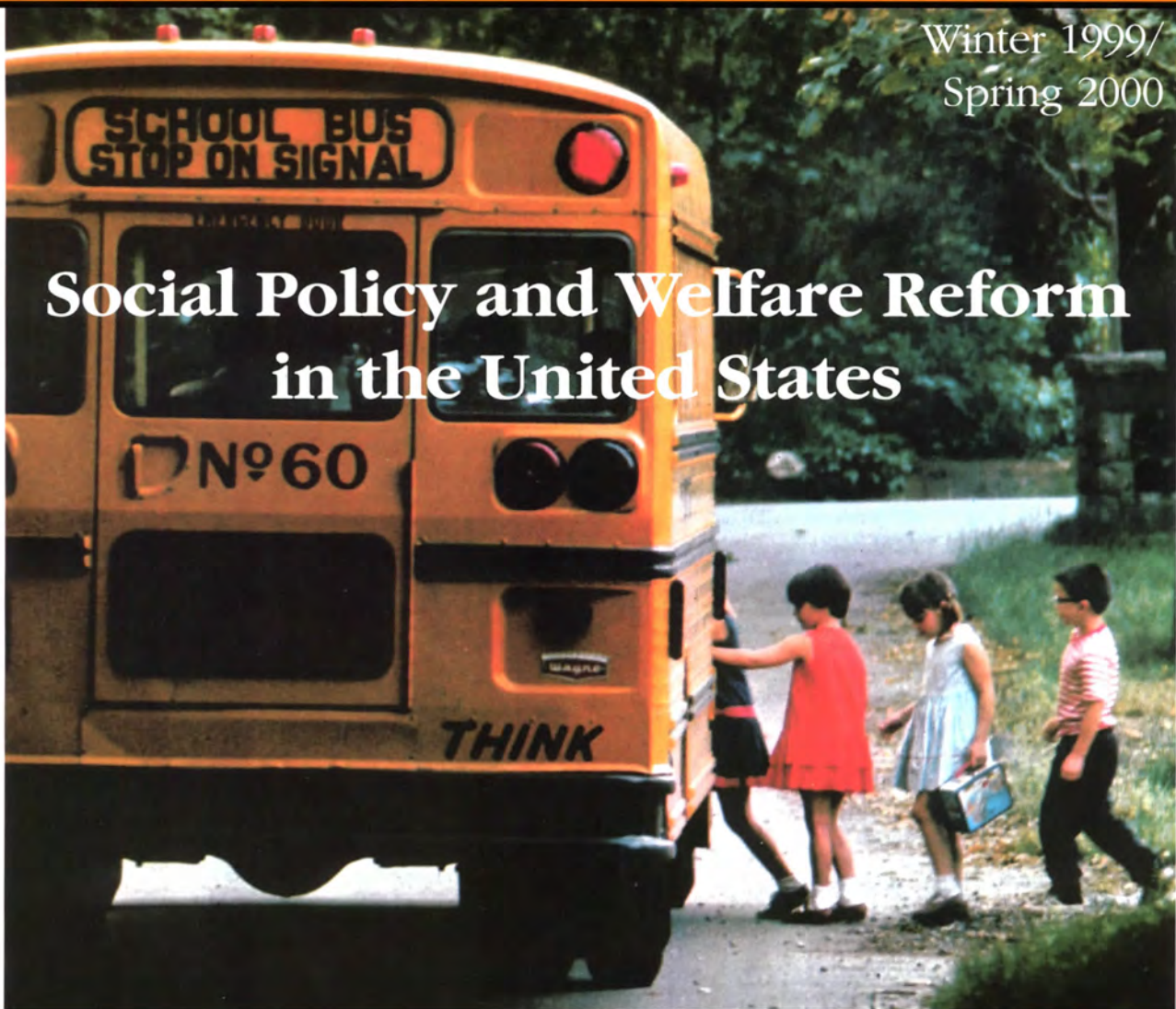


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Social Policy and Welfare Reform in the United States



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Editor's Note

Lutherstadt Wittenberg, February 2000

Dear Readers,

This volume of the *American Studies Journal* examines U.S. social policy and the recent welfare reforms. Of course, the ASJ would have to entertain no further worries about its own welfare if this issue were able to present solutions to the complex social, political, cultural, and demographic questions involved in reforming the Western systems of social provision. However, 64 pages are unlikely to accomplish what innumerable scholarly books, reports, articles, and conferences have so far not been able to do. The intention of this issue is thus simply to acquaint the reader with some of the distinctive features of the American system of social provision as it developed historically, and to review some of the recent policy developments.

In keeping with the editorial announcement in the previous issue, the *American Studies Journal*, while retaining its traditional sections geared toward classroom use and teaching purposes, has decided to include some scholarly articles on the topic of this issue. Hence, rather than giving you a textbook-style overview, lots of statistics, and byte-sized information, we decided to ask a number of observers, both inside and outside academia, to submit their thoughts and research on specific aspects of the American welfare state. The articles you are about to read are the contributions we found the most perceptive and thought-provoking.

As a way of introducing our new book review section, we decided to feature a "review symposium" on Daniel T. Rodger's intriguing book *Atlantic Crossings*. The book fits both into the transatlantic emphasis of this edition and into our focus on history. In addition, the issue includes suggestions for further readings, and a list of websites.

We hope you will find this edition of the *American Studies Journal* instructive and helpful. Since we are in the process of redesigning the ASJ, we would appreciate any comments or suggestions you have. Please feel free to contact us at asj@serv.zusas.uni-halle.de. We would be happy to hear from you.

For further information, please see the *American Studies Journal* web site at <http://www.zusas.uni-halle.de/asj>. This site contains information on subscriptions, back issues and future issue topics. If you are interested in submitting an article to the *American Studies Journal*, please refer to **Submission Guidelines** within the web site.

Axel R. Schäfer
Guest Editor, *American Studies Journal*
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Social Policy and Welfare Reform in the U.S. –An Introduction

Axel R. Schäfer

Reforming the welfare state is a prominent topic on the public policy agendas in both the United States and Germany. Critics of European systems of social provision frequently implore us to look to the U. S. for models of change in order to adjust to new global economic challenges. Defenders of European-style social provision argue that the very existence of social safety nets allows people to be flexible and innovative without fear of falling through the cracks. Admonitions about the pitfalls of the *Standort Deutschland* are countered by warnings about *amerikanische Verhältnisse*.

However, the social policy debate in the United States is very different from the discussion in Germany. Terms such as “workfare,” “managed competition,” “welfare dependency,” and “devolution” have no easy equivalent in German. The American welfare state also has many distinctive features that contrast with European systems of social provision. First of all, it is marked by a rigid distinction between *public assistance* and *social insurance*. While non-contributory assistance programs for the poor, such as Food Stamps, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), Supplemental Security Income (SSI), and Medicaid offer meager support with many restrictions, *social insurance*, such as Social Security and Medicare, are “respectable” programs that serve a working and middle-class clientele.

Another main feature of the American welfare state is its decentralized nature. While Social Security is administered by the federal government, most assistance programs are controlled by the states, counties, and cities. In the same vein, there are many state-level programs that either go beyond or lag behind federal standards. For example, although President Clinton’s health care initiative failed to implement national health insurance, many states passed legislation establishing public health care funds.

A third important aspect is that the American social system relies greatly on charitable and philan-

thropic institutions. In the current drive for privatizing social services, both non-profit and for-profit providers vie for government contracts. Some scholars have even argued that the extensive network of private social agencies has spun a social safety net that is comparable to the European welfare states. While this thesis is controversial, many charitable agencies have expanded from single-purpose to multi-purpose operations. They combine, for example, providing shelter with job training, community development with self-help credit unions, and health services with legal support. Moreover, government funding for third-sector social services has increased dramatically since the 1960s.

The articles in this issue examine both the recent welfare debate and the distinctive features of American social policy. They do this by discussing the influence of women and gender on welfare state formation, the distinctive American social work tradition, and the connection between welfare benefits and work requirements.

Gender analysis is well suited to reveal the general contradictions of social legislation in the United States. Women in the United States were more involved in designing the welfare state than in Europe, yet they ended up being treated worse. The rigid distinction between assistance and social insurance, **Elizabeth Clapp** points out in her article on the General Federation of Women’s Clubs, had its origins in the gender construction of the early “maternalist” American welfare state. Women used their ascribed roles as upholders of moral values to break out of the confines of the household and enter the political scene. However, the emancipatory potential of this step was mitigated by the conservative content of their social ideology, which was often moralistic, strictly middle-class, and designed to preserve traditional gender relations.

In the second article, **Robert Wolf** and **John D. Morrison** share their observations on the differences between social work and social policy in Germany and the United States. American social

work, they point out, is much more interventionist and restrictive than its German counterpart. Graffiti and open drug use would not be tolerated in many American cities the way it is in Germany. At the same time, the authors see a lack of concern for high-risk behavior and deviancy in Germany. The article shows that the emphasis in American social work is on both disciplining and rehabilitating clients, while maintenance is the focus of German practice.

Three articles in this edition offer a variety of perspectives on the 1996 welfare reform in the United States. The new law replaced the right to welfare with state-based temporary assistance programs, imposed time limits on welfare benefits, and tied benefits to work requirements. **Holger Backhaus-Maul** maintains that a radical change took place. He sees the new law as a return to a paternalistic enforcement of traditional social norms that do not match well with the cultural heterogeneity of American society. **Steven Weir** examines more closely the moral basis of the American system of relief-giving. He sees the recent changes as indications that the work imperative has been asserted at the expense of the protective impulse that underlay the dismantled AFDC program. Finally, **Waltraud Schelke** suggests that we need to see the recent reforms in conjunction with other cash assistance policies for the poor. She argues that the reforms mark an important step in the direction of establishing an American system of universal social insurance.

Since this edition does not provide a step-by-step review of the development of the American welfare state, a few general remarks on its history are in order. Although many scholars would not even think of talking about an American welfare state prior to the New Deal in the 1930s, a distinct tradition of governmental social responsibilities had emerged by the late nineteenth century. On the federal level, the Civil War pension program had by 1890 developed into a quasi-universal system, which gobbled up a large percentage of the federal budget and was more generous and less discriminatory than comparable European systems. Nineteenth-century state governments did not confine their activities to the proper sphere envisaged by advocates of *laissez faire*, either, as railroad subsidies, the building of roads and canals, and inspection and licensing laws indicated. Likewise, city governments controlled by urban party machines offered jobs and a measure

of social security to a working-class clientele in exchange for votes and loyalty.

Nonetheless, this legacy did not develop into a full-fledged system of social insurance. One reason was that the social reformers of the Progressive Era, who spearheaded the first concerted effort to expand the social responsibilities of the state, resented the patronage, inefficiency and corruption of nineteenth-century American government. They preferred regulation over redistributionist social insurance programs designed to address the injustices of the market. In turn, protective legislation for women and children, anti-trust policies, workmen's compensation, railroad regulation and consumer protection became staple elements of early federal social policy. Today, regulatory agencies, such as the Food and Drug Administration, the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission, and the Environmental Protection Agency, are among the most powerful institutions of American government.

Twentieth-century warfare had a tremendous impact on the development of state systems of social security. During World War I, the United States set up numerous agencies to control production, regulate business, standardize products, and fix prices. In addition, war-time government mediated in labor conflicts, experimented with federal housing projects, and expanded federal insurance programs. Yet, federal intervention during the war was premised upon serving limited interest groups, not upon creating a system of broad-based social benefits. The expansion of governmental power during the war failed to create a lasting administrative legacy in the public sector. Nonetheless, war-time policies established a precedent of intervention and legitimized the use of the state as a restrictive police power. In the 1920s, this legacy was apparent in the moral reformism of prohibition and the cultural restrictiveness of immigration control. In addition, post-war government engaged in cooperative ventures with big business under the auspices of Herbert Hoover's "associative state."

The tide turned with the Great Depression. Reeling under the impact of a prolonged economic downturn that affected not only the poor, but also large parts of the working and lower-middle classes, federal social policy went significantly beyond strengthening traditional regulatory mechanisms. In the mid-1930s, Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal legislation established Social Security, unemploy-

ment insurance, and Aid to Dependent Children (ADC). These became the basic elements of a moderately redistributionist American welfare state designed under the conditions of economic decline

Again, it was warfare that both redefined and fine-tuned social policy. War production, rather than the New Deal, ended the Depression, and in contrast to most predictions economic growth continued after the war. Although some expected the new fiscal benefits to translate into more money for social programs, post-war policy makers defined the role of government differently. Generous support programs for returning soldiers, reliance on company benefits negotiated by labor unions, and policies to stimulate economic growth became the staple elements of the post-war welfare state.

The most ambitious attempt to establish an American welfare state took place in the 1960s during a time of uninterrupted economic growth. It was President Lyndon B. Johnson's goal to add the missing links to the American system of social provision. However, the plethora of programs he instigated during the "War on Poverty" left an ambivalent legacy. While Medicaid and Medicare established a rudimentary public health insurance system, and Food Stamps and AFDC laid the foundation for a right to welfare, the hopeful beginnings of the Great Society soon gave way to gloomier realities. The Vietnam war undercut funding for social programs, average Americans resented the rising tax levels, and the programs failed to establish a political coalition between the poor and the middle classes.

In the 1970s, the anti-welfare coalition that eventually forced the reforms of 1996 gradually emerged. Blue-collar workers, hit hard by inflation, social unrest, and deindustrialization, resented rising welfare costs. Christian fundamentalists and economic conservatives attacked moral permissiveness and big government. The result was a complete change in the way welfare was viewed. Rather than seeing welfare benefits as a way of helping those who would otherwise lose their social bearings, public assistance was blamed for sustaining socially destructive and morally reprehensible lifestyles. Many regarded welfare recipients, primarily single mothers, as promiscuous, lazy, and irresponsible. In turn, after the failure of the Nixon administration's proposal for a guaranteed income, social policy focused on making public assistance dependent on work efforts.

Four main developments have dominated social policy since the 1970s. First, the raucous debate about welfare reform has questioned the underlying premise of decades of public assistance — that women should be able to stay at home with their children. Welfare programs, which were originally designed to enable poor mothers to raise their children at home, now stigmatized women for not being part of the work force.

Second, while assistance programs were being dismantled, the basic social security system in the United States has remained unscathed. In the 1980s, for example, the Reagan administration pushed for severe cuts in federal spending on assistance programs. Social insurance programs, however, which had a better organized lobby and enjoyed popular support, largely escaped retrenchment.

Third, federal waivers have allowed states to experiment with their own social policies, ranging from health insurance to welfare-to-work programs. The most innovative impulses, but also some of the most disparaging results of two decades of welfare reform can be witnessed on the state level.

Fourth, charitable and philanthropic agencies have grown on an unprecedented scale. The Great Society's dramatic increase in the amount of money funneled into non-profit organizations through grants, tax exemptions, and purchase-of-service arrangements changed the entire structure of non-profit funding. Although the Reagan administration significantly cut federal funding, the precedent set by the Great Society remained a stable element of post-1960s relations between government and the non-profit sector.

It is upon this cultural and political background that the recent welfare reforms need to be seen, and this is where the articles in this issue of the *American Studies Journal* pick up the story.

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The General Federation of Women's Clubs and American Social Welfare in the Progressive Era

Elizabeth J. Clapp

The involvement of women in social welfare reform during the Progressive Era has been the focus of much scholarly attention in recent years. This scholarship has influenced both the way in which historians of welfare have interpreted the origins of the welfare state, and the way in which historians of women have viewed one of the central analytical constructions of women's history—the concept of separate spheres.¹ By placing gender at the center of their analysis, it becomes clear that many of the more traditional concepts of the welfare state are too restrictive. As Koven and Michel have observed, most non-feminist theorists defined the welfare state in terms of work-related pensions, general medical care and old-age benefits, with little regard for how these affect relationships between members of the family. Moreover, traditional studies of the welfare state have been little concerned with those aspects of state welfare policy which directly and explicitly affected women, especially sex-based protective legislation, and maternal and child welfare programs.²

While this feminist critique of the welfare state at first led to assumptions that women were victims of a patriarchal state, and that state welfare programs were designed by male policy-makers to regulate women's productive and reproductive lives, this assumption has in its turn been challenged.³ Some scholars have suggested that female recipients were not passive victims of a state-imposed welfare system, but rather they helped to shape both policies and welfare agencies to their own purposes.⁴ Other scholars have questioned the assumption that social welfare policy was always designed by men, and have begun to write female policy makers back into the history of welfare. While some of the early scholarship was highly celebratory of the middle-class female social reformers, more recently a much more complex picture has begun to emerge. Women are now seen not only as the clients of welfare programs, but also as their creators, and some of these programs have been seen as discriminatory towards women.⁵ Against this background, historians have begun to explore the motives of middle-class

women in pursuing social welfare reform, and the means they used to achieve those reforms.

"Feminism" has been seen by some historians as the motive behind the involvement of middle-class women in voluntary organizations and hence their involvement in reform. They argue that by joining together in associations, women gained the self-confidence to assert their right to social and political equality with men. These women were able to build a power base for themselves by agitating for particular reforms.⁶ While undoubtedly some clubwomen did begin to demand rights for themselves as a result of their involvement in reform, recently historians have begun to see their motives as more complex. Clubwomen found that by working on behalf of others and on behalf of reform causes, they raised their own public stature and responsibilities and also expanded society's understanding of the limits of women's sphere to the extent that they were able to justify its expansion.⁷

This process began earlier in the nineteenth century as a result of changes in American society and the economy. One of the consequences of industrialization, which began to take root in the antebellum period, was the effective separation of the public and private spheres. Home came to be perceived by many middle-class opinion formers as women's sphere, and an ideology of domesticity was gradually defined.⁸ In the early nineteenth century, woman's role was constructed as the "Republican Mother," bringing up her children to be good citizens. Women were also expected to be the protectors of society's morals and values.⁹ The emphasis on domesticity and motherhood that this implied, did not, however, restrict women to a purely domestic role, it actually allowed them to become involved in activities beyond their own firesides. Moreover, the ideology of Republican Motherhood encouraged women to demand an education in order to educate their sons to be good citizens. Education was not the only area in which women were able to expand the limits of their prescribed

sphere beyond their own homes. Gradually, women created a space for themselves in voluntary activities and reform in areas not claimed by the male sphere of commerce and politics.¹⁰ Thus, a female tradition of activism and reform developed, constructed in gendered terms and based on assumptions about female moral authority and superiority, and the supposed ability of middle-class white women to speak for other women.

As middle-class women began to move into America's cities at the end of the nineteenth century, they did so not as self-conscious feminists, but as the inheritors of this tradition of female activism. Women claimed to be the conscience and the housekeepers of America and as such they justified their entry into areas which might previously have been considered outside their sphere.¹¹ But, as a number of historians have recently observed, a new discourse had begun to emerge by the end of the nineteenth century which further justified women's involvement in social activism and which dictated the kind of activism these women undertook.¹² This emphasized women's role as mothers and grew out of the older ideology of Republican Motherhood, but also reflected the marked transformation in attitudes towards childhood and child rearing that had been occurring throughout the nineteenth century.¹³ These historians have labeled this kind of gender consciousness "maternalism." The concept of maternalism drew on the principle of gender difference and accepted, even idealized, women's traditional role as wife and mother, but at the same time insisted that this meant women had a duty to extend their female skills and concerns beyond their own homes. The discourse of maternalism thus asserted women's role as universal mothers, making it their duty to look after all children not just their own, and to extend their domestic and familial values to society at large.¹⁴ Impelled by this kind of gender consciousness, women reformers were provided with a motivation and a means to enter politics in the Progressive Era, by pursuing reforms on behalf of women and children. Most Progressive Era female reformers sought reforms that would affirm women's role as mothers and their dependence upon a male breadwinner. Thus, it was female values that lay at the heart of the welfare state. But these women created a maternalist state, based on quite different assumptions from those that lay at the foundations of later aspects of the welfare state, such as social insurance programs.¹⁵

While some historians have concentrated on the motivations behind women's social welfare reform in the Progressive Era, others have explored the sources of women's power, which enabled them to expand the private sphere into the public. A number of scholars have examined how intimate friendships provided important support networks for politically active women, while others have looked at the wider networks of women reformers who provided the necessary back-up and lobbying power to enable women to push for local and national reforms.¹⁶ Kathryn Kish Sklar has gone beyond this to examine the ways in which settlement houses in the slums of America's great cities provided women both with the institutional basis from which to pursue careers in reform and the emotional and financial support necessary to enable them to escape family responsibilities. Settlements also enabled them to collectivize their talents and work with sympathetic male reformers and their organizations without being controlled by them.¹⁷ On a national level, the Federal Children's Bureau, which had been created with the support of women's networks, was able to create a bastion of female dominion outside male control. Robyn Muncy has argued that the women reformers of the Bureau were willing to use men and male institutions to gain their objectives, but the administration of the Bureau remained under female control and relied on female networks to staff it and to enforce its measures.¹⁸

Women's institutions, such as settlement houses, were only one source of women's power at the end of the nineteenth century, though they provided many of the leaders of women's reform. Women's clubs and other women's agencies were an important source of grass-roots activism. Together they lobbied for reforms at both a local and a national level. According to Theda Skocpol, women's agencies forged a national political network and a coherent political agenda, all at a time when the majority of women were politically disfranchised. Indeed, Skocpol argues, their disfranchisement promoted the formation of a gender consciousness that encouraged women to mobilize and make political demands at a time when the political situation favored this kind of organization and policy initiatives.¹⁹

Although working from a somewhat different perspective from Skocpol, Paula Baker has also seen their political disfranchisement as part of the source of women's power. She argues that during the

Progressive Era, as the result of women's actions, social policy, which had previously been the province of women's voluntary organizations, became public policy. This was the result of women's realization that voluntary measures were not sufficient because alone they were powerless to enforce these measures; they needed legislation to carry out their reforms.²⁰ Social policy was constructed in gendered terms, for men and women had quite different conceptions of the role of the state in the late nineteenth century. Women were much more willing to use the state than were men, but they did so to help society's dependents, women and children, and they sought to maintain traditional conceptions of gender roles within the family by doing so.²¹

Middle-class white women were not the only women to become involved in social welfare reform during the Progressive Era. Historians have begun to look at the roles that race, class and ethnicity have played in shaping the kind of reform women pursued. This research shows that women of different classes and races had varying perceptions of social realities, and these influenced their definitions of reform, as well as their understanding of the relationship between domesticity and politics. It suggests, moreover, that during this period there was a contest between middle-class white and immigrant women's visions of femininity, and denies that cross-class sisterhood was at the heart of female reform. Women tended to identify more with men of their own class or race than they did with women across the class or racial divide.²²

Racial, ethnic and class differences were not the only factors that affected women's visions of reform. Even among white middle-class women, essentially working within a maternalist framework, there were marked differences. Maternalism was not a unified movement speaking with one voice, there were fundamental divisions within it. As Joanne Goodwin has argued, this could affect the way in which maternalist reforms were implemented.²³ Thus, maternalism is rather more complex than it at first appeared. Despite the divisions among maternalist reformers, there were, however, clear differences in approaches between women reformers on the one hand, and male reformers on the other.²⁴

Recent research that looks at women reformers in the Progressive Era has had a marked impact on the way in which scholars have viewed the

foundations of the American welfare state. By examining the work of the General Federation of Women's Clubs (GFWC) in the first two decades of its existence, we can explore further some of the issues raised by this scholarship. For, during the Progressive Era, the General Federation of Women's Clubs became an important forum for encouraging and publicizing female welfare reform initiatives.

The GFWC was established in 1890 in New York City based on the idea of Mrs. Jane Cunningham Croly, who had for some time sought a national forum for women's clubs. Its object was, according to its constitution, "to bring into communication with one another the various women's clubs throughout the world, that they may compare methods of work and become mutually helpful."²⁵ At its initial meeting, the GFWC had attracted delegates from sixty clubs, but this number quickly grew until, in 1910, the federation boasted one million members in affiliated local clubs and state federations across the United States.²⁶

The General Federation of Women's Clubs was not the first national organization of women—it was preceded by both the Women's Christian Temperance Union and the suffrage organizations, among others—but it was important in one significant respect. Rather than being formed to lobby for a particular reform agenda, the GFWC was established to bring together and coordinate the work of the many local clubs across the United States. It drew its members from both the literary and the general-purpose clubs that had sprung up in American cities since the foundation of Sorosis and the New England Woman's Club in 1868. As Mrs. Charlotte Emerson Brown, the first president of the federation, observed in 1892: "What the local club is to its individual members the General Federation is to local clubs. The Federation is the local club two hundred times multiplied. What the local club does for a hundred women the Federation is doing for twenty thousand."²⁷

Those women who attended the first convention of the GFWC in New York reflected the social background of the clubwomen they represented. They were wives, mothers, householders — women of reputable standing in their churches, communities and states.²⁸ Most of them came from middle-class backgrounds, the wives and daughters of business and professional men. The early leaders of the GFWC tended to be drawn from the social elite of

their communities. For instance, the first treasurer of the organization was Mrs. Phoebe Hearst, the wife of the United States Senator and newspaper publisher George Hearst, and mother of publisher William Randolph Hearst.²⁹ Among the early presidents was Mrs. Ellen Henrotin, the wife of a leading Chicago Banker, a member of the Chicago Woman's Club, and the vice-president of the women's branch of the World's Columbian Exposition in 1893.³⁰ Many of the other delegates at the first convention and later biennials enjoyed local or national prominence as the wives or daughters of noted political or commercial figures.³¹

While the GFWC acquired a fashionable and society-like reputation because of the elite women who were among its leaders, its purpose was to coordinate and inspire the work of local clubs. It aimed to encourage the formation of local clubs and to bring them into membership with the General Federation.³² But it was not as all-inclusive as the rhetoric of its leaders might suggest. For the GFWC did not welcome all clubs into its fold. A very public row broke out in 1900 when an African-American women's club, the New Era Club of Massachusetts, applied for and was granted membership to the Federation. When delegates from the Club tried to take their seats at the biennial meeting, the Georgia State Federation objected vociferously. In seeking to placate the Georgia federation, Mrs. Lowe, the GFWC president, had to admit that she had not been aware that the New Era Club was a colored women's club when she accepted its request for membership. The offer of membership was withdrawn on a technicality, but this precipitated a passionate debate, both among board members and in the pages of the Federation's magazine. It was not until 1902 that a compromise was reached, allowing African-American women's clubs to secure membership only when their state federations had already admitted them.³³ The GFWC thus reflected the wider society's attitude towards the race question.

It was not only over the question of race that the GFWC's aim of inclusiveness broke down. There had earlier been some doubt whether Jewish or Catholic clubs should be admitted, although debate quickly resolved itself in favor of these clubs. Over the question of class, too, the GFWC was somewhat ambivalent. It was essentially an organization for middle-class white women's clubs, and it made no great efforts to try to recruit organizations representing poor or working-class women.³⁴ In this

respect the GFWC reflected the composition of its member clubs. While many of them worked to improve conditions for poor women, few of the affiliated clubs and federations included such women among their membership.

Despite disputes over the composition of its membership, the GFWC continued to expand nationally, and it rapidly became a large organization encompassing local clubs and state federations from all regions of the United States. It embraced a wide range of social and political viewpoints from the traditionalism of the National Congress of Mothers to the more forward-thinking women representing the social settlements and National Consumers' League. Although it excluded clubs that were of a specifically religious or political purpose, the federation was not otherwise restrictive in its membership.³⁵ It is therefore difficult to ascertain the general tenor of the organization. Certainly in the early days at its biennial conventions, the GFWC presidents and other speakers espoused a maternalist ethos. Thus, at the 1894 biennial, Anna Longstreth speaking on women in municipal affairs, could justify women's civic work from a maternalist viewpoint: "Who knows as well as the mother, if the children are crowded with too many lessons at home, and if unreasonable demands are made upon mind and body? So in many ways her domestic training would become a useful factor in the ways and means of public improvement. There can be no question as to our right to be consulted in the management of civic affairs. They operate upon us for good or ill..."³⁶ Similarly, Mrs. Granger, the Chairman of the Child Labor Committee of the GFWC, could observe in 1905: "...all club women have hearts. When once those hearts have opened to the suffering of the children the motherhood inherent in woman responds to the call—she listens to the 'Cry of the Children' who are wearing out their lives in unwholesome work—and listening and studying the club women have learned many things!"³⁷

Such speeches seemed to mark the GFWC as a "traditional maternalist" association, advocating club work that would draw on women's traditional roles as mothers and housewives.³⁸ But, even from its earliest days, the GFWC was an umbrella organization. It included in its membership both traditional maternalists and individuals and organizations who may be described as "professional maternalists"—women, often trained in the social

sciences, for whom gender consciousness was only one factor in their activism.³⁹ There were also some women within the GFWC who embraced the cause of women's suffrage and women's rights.⁴⁰ Thus, the Federation embraced a wide range of women's ideologies from the most conservative to the relative radicalism of the suffragists.⁴¹

It seems likely that Mrs. Croly had initially envisioned a federation of literary clubs to promote cultural programs. Indeed, the Federation's historian suggests that there was considerable reluctance to becoming involved with civic work and that the early meetings of the Federation concentrated on the promotion of intellectual development and recreation, and the club as a "resting place" from the regular activities of life.⁴² However, while literary work was undoubtedly part of the GFWC's concern, it quickly became involved in wider activities and promoting the involvement of clubs in all aspects of modern life. Mrs. Brown, the first President of the GFWC, observed: "The club is not for culture alone, but for culture as a means of greater power in all the relations and duties of life. It is a source of joy that so many of our ablest and best known women workers in every department of women's activity are club and federated club women."⁴³ The GFWC quickly embraced civic work and social reform. As the collective voice of thousands of clubwomen from across the United States, it was able to carry weight with legislators and acted as a centralized national alliance for women's reform.⁴⁴

Few of the reform causes pursued by the GFWC were as radical or as clearly designed for the advancement of women as some of the suffragists among its membership would have liked. Nonetheless, by the early twentieth century the GFWC had become involved in a diverse range of activities, many of them concerned with social welfare reform. The majority of these initiatives could be justified in terms of women's traditional sphere—through the discourse of maternalism—but the effect of much of this social welfare activism was to move women beyond matters traditionally encompassed by the women's sphere.

The work of the GFWC was carried out by the various standing committees or departments it established, and these were overseen by the Board of Directors. The establishment of a department marked the interest of the GFWC in that area of work. Thus, in its first decade, the federation's

committees reflected a fairly conservative range of interests, mostly concerned with matters related to the home and culture, with committees for literature and the home, but also showing its interests in the wider world, with committees for social economics, philanthropy, education and finance.⁴⁵ By the early twentieth century, the number of committees had expanded, and so too had the range of the GFWC's interests to include committees for: Art, Education, Pure Food, Outlook, Civics, Civil Service Reform, Forestry, Household Economics, Industrial and Child Labor, Legislation, Library Extension, Reciprocity, and Literature.⁴⁶ While many of these interests fitted well within a maternalist agenda, some of the others clearly went beyond what had traditionally been considered as being encompassed by women's sphere, and arguably could no longer be justified as such.

Similarly, the resolutions these committees produced to present to the biennial conventions, reflect a shift in the interests of the GFWC and its willingness to move beyond an agenda concerned directly only with the protection of children, women and the home. At its 1898 biennial, the GFWC adopted resolutions that could easily be described as maternalist—resolutions demanding restrictions on child labor, maximum hours legislation for women workers and adequate provision for school facilities. But even at this early stage, the biennial also adopted resolutions demanding a postal savings bank for the benefit of small savers, and one expressing sorrow at, but support for the war against Spain. While undoubtedly GFWC members could justify these resolutions on the grounds that they



Women Suffragists Marching on Pennsylvania Avenue, Washington, D.C., 1913.

Source: Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-22262 DLC

did ultimately affect women, neither economics nor foreign policy were traditionally embraced by women's sphere.⁴⁷ By the time of the 1910 biennial, the GFWC president was still expressing herself in the language of maternalism, but she was claiming that the city was only a larger home and therefore the legitimate province of women's activism: "We have no platform unless it is the care of women and children, and the home, the latter meaning the four walls of the city, as well as the four walls of brick and mortar."⁴⁸

By the 1914 biennial, the GFWC was finally persuaded to claim political equality for women and men.⁴⁹ While it was much slower to endorse the suffrage than a number of other women's organizations, the GFWC had already begun to move beyond the traditional concerns of women's sphere to other areas before 1914. Indeed it seems likely that the GFWC would have endorsed the suffrage earlier if it had not been for the conservative elements within it. By 1914, suffrage was no longer seen as quite the radical departure it might have been in the nineteenth century.⁵⁰

The organization and structure of the General Federation of Women's Clubs were such that it operated in a quite different fashion from the majority of other women's clubs, whether local or national. Much of its work took the form of publicity and encouragement of local clubs and state federations, rather than itself being involved in practical work. The most public aspect of the GFWC's work was its biennial conventions, held in different cities across the country. These were huge and elaborate affairs, lasting over several days, to which delegates of the member clubs and federations were invited to listen to speeches, discuss federation policy, and report on their activities. These were as much social as business events. Delegates enjoyed carefully organized entertainments, receptions and other social occasions, often reported fully in the local and national newspapers. While biennial conventions served an important function, especially for those women who attended as club delegates to learn about and discuss the work of other clubwomen, the main work of the federation was done in the various committees that met regularly between the biennials. The GFWC also retained a national headquarters in Washington, D.C., maintained several standing committees, and publicized its activities through its official magazine and other publications.

By the mid-1890s, the General Federation was being used as a model for the formation of state and regional federations. At first this caused uneasiness among the leadership of the national body, because they feared that these local federations would divert membership from the national federation, but such fears were quickly dispelled as most state federations quickly affiliated with the GFWC, as did a number of national women's clubs. Karen Blair has suggested that local and state federations actually strengthened the GFWC, often at the expense of local autonomy.⁵¹ It is unclear, however, just how much control the GFWC had over local clubs and state federations. While it might have appeared that the GFWC was highly structured, with three levels of organization at national, state and local levels, and a clear flow of information and control, in practice the GFWC probably exercised fairly loose control over its constituent members.⁵² The state federations gave reports to the GFWC and, in turn, adopted some of the policies suggested by the board of directors and the committees of the GFWC. The GFWC could also act as a national forum for particular interest groups within it, giving them publicity and the endorsement of a national body, thus strengthening their positions in their localities. For the most part, however, it seems likely that most local clubs continued to exercise considerable autonomy, and it was in these clubs that much of the work for social welfare reform was carried out.

Nonetheless, during the Progressive Era the GFWC became an important forum for publicizing female welfare reform initiatives among its member clubs and providing advice for others wishing to pursue similar initiatives. As the voice of many clubwomen, it also played a significant role in lobbying for legislation at both state and federal level to protect women, children and the home. It was thus an important agency in the creation and securing of those Progressive Era social welfare reforms that laid the foundations of the American welfare state.

The majority of social welfare reforms were not initiated by the officers or committees of the GFWC. They were brought to its notice either in the reports from the states given at each biennial or in the federation's official publications, or they were the result of an attempt by an individual or group who wished for the support of the GFWC. Thus, in the case of the establishment of juvenile courts, the first



Throughout the twentieth century, photographic images of poverty and dereliction played an important role in mobilizing public demand for social programs.

Street Arabs, photograph by Jacob Riis, © 1900.

juvenile court law was passed in Illinois in 1899, largely as the result of initiatives by a number of women's agencies in Chicago. This was quickly reported and praised at the 1900 biennial convention and in the magazine *Club Woman*, and undoubtedly this encouraged women's clubs in other states to lobby for similar juvenile court laws.⁵³ In 1903, the Industrial Committee of the GFWC issued a leaflet with various recommendations to clubs, among them the suggestion that clubs should: "...agitate for juvenile courts and probation officers wherever these do not exist." The committee also sent out a circular at the end of 1903 to see how far its recommendations had been adopted.⁵⁴ The GFWC in this case acted as both the conduit through which local women's clubs found out about the Illinois Juvenile Court Law, and also as a national advocate for the cause, providing information about model laws and expert advice.⁵⁵

A similar pattern may be seen in the campaigns for other welfare measures. The question of protective legislation for wage-earning women and children was a matter that greatly concerned the GFWC. In 1898, the biennial passed resolutions demanding restrictions on the employment of women and children, and a resolution to ensure that there should be uniform labor laws in different states. The biennial also established a standing Committee on Legislation for Women and Children, whose duty was to inquire into the labor

conditions of these groups. These concerns were again raised at the 1900 biennial, at which time Mrs. Florence Kelley, the secretary of the National Consumers' League, was appointed chairman of the committee.⁵⁶ In later years this committee reported on legislative successes in various states, the need particularly for restrictive legislation in the southern states, and eventually also for federal legislation to restrict child labor. The GFWC, working with the National Child Labor Committee and the National Consumers' League, acted as an advocate for such legislation by encouraging its affiliated local clubs and state federations to lobby in their states for model laws provided by the Federation. Speakers from the National Child Labor Committee and National Consumers' League addressed the biennial conventions and standing committees of

the GFWC to encourage support from the clubwomen. The GFWC thus became part of a wider coalition pushing for protective legislation for women and children, but maintained its own maternalist stance in doing so.⁵⁷

As a national body, the GFWC played a rather different role from the local clubs and state federations. It could lobby for causes which were of interest to local clubs but required legislative action by the federal government. The records of the GFWC reveal resolutions asking local clubs for support for a national pure food law two years before such a law was passed.⁵⁸ Similar resolutions were proposed by the Council Meeting of the GFWC in 1906:

WHEREAS the President of the United States in transmitting to Congress the report of the investigations of the great packing houses announces that the conditions disclosed are revolting, uncleanly and unsanitary, and that immediate legislation is necessary to remedy these conditions, therefore

RESOLVED, by the General Federation of Women's Clubs now in session, representing half a million women of our country, that we urge upon the Congress of the United States speedy and effective legislation to protect the homes of the country against these shocking and dangerous evils.⁵⁹

In this fashion the GFWC could act as a lobby in Washington, speaking as the voice of the clubwomen of America, and pushing for legislation which was deemed of interest to women as the protectors of their homes. Indeed, the GFWC had a representative in Washington whose duty it was to look after legislative matters in Congress. They also had a congressional delegation which would use its influence to have national legislation enacted.⁶⁰ As with other women's agencies, the GFWC was willing to push for legislation in order to achieve its objectives and to use the state to protect society's dependents, women and children. It was concerned, however, that its influence should not be used indiscriminately, as a report on legislation to the Board of Directors noted in 1906:

We should avoid wasting our ammunition on too many measures. To make the power of eight hundred thousand women effective we must have a policy and cling to it. No matter how good the cause it is not wise to give our endorsement to every organization that asks it. It certainly weakens our influence to petition Congress too often and on too many subjects.⁶¹

For this reason the GFWC confined its legislative efforts to measures that could be most closely justified in terms of women's sphere.⁶²

While the Federation was able to exercise influence and claim that it represented the clubwomen of the nation, the extent to which that influence was effective is more difficult to measure. The majority of women were unable to vote in federal elections until the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment in August 1920, thus they could exert no direct political power. Nonetheless, as Theda Skocpol and others have shown, the political situation during the early years of the twentieth century was peculiarly suited to the kind of women's collective action pursued by the GFWC—a kind of activism that might broadly be defined as maternalist.⁶³ The GFWC itself recognized that if it were to secure the kind of legislation it believed to be necessary, it would have to educate public opinion to its way of thinking. It believed that the way to achieve this was to appeal to other women, but also to the press, the pulpit and the bar, who would recognize the justice of women's claims and support their demands for legislation:

The splendid womanhood of our beloved country is arrayed against any evil which

threatens the home... To the wife, the mother, the daughter, when arrayed in her habiliments of justice, righteousness, and love, the sovereign world must bow. Her clear, undazzled vision looking to the future good of her children will enable her to discern what is wise in legislation, and her calm judgment will enable her to choose wise means for its enactment into law.⁶⁴

Throughout the Progressive Era, the GFWC remained an important national forum for women's reform, encouraging and cooperating with grassroots women's agencies to fulfill its purposes. While its early concerns had been with literary and cultural work, increasingly by the early twentieth century the focus of the Federation had shifted towards work for social reform and the securing of legislation at both the state and national level. Many of the reforms for which the GFWC lobbied were to provide the early foundations of the American welfare state—measures to protect women, children and the home. Though much of this social welfare work may be described as maternalist, the GFWC also endorsed resolutions and discussed issues that were not encompassed by traditional constructions of women's sphere. This reflects both the wide range of women's ideologies within the GFWC, and possibly also a new understanding by activist women of their social role.

As much of the current scholarship on the origins of the American welfare state has shown, gender played an important role in shaping welfare legislation. Men and women had different visions of welfare and the role of the state in social reform, but women, too, had varying visions of welfare. Some of these variations were influenced by their class, race or ethnic backgrounds, but even among middle-class white women there were differences.

Although middle-class female activists might approach social welfare reform from different perspectives, they were nonetheless able to work together for a common end. As this study of the General Federation of Women's Clubs has suggested, coalitions of women reformers encompassing many distinct perspectives on reform, worked as one organization to shape the early American welfare state. While the role of the GFWC was more as a publicist than as an initiator of reform, its work as a source of information and expert advice illustrates that, despite their heterogeneity, women activists found support and strength in their work with other women activists.

Notes

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1. See also Elizabeth J. Clapp, "Welfare and the Role of Women: The Juvenile Court Movement," *Journal of American Studies* 28 (Dec. 1994): 359-370; Kathryn Kish Sklar, "Comment: A Call for Comparison," *American Historical Review* 95 (Oct. 1990): 1109-1114.

2. Seth Koven and Sonya Michel, "Womanly Duties: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States in France, Germany, Great Britain, and the United States, 1880-1920," *American Historical Review* 95 (Oct. 1990): 1081-1084; Seth Koven and Sonya Michel, eds., *Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

3. Mimi Abramovitz, *Regulating the Lives of Poor Women: Social Welfare Policy from Colonial Times to the Present* (Boston: South End Press, 1988). See also Koven and Michel, "Womanly Duties," 1083-1084; and Linda Gordon, "The New Feminist Scholarship on the Welfare State," in *Women, the State and Welfare*, ed. Linda Gordon (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990) 9-35.

4. Linda Gordon, *Heroes of Their Own Lives: The Politics and History of Family Violence* (London: Virago Press, 1989); Barbara Brenzel, *Daughters of the State: A Social Portrait of the First Reform School for Girls in North America, 1855-1905* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1983); Mary Odem, *Delinquent Daughters: Protecting and Policing Adolescent Female Sexuality in the United States, 1885-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 128-156.

5. Gordon, "The New Feminist Scholarship," 10-18; Koven and Michel, *Mothers of a New World*, 1-42; Joanne L. Goodwin, *Gender and the Politics of Welfare: Mothers' Pensions in Chicago, 1911-1929* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

6. See e.g. Karen J. Blair, *The Clubwoman as Feminist: True Womanhood Redefined, 1868-1914* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1980); Barbara Berg, *The Remembered Gate: Origins of American Feminism: The Woman and the City, 1800-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).

7. Nancy F. Cott, "What's in a Name? The Limits of 'Social Feminism': or Expanding the Vocabulary of Women's History," *Journal of American History* 76 (Dec. 1989): 809-829; Anne Firor Scott, *Natural Allies: Women's Associations in American History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993).

8. Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-1860," *American Quarterly* 18 (Summer 1966): 150-174; Amy Dru Stanley, "Home Life and the Morality of the Market," in *The Market Revolution in America: Social, Political, and Religious Expressions, c. 1800-1880*, ed. M. Stokes and S. Conway (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996), 74-96.

9. 'Republican Motherhood' is defined by Linda Kerber, "A Constitutional Right to be Treated Like American Ladies: Women and the Obligations of Citizenship," in *U.S. History as Women's History: New Feminist Essays*, ed. Linda Kerber et al. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 24-25; see also Ruth Bloch, "The Gendered Meaning of Virtue in Revolutionary America," *Signs* 13 (Autumn 1987): 37-58.

10. Kathryn Kish Sklar, *Catherine Beecher: A Study in American Domesticity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973); Barbara M. Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women: A History of Women and Higher Education in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985); Nancy Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: 'Woman's Sphere' in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977); Lori Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

11. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: Oxford University Press,

1985), 167-181, 245-296; Margaret Gibbons Wilson, *The American Woman in Transition: The Urban Influence, 1870-1920* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1979); Anne Firor Scott, "On Seeing and Not Seeing: A Case of Historical Invisibility," *Journal of American History* 71 (June 1984): 7-21.

12. Koven and Michel, "Womanly Duties," 1081-1084; Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992).

13. For a further discussion of the changes in attitudes towards childhood and child rearing see Elizabeth J. Clapp, *Mothers of All Children: Women Reformers and the Rise of Juvenile Courts in Progressive Era America* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), 10-14.

14. Sonya Michel and Robyn Rosen, "The Paradox of Maternalism: Elizabeth Lowell Putnam and the American Welfare State," *Gender and History* 4 (Autumn 1992): 364; Molly Ladd-Taylor, *Mother-Work: Women, Child Welfare, and the State, 1890-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 3;

15. Koven and Michel, "Womanly Duties," 1076-1084; Noralee Frankel and Nancy S. Dye, eds., *Gender, Class, Race and Reform in the Progressive Era* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1991), 1-9; Linda Gordon, "Social Insurance and Public Assistance: The Influence of Gender in Welfare Thought in the United States, 1890-1935," *American Historical Review* 97 (Feb. 1992): 19-54;

16. Blanche Wiesen Cook, "Female Support Networks and Political Activism: Lillian Wald, Crystal Eastman, Emma Goldman," *Chrysalis* 8 (Summer 1979): 43-61; James Johnson, "The Role of Women in the Founding of the United States Children's Bureau," in *Remember the Ladies: New Perspectives on Women in American History: Essays in Honor of Nelson Manfred Blake*, ed. C. V. R. George (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1975).

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19. Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers*, 317-372.

20. Paula Baker, "The Domestication of Politics: Women and American Political Society, 1780-1920," *American Historical Review* 89 (1984): 620-647.

21. Gordon, "Social Insurance and Public Assistance," 19-54; S. Sara Monoson, "The Lady and the Tiger: Women's Electoral Activism in New York City Before Suffrage," *Journal of Women's History* 2 (Fall 1990): 100-135; Maureen A. Flanagan, "Gender and Urban Political Reform: The City Club and the Woman's City Club of Chicago in the Progressive Era," *American Historical Review* 95 (Oct. 1990): 1032-1050; Paula Baker, *The Moral Framework of Public Life: Gender, Politics and the State in Rural New York, 1870-1930* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Clapp, *Mothers of All Children*, passim.

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Michel and Rosen, "The Paradox of Maternalism," 364-386; Molly Ladd-Taylor, "Toward Defining Maternalism in U.S. History," *Journal of Women's History* 6 (Fall 1993): 110-113.

24. Clapp, *Mothers of All Children*; Gordon, "Social Insurance and Public Assistance," 19-54.

25. "Constitution of the GFWC. Article II: Object." Minutes of the Board of Directors, General Federation of Women's Clubs, vol. 2, 0101-02-1/4. General Federation of Women's Club Papers, Archives of the General Federation of Women's Clubs, Washington D.C. (hereafter GFWC Papers).

26. Mary I. Wood, *The History of the General Federation of Women's Clubs for the First Twenty-Two Years of Its Organization* (New York, 1912), 294; Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers*, 329.

27. Speech at the Chicago Biennial, 1892, Presidents' Papers, Charlotte Emerson Brown (Speeches), 1892/05, GFWC Papers.

28. Wood, *The History of the General Federation of Women's Clubs*, 39-40.

29. Edward T. James, Janet Wilson James and Paul S. Boyer, eds., *Notable American Women: 1607-1950: A Biographical Dictionary*, 4 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971) 2, 171-173.

30. *Ibid.*, 2, 181-183.

31. Blair, *The Clubwoman as Feminist*, 95.

32. Minutes of Advisory Board, May 7, 1890, Minutes of the Board of Directors, vol. 2, GFWC papers.

33. This row may be followed in the Minutes of the Board Meeting, June 4, 1900, June 7, 1900, November 9, 1900, and November 10, 1900. Those for 1901 and 1902 are missing. Minutes of the Board of Directors, vol. 2, GFWC papers. It was also waged in the pages of the *Club Woman*. See *Club Woman*, 9 (March 1902), for the compromise reached; see also Blair, *The Clubwoman as Feminist*, 108-110, and Clapp, *Mothers of All Children*, 96-97.

34. Minutes of the Directors' Meeting, Oct. 16, 1894, Minutes of the Board of Directors, vol. 2, GFWC papers. Jewish women's organizations regularly reported their activities in the *Club Woman*. The issue of class is discussed by Blair, *The Clubwoman as Feminist*, 110. However, the GFWC clearly saw itself as representing the interests of all women.

35. Minutes of a Board Meeting held Nov. 1, 1895, Minutes of the Board of Directors, vol. 2, GFWC papers.

36. Anna M. Longstreth, "Women in Municipal Affairs," speech May 10, 1894, Convention Records (Addresses and Papers), vol. 3: Biennial Addresses and Papers, 1890-94, 252-253, 0302-1-1, GFWC Papers.

37. Speech by Mrs. A. O. Granger, Feb. 1905, Folder 2: Program Records, 1904-1906 (Pamphlets), Industrial Committee, Child Labor Committee, Program Records, 1905/02/14-1905/02/16, GFWC Papers.

38. Blair, *The Clubwoman as Feminist*, 105-108, though Blair refers to this as 'municipal housekeeping' rather than maternalism. See also Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers*, 328-333.

39. These definitions appear in Clapp, *Mothers of All Children*, 3-4, 20, 48. Similar constructions are used by Ladd-Taylor, *Mother-Work*, 43-44.

40. Blair, *The Clubwoman as Feminist*, 111-112.

41. The suffrage was finally endorsed by the GFWC in 1914, see: Twelfth Biennial Convention, Chicago, 1914, folder 3 - Resolutions and Legislation, GFWC Papers. Earlier attempts to gain GFWC endorsement of the suffrage may be found in "The Question," *New Cycle* 8 (July 1894), 1-2, and the reply by Mrs. Henrotin, President of the GFWC, "Record of the Clubs," 19-22.

42. Wood, *The History of the General Federation of Women's Clubs*, 49-51.

43. President's address, May 11, 1892, Convention Records (Addresses and Papers) 1890-94, 0302-1-1, vol. 3: Biennial Addresses and Papers GFWC, 41, GFWC Papers.

44. Blair, *The Clubwoman as Feminist*, 93; Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers*, 328-333.

45. Circular letter from Mrs. Henrotin, dated Dec. 14, 1896, Minutes of Board Meeting, Feb. 15, 1897, Minutes of the Board of Directors, vol. 2, 117, GFWC Papers.

46. Board of Directors Meetings, Sep. 20-23, 1906, Minutes of the Board of Directors, vol. 7, 17-19, GFWC Papers.

47. Wood, *The History of the General Federation of Women's Clubs*, 109-11.

48. *Ibid.*, 250.

49. Twelfth Biennial Convention, Chicago, 1914, folder 3 - Resolutions and Legislation (Resolutions) 1911-16, Resolutions and Legislation, GFWC Papers.

50. On the changing arguments over woman's suffrage see Baker, "The Domestication of Politics," 620-647.

51. Blair, *The Clubwoman as Feminist*, 96-97.

52. Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers*, 328-331. Notices of the affiliation of various clubs and state federations may be found in issues of the GFWC's magazine, variously published as *Woman's Cycle*, *Homemaker*, *New Cycle*, *Club Woman* and *Federation Bulletin* during the period under discussion.

53. Report of the Illinois State Federation to the Fifth Biennial, June 4-9, 1900, Convention Records (Proceedings-Reports) 1900/06/04-1902/05/08, GFWC Papers. Reports in *Club Woman* 3 (Nov. 1898), 68-69.

54. "Report of the Industrial Committee of the GFWC," Seventh Biennial, 1904, Convention Records (Proceedings-Reports) 1904/05/17-1904/05/27, GFWC Papers.

55. The role of the GFWC in the juvenile court movement is discussed further in Clapp, *Mothers of All Children*, 99-102.

56. Wood, *The History of the General Federation of Women's Clubs*, 109-111, 134-139, 145-148. On Kelley see Kathryn Kish Sklar, *Florence Kelley and the Nation's Work: The Rise of Women's Political Culture, 1830-1900* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

57. Ella Haas, "Factory Inspection," Report of the Tenth Biennial Convention, 1910, 387, GFWC Papers. Discussions of work for protective legislation for women and children, speeches to the biennials and reports of progress may be found throughout the records of the GFWC and in Wood, *The History of the General Federation of Women's Clubs*.

58. Minutes of Meeting, May 25, 1904, Minutes of the Board of Directors, vol. 5, 112, GFWC Papers.

59. Council Meeting, June 8, 1906, Minutes of the Board of Directors, vol. 7, 11, GFWC Papers.

60. Meeting of the Board of Directors, May 26, 1904, Minutes of the Board of Directors, vol. 6, 9, GFWC Papers; Meeting of the Board of Directors, Apr. 17, 18, 21, 1911, Minutes of the Board of Directors, vol. 9, 139, GFWC Papers.

61. Meeting of the Board of Directors, Sep. 20-23, 1906, Minutes of the Board of Directors, vol. 7, 58-59, GFWC Papers.

62. Report of the Legislative Committee, Report of Tenth Biennial Convention, 1910, 371-387, GFWC Papers.

63. Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers*, 317-320; Kathryn Kish Sklar, "The Historical Foundations of Women's Power in the Creation of the American Welfare State, 1830-1930," in *Mothers of a New World*, ed. Koven and Michel, 43-93.

64. Report of the Legislative Committee, June 6, 1906, Report of the Eighth Biennial Convention, 1906, 269, GFWC Papers.

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Social Work and Social Policy in Germany and the United States

John D. Morrison and Robert A. Wolf

This paper is an attempt to contrast current German and American social welfare systems. We write it from the perspective of two American social workers who had the opportunity to be part of a series of international exchanges. Under the sponsorship of the American National Association of Social Workers (NASW), the Chicago-Hamburg Sister City Program and the Hamburg Youth Authority, three two-week exchanges of professionals occurred between November 1996 and September 1998. In the 1996 and 1998 exchanges, twelve NASW members traveled to Hamburg to study, discuss and contrast the welfare and social service systems of both countries. In 1997, twelve German professionals traveled to Chicago to study the American system, and another group of Germans came in May of 1999.

Our analysis is based on our observations and discussions with German counterparts, and includes observations made by the Germans who visited Chicago in 1997. As Americans, we have the advantage of observing the differences between German and American social services, but had the disadvantage of not having studied a great deal of the history and social legislation of Germany.

In writing this paper we have attempted to compare German and American social welfare systems. A comparative approach to studying social welfare services is useful in several ways. Looking at different systems increases the ability to understand one's own culture and service system. By identifying differences between a system that we are familiar with and an alternative system, we can hopefully discern the underlying philosophy, values, history and cultural contexts of each. The identification of these differences suggests alternatives to the status quo and provides a broader range of practice and policy options for future consideration. A comparative analysis should not attempt to pose the question "which system is best," but rather "under what conditions should an alternative be considered." We offer a series of eight discussion points to summarize our comparison of the two systems:

1. The Role of Welfare and Social Services

Social welfare and social services do not stand alone but reflect a society's culture, values and history. Germany has had a much longer history of providing basic health and income supports, dating back to the Bismarck era in the 1880s. Indeed, the term "welfare," or *Wohlfahrtsstaat* in German, suggests a social contract between citizen and government in contrast to the stigma attached to welfare in America. Social welfare provisions are not only well accepted by the German public, but expected. Most welfare services are citizen entitlements and available at no cost regardless of individual or family income. Germans also seem much more accepting of a strong role for government and seem to assume that government usually works in the best interest of citizens. Indeed, German professionals often expressed the view that government-run services were of higher quality than those services offered by non-public organizations. However, recent cut-backs in government funding along with the increasing role of the private sector may change this view.

Ultimately, social welfare policy revolves around whom we consider strangers rather than neighbors, and the relative weight given to individualism versus the common good. The homogeneous nature of German society, with a more consistent culture and value system, supports the latter, more communitarian view of social welfare. There is a strong social contract that exists between government and citizens, with an understanding that citizens can rely on government in times of need. This social contract is widely supported and cannot be easily modified. We would suggest that social welfare is an umbrella of services, which supports most families in Germany and promotes the cultural, moral and ethical values that have been developed through political consensus at the federal and state levels of government.

In contrast, American social welfare provisions have no such goals of increasing social cohesion, a

sense of national purpose, or commitment to one another. Social welfare began selectively in the 1800s through religious and non-sectarian private efforts, rather than under governmental auspices. National government sponsorship of services began much later, particularly as a reaction to the Great Depression of the 1930s. Until the 1960s, government focus was on specific needy groups such as military veterans, orphans, and dependent families. Americans historically have viewed government as a necessary evil, a financial burden and a threat to individual liberties. Elevating the anti-government attitude, Senator Bob Dole in his 1996 presidential campaign argued against large, centralized government by frequently starting his speeches with, "The scariest words in the English language are 'I'm from the federal government and I'm here to help you.'"

The United States is a "reluctant welfare state" and the social safety net is much less developed and covers fewer people who are at risk than in most European countries.¹ Welfare programs typically identify the sickest and poorest as their charge with little interest in the working poor, common good or universal prevention approaches. While some states and localities have provided public and private funding to create local safety nets and preventive programs, these initiatives reflect local values and available resources, rather than a larger national consensus. There is a tendency in America to assume that the economic market, the family or the church will take care of most problems. Those who actually use services are often seen as lacking character and are therefore stigmatized; there is a tendency to "blame the victim."

2. Establishing a Financial Safety Net

The German financial floor or "safety net" is set at a much higher level than in America, which makes it possible for families to maintain a relatively decent standard of living on government supports. Most programs are open to all citizens and do not require an extensive work history in order for individuals to receive benefits. The implications of this are enormous. Many social problems are correlated with poverty, including child abuse and neglect, family dissolution, violence, school failure, crime and delinquency. One simply does not see the kind of poverty in German cities that one experiences in America. Lower rates of poverty contribute to the much lower incidents of delinquency, child abuse, neglect, and violence in Germany.



Although many elderly women receive social security, benefit levels in both Germany and the United States are still much lower for women than for men.

American income support programs are heavily tied to employment. In America, a two-tier system exists, one for those with extensive work history (five years or more for Social Security), which tends to be much more holistic and collaborative with clients (Social Security, Unemployment Insurance and Medicare), and a second for those with little work history (Public Assistance, Supplemental Security Income and Medicaid). The first is typically characterized as social insurance, and recipients are seen as "worthy," and the second as "welfare," where recipients are seen as weak or flawed. Support levels are much more generous for those who have had regular employment, but still lag behind German levels of assistance. An implied social contract exists for those covered by social insurance, but no such contract exists for welfare recipients. We found much less of a dichotomy in German thinking and practices related to cash support.

It is unclear what level of poverty would occur "naturally" in each country without poverty mitigation programs. What is most important is that Germany does a much better job of preventing the effects of poverty. Reducing the level of absolute poverty has societal benefits; not dealing with poverty results in both social and fiscal costs. Perhaps we have an option to either pay early (Germany) or pay later (America). It is unclear what the total cost is with either option, but the German model probably results in fewer casualties and a higher sense of national cohesion.

3. Meeting Need or Providing Social Control

German services express value for the individual and his or her family, and tend to be much more

holistic and collaborative than in the U.S. There is a tendency for Germans to deal with actual need and not to blame clients for their situation. In the German foster care system, for example, biological families unable for a variety of reasons to raise their children, can maintain a continuing relationship and legal rights to their children even after placement in a foster care home. The child can grow to adulthood in the foster home or an institution enjoying support from both biological and foster parents. In contrast, the growing cost of foster care in America led to new legislation establishing a time limit of twelve months for either rehabilitating the biological parents or legally terminating their parental rights and placing the child for adoption. It is also worth noting that German foster parents are paid almost twice as much for caring for a foster child than their American counterparts.

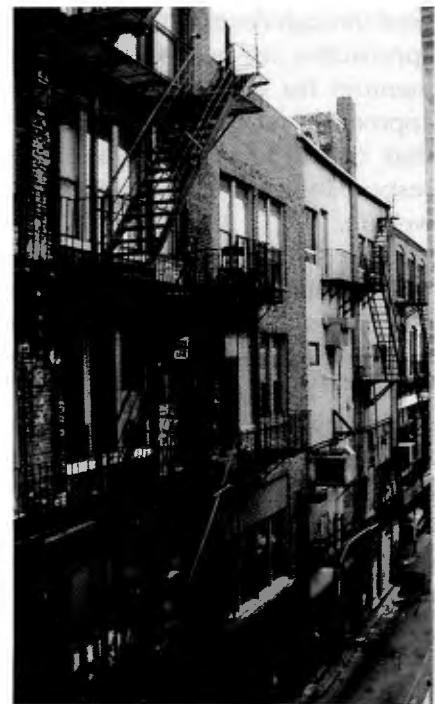
In Germany, there is the conviction that the state should only impose on individual behavior when life-and-death issues are at stake. This societal preference for non-intervention may result in institutional blind spots and an underreporting of child abuse or domestic violence. While American social workers assume that they also perform a social control role for society, German social workers are most uncomfortable with this concept. We believe this is a reaction to the excesses of the National Socialists, when deviancy of many forms was punished by authorities. We observed a number of manifestations of this reluctance to impose professional or societal controls or values on clients. For example, despite a growing interest in "accountability" or measuring the outcomes of their work, social workers keep very few records, as records had been misused by Nazis to identify deviants.

The threshold of risk tolerance is clearly much higher in Germany than in America. For youths, the individual's right to make harmful decisions concerning his or her own life, e.g. drug addiction, prostitution and homelessness, was striking. At the same time a host of support services were provided to maintain these high-risk individuals and families until they themselves decided to seek help. Indeed, several policemen talked of the open drug use and prostitution as a social, not a criminal problem, even though both are illegal. Other examples include government-sanctioned, but unsupervised group living apartments for homeless/runaway fifteen and sixteen-year olds; temporary court-sanctioned

housing in a public hotel for a violent "skinhead," until a psychiatric bed became available in a hospital; and the reported reluctance to force the removal of a sexually abusive parent from the home, opting instead to remove the child victim.

German social workers (and seemingly German society) guard against imposing their middle-class values on their clients. Social workers, in particular, were more tolerant of clients' rights to choose alternative life styles than their American counterparts. The openness and tolerance of drug use, prostitution and a counter culture surprised us. We asked ourselves how long the Chicago municipal administration would tolerate addicts congregating around the central station or the caravan squatters occupying open land as we saw in Hamburg-Altona. Despite civil rights issues, only a few days would elapse before the Chicago police would feel compelled by the public to take action.

Similarly, there was very benign attitude toward youth crime and vandalism. The tolerance for "graffiti" and gangs stands in stark contrast to an American overt battle with both. Americans view graffiti as reflective of gang and, therefore, criminal activities. American gangs are formed for the primary purpose of carrying out illegal activities, primarily the distribution of narcotics. Gang members mark their neighborhood with graffiti to show their allegiances to the gang and its territory, as well as to challenge rival gangs. The Chicago Crime Commission has targeted gangs as "Public Enemy No. 1." In contrast to German authorities seeking alternatives to jailing youths for criminal offenses, America is increasingly concerned with youth violence and



Back Alley, Public Housing, Boston

there is a growing tendency to incarcerate youths and try them as adults. We feel that American society is much less tolerant of deviant behavior than German society. We understand that these practices and other social policies in Germany reflect a reaction to the authoritarian abuses of the National Socialist regime. However, we would suggest our German colleagues might want to reconsider the balance between the rights of the clients with the rights of potential or actual victims and society as a whole.

4. Designing and Implementing Social Services

The focus of American social services is treatment and remediation, rather than prevention. Interventions are targeted to individuals, rather than communities. American social work historically embraced Freudian and psychoanalytic theory in developing its practices. These theoretical underpinnings view human problems as originating in individual pathology, rather than a dysfunctional society, and parallel the highly regarded medical model of diagnosis and treatment. Starting with the family therapy movement in the 1960s, the psychoanalytic model began yielding to a more holistic view of the client, and eclectic interventions were developed drawing from a range of theoretical constructs. In the last decade there has been an emerging interest in America for addressing social need through developing coordinated neighborhood approaches, self-help support groups and volunteer mentors for clients. Some of these less costly approaches may well be motivated by a realization that the federal government is reducing its responsibility and financial support for social welfare.

Paralleling German reform with the passage of new laws on social assistance and assistance to youth in 1961, the American government began responding to social need through enacting enabling and/or mandating legislation and allocating monies to states to develop individual plans for starting a number of new initiatives. Some early federal initiatives in the 1960s included the community mental health movement, court-focused juvenile justice programs, school-focused special educational services for handicapped children, and President Johnson's Great Society initiatives to eliminate poverty. This trend at the federal level has continued throughout this decade. However, when states started these federally

funded initiatives, services often became complicated by bureaucracy and political interference, distanced from the very communities so necessary for success, and costly as inflationary forces required ever increasing financial support from the states. From these combined factors and a growing tension between federal and state officials, governmental services began being transferred to the private sector. Supported by the growing New Right in America and its increasing political influence and power, the current welfare reform arguments have extended this trend, organizing around a concept called "devolution." Devolution is "the passing of responsibility and (partial) authority for activities and services of the federal government to the state governments and from the state governments to local governments...."² While untested and having the potential to create holes in the safety net, devolution and the growing political popularity of localized control is accelerating the privatization of governmental services. With this shifting of resources, remaining government-run services struggle to maintain adequate funding and quality standards.

In contrast, the growing private sector has successfully sought private funding in order to leverage government dollars. This additional financial support is dramatically increasing the quality of services, as private agencies develop training programs and quality assurance systems, and seek higher levels of professionalism through meeting accreditation standards. These standards are developed by accrediting bodies, which are national in scope and represent a professional consensus on "best practices." Agencies apply for accreditation by completing a lengthy self-study, in which they describe and document how they comply with all of the standards. The accrediting body then sends a review team of professional colleagues to spend several days in the agency verifying compliance with the standards. If successful, the agency becomes accredited for a three to four-year period, after which the self-study and professional review is repeated. We found no equivalent process in Germany.

German counseling or personal social services offer many contrasts to American practices. First, the counseling process itself appears to be anchored in ego psychology and social learning theory and is intended to be short term. German counseling tends to focus on client strengths and appears to actively engage family, friends and community in problem-

solving and validating the dignity of the client. We were surprised, but delighted, to visit one agency in Hamburg whose staff was undergoing training in "Solution-Focused, Short-Term Therapy." The training was being provided by the Family Institute of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, an organization known and respected by these authors. Second, we found little interest in court-mandated counseling, unlike in America, where court tolerance for deviant behavior is limited. Third, direct and/or forced government intervention in the lives of its citizens appeared rare. Social workers often describe their role as being available to help clients when clients are ready. Parent(s), rather than other professionals,



Medicare, the federal health insurance program for the elderly, is among the most expensive social programs in the United States.

seek out child welfare services for their children, define the problem and determine the type of intervention. The parents' "...decisions in this respect have to be accepted as long as the child's welfare is not endangered."³ This control and direction of services by the parent(s) stands in stark contrast to the American view of the professional knowing what is best for the client, and the expectation, as

in the doctor-patient relationship, that the client will accept the professional's recommendation.

5. The Social Service Delivery System

In Germany, most services are funded by the government, which also directly operates many services. Social service workers are for the most part public employees. With this homogenous work force under a single employer, a shared view of

purpose and methodology was evident in the professional community.

The Hamburg Youth Authority, for example, operates a wide range of services typically with its own staff, rather than relying on contracts with non-governmental agencies. On the one hand, this makes for a high degree of stability in the provision of services and consistency of policy. It also means, on the other hand, that services are not so responsive to changing conditions, innovations are neither sought nor rewarded, and there is less sanction against marginal performance by staff. Our German colleagues, for example, had trouble thinking of situations where professionals had lost their positions due to poor performance.

A shifting of power and control is also occurring in Germany with the passage of care insurance. The new Care Insurance Funds (*Pflegeversicherung*) assumes responsibility for licensing providers, negotiates the cost and quality of services, and creates parity between welfare associations and commercial providers. These differences, we suspect, will significantly impact the very nature of government and non-governmental agencies, as survival will depend on successfully competing with the commercial market and each other.

As indicated earlier, most current American social services are provided by private, not-for-profit agencies. These agencies are legally independent entities with their own governing boards of directors. Typically, these boards have locally prominent citizens as members. In Chicago, more than 1,000 private social service agencies operate, often with little central planning, unifying philosophy or consistent policies and procedures. At the same time, competition encourages voluntary social agencies to specialize and be innovative. Funding of agencies is fragmented and most agencies rely on multiple funding sources including government funds (the largest revenue source), private contributions and charitable foundations. Competition between agencies has been related to securing external funding, rather than attracting clients, so clients have not seen benefits from competition in terms of more responsive services, such as more flexible hours or individually customized services based on clients' needs.

With this competitive environment, it is not surprising that an entrepreneurial mind-set prevails.

Social agencies are increasingly using the language of private corporations to describe their operations. The term "president" is replacing the earlier non-profit term "executive director" to describe the chief staff person, and agencies are increasingly describing themselves as "companies." Qualifications for leadership positions increasingly emphasize marketing, public relations and business credentials, rather than skill at providing social services and understanding of the human condition.

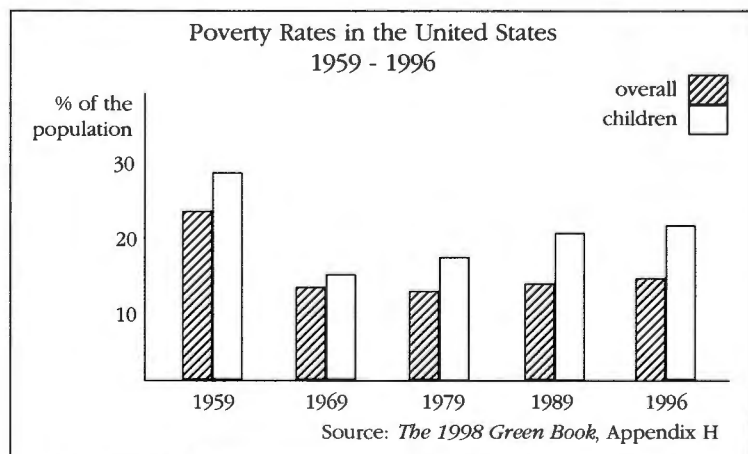
6. Financing Social Welfare and Managing the Costs of Service

Both countries are reexamining social welfare provisions and their costs. Much of this discussion has unfortunately been framed in terms of globalization, international competition and fiscal constraints, which sets the stage for reducing support of social services.

In America, there has been a dramatic reduction in federal responsibility for public assistance for the poorest Americans. The political Right has advanced the myth that most public assistance clients are from minority groups, have used social programs on a long-term basis and have become dependent on welfare. While minority groups, such as African-Americans and Latinos, have tended to use public assistance programs proportionately more than whites, the majority of welfare clients are, in fact, white. This distortion, however, has contributed to the image of public assistance programs as programs for minorities, which reduced support for public assistance in the larger society. As a result, the system of federal assistance (Aid to Families with Dependent Children [AFDC]), which had been maintained since the 1930s and was primarily funded by the federal government, was replaced in 1997 with a far more limited program. While AFDC provided grants at a level of half of the official poverty level and was administered by the states under federal guidelines, the new program, Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF), eliminates most federal government standards. It puts the states in charge of both regulation and administration. Most importantly, the new program limits aid to a lifetime maximum of five years for a family, and new emphasis is placed on moving parents into employment. One of the few positive changes is a

much broader provision for day care for children of working parents and better health care provisions for children. (See also the articles on the 1996 welfare reforms on pp. 26-44 – Ed.)

Increasingly, American services are subject to "managed care" provisions, which are attempts to contain the costs through rationing services. This has happened first in health care, where medical services must be pre-approved by a managed care company or health maintenance organization (HMO), which serves as an intermediary organization between the employers, who pay for services, and clients, who use them. Typically in the health care arena, these quasi-insurance organizations are private, for-profit corporations, which authorize physician and hospital services. If they provide fewer or cheaper services, the corporations make more money, because they are paid on a fixed per-capita basis. This trend is spreading to social services as well. A voluntary agency might, for example, be provided a fixed dollar amount by the state to deal with all aspects of care for a foster child. If the child requires less services, the agency profits, if more services are required, the agency must find private funds to cover the additional cost.



As mentioned earlier in this paper, the devolution movement in America attempts to manage costs by allocating predetermined levels of funding from the federal and state governments to local governmental and private agencies. The local service providers then will have to struggle with stretching the resources to meet local needs. Options will include seeking private funds to supplement government funding, limiting services through prioritizing clients based on greatest need, providing less service and/or reducing operating expenses through use of volunteers and hiring less qualified staff.

Franz Bönker and Helmut Wollmann identify a similar policy shift in Germany in the late 1980s: "Confronted with massive fiscal stress and growing discontent with service quality, social policy 'rediscovered' the alleged virtues of subsidiarity...many municipalities now sought, where possible, to delegate social services to the welfare associations."⁴ Consequences of this German version of devolution are a very uneven range of services from one city or state to another, dependent on the local willingness to financially support social services. With the absorbing of East Germany and global economic pressures, the resulting fiscal pressures on the German central government will probably result in decreasing support for social welfare programs. However, starting from a much higher base, it is unlikely that Germany will reduce its income support programs to American levels.

One growing trend which might minimize the effects of diminishing government support is the growth in the number and size of German foundations. The Executive Director of the Heinrich Böll Foundation, Ralf Fücks, stated: "The question is not state or private, but increasing public-private partnership."⁵ With the left-leaning Green Party recently proposing new laws to encourage the creation of foundations, one may argue for a developing consensus that government alone cannot meet all of the social welfare needs in German. If true, the foundations and commercial markets will become new players in the designing and implementing of social welfare policies.

7. Perceptions of Social Work

History has also affected the nature of professionalization of social services in each country. The first training or education programs for social workers in America began one hundred years ago. Because individuals entering social services were typically graduates of colleges or universities (often women, with degrees in a variety of academic disciplines), these programs began as short, post-graduate, agency-based training programs. From this beginning, university-based, graduate-level schools of social work evolved. Although until the 1940s, faculty were usually individuals with only a master's degree in social work, doctoral-level education in social work as a discipline emerged soon. Currently, faculty in most social work programs (undergraduate or graduate) have a doctoral degree in social work. American social work as a discipline has all the

trappings (although not the prestige) of other professions, with journals, conferences, awards, licenses, a code of ethics, etc.

In contrast, as a profession, social work is less developed in Germany and has little professional identity. The term "social work" seems more often to be used to describe job duties rather than the credentials of a person. Those employed in German social services come from a variety of educational backgrounds. Some may be trained in university-based education programs (*Sozialpädagogen*), others in polytechnic (*Fachhochschule*) social work programs, and still others are trained in law, psychology or sociology. Education for social services typically takes place at a post-high school or bachelor's level, and typically social work students are being taught by professors with education in a discipline other than social work. Lack of doctoral training in social work as a profession, as well as the absence of a coherent body of practice-based knowledge and research, has limited the development of social work as a profession.

There are also status differences in terms of German education. Polytechnic education, no matter how good, is not regarded in the same way as university education. In contrast, in America there is a common set of degrees: bachelor's, master's and doctorate that all colleges and universities use. This gives at least the appearance of similar education attainment, despite the reality of substantial differences between various institutions of higher education. German social work practice seems to be driven largely by government policy. It was unclear to us to what extent public policy is influenced by client advocacy and client needs as identified by professionals in the field. German social service staff seem to regard themselves first as agency employees and only secondarily as members of a profession. Americans, partly because of job mobility and the diverse and fragmented nature of agencies, are more likely to emphasize their professional status and market their areas of expertise.

There are differences in the philosophy, theory and knowledge used by professional social service workers in each country. German social work is much more sociological than American social work, which places much more emphasis on psychological theory. This is probably not surprising, given the individualistic nature of American society. Our brief discussions with German social work educators

suggest that German social workers are more likely to deal with fundamental philosophical issues at the policy rather than the practice level. Americans seem ultimately to be more pragmatic, rather than philosophical. It seemed particularly ironic that in one school of social work, philosophical writings of German Jews, who had fled to the United States, were now required readings for students. American social workers place emphasis on a professional code of ethics, but this focuses on the practice and behavior of individual social workers in relationship to individual clients, rather than on agency practices or governmental policy.

8. Diversity and Homogeneity

Germany has considerably less population diversity than America. Diversity in Germany is thought of as "Germans" and "foreigners," meaning anyone not born German. In America, diversity is discussed and organized along racial categories, such as white, black, Latino, Asian, rather than immigrant status. While there has been steady immigration to Germany, citizenship is not easily obtained. Second-generation immigrants, who had successfully obtained citizenship, still reported feeling like foreigners and therefore unequal. We saw refugees and guest workers from a variety of countries. For example, many whose asylum status was not confirmed were housed separately in special boats anchored in the Hamburg harbor. We speculated that this was done to minimize integration with German citizens and to make it easier to eventually return non-citizens to their homelands. While immigration is controlled in America, setting aside such special housing provisions for non-citizen residents would have little support.

The integration of East and West Germany seems particularly challenging. While basic language and history are the same, a half century of different cultural development and a different reward systems has made integration problematic. America has a large non-white population, mostly African-American (12.1%) but with an increasing Latino and

Asian-American population that is not fully integrated into our society.⁶ Minorities, either foreigners or ethnic minorities, challenge the social welfare system to be culturally responsible in responding to their needs and in ensuring that each family receives the support that is needed.

We would caution against looking at social welfare simply as a "cost." There are considerable benefits in terms of prevention of more troublesome social problems and the ultimate costs that go with these. The value of social services in terms of quality of life for all, national stability and cohesion have too often been minimized.

Conclusions

The role social welfare plays in each country is quite different. German welfare is part of the very culture of the people articulating government's commitment to the common good. The German design in current practices is clearly tied to countering and guarding against a repeat of the abuses of the National Socialist regime. American welfare, on the other hand, started with private religious organizations taking care of their own, and only reluctantly did government become involved with broader social problems. Welfare benefits are minimal by German standards and cover only the sickest and the poorest of citizens. In Germany, one



President Roosevelt signing the Social Security Act into law, August 14, 1935

does not see the level of poverty as in America, nor the high rate of poverty-related problems, such as delinquency, child abuse, violence, etc. Quite naturally then, American social services focus on these targeted groups and have developed various therapeutic techniques to assist clients in changing their behavior. Court-ordered interventions (social control) are freely utilized when individuals or families are in trouble or are resisting services. Unfortunately, none of these efforts address the fundamental issues of being poor in a rich country. German social services, in contrast, are supportive in nature and seem to have the resources to address the fundamental issues of poverty, housing, job skills, etc. Proportionately, German social services serve fewer clients than their American counterparts. We would argue that this stands as testimony to the effectiveness of preventive services. We also suggest that the value placed on prevention and non-intervention may actually create societal blind spot, resulting in significant underreporting of needs. The degree to which German social services tolerate and to some degree support deviant and high-risk behavior was striking to these authors. The American preoccupation with placing blame and using the court system to sue for alleged damages means that the social welfare system places considerable energy into self-protection and managing risk.

One question that we came away with is whether the Germany of the future will be like the present America in terms of the level and nature of social problems. If it does, Germany might learn much from various tried and tested American models of intervention and remedial services. Technology related to individual services is better developed in America because of its emphasis on "fixing" the individual. Consequently, American social services have developed an extensive range of psycho-therapeutic approaches and imposed intervention. These may be of value to German practitioners with appropriate modifications, if Germany eventually experiences increasing levels of social problems.

The role and function of social workers and social services reflect the culture and values of the society of which they are a part. As each society continues to modify its view of the role of social services and social welfare, changes in the role of social workers and their education will be required. American social workers can benefit from studying the German use of environmental resources in service delivery. Given the American preference for in-patient hospital

treatment, Americans could benefit from studying the German approach to addiction, from outpatient detoxification to outpatient treatment approaches, which recognize relapse and tend to focus on addictive behavior and its dynamics, rather than the substance or behavior of addiction.

Finally, it needs to be recognized that fiscal constraints will increase on both sides of the Atlantic. Social welfare officials will have to adapt through the development of new methods to increase efficiencies, such as collaboration with other agencies and the merger of smaller agencies. In addition, working with the commercial and foundation world would expand services and increase fiscal resources.

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Welfare Reform as “Social Experiment”?

Holger Backhaus-Maul

1. Continuity and Change

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996 represented a “radical” change in the welfare policy of the U.S. while simultaneously giving expression to continuity within that policy, however paradoxical that may sound. In the U.S., social welfare benefits have always been provided under the terms of an orientation towards work that dominates the entire society and has traditionally placed great emphasis on the welfare recipient’s obligation to work. With William J. Clinton’s programmatic call during his presidential election campaign “to end welfare as we know it,” and the subsequent reform of welfare in 1996, there is no longer a single, nationwide, open-ended entitlement to welfare in the U.S.—and therein lies the far-reaching change.¹

Since initial experience with welfare reform has been gained, the question is whether the broad transfer of power to the individual states, the cap on the duration of welfare payments, and the strategies to integrate welfare recipients into the labor market are contributing to the long-term solution of the problem of poverty or not. The following article will first describe and then critically examine some unique features of the American social welfare and insurance system, in particular the forms of social assistance of interest here.

2. Social Insurance and Social Assistance

Public and Private Safety Nets

There is no comprehensive system of social welfare and insurance in the U.S. that ensures a minimum existence. A significant section of the population is not integrated into the social welfare system at all. Even for those groups who do receive some public assistance, benefits alone neither cover basic needs nor ensure survival.² Hence, it is not surprising that the U.S. share of social payments is manifestly lower than in Germany.³ In evaluating such national social payments and expenditures,

however, it must be kept in mind that, in contrast to Germany, safeguards against social risks in the U.S. are to a large extent provided privately. In this context, private insurance and various types of private “wealth” accumulation should be mentioned. In addition, private citizens in the U.S. are much more likely than in Germany to be active as volunteers in a wide range of non-profit organizations that deliver social services and assistance.⁴ Private provisions and private volunteerism thus form the mainstay of individual safety nets in the U.S., while public welfare benefits provide a necessary supplement.

Forms of Insurance

Put simply, the social system in the U.S. can be divided into types of insurance and types of assistance.⁵ Retirement and health insurance for the elderly form the core of the federal social insurance system. Since retirement insurance is financed by employer and employee contributions, and over 90% of the employed in the U.S. are insured, this program enjoys widespread political acceptance. The risk of illness is generally insured through private policies, since there is no statutory health insurance requirement, with the exception of health insurance for the elderly (Medicare). As a consequence of the lack of obligatory health insurance, large sections of the population either have insufficient coverage or are not insured at all. Unemployment insurance and disability insurance are other important types of social insurance programs. However, they fall within the legislative powers of the individual states, with the result that there are no uniform national standards in the U.S. governing these two types of social insurance.⁶

Social Assistance

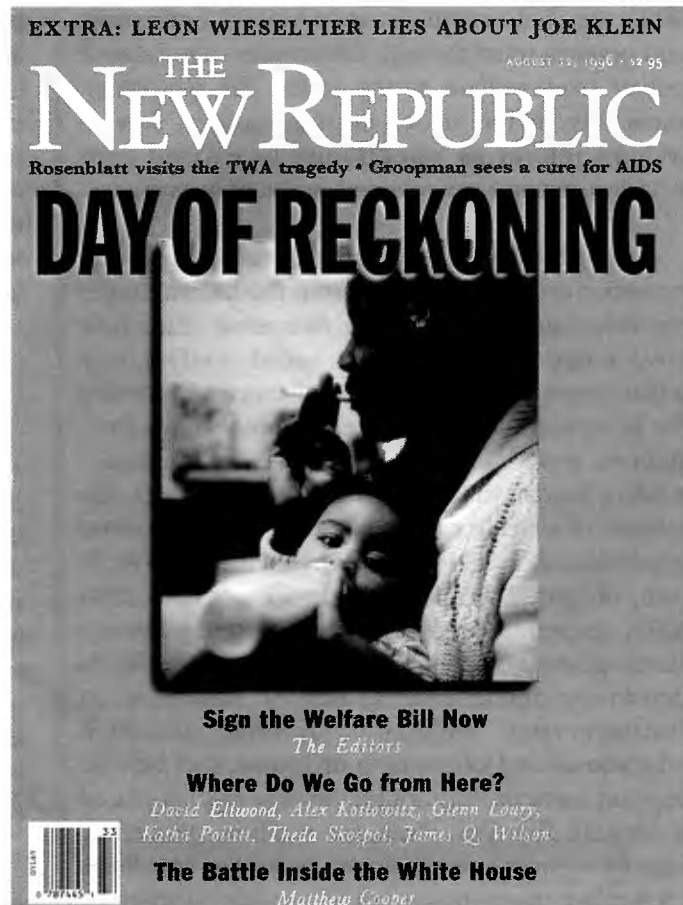
Social assistance is an essential component of the American social welfare and insurance system. In contrast to the German system, it comprises a number of federal, state and local programs that are subject to considerable political influence. Four

national, needs-based, tax-financed social assistance programs aimed at specific target groups form the core of this system. These programs are subject to relatively frequent modification:

- *Aid for Families With Dependent Children (AFDC)*. Until 1996, this program provided financial payments to needy families with children. The recipients were primarily single mothers. This program was at the heart of welfare reform and was replaced by the controversial *Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)* program.
- As part of *Supplement Security Income (SSI)*, financial assistance is granted to needy elderly and disabled persons.
- The *Food Stamp* program offers assistance for groceries for needy families.
- *Medicaid* provides minimal health care services for the poor.

As far as the financial volume of these four social assistance programs is concerned, AFDC, SSI, and Food Stamps each required only an estimated one-fifth to one-quarter of the funds spent on Medicaid (figures for 1992). These federal social assistance programs are supplemented by additional social assistance measures enacted by the individual states and localities and by tax measures, such as the Earned Income Tax Credit, that is tax relief for gainfully employed low-income families (the working poor). Looking at the payment side of these programs, however, it is clear that such social assistance neither covers the needs nor ensures basic survival. A majority of benefit recipients in the U.S. remains below the official poverty line.⁷

Despite these rather limited and fragmentary benefits, social assistance was nonetheless the repeated target of restrictive political strategies. There are reasons for this phenomenon. Not least among them is the fact that tax-financed social assistance without an obligatory *quid pro quo* has become the subject of political debate and populist enmity in a society centered on work. This even includes discrimination against the so-called "undeserving poor."⁸ In 1996, criticism of social assistance culminated in the passage of welfare reform, which essentially ended the unlimited entitlement to payments under AFDC, and replaced it with TANF. Another consequence of welfare reform was the reduction of payments under the Food Stamp program.



This 1996 cover page for an issue of *The New Republic* on welfare reform sparked controversy. Critics accused the magazine of racism and sexism. Reprinted by permission of *The New Republic* © 1996 The New Republic, Inc.

End of an Entitlement

Welfare reform was the result of an initiative by the Clinton administration. It was supported by numerous Republican and Democratic governors, and eventually enjoyed broad approval in Congress from Republicans and large sections of the Democratic party.⁹ The political motivations underlying the initiation and support for welfare reform are heterogeneous. Republicans, for instance, promoted the view that welfare was simply not capable of solving social problems and created a "damaging" social dependency. They sought to end federal government welfare and to transfer power to the individual states. They also called for measures to change behavior, in particular that of teenage mothers, who were to be brought back onto the "path of righteousness." The Clinton administration, on the other hand, argued primarily in favor of a cap on the duration of welfare, government educational and job training measures, and supporting social services, particularly day care.

While the Clinton administration looked for financial and political relief through the transfer of legislative power over welfare to the states, the governors, especially in the richer northern states, saw in welfare reform an opportunity to expand their decision-making powers and political leeway.

The 1996 welfare reform transferred broad powers over welfare policy from the federal to the individual state governments. As a result of the new law, a nationwide right to social welfare was transformed into temporary assistance in entering the labor market, which takes different forms from state to state.¹⁰ The federal government makes welfare funds available to the individual states, the amount of which is calculated on the basis of welfare expenditures in 1994. The individual states are, in turn, obligated to allocate only 75% of their 1994 AFDC expenditures. Beyond that, the individual states possess wide latitude in their authority to determine needs criteria, impose sanctions on "undeserving" welfare recipients, establish educational and job-training programs, and provide support services.¹¹ Although the new law stipulated a lifetime five-year limit for welfare payments, individual states can either impose further time limits on welfare payments or opt to provide support for more than five years for up to 20% of benefit recipients.

In light of the extremely favorable economy, it is not surprising that welfare reform has led to a noticeable reduction in the number of welfare recipients.¹² The Clinton administration was able to announce that by 1998, 35% of adult welfare recipients were either gainfully employed 20 hours a week or participating in a work training program.¹³ In Wisconsin, which is considered a pioneer in welfare reform, the number of employed former welfare recipients actually exceeds 55%.¹⁴ These successes have also provoked critical examination, however. Welfare recipients have been integrated into the labor market under favorable economic conditions. Predictions of the future employment prospects for welfare recipients cannot be made on that basis. According to Robert Solow, it is doubtful whether the labor market can even absorb all employable and generally insufficiently trained welfare recipients.¹⁵ The initiative of some states in offering expanded educational and training programs along with support services to welfare recipients is often nothing more than the overdue effort to compensate for the glaring deficits of the

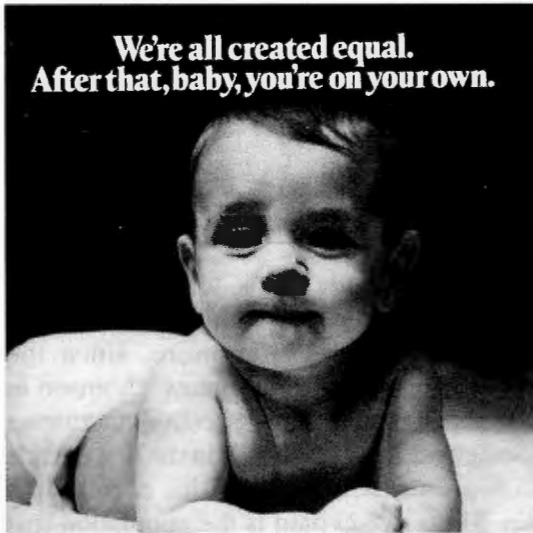
public education system. In places where any appreciable integration of welfare recipients in the labor market has been achieved, the resulting wage competition has led to a worsening of the already precarious situation of the working poor. If the economic situation in the U.S. takes a turn for the worse, critics of welfare reform point out, the former welfare recipients will be the first group to be hit by lay-offs.

3. The Future of Welfare Policy

In the U.S., the political debate in the context of a poorly institutionalized welfare state has led to a radicalization of welfare policy and, with the end of the entitlement to social assistance and a cap on the duration of benefits, to profound legal changes. It should be kept in mind, however, that, in contrast to Germany, American social policy is accustomed to programs with caps that can be modified relatively quickly. This enables American welfare policy to react flexibly to current needs. At the same time professional social work is subjected to a much greater degree to political supervision and influence.

The political discussion about welfare reform centers not on the rights of benefit recipients, but rather on their obligations in return for receiving tax-supported benefits. Welfare reform tipped the balance between rights and obligations one-sidedly in favor of the latter. The public discussion of obligations and its explicit paternalism recall traditions of charity and the enforcement of traditional social norms, which have been long outdated, at least in Germany. Anyone who draws welfare benefits in the U.S. is expected by the majority of tax-payers to conform to a "normal" lifestyle. However, given the social and cultural heterogeneity of U.S. society, achieving a consensus on what that might be will not be easy.

Currently, welfare reform continues to raise more questions than it answers. First, since there is a cap on the duration of welfare benefits, what happens to those who, even with continuing economic prosperity and a tight labor market, do not manage to make the transition to employment? Second, experience indicates that former welfare recipients, because of their lack of training, will be among the first to be laid off when economic prosperity comes to an end. What will happen to these laid-off former welfare recipients if welfare benefits do not ensure survival, or if they have already exhausted their



Social rights are not part of the American conception of social policy. An advertisement for *Fortune* magazine.

benefit, which are now limited to five years at the most?

American society has drastically reduced its social assistance to the poor and limited its duration. At the same time, an intensive debate in Germany centers on reducing the benefit levels of various forms of social insurance and making the system of social welfare and insurance "poverty immune" by instituting some form of basic security.¹⁶ The differing political preferences in the U.S. and Germany can be explained primarily by the path of institutional development in each society, which has profound effects on the future shape of social assistance. This poses a fundamental political and economic question—whether social policy and expenditures impede economic progress, or whether a modern system of social welfare and insurance actually favors economic progress. According to Elmar Rieger and Stephan Leibfried, social security, including social assistance, provides societies with the necessary institutional flexibility to be able to successfully compete in the world market—a well-founded assumption, the test of which we will experience in the years to come.¹⁷

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Reform and the State of Welfare Today

Steven Weir

On August 22, 1996, President William J. Clinton signed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), ending a federal program which, for six decades, had guaranteed financial aid to needy single-parent families in the United States. This program, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), has become synonymous with the term "welfare" in America, and it has dominated the recent debate surrounding welfare reform. The cancellation of AFDC as a federal entitlement program and its replacement by a block grant to the states marks a new watershed in the development of the program's complex and fascinating history.

Since the passage of the PRWORA, the media has been full of glowing praise for the effects of the new legislation. In August 1997, *Newsweek* declared that the PRWORA "blows the door off even the most optimistic predictions." One year later a front-page article from *The Washington Post* announced "Welfare Reform's Unprecedented Success."¹ Further, in April 1999, the White House published state-by-state data demonstrating that the number of welfare recipients was at its lowest level for 30 years and showing that the welfare rolls had been cut in half since Clinton had become President. The Clinton administration credits this success to the PRWORA, a strong economy and the President's liberal granting of federal waivers to the states since his coming to office.²

The hero in the states' success story to implement effective welfare reform initiatives has been the state of Wisconsin. In a radio address to the nation in May 1996, Clinton praised the "solid, bold welfare reform plan" initiated by this state. Listing "the things about the Wisconsin plan which [were] compelling to [him]" at a National Governors' Association (NGA) conference in July 1996, Clinton emphasized the work requirements imposed by that state, but also the guaranteed health and child care services provided for those willing to work or be trained, as well as the guarantee of community service jobs if employment was not available in the private sector.³

At least since the early 1970s, Wisconsin has led the way in experimenting with welfare reform initiatives in America. Furthermore, since the ascendancy of State Governor Tommy Thomson in 1986, it has proven to be highly effective at reducing its AFDC caseload, which fell 55% in the first decade under his administration.⁴ At the core of the Wisconsin Works (W-2) plan is the stipulation that "for those who can work only work should pay," which sets stringent eligibility criteria and a stiff work-test requirement for benefits. Welfare mothers are required to go to work once their youngest child has reached 12 weeks of age, and penalties such as a reduction in benefits are enforced for jobs rejected or hours of labor missed. Benefits can be collected for a maximum of two years at a time, and a 5-year lifetime limit is imposed. In addition, children born to aid recipients are not eligible for welfare benefits.⁵

Under the Wisconsin Works plan, private "partnership companies" engage W-2 recipients at jobs, often receiving subsidies from the state to pay them minimum wages or slightly more. In addition, those welfare mothers who cannot be placed in private-sector jobs are put to work answering phones in city offices or sweeping streets for their public assistance checks. Child care and medical services are provided as long as one fulfills the work conditions of the "social contract" laid down by the state's authorities and some counties in Wisconsin have been able to find work for up to 91 percent of their welfare caseload.⁶

Given the robust economy, it is perhaps not surprising that welfare reform successes have been documented in most states of the nation. Indeed, according to a study conducted in 1998, the national unemployment rate in mid-1997 was at its lowest level in 24 years. The study predicted that the U.S. economy could easily absorb welfare recipients whose benefits were terminated.⁷ However, why had the welfare role not been reduced during earlier periods of economic upturn? According to many commentators, it is because the welfare reform measures are changing the work behavior of one-

time AFDC recipients. In February 1999, Daniel Casse, a senior director of the White House Writers Group, wrote that

It is a mistake to believe that the welfare debate was ever about the amount of money the country was spending.... Money alone was never the problem. Instead, what distinguishes the current reform is that it has forced both federal and state governments to take seriously the idea that welfare policy can deter, or discourage, behavior.⁸

If the observation that the present reforms are changing the behavior of America's poor is correct, it would seem to confirm the hypothesis of conservative academics such as Lawrence Mead, who has argued that "behavioral conditions on aid" are a necessary prerequisite for enforcing the work ethic and other traditional values.⁹ Supporting the view that work values are receiving renewed attention under the new regional reform initiatives, New York's Republican mayor Rudolph Giuliani has maintained that

The work ethic is like a muscle. If it is not exercised, it atrophies. And we're succeeding in returning the work ethic to the center of New York City life. Over the past four years we've moved 440,000 people off the welfare rolls—more than the entire population of St. Louis.¹⁰

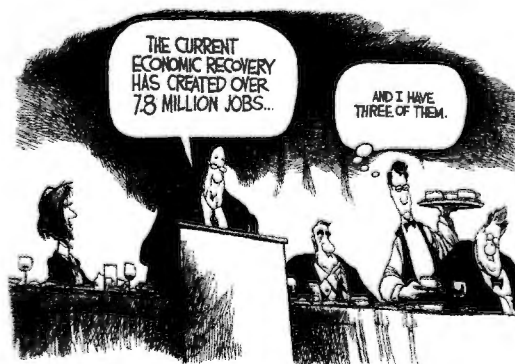
Moreover, the idea that a fundamental transformation is taking place in the self-image and behavior of America's poor presented a major theme in a recent *Newsweek* article investigating the condition of African-Americans. Entitled "The Good News About Black America," the article begins by reporting that welfare participation and out-of-wedlock births among African-Americans are at their lowest levels in decades. It then points out that when asked whether they thought "welfare-to-work laws have resulted in more black self-reliance," 63 percent of black respondents answered affirmatively, with another 57% attributing an increase in available jobs to these new rules. Acknowledging the role the present economic expansion has in making it easier to find work, the author of the article, Ellis Cose, insists that

It would be a mistake, however, to credit the economy alone for the sense of hope sprouting in many black communities...a strong resurgence of black self-confidence and self-determination has made their realization more probable.¹¹

With all the optimistic reportage on the effects of the different welfare-reform initiatives facilitated by the passage of PRWORA in 1996, it is easy to lose track of the flaws in the rosy picture painted of the new state programs. Nevertheless, critics of the new situation point out that many deficiencies do exist. In a December 1998 report by the Save the Children Fund, which compiled the findings of over 30 state and local studies, it was found that although more families were leaving welfare, many were doing worse than before, lacking necessary food, medical care and housing. In addition, the report revealed that of those single-parent mothers who had found work, 71% did not earn enough to raise their family's living standard above the official poverty line.¹² In addition, the question of the absence of affordable housing presents a major issue of concern for researchers analyzing the effects of the new welfare reform programs.¹³

Reporting on two recent, nationally conducted studies in an article for *The New York Times*, Jason DeParle has noted that although the federal standards prescribe that housing should consume no more than 30 percent of a poor family's income, most low-income families are spending an average of 60 percent of their income on shelter.¹⁴ Furthermore, although Wisconsin Works provides relatively generous assistance benefits, access to child care and medical services, and subsidies for employers hiring welfare mothers, not all the states offer these standards. The benefit level for a family of three living in Mississippi is \$120 a month. In Texas, where the absence of an income tax has been used to justify the refusal to pay for expensive child care services—thus hindering efforts by poor women to work—the assistance rate for a family of three constitutes a mere \$184 per month.¹⁵

Critics have consequently argued that many states are "trying to do welfare reform on the cheap," keeping their benefit levels low in order to



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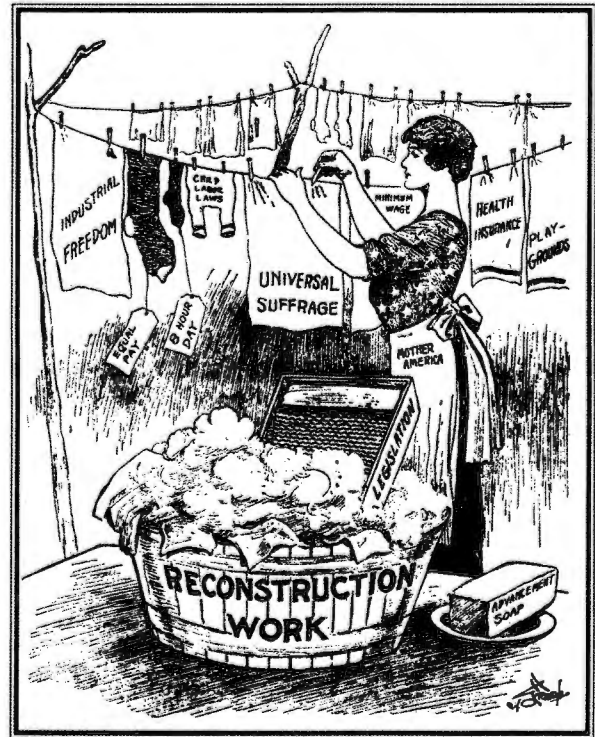
avoid becoming a "welfare magnet" for assistance applicants from nearby states.¹⁶ They also claim that the press has mainly focused on the success story of the "easy cases," and that many needy families are simply disappearing once their benefits have been cut off.¹⁷ Thus, in a 1999 study for the Urban Institute, Pamela Loprest points out that while the falling caseload means fewer mothers are receiving cash assistance, such statistics reveal nothing about the conditions under which families leave TANF assistance, where they go, or whether they are making a successful transition to the job market.¹⁸

The question of what happens to welfare recipients who are not officially registered as employed once they leave the roles currently represents a major point of controversy among analysts. Even in the "Wisconsin Welfare Miracle," 55 percent of families who have left the state's welfare roles have not been accounted for. Have these people found stable, full-time jobs which earn them enough to support their families, or are they now dependent on other family members ("doubling up"), or swelling the numbers dependent on homeless shelters and other emergency relief services?¹⁹ Thus, for example, although Mayor Giuliani's administration drastically reduced New York City's welfare caseload between 1994 and 1997, the number of meals served by the city's soup kitchens increased by 70 percent during the same period.²⁰

Finally, since August 1996, the Clinton administration has attempted to soften the harshest features inherent in the PRWORA. Under a budget plan from July 1997, parts of the 1996 cuts to Food Stamps and aid to immigrants were repealed, and the use of welfare recipients in community service work for their assistance checks was prohibited. In addition, federal standards of "regular employment" must be observed as a condition of welfare-recipient labor.²¹ This attempt to take the squeeze out of the "tough love" measures enacted by most states may, for many one-time AFDC families, appear to be a feeble effort to close the door after the horse has bolted. Regardless of the outcome of such legal and technical amendments to the PRWORA, Aid to Families with Dependent Children as a federal welfare entitlement program for poor women and their families living in the United States, has ceased to exist. And, as Daniel Casse has observed, "whatever the final consequences, it is unlikely we will ever return to the old model."²²

Background Analysis

Upon examining the history of the AFDC program, the researcher is ultimately confronted with the question whether it is possible to identify predictable determinants which drive the mechanisms of relief-giving for indigent single mothers and their children. These causal factors, I argue, are primarily ideological in nature. The American system of values dictates to a large degree who is worthy of relief and under what conditions this support will be provided. The first and most important component of this belief system is the "work ethic." The fundamental moral conviction of the inherent "goodness" and "righteousness" of labor as a means of proving one's worth as a productive and responsible member of society, presents a formidable ideological force in America, creating a standard of worthy or acceptable social behavior based on an individual's willingness to work.²³ The American poor have traditionally been required to work as a precondition for relief.



A 1918 view of social policy. In the early twentieth century, many middle-class women in the United States pushed for federal public assistance programs. Today, working women are at the heart of the controversy over the recent welfare reforms.

However, in the case of needy single women with children, the historically consistent pressure to conform to the "work ethic" coexisted with the demand to fulfill culturally prescribed gender roles,

defining their social responsibilities as women and mothers. Consequently, traditional American "family values," which define socially acceptable sexual and family behavior, present a second key causal factor, identified in this article as playing a regulatory role in determining the accessibility of relief for poor women and their children.²⁴

The dominant position which the work imperative represents in the U.S. is revealed, however, by the ultimate rejection of the family-oriented goal of the mothers' pensions and ADC programs to release women from the work necessity in order to care for children in the home. The termination of AFDC in many ways represents the restoration of a *status quo* in public-relief ideology which prevailed before the advent of mothers' pensions almost a century ago, and the reassertion of work and family values constitutes a principal force, affecting this reversal in welfare policy. The profound influence which these social beliefs have exerted in determining the course of welfare development is clearly revealed in a 1997 address to the nation in which President Clinton announced the progress made toward the realization of these American ethical principles since the passage of his welfare reform bill. Reporting that 1.2 mil. recipients had left the welfare rolls due to the "historic legislation that revolutionized welfare" in 1996, Clinton declared that "we have begun to put an end to the culture of dependency, and to elevate our values of family, work, and responsibility."²⁵

Finally, a word about the future of welfare in the United States. There are five presently observable trends which will impact public welfare policies in the coming century. These are a shrinking pool of available work due to advancing automation; the increasing importance of highly-skilled labor and a heightened emphasis on the value of efficiency in U.S. society; the widening gulf between the wage levels of the rich and the poor; a growing acceptance of a deterministic (genetic) interpretation for the causes of human behavior; and a gradual weakening of the welfare state.²⁶

The following questions are raised by the emergence of these realities and could thus provide a useful subject for future research: How does one enforce a work ethic in a nation in which there is a serious and increasing shortage of jobs?²⁷ What should be the reaction of government to a situation in which a large percentage of the population lives



Under the conditions of a booming economy, workfare programs had some success in providing jobs for welfare recipients. However, many of these jobs are in the low-paying service sector.

on the edge of poverty although they are working or willing to work? How will government respond to the needs of the poor during a renewed period of economic depression? Will the need to maintain social order result in a new era of welfare-state expansion, or will the perceived failure of this familiar model lead to its rejection and the adoption of a new approach which will guarantee social stability? What happens to the role of traditional values when the behavior of the poor is not defined in moral, cultural, or behavioral terms, but as an inevitable product of inferior genes? These are questions, deserving serious consideration. It can only be hoped, that regardless of the economic or social conditions affecting the United States in the coming century, its democratic and philanthropic traditions will prove strong enough to guarantee a just treatment of the nation's poor. Because, as Canadian scientist and author David Suzuki has so aptly observed, "the way we deal with the disadvantaged defines who and what we are."²⁸

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26. For a good reference to the future decrease in available jobs and importance of education and efficiency standards see Jeremy Rifkin, *The End of Work: The Decline of the Global Labor Force and the Dawn of the Post-Market Era* (New York: G.P. Putnam Sons, 1995); William Greider, *One World Ready or Not: The Manic Logic of Global Capitalism* (New York: Touchstone Publishers, 1997); William Julius Wilson, *When Work Disappears: The World of the New Urban Poor* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996). See also Joseph Dillon Davey, *The New Social Contract: America's Journey from Welfare State to Police State* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1995), 30-31. For information pertaining to the renewed popularity of deterministic thinking in the U.S. see Francis Fukuyama, "Is it All in the Genes: Nature is up, Nurture down," *Commentary* (September 1997): 30-35; Lionel Tiger, "My Life in the Human Nature Wars," *The Wilson Quarterly* (Winter 1996): 14-25; Howard Gardner, "Who Owns Intelligence?," *The Atlantic Monthly* (February 1999): 67-76.

27. Although there has been an apparent increase in the number of jobs available in the United States over the past few years, this data masks the fact that many of these jobs are low-paid, part-time and lacking provisions for essential medical and old-age insurance benefits. Furthermore, as the automation process accelerates, it is only a matter of time before many forms of simple, manual labor are replaced by machines. See Rifkin, *The End of Work*; Greider, *One World Ready or Not*.

28. David Suzuki, "Correlation and Causation," in *The Bell Curve Debate: History Documents, Opinions*, ed. Russell Jacoby and Naomi Glauberman (New York: Random House Publishers, 1996), 282.

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Is Workfare “Ending Welfare as We Know It”?

Waltraud Schelkle

The Welfare Reform Act of August 1996 introduced a model of public assistance in the U.S that came to be known as “Welfare to Work” or *workfare*. In his 1992 campaign for reelection, President Bill Clinton promised this reform to “end welfare as we know it.” It eventually passed Congress under the catchy title “Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunities Reconciliation Act” (PROWRA). The Act turned out to be far more radical than most observers and experts had expected. The individual entitlement to welfare was explicitly abolished. Benefits were made dependent on participation in defined work activities. The law established a life-time limit of five years after which the federal government in Washington no longer funds a state government’s transfer payment to a welfare recipient who has reached this limit.

Is U.S. welfare reform one of those rare instances where reality lived up to political rhetoric? It seems to me that the answer depends on what is meant by *welfare*. The answer must be in the affirmative if *welfare* is understood to be the pre-1996 U.S. system in which assistance for poor people was separate from the social insurance system for working households. Welfare then meant those 80 benefit programs which were means-tested, above all Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), but the answer is negative, meaning, workfare is *not* ending welfare, if *welfare* assumes the continental European meaning of fairly universal social insurance against risks that affect an individual’s capability and capacity to generate income, be it disability or old age, unemployment or maternity. I will argue that the introduction of workfare in the U.S. was a step towards welfare in a continental European sense, given Anglo-Saxon labor market institutions and given the present conditions of comparatively generous funding.

Just a short digression on terminology: A means-tested benefit is given only if the recipient’s income and/or assets are less than a certain threshold amount. This is in contrast to benefits such as Social Security, which are conditioned on the recipient

having paid a certain amount of contributions. In Germany, *Arbeitslosengeld* is an entitlement based on contributions to unemployment insurance, while *Arbeitslosenhilfe* is a means-tested transfer after this entitlement has expired.

In the first section, I elaborate on what led to such a radical reform. Then, I briefly outline the contents of the Reform Act and describe what have been the experiences with workfare as far as one can tell after only three years of its implementation and given the exceptionally benign macroeconomic environment of high employment growth without inflation. Finally, I will argue the case that post-reform welfare in the U.S. has become more universal in its coverage and in overcoming the dichotomy between poverty relief and social insurance.

Mounting Frustration and Politics of Reform

Pressure on U.S. “welfare as we know it” appears to have built up as a result of two developments.¹ These were, on the one hand, a substantial rise in government efforts to alleviate poverty and, on the other, a continuous worsening of welfare indicators. Naturally, the widening gap between effort and outcome had to produce frustration on the part of politicians and their electorate across party lines.

The measurable increases in welfare provision just before the passage of the Act may be illustrated as follows:

- Between 1968 and 1994, real expenditure for welfare programs almost quintupled, rising by 399 percent. In this period, the U.S. population rose by 32 percent. In constant 1996 dollars, per capita spending increased to \$ 1,386 from \$ 367 in 1968.²
- The number of beneficiaries has increased considerably. In 1996, 41.3 million persons received Medicaid, 26.8 million food stamps, an estimated 14.6 million adults AFDC, and 53.7 million persons

(children and adults) in 17.9 million families benefited from earnings subsidies under the Earned Income Tax Credit.³

- Total outlays on income-tested benefit programs reached a record-high in fiscal year 1995, namely 5.1% as a share of GDP. The national government provided more than two-thirds of these funds, which accounted for 16.7% of the 1996 Federal budget.⁴

Despite these increases, welfare indicators, such as the rate and persistence of poverty, worsened steadily, particularly during the recession of 1990 to 1992:⁵

- Since 1979, poverty has increased steadily, reaching a record high of more than 15% of the population in 1983. Of particular concern is the fact that in the recent period of rapid job growth, poverty rates have declined only slowly, namely from 15.1 % or 39.3 million persons in 1993 to 13.7 % or 36.5 million persons in 1996.⁶

- The “working poor” phenomenon has become more severe. A larger portion of families required means-tested benefits despite having at least one working adult. The poverty rate among all workers, including those without children, was nearly 20 percent higher in 1996 than in 1979. Some 15 million people (of which 8.8 million were children) lived in a working-poor family in 1996. The poor working parents had a combined average of 41 weeks of employment, meaning that welfare eligibility was not primarily due to long-term unemployment.⁷

- While the average length of time a family is on welfare varies widely, it is more than five years for about one half of all recipient families in 1994. The average time on welfare was 6.5 years.⁸ This implies that the time limit of five years introduced by the welfare overhaul could become binding for a significant share of welfare beneficiaries.

- The share of single-parent households in all parent-child family groups rose from 13 percent in 1970 to 30% in 1993.⁹ Over 90% of welfare parents are single mothers, and having a baby within the last six months was the most common cause for first becoming eligible for AFDC.¹⁰ There are no other equally characteristic features of welfare recipients. Welfare mothers are fairly evenly distributed among major ethnic groups (white, black,

Hispanic), although minorities are clearly overrepresented.¹¹ The education levels of welfare recipients in general cover the full range of possible attainment (42% had less than high school education, 42% graduated from high school, 16% had some college education), and a welfare family has on average less than two children, just like the population in general.¹²

There is no single cause for these developments. It is not even possible to establish beyond doubt to which extent welfare helped to mitigate these trends, or whether it actually contributed to them. Yet, to most observers it seemed all too obvious that the welfare system provided the wrong incentives for recipients, possibly also for those whose business and profession it was to provide those services. Welfare was thus accused of discouraging work, of encouraging illegitimacy, of prolonging dependency, and of being inefficiently provided. Above all, the welfare system was not only unpopular with politicians and taxpayers, but also with recipients.¹³ It is beyond the scope of this study to discuss these arguments, since they have been made with respect to virtually all mature welfare systems. However, a balanced account requires a brief description of the political setting of the welfare debate, in particular the role of the state governments and the political parties. This setting was characterized by budgetary pressures, partisan competition and increasing public hostility to welfare. These forces were felt at the national as well as the state levels.¹⁴ In addition, a steadily increasing welfare caseload nurtured the debate.

The so-called New Federalism is an important element of making workfare operate. Ever since the first term of the Reagan administration, state governments were given greater latitude in administering the AFDC program. In particular, they were allowed to introduce “workfare” programs which made benefits dependant on public service work. Waivers were provided for state experiments and demonstrations in administering AFDC, Food Stamp and Medicaid programs. Two conditions were laid down for waiver-based demonstrations to be approved. First, they had to imply no additional outlay for the national government, and, secondly, they had to be rigorously evaluated by random assignment.¹⁵ The cost effects were assessed by comparing costs between control and experimental groups with state budgets covering the difference between national pre-case costs for the control and

for the experimental group. In the beginning of welfare reform, it is thus quite obvious that retrenchment and devolution were twins. The latter is the core of what later came to be known as the "New Federalism."

Politically, these waivers for demonstration programs firmly established a sustained interest of state governments in welfare reform. Since the late 1980s, they were instrumental in shifting the center of gravity of welfare reform away from the national government. Ironically for the Republican party, this may eventually have helped presidential candidate Clinton, then governor of Arkansas. Welfare reform offered him a political platform to make a name for himself at the national level. As President, however, he had a somewhat strained relationship with these state initiatives. On the one hand, his administration let it be known that state initiatives would be welcomed almost without any qualification, thus breaking imminent stalemates in the national maneuvering over welfare legislation.¹⁶ On the other hand, this also left the impression that his administration had lost control over the reform agenda to the state legislatures, which were relentlessly pushing for waivers, some as forerunners and others joining them once the show was on the road.¹⁷

No government or party, neither at the state nor at the national level, could afford to ignore the public hostility against welfare. Public opinion polls throughout the period of the political haggling over welfare legislation showed that the electorate preferred almost any change to no change at all.¹⁸ Most scholars ascribe this widespread hostility to a common-sense notion that one has to distinguish between the deserving poor, such as the disabled and the elderly, and the undeserving poor, such as single mothers or long-term unemployed adults. The rising share of caseloads related to out-of-wedlock births was clearly taken as an indicator that welfare was more and more spent on the undeserving poor. The racial skewing of the AFDC caseload only contributed to that hostility.¹⁹

It is important to note that the extreme unpopularity of welfare in the U.S. is institutionally fostered by the social policy regime. The regime sets up a dichotomy between welfare on the one hand, and social security cum unemployment compensation on the other. Thus, for most



Since the 1970s, many traditional social programs have been cut as a result of tax revolts. Changes in the tax system lowered taxes for the rich, but also created new assistance programs for the poor.

Americans it is inconceivable that they will ever be in need of support from the welfare part of the social system. For that majority of mostly white, middle and upper-class Americans, welfare is a public expenditure for which they are taxed, but from which they never expect to benefit directly. For the median taxpayer, welfare is a kind of contrived philanthropy.

In contrast, in a uniform social insurance system each individual will at some point be a beneficiary. A universal system covers welfare benefits for the poor, basic health care irrespective of income levels, social security for the aged, means-tested as well as contribution-based unemployment benefits, and so on. In such a system, it is rather unlikely that a

majority will be hostile to the various benefit programs. This is true notwithstanding the fact that a majority may feel uneasy about the cost-benefit-ratio of its contribution to the system.

It would lead us too far to describe the bitter combat over welfare reform between the Republican and the Democratic party. At the peril of oversimplifying, it seems to me that the Republican handwriting is obvious in the "personal responsibility" part of the act, while the Democrats insisted on the reconciliation with "work opportunities" to be taken care of by the government. The reform proposals, which constituted a radical break with past welfare policy and were later adopted in the actual law, made their first public appearance in congressional initiatives of the Republican party.²⁰ This is not at all surprising if one recalls that the workfare model was popularized in the Reagan era and that the Republican party is traditionally inimical to big government. In principle (if not always in practice), it favors decentralization and a minimalist state. That Republican principles and practice do not easily match was most obvious in the party's discussions over the amount of devolution it should lobby for. While the party's principles suggest that "getting Washington out of the welfare business" was the key, in view of liberal state practices some Republicans argued "that it was irresponsible to give states money without mandating deterrence approaches—such as family caps, a ban on benefits to teenage mothers, and time limits."²¹ The law gave these practical considerations more weight than the Republican principles.

Above all, it was President Clinton's centrist political line that helped the Republicans push through their reform agenda. He seized the opportunity to achieve major reform against the odds that he was no longer backed by a Democratic majority after the landmark congressional election in 1994. The Republicans gained the majority in both houses for the first time in forty years. To get results required Clinton to compromise on the substance of his party's stance on welfare, namely that welfare is an entitlement of any needy individual. It also meant to alienate important Democratic constituencies, such as unions and public sector employees, since advocacy of workfare was hardly popular with them. They feared displacement effects of low-wage workers by welfare recipients in addition to downward pressure on low wages, a view that is shared by the Nobel Prize-winning

economist Robert Solow.²² Clinton's literal opportunism was most obvious with respect to a rigid time limit for obtaining welfare. He strictly opposed such a limit in the beginning, but finally accepted it to keep things going, to the dismay of his party and the delight of the Republicans.²³ In this, he was ideologically backed by a "New Paternalism" that endorsed mandatory work as part of a supervisory approach to poverty relief.²⁴ The total of reform provisions thus sanctioned by a Democratic president amounted to what is to most observers an unexpectedly radical reform law.

The PRWORA was finally passed by a vote of 328 to 101 in the House of Representatives (Republicans 230 – 2, Democrats 98 – 98) and by a vote of 78 to 21 in the Senate (Republicans 53 – 0, Democrats 25 – 21). Thus, the Senators were decisive for a slight majority of the Democratic party in favor of the reform bill. The Senate vote may be interpreted as a further indication that the states' advocacy of welfare reform contributed more to its final passing than bipartisanship. Moreover, there was virtually no opposition on the Republican side to President Clinton's position. The Republicans' near unanimity and the Democrats' split over welfare reform are revealing. The opposition, led by the present House minority leader Richard Gephardt, took issue with the reform agenda, because to traditional welfare advocates it was not just a transformation of public aid. They perceived ending welfare as hitherto known rather as "ending welfare, full stop." The following assessment may help to understand why there was such a polarization of political opinion.

The Reform Act and Recent Experiences

Workfare captures the thrust of welfare policy enacted in 1996. A recipient has to take up a job in order to obtain cash assistance, and government will support her or him in doing so. The core of this new welfare policy is the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program (TANF), which replaced Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) and two other minor programs. The Reform Act has three essential features:

1. The law establishes a universal work obligation and explicitly eliminates the entitlement to financial support when destitute. There is no longer a notion of families or individuals being categorically eligible to obtain cash assistance. Moreover, job placement is

given priority to formal training. This priority was already obvious in the Clinton administration's massive expansion of earnings subsidies for low-income jobs, the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), since the beginning of the '90s. This prepared the ground for a "work first" strategy, which made employment to be the binding constraint on receiving transfers.

2. The status of being "on welfare" is meant to be strictly transitional. To this end, there is a maximum span of time that an adult or the head of a household may obtain cash benefits, funded by the federal government. This time limit of five years applies with few exceptions. The respective applicant is obliged to accept a job offered within two years of receiving benefits (or less than two years as a state option). On the side of government, this conditionality of aid requires state administrations to provide work opportunities.

3. The fiscal responsibilities and regulatory functions among central, state and local units of the federation have been realigned. There is a general tendency to decentralization and devolution. Lower levels of government have assumed a more active role and got greater leeway in designing welfare programs of their own. Transfers from the national government to the states now come to a large extent in the form of block grants instead of matching grants. Marginal spending on welfare has thus become more expensive for state governments.

These three elements contain the meaning of what the pompous title of the welfare overhaul tries to convey. Personal responsibility means that welfare recipients have to accept a job in return for cash benefits which are of a temporary nature. The greater demands on personal responsibility are supposedly matched by a work opportunity being made available. Fiscal decentralization has provided a means to enforce this. The state governments have to provide job opportunities directly or indirectly through subsidies for private employers. Otherwise, the national government curtails its payments to the respective state government.

In a broader understanding of workfare, it is not only TANF which is significant for the post-reform welfare system. While this cash assistance program for poor families contains all the ingredients of the welfare overhaul, it is equally significant that, first, the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) was expanded even before the PROWRA was passed in 1996 and,

second, that the statutory minimum wage was increased in a package deal at about the same time:

- The EITC, already in place since 1975, is meant to compensate for the impoverishing effects of taxation on low-wage earners. It is a refundable tax credit which means that households actually get payments if their tax liabilities are lower than the earnings subsidy they are entitled to. Like welfare benefits, it is means-tested, but, in contrast to welfare, it is administered by the tax authorities, namely the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). This earnings subsidy experienced successive liberalizations and expansions under Republican administrations in 1986 and 1990, and even more so under the first Clinton presidency in 1993.²⁵ This underscores not only the new emphasis on in-work-benefits, but also that a bipartisan consensus had built up over quite some time.

- In 1996-97, the minimum wage was substantially increased from \$4.25 to \$5.15 in three steps. In real terms, this is still roughly 20% less than what workers at that wage rate had before 1979.²⁶ However, a nominally defined minimum wage provides a barrier against deflationary pressures, which may arise if workfare adds to the labor supply at the lower end of the wage scale. Moreover, it limits the fiscal costs of earnings subsidies, since it halts the downward pressure on the wages that firms pay. The minimum wage is thus a complement and not a substitute for earnings subsidies cum work requirements.

What are the emerging trends in U.S. public assistance? Less than four years after reform, it is too early to draw any definite conclusions about the effects of the U.S. welfare overhaul. The time that has elapsed since its implementation is too short for the time limit to become binding. The time span since enactment has been characterized by continuously strong and non-inflationary employment growth, so that the U.S. workfare model did not have the chance to pass the real test for any social safety net, namely a recession.

However, some broad trends are discernible and agreed upon by many expert observers:

1. The caseload of welfare recipients under TANF has declined dramatically for a variety of reasons, while total spending on TANF has barely been reduced.

Between August 1996 and March 1999, the month for which the latest data are available, the welfare (non-work cash assistance) caseload has declined by 40%. However, by law total spending stays almost at the same level until 2002. The national block grant to the states amounts to \$ 16.5 billion annually, which is the spending level of the national government when the caseload was at its peak in the first half of the 1990s. In contrast, state governments have to maintain a minimum level of spending that amounts to 75% or 80% of what they spent in the period just before reform. This rise in per-capita spending on welfare is not to be confused with an increase in per-capita benefit levels, which have barely changed.

The debate on how to interpret this rapid decline in caseloads has just started, in particular on how much is due to the welfare overhaul proper.²⁷ Welfare reform created incentives as well as sanctions, both for recipients and for state administrations, to get a job or to place people into work, respectively. But the decline in the caseload already began in 1994, which indicates that other forces may have been at work. These other forces are, first of all, strong and non-inflationary job growth, which made U.S. labor markets unexpectedly absorptive. Another force might have been the expansion of the EITC, which creates strong incentives to take up a job, though not necessarily for full-time employment. Finally, state administrations have developed what is sometimes euphemistically called "diversion strategies." These are all kinds of measures to prevent families from getting onto the welfare rolls, such as providing child care and transportation services instead of cash assistance.²⁸ There is also anecdotal evidence from press reports that potential welfare recipients are simply deterred at the job placement centers that welfare administrations have become after reform. Such measures to deter beneficiaries could be driven by the states' fear of financial sanctions, particularly a cut in their block grant from the national government, if they do not succeed in getting a certain share of TANF recipients into defined work activities. So they try to divert the more problematic cases from the very beginning.

2. EITC has become the nation's largest cash assistance program.

In 1993, this refundable tax credit was made more generous. The number of recipient households jumped from 15 million to 19 million.²⁹ After 1993,

the number of recipient families was projected to stay about the same. This is remarkable in light of the fact that there was a rapid decline in the AFDC/TANF caseload from 1995 onwards and that labor markets were getting increasingly tight. These developments suggest that a considerable number of poor families stay on the workfare rolls, if not on TANF then on EITC. However, per-family benefits on EITC are merely a third of non-work benefits under TANF, and the refund is reduced just when recipients have barely passed the poverty threshold.³⁰ As an anti-poverty program EITC is a substitute for TANF only to the extent that recipients are capable of making up for the decline in benefits by earnings.

3. For most former welfare recipients, leaving the TANF rolls means finding employment, but not necessarily moving out of poverty.

As mentioned in the last section, state governments were allowed to experiment with workfare if they obtained a waiver. These state experiments generated a number of "leaver" studies that try to assess how those recipients fared who left the welfare rolls (AFDC/TANF). Leaver studies only document those former welfare recipients who do not return to welfare for the time covered by the study. This may bias the results. In particular, excluding those who returned to welfare from calculating the employment rate results in higher employment figures, since many return when or because they are unemployed. Those few studies which document recidivism find between 19% returning to the welfare rolls after three months in Maryland, and 30% after 15 months in Wisconsin.³¹

Additional categorical assistance programs have been more generously endowed by welfare reform, so as to remove employment barriers, such as child care and transportation, which is in line with the workfare logic. If their cash equivalent is added to earnings and EITC refunds, a family of three manages to move out of absolute poverty as measured by the federal poverty level.³²

The question thus arises whether workfare is apt to encourage employment and self-sufficiency as well as to provide less costly poverty relief as the workfare proponents expected. The preliminary findings above suggest to me the following, equally preliminary assessment:

- The decline in caseloads and the high employment rates of former beneficiaries are reassuring in regard to the promise of workfare to encourage participation in the labor force. Thus, workfare does not necessarily fail because it is impossible for labor markets to absorb the additional labor supply, as has been feared for good reason by many critics of a work requirement.

- Employment in low-paid jobs and continued dependence on categorical assistance implies that the majority of those leaving the TANF rolls do not achieve self-sufficiency but stay on the workfare rolls close to the poverty level.³³ Labor markets absorb the additional labor supply only at levels of wages that are too low for passing the poverty threshold. Thus, workfare at the current level of generosity is not a particularly effective means of poverty relief.

- It is not clear yet whether workfare promises to be a more cost effective way of providing poverty relief. The U.S. data suggest that workfare allows to save in direct welfare payments, because higher-than-average TANF benefits are replaced by lower-than-average EITC benefits. Yet higher per-capita expenditure levels indicate that greater responsibilities of states to bring beneficiaries into work lead to higher administrative costs and additional services to address employment barriers.³⁴

Interpreting the Post-Reform System

It seems safe to say that the majority of former welfare recipients moves not simply "from welfare to work" but rather "from welfare to workfare." This is not exactly an indicator of success if the objective of workfare is the more ambitious one of self-sufficiency in the long run, and not just of getting people off welfare.³⁵ In this sense, workfare has not led to what some proponents of "ending welfare as we know it" have hoped.

However, such disappointment may be self-inflicted, resulting from too narrow a view of workfare. Some, especially economists, see workfare simply as imposing work requirements on transfer recipients.³⁶ This view of workfare is simplistic in that the welfare system and its reform are seen solely against the background of the low-wage labor market, and welfare as primarily an adverse incentive on the labor supply. A general work obligation is then all that is required to transform welfare into

workfare. If seen as a system of modern public assistance, however, *the workfare solution to U.S. public assistance appears to provide more universal social insurance than pre-reform welfare*. This holds true at least for the time being, where labor markets are unusually absorptive and plenty of funds for spending on additional services are available.

What do I mean by a system of modern public assistance? Without claim to be exhaustive, such a system has at least three essential functions. First, to determine the eligibility for social insurance of income risks; second, to specify the entitlement to poverty relief; and, third, to contribute implicitly or explicitly to macroeconomic stabilization. I do maintain that workfare is a full-fledged system of modern public assistance, because each of these functions are fulfilled:

- In each system of public assistance, it has to be determined who and what is eligible for insurance. This is what the work requirement does. According to this eligibility criterion, workfare extends insurance to anybody who joins the labor force. Since this is a rather comprehensive criterion, the necessity for actual insurance payments has to be established by means-testing, meaning an income threshold.

- By its very existence, a system of public assistance acknowledges an entitlement to poverty relief. In the workfare model, the individual entitlement to welfare, that is non-work, means-tested assistance, has been replaced by an individual entitlement to an earnings subsidy and some categorical assistance, such as Food Stamps. In the U.S., for instance, this amounts to an obligation of the IRS to hand out the refunds under the EITC program to any tax-filing household that is eligible even if the refund has not been explicitly claimed. The entitlement varies in its coverage, of course. The income risk from unemployment may be uninsured or covered by the government stepping in as an employer of last resort.³⁷

- It is a characteristic of *modern* public assistance programs that they are designed with a view to support macroeconomic stabilization, most importantly in times of economic downturns.³⁸ In the workfare model of public assistance, a nominally defined minimum wage may be interpreted to contribute to macroeconomic stabilization, even if this has not been its intention. It provides a

downward floor to wages and thus anchors the price level. In the workfare model of public assistance, however, the level of a statutory minimum wage is likely to be low relative to the median wage, in order to create as little barriers to employment as possible. This is because unemployment is an income risk that puts more strains on workfare than on welfare.

Quite obviously, workfare as a system of public assistance is particularly adapted to Anglo-Saxon labor market institutions, as well as to a culturally and economically heterogeneous polity such as the U.S. The main features of these labor market institutions are well-known: weak unions which effectively represent only segmented interests of organized labor, a decentralized wage bargaining mostly at the company level, and a minimal role of government regulation regarding practices such as the hiring and firing of workers.³⁹ Workfare fits well with the heterogeneity of the U.S. polity, because this system relies on as little contrived solidarity from the taxpayers as possible. On the contrary, it requires the recipients to comply with a broad consensus that, above all, it is hard work and the individual struggle for self-reliance that deserves support.

The emphasis on the general functions of modern public assistance thus reveals a basic equivalence of workfare and welfare in providing non-categorical transfers to those considered needy. They are *not* alternatives in the sense of workfare ending and welfare maintaining public assistance for individuals who experience hardship. Both provide what markets are not geared to do, mainly to secure a certain living standard. That is, both are interventionist. The workfare model is interventionist in that it steps up earnings by transfers or, if seen from the employers' side, subsidizes low-wage labor inputs.⁴⁰

The case for the assessment that workfare is a more universal or inclusive system of public assistance rests basically on the observation that there is now more government activism to bring former welfare recipients into work and this, in turn, entitles them to earnings subsidies. In contrast to AFDC and TANF benefits, an earnings subsidy under EITC does not even need to be claimed, since eligibility is automatically established for filing taxpayers who have earnings below a certain level. This seems to me the universalism of social assistance in workfare. This variety of universalism

does not mean comprehensiveness in regard to insurance of income risks, since unemployment remains basically uninsured. Nonetheless, workfare blurs the distinction between recipients of welfare (means-tested transfers) and recipients of social insurance (tax and contribution-financed transfers). Under EITC, beneficiaries are potentially contributing to and potentially receiving from the system.

The expansion of EITC thus makes public assistance less discriminatory or stigmatizing. This holds true for workfare in general as it helps former welfare recipients to enter the ranks of the working poor. Being among the working poor may not make that much of a difference in regard to living standards, since the loss of leisure time (which, for instance, means a loss of time for child care) has to be offset against material gains, if there are any. However, it does make a difference in regard to social and self-respect, since there is widespread political support for assisting the working poor even by those who are stern opponents of traditional welfare.⁴¹ According to mainstream norms, working is largely synonymous with "deserving" in the case of a nonelderly and nondisabled adult.

In other words, workfare has become more universal insofar as it tackles more effectively one syndrome of poverty in the U.S., namely the existence of an *underclass*. The underclass, meaning long-term recipients of welfare who become more and more detached from mainstream norms concerning work and self-support, are made to join the mainstream through a work obligation and the lifetime limit for TANF. In order to do so, however, U.S. public assistance had to give in with respect to another syndrome, namely the persistence of the working poor. The work requirement adds to the pool of low-wage workers, which puts additional pressure on wages in this segment of the labor market.⁴² This is likely to become a more pressing issue when extraordinary income and employment growth comes to a halt.

Why could a more universal character of social insurance be warranted from an economic point of view?⁴³ The modern economic theory of the welfare state rests on the insurance principle. If welfare institutions enable the individual to bear more risks, one would expect an increase in real income — an increase despite the fact that failures also become more likely. This is because markets select projects where higher risks are compensated for by higher

expected returns. Pooling of risks by social insurance thus makes for income gains in the aggregate without the individual bearing the consequences of the higher aggregate risk that goes with it. This is why we can speak of "risk-productivity" or social insurance increasing "risk-efficiency."⁴⁴ The enabling features of social insurance allow individuals to become more mobile, to acquire more specialized skills, or to found their own companies in tiny market niches. The importance of such individual risk-taking is likely to vary with the stage of economic development. Mature economies, for example, generate income in ever more specialized services and rely on a workforce ready to switch between (high-skill) jobs.

From that point of view, it makes good sense that when economies grow richer, they also create more comprehensive and generous safety nets. This is otherwise a paradox. Why should households vote or opt for more social insurance if increased private wealth enables the individual to draw on private resources? So far, the U.S. has been a notable exception to this stylized fact of socio-economic development. However, workfare seems to be the American way of joining the evolution of mainstream welfare states on this side of the Atlantic. If that is the case, workfare or welfare in the U.S. is as much "ending pre-reform welfare as Americans knew it" as it is "starting universal welfare as continental Europeans know it."

Notes

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1. See Michael Wiseman, "Welfare Reform in the United States: A Background Paper," *Housing Policy Debate* 7 (1996): 598-607; Robert I. Lerman, "Retreat or Reform? New US Strategies for Dealing with Poverty?," in *Social Policy Review* (Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute, 1999), 2-6.

2. House of Representatives, Committee on Ways and Means, 1998 *Green Book: Background Material and Data on Programs within the Jurisdiction of the Committee on Ways and Means* (Washington, DC., 1998), 1416 <<http://www.access.gpo.gov/congress/wm001.html>>; Paul E. Peterson, *The Price of Federalism* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution & The Twentieth Century Fund, 1995), 115.

3. House of Representatives, 1414. There are double counts in these figures, that is persons may receive Food Stamps as well as Medicaid. From the State Rankings of the Census one can gather that roughly 7.7% of the U.S. population received some kind of public aid in 1994. See Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States* (Washington, D.C., 1998), 14 <<http://www.census.gov/main/>>.

4. House of Representatives, 1413.

5. The studies referred to in the article rely on data either from *The Green Book* or from the Census (notes 2 and 3, respectively). *The Green Book* is the authoritative source for welfare programs in the U.S.

6. See Robert Haveman and Barbara Wolfe, *Welfare to Work in the U.S.: A Model for Other Nations?* (Madison: Institute for Research on Poverty, 1998), 21-22. The Census measures poverty in absolute terms and is based on the cash income necessary to maintain a minimum standard of living.

7. Nicholas Johnson and Ed Lazere, *Rising Number of States Offers Earned Income Tax Credit* (Washington, D.C.: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 1998), 3 <<http://www.cbpp.org/9-14-98sf.htm>>.

8. House of Representatives, 531-532; Demetra Nightingale, *A General Profile of the Welfare Population*. (Washington, DC: The Urban Institute, 1996), 4 <<http://wtw.doleta.gov/recruit/URBAN.HTM>>.

9. Bureau of the Census, "How We're Changing: Demographic State of the Nation: 1995," *Current Population Reports, Special Studies, Series P-23*, 188 (Washington, D.C., 1994).

10. House of Representatives, 533.

11. In 1994, 37 % of welfare mothers were white, while about 80 % of women in American society are white; for African-American women the figures are 36 % to 12 %, for Hispanic (who may be of various race origins) they are 20 % to over 3 %. See Bureau of the Census, "We asked... You told us." *Census Questionnaire Content*, 1990 CQC-4 (Washington, DC., 1992).

12. Nightingale, *General Profile*, 1-2.

13. Wiseman, "Welfare Reform," 604-607; Lerman, "Retreat or Reform?," 4.

14. See R. Kent Weaver, "Ending Welfare as We Know It," in *The Social Divide: Political Parties and the Future of Activist Government*, ed. M. Weir (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1998) 400.

15. see Wiseman, "Welfare Reform," 614-616.

16. Weaver, "Ending Welfare as We Know It," 362, 393.

17. Ibid., 401. For background information on the Wisconsin welfare reforms challenging the approaches of the Clinton administration see Thomas Kaplan, *Wisconsin's W-2 Program: Welfare as We Might Come to Know It*, Discussion Paper 1173-98 (Madison: Institute for Research on Poverty 1998), 10-13 <<http://www.ssc.wisc.edu/irp>>.

18. Weaver, "Ending Welfare as We Know It," 375.

19. Ibid., 364; Linda Faye Williams, "Race and the Politics of Social Policy," in *The Social Divide*, ed. Weir, ch.10.

20. The idea of a 5-year time limit for obtaining AFDC was introduced on February 2, 1993, by House Ways and Means Committee Republicans. A universal work obligation as an expression of "personal responsibility" was sponsored by House Republicans in H.R. 3500 on November 10 of the same year. The Democrats, in contrast, initiated several proposals to increase funding for training and job provision, such as the Work for Welfare Act of Democratic Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan on January 21, 1993. See American Public Human Services Association, *A Recent History of Welfare Reform* <<http://www.apwa.org/reform/timeline.htm>>.

21. Weaver, "Ending Welfare as We Know It," 385.

22. Robert M. Solow, "Lecture II: Guess Who Pays for Workfare," in *Work and Welfare*, ed. A. Gutmann (Princeton: The Princeton University Center for Human Values, 1998).

23. Weaver, "Ending Welfare as We Know It," 381, 389.

24. See Lawrence M. Mead, ed., *The New Paternalism: Supervisory Approaches to Poverty*, (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1997).

25. Weaver, "Ending Welfare as We Know It," 398.

26. Jared Bernstein, "The Next Step: The new minimum wage proposal and the old opposition," *EPI Issue Brief* 130 (Washington, D.C.: Economic Policy Institute 1999), 1 <<http://www.epinet.org/>>.

27. See Alberto Martini and Michael Wiseman, *Explaining the Recent Decline in Welfare Caseloads: Is the Council of Economic Advisers Right?* Discussion Paper (Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute, 1997) <<http://www.urban.org/welfare/cea.htm>> for a meticulous discussion of the methodological and heuristic problems involved.

28. General Accounting Office, *Welfare Reform: Information on Former Recipients' Status*. GAO/HEHS-99-48 (Washington, D.C., 1999), 5.

29. Haveman and Wolfe, *Welfare to Work*, table 1.

30. For a single parent with one child, phasing out of the credit starts at an annual income of \$12,260. This is equivalent to 114% of the federal poverty standard. For a single parent with two children this is the case when effective after-tax income amounts to an equivalent of 109% of the poverty standard.

31. General Accounting Office, 16.

32. Acs et al., *Does Work Pay? An Analysis of the Work Incentives under TANF*, Assessing the New Federalism Occasional Paper (Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute, 1998), 14-15 <<http://newfederalism.urban.org/>>.

33. Between 44% and 83% of leaver families continued to receive Medicaid and between 31% and 60% Food Stamps. See General Accounting Office, 21. "Old-fashioned" categorical assistance has evidently not become obsolete in workfare.

34. Again, it is too early to tell whether these costs will decline after the initial phase in which administrations and services have to be built up. Moreover, the substantial amounts of TANF funds that were not spent by the states by the end of 1998 are difficult to interpret. On the one hand, they indicate savings from greater cost effectiveness and a lower incidence of welfare need. On the other hand, they can also mean non-myopic workfare spending of state governments that put funds aside for rainy-day purposes. See Ed Lazere, *Unspent TANF Funds at the End of Federal Fiscal Year 1998* (Washington, D.C.: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, revised February 26, 1999).

35. Rebecca M. Blank, David Card and Phillip K. Robins, "Financial Incentives for Increasing Work and Income Among Low-Income Families," Paper prepared for the *Joint Center for Poverty Research Conference* on "Labor Markets and Less Skilled Workers," November 5-6, 1998; revised February 1999, 4-5.

36. See Timothy Besley and Stephen Coate, "Workfare versus Welfare: Incentive Arguments for Work Requirements in Poverty Alleviation Programs," *American Economic Review* 82 (1992): 249-261. The authors nevertheless provide a most thoughtful economic discussion of workfare.

37. See David Raphael Riemer, *The Prisoners of Welfare: Liberating America's Poor from Unemployment and Low Wages* (New York: Praeger, 1988) for an early and convincing study in favor of workfare in general and in favor of one that entails providing jobs in public employment schemes.

38. The modernity of modern social assistance is expressed in the protection against individual risks such as unemployment that can hardly be insured by private markets. In stabilizing individual incomes, government also stabilizes the economy as a whole. On the available evidence see Rebecca M. Blank and Alan S. Blinder, "Macroeconomics, Income Distribution, and Poverty," in *Fighting Poverty: What Works and What Doesn't*, ed. Sheldon H. Danziger and Daniel H. Weinberg (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986), ch.8; Charles Murray, *Losing Ground: American Social Policy 1950-1980* (New York: Basic Books, 1984) 16-18; and Weir, ed., *The Social Divide*, ch.7. In contrast, traditional poverty relief was provided by non-governmental organizations, e.g. the church, and was based on shared values of charity, unrelated to the workings of the economy.

39. The minimalist regulation of labor markets is in stark contrast to heavy regulation of commodity markets, for example regarding producers' liabilities, and considerable regulation of financial markets, such as rules regarding insider regulations or accounting standards.

40. The classic welfare states in continental Europe are more likely to engage in output subsidization or protection to help employers bear high non-wage costs.

41. Murray, *Losing Ground*, 17, 230-231.

42. Solow, "Guess Who Pays for Workfare."

43. I stress the economic point of view primarily in response to the simplistic view of workfare as an appendix to the labor market. Workfare seen as a system of social insurance also has an economic rationale.

44. See Kai Konrad, *Risikoproduktivität* (Berlin: Springer, 1992) and Hans-Werner Sinn, "Theory of the Welfare State," *Scandinavian Journal of Economics* 97 (1995): 495-526, respectively, for these terms.

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Review Symposium

Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age*

Last Fall, three editors of H-net, a humanities listserver, organized a review symposium of Princeton historian Daniel T. Rodgers' recent book *Atlantic Crossings. Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Harvard University Press, 1998). The book offers a substantial reinterpretation of Euro-American social reform in the decades 1880 to 1940. We reprint excerpts of the reviews with permission of H-net.

Atlantic Crossings: A Summary

by Harry Marks,
Johns Hopkins University

"Why is there no welfare state in America?" For decades, sociologists and historians interested in the development of the post-World War II European welfare state have looked to the generative period from 1880 to 1940, when Germany, France, England and the Scandinavian countries adopted a series of innovative, state-centered, social programs—unemployment insurance, social security, industrial accident and health insurance—adding programs for child care and mothering work in the postwar era. While the explanations for these policies varied with scholarly fashion and the changing political fortunes of the welfare state itself, a uniform belief in the coherence (and inevitability) of the phenomena persisted, along with the conviction that there was something peculiar about the United States polity. How else to account for its noted delays in adopting some programs (social security, unemployment insurance) and failure to develop others (universal health insurance, maternity subsidies)?

Not the least of the merits of Daniel Rodgers' pathbreaking book is that it calls into question this received wisdom, which saw strong connections between the postwar welfare states and the social policies of the previous sixty years. For Rodgers, the postwar welfare states are something quite different from the "social politics" of the interwar and *fin-de-siècle* decades: "The 'welfare state' was not the articulated goal of its framers, but [at best] a label trailing the fact (28)." Even the label belongs to a later era: progressive reformers endorsed neither the statism of the 'welfare state' nor its narrow reliance on social insurance mechanisms. Rather than seeing the prewar era as the gestation period of the welfare state, it must, Rodgers argues, be read on its own terms, as a period of trans-European, trans-Atlantic, social experimentation—experimentation with programs meant to soften and limit the effects of intensive industrialization and urbanization.

Searching for a "middle course between the rocks of cutthroat economic individualism and the shoals of an all-coercive statism (29)," the "progressive architects of social politics" traveled to learn by example. The greatest of these sociological tourists were the Americans, who turned again and again to Europe seeking lessons in social reform. Some of these visitors are well-known. Jane Addams made multiple pilgrimages to London's

ATLANTIC CROSSINGS SOCIAL POLITICS IN A PROGRESSIVE AGE



DANIEL T. RODGERS

Title page of *Atlantic Crossings*, depicting a detail of the French artist A. M. Cassandre's Art Deco picture *L'Atlantique*.

Toynbee Hall in the 1880s, while Graham Wallas, Mary MacArthur and Keir Hardie, *inter alia*, returned the compliment by later sojourns at Lillian Wald's Henry Street Settlement. Richard T. Ely and W.E.B. DuBois studied the historicist methods and social doctrines of the German *Kathedersozialisten*. In the early 1930s, Lewis Mumford and Catherine Bauer surveyed modernist architecture and housing reform in Frankfurt, Berlin, and Vienna. A great many more travellers were forgotten until unearthed by Rodgers' prodigious trolling through the pages of *Charities and the Commons*, *The Nation*, *The New Republic*, and countless government and commission reports. Who but a few specialists remembers Albert Shaw's translation of Glasgow's experiments in municipal ownership of railways? Do even specialists know about Frank Williams, who imported German zoning maps and speci-

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fications to New York in 1913 or David Lubin, who modified Prussian agrarian mortgage banks to help create the Farm Loan Act of 1916? The cumulative effect is unmistakable and irrefutable: political innovation in social policy took place in a trans-European, trans-Atlantic context. Isolationist in foreign policy the United States may have been, but in social policy they were internationalists.

The book consists of eleven chapters: an opening account of the Paris Exhibition of 1900, where the *Musée Social* put the wares of European and North American reformers on display; a chapter on the travels of settlement house workers, journalists and politicians to examine what Europeans had made of the urban, industrial world America was coming to resemble; a chapter on the pilgrimages U.S. students of economics made to Germany in the 1870s; a chapter on experiments in "municipalization"—the political contests, from Birmingham (England) to Cleveland, over whether private entrepreneurs should be allowed to continue owning the water lines and the trolleys; two chapters devoted largely to city planning and housing reform, one on the decades preceding the Great War and one on the 1920s and 1930s; a chapter on social insurance (workmen's compensation and health insurance) and workplace regulation; a chapter on the ephemeral experiments with "war collectivism" in the Great War (housing reform, economic planning and labor relations); a chapter on agrarian cooperatives and rural reconstruction; and two closing chapters on the legacies of social politics—the New Deal and the fate of William Beveridge's plans for the postwar social reconstruction of Britain.

As the above inventory suggests, Rodgers' notion of social politics includes the conventional social insurance schemes beloved of

welfare state historians—workmen's compensation laws, unemployment insurance, pensions and health insurance—but it also incorporates city planning, municipal utilities (waterworks, gas works and street railways), farmers' cooperatives, sanitary improvements (public baths and milk stations) and housing reform (from slum clearance to garden cities). Though Rodgers is not the first to offer a more expansive version of pre-World War II "welfare statism," his is surely the most comprehensive, most systematic exploration of the topography of "social politics." I would not dare attempt to tell you all Rodgers says about each of these movements, but will simply report that I learned something on virtually every page, even about things I thought I knew rather well. But what does Rodgers wish us to understand about the nature of social politics, and its fate in the United States?

Rodgers' travellers are "idea" women and men who use their foreign experiences to initiate and promote new social programs. "Amateurs" rather than specialists or career government officials, "they never wielded clear political power (25)." Yet they "produced the ideas, alternatives and solutions that made social politics possible." Rodgers explicitly commits himself to explaining policy agendas and programmatic ideas, not outcomes. What, then, of America's "backwardness," of the failures to transplant European programs on American political soil, of political outcomes? Despite his reluctance to take political results as the proper end of all politics, Rodgers has a good deal to say about the institutional fate of European ideas.

Essential to Rodgers' method is that we understand the nature of international exchange in the political realm. Even when the North Atlantic countries faced similar social problems, and even when national reformers investigated and appro-

priated foreign models, the process of translation was active, not passive. Existing local (and political) circumstances shaped the process of appropriation. Take the example of social insurance in the late nineteenth century. Social insurance there was, but the financing and control varied from place to place. In Germany, initially only the miners had a state-mandated insurance fund, while in France the state banked the funds of government registered mutual benefit societies; in Britain, the same friendly societies shared their market with commercial insurers. The weight of existing markets and interests (unions/mutual benefit societies; the so-called "private sector"), and the history of state-private relations gave defined shape to the resulting programs. Similarly complex stories are told about housing and agrarian reform, among others.

What of the United States? Americans remain, in Rodgers' telling, Innocents Abroad. Just as the local ramifications of existentialism and deconstructionist critique escaped American academics in the 1950s and 1980s, so the nuances of European social politics in the 1880s, 1910s or 1940s escaped American social progressives. How else to explain the enthusiasm of American social reformers—self-pronounced anti-socialists—for the socialist platform of British post-World War I social reconstruction, Sidney Webb's and Ramsey MacDonald's *Labour and the New Social Order*? Or the studied blindness of American agronomists to the role played by government land banks in the much lauded Danish rural cooperatives? Translation is selectively tuned to some melodies but not others.

In several stories, timing plays a key role—both the sequencing of deep historical time (America's "backwardness" vis-à-vis Europe) and the adventitious character of ordinary historical time. Thus, by the time the movement for municipal

ownership reaches North American shores (in the first decade of the twentieth century), the gas utilities, which were the target in Joseph Chamberlain's Birmingham, were already waning. The late-blooming domestic "municipalization" movement directed its attention instead to the nascent street railway industry. The movement to import European health insurance models, by contrast, simply has historical bad luck. The campaign for health insurance heated up in 1915, just as the "made in Germany" charges sparked by World War I became available to critics.

The loyalties of American law and the American judiciary to property rights provided a more consistent check against progressive politics, especially in the cities. Rodgers makes clear the courts' role in breaking the rapid movement toward municipal ownership of railways. Yet, even here it is the intellectual currents which intrigue him. For in the face of legal challenges to the municipal control of railways, progressives resurrected a venerable but moribund political innovation—the railway commission—giving the public a voice in monitoring rates and service, but not in owning railways and other utilities. Ideology and political precedent, not just the balance of power, account for the political path taken.

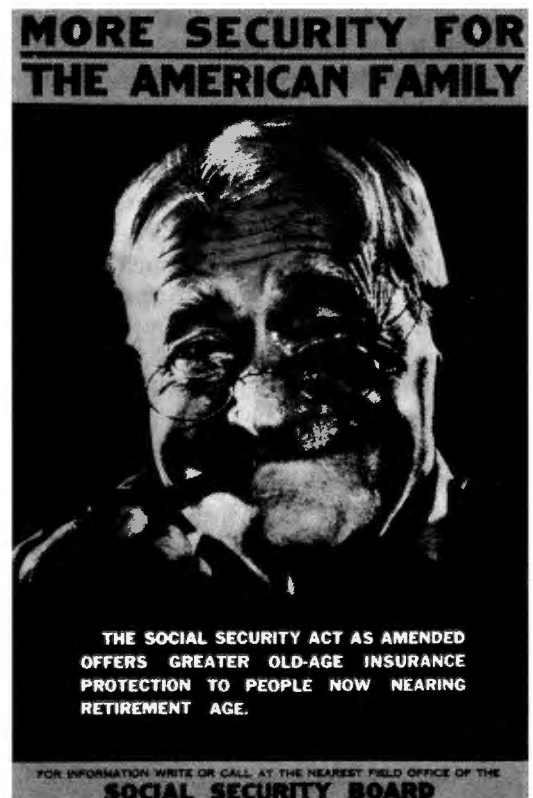
Rodgers' affection for the architects of social politics cannot conceal the fact that their successes were geographically limited and, in many cases, short-lived. Efforts to extend local programs to the national level were often checked by a combination of powerful business opponents and tepid or ambivalent allies. If social progress in North America remained local and piecemeal, still Rodgers has rescued a range of regional innovations from partial obscurity: from Elwood Mead's California experiments with state-subsidized cooperative farm colonies (345-353) to Carl Mackley's German-

inspired working class housing in Philadelphia (403-404).

Perhaps the greatest legacy of social politics, however, can be found in the New Deal. Here, Rodgers radically extends and revises a thesis of the historian William Leuchtenberg, that New Deal programs and personnel had their roots in the agencies and ideals of the Great War. Do not direct your attention to the main stage of the New Deal—the National Industrial Recovery Act or the Civilian Works Administration—, Rodgers argues, or to the main performers—few of Roosevelt's inner core came to Washington from the rank and file of social politics. Look rather to the periphery—to the cooperative farming programs of the Rural Resettlement Administration, which took up Elwood Mead's experiments with rural cooperatives—or to the interstices—the public housing program inserted into the NIRA legislation by Senator Wagner, incorporating the advice of German-inspired New York housing reformer Mary Simkhovitch. It is not, Rodgers argues, that Franklin Roosevelt and his advisors were social progressives; rather the New Deal drew on "an overstocked warehouse of reform proposals [from the past] stumbling into the political center" (446). Even within the core programs of the New Deal, Rodgers notes the weight of three decades of social politics. The provisions of Social Security, he argues, have less to do with addressing "the economic insecurity of the Depression," and more to do with European precedents in social insurance and child health nurtured by American progressives (428-446). Here, as elsewhere, Rodgers is careful to note the ways in which domestic political

circumstances modified European precedent, as in the insistence, modeled on commercial insurance, that the federal government track individual contributions to Social Security accounts (445-446).

The New Deal is, for Rodgers, virtually the last gasp of social politics in the United States. By the time the British issue William Beveridge's manifesto for a postwar welfare state, American reformers have turned their attention elsewhere, to the dictates of a home-brewed Keynesianism which relied on economic growth to produce social justice. The U.S.'s extraordinary economic command over the international postwar economy gave reformers a ready reason to put their faith in the generosity of the expanding market, and to regard the European states as followers, not leaders, of other nations.



My brief is to describe and not criticize Rodgers' work. Still, some talking points occur to me, which might be taken up in the discussion:

NATIVISM. Rodgers makes clear how much progressive discourse invoked European example. Yet, apart from a few brief mentions, the progressives' acknowledged debts to Europe are not treated as a political liability. How much of the failure of progressivism, especially during the 1920s, can be attributed to the strengths of nativism and the political mobilization of anti-communism? And what about the complex nativism of middle-class reformers itself, especially in the settlement house movement? If we are considering the impact of European political example, should not we recognize the contemporary distinction between two Europes, the Nordic Europe of Germany, Britain and Scandinavia (good, progressive) and the Europe of Italy and the Pale (bad, unmodern)?

THE STATE. Rodgers' focus is on outsiders, those who generated ideas from think tanks, and philanthropies, national and local. He makes a point of noting that few of these outsiders made a career of holding government office. Yet I wonder if the trajectory of "social politics," especially in the 1920s and 1930s, can be explained without considering the careers of people such as the economist and statistician Edgar Sydenstricker, who went from a job as an analyst on the U.S. Commission on Industrial Relations to a full-time career in the U.S. Public Health Service. For two decades thereafter, Sydenstricker championed the cause of public health insurance, serving as a bridge between private philanthropies (the Milbank Fund), independent commissions (the Committee on the Cost of Medical Care) and the government. What about the democratic planners in the U.S. Bureau of Agricultural Economics—Milburn Lincoln Wilson and Lewis Cecil Gray—, both trained in John Commons' laboratory in progressive economics at the University of Wisconsin? Or the many officials who participated in international congresses on workplace

conditions and industrial accidents, whose efforts Anson Rabinbach has recently explored? Perhaps now that Prof. Rodgers has so lovingly charted the place of social progressives outside government, we can also examine their allies in government.

Defining and Explaining North Atlantic "Social Politics"

by David C. Hammack

Case Western Reserve University

One of the notable virtues of *Atlantic Crossings* is Daniel Rodgers' observation that the progressive "social politics" of the last two decades of the nineteenth century and the first third of the twentieth was not simply about the expansion of "the state." It had, as he puts it, more to do with efforts, social as well as political, to limit the market. Some innovations required only independent, cooperative, voluntary social action. Some needed only permissive enabling legislation. Other innovations called for state subsidies of "the voluntary institutions of society" in a pattern Rodgers calls "subsidiarist" (28). Here Rodgers makes the very important distinction, usually ignored by historians of social politics, between services provided directly by state employees, and services the state encourages or, through direct contracts or indirect vouchers, pays others to provide. This is a theme others may well want to pursue. Rodgers does not connect subsidiarist efforts of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to recent activity, but the connections surely exist. State subsidies to "non-government organizations" have increased significantly in Europe and elsewhere in recent decades. In the United States, an examination of federal expenditures shows that the share of the Gross Domestic Product that flows through the federal government and goes to pay for health care, research, education, job training, and other human services

increased from less than 0.4% in 1960 to just under 3% in 1980, then to nearly 4.5% in 1997. Perhaps two-thirds of this money flows, in a kind of "subsidiarist" fashion, to nonprofit organizations. Most commonly, federal money flows through vouchers and related instruments, increasingly the chosen instruments of federal social policy in the United States. Under recent "charitable choice" legislation, some of this money is now going to pay for services provided by organizations that are closely connected or even identical with religious groups.

Atlantic Crossings has other virtues as well, and I am sure they will receive full attention in this symposium. To start discussion here, I would raise some questions about Rodgers' definition of his topic and about his treatment of the policy environment faced by Americans who sought to bring ideas about the positive uses of government into the United States.

To judge from his own index, Rodgers defines "social politics" in a way that emphasizes efforts to expand government involvement in the welfare of employed workers and farmers, and in urban development. Apart from Franklin D. Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, David Lloyd George, and Theodore Roosevelt, the largest number of his index citations go to urban planning and housing advocates Catherine Bauer, Charles Booth, Frederic C. Howe, Lewis Mumford, and Raymond Unwin, and to social reformers William Beveridge, Richard T. Ely, Florence Kelley, Beatrice Webb, and Sidney Webb. Close behind in index references are other social reformers concerned with city living conditions—Jane Addams, Paul U. Kellogg, Albert Shaw, Mary Kingsbury Simkhovitch, and Edith Elmer Wood.

There is no doubt that Rodgers has tapped into a rich and underexplored area here. In many

ways, *Survey* magazine and its sponsor, the Russell Sage Foundation, lay at the heart of "social politics" as Rodgers defines the topic. Russell Sage idea brokers, such as those on whom Rodgers focuses (Unwin and Kellogg as well as social work founder Mary Richmond, housing reformer Lawrence Veiller, labor reformer Mary Van Kleeck, and many others) concerned themselves with the entire array of policy concerns that he emphasizes. It would be inappropriate to criticize so coherent and effective a book for the omission of additional topics. But it is interesting that, although Rodgers states that he defines "social politics" to include nongovernmental efforts to limit the market, and although he does write extensively about cooperatives, both in agriculture and among industrial workers, he pays almost no attention to nonprofit organizations that were not set up as cooperatives. Yet, such organizations (including a majority of U.S. hospitals and clinics, very large shares of its colleges, and social service agencies, and nearly all of its museums) probably expanded from 1% to 3% of the U.S. gross domestic product in the years he writes about.

It would also be interesting—though it would also be too much to ask of a single book—to know whether Rodgers ever thought about including developments in two policy fields that he generally ignores: elementary and secondary education, and health care. U.S. idea brokers and policy-makers in these fields paid as much attention to European and British Commonwealth models and innovations as did those in the fields he does emphasize, especially before World War I. As David Tyack and other historians of education have shown, for example, many late-nineteenth-century education leaders extolled Prussian approaches. In these areas, as in urban planning, public health, and social welfare, U.S. leaders usually had to find decentralized and

sometimes private, nonprofit ways to accomplish purposes they shared with people in other parts of the industrial world.

I would also raise two questions about the policy environment in which Rodgers' idea brokers sought to advance their favored reforms. In the manner of an intellectual historian, Rodgers focuses on connections among the idea brokers themselves, rather than on the context in which they operated. But one of the excellent qualities of *Atlantic Crossings* is his thoughtful attention to the constraints imposed on the idea brokers by the political and policy contexts in which they operated—constraints of which nearly all his protagonists were *well aware*.

The first question has to do with the relation between ideas and "problems" in shaping policy debates. In making his case for close attention to idea brokers, Rodgers offers a strong argument for the significance of ideas in politics. "Americans in the Progressive Era," he writes, "did not swim in problems—not more so, at any rate, than Americans who lived through the simultaneous collapse of the economy and the post-Civil War racial settlement in the 1870s. It would be more accurate to say that they swam in a sudden abundance of solutions, a vast number of them brought over through the Atlantic connection" (6). Rodgers is surely right to insist that problems do not create their own solutions. He is also right to insist that some matters are not "problematic" at all until we place them in a framework of ideas that frames them as such. But the usual argument has not been simply that the American progressives faced many problems. It has been, rather, that they faced some very specific problems that grew out of the rapid urbanization of the northeastern and upper midwestern U.S., and out of those regions' simultaneous industrial transformation. Violent labor

conflict, rising death rates from tuberculosis and sewerage-borne diseases of crowding, unwed teenage mothers, and other "problems" of the period were not only the product of framing ideas: they had a certain palpable reality as well. The idea brokers who fill Rodgers' book focused quite explicitly on these problems. Others may well want to do more than Rodgers does with the relation between pressing problems, such as, for example, the poverty of families whose breadwinner had suffered injury at work, and ideas about work accidents and the law.

The second question has to do with participants in the U.S. policy-making process. One of the great strengths of *Atlantic Crossings* is Rodgers' insistence on the variety of the forces and circumstances that shaped policy decisions. His argument that economic interests and commitment to private property rights were very important, but by no means determined all outcomes is very persuasive. But I wonder whether he gives adequate attention to the importance of the family farm, the private house on its own lot, the small retail business, and even the small manufacturing firm in shaping the perceptions and preferences of American voters and elected officials.

Perhaps more important, I wonder whether he gives sufficient attention to the impact of religious diversity on social policy debates in the United States. It is striking that *Atlantic Crossings* pays more attention to Catholics in Europe than in the United States. Rodgers disagrees quite sharply with Elizabeth Cohen's argument in *Making A New Deal*, that ethnic, often Catholic, mutual-benefit associations played important roles in the big cities of the upper Midwest and Northeast before the Great Depression. Rodgers certainly seems right to insist that ethnic mutual-benefit insurance companies were financially weak and often poorly run. But Catholic commitment to community institutions, together

with the powerful Protestant attachments of the leaders of many public institutions, explains much of the persistent American opposition to the expansion of government social and health care as well as educational services before the Great Society. Accounts of policy debates within the Democratic party between Reconstruction and the 1970s must pay as much attention to Catholic views as to the views of Southern segregationists.

American Catholics (and to a lesser extent Lutherans, members of the various Eastern Orthodox communities, African-Americans, and Jews) defined and continue to define their communities to a great extent through their sponsorship of hospitals, orphanages, homes for the elderly, schools and colleges, as well as through mutual benefit organizations. They devoted great effort between the 1870s and the 1930s to the defense of their right to do so, as Lloyd P. Jorgenson showed in *The State And The Nonpublic School, 1825-1925*. One high point of that effort was the successful mid-1920s defense before the U.S. Supreme Court, in the case of *Pierce v. Society of the Sisters*, of the right of parents to send children to nonpublic schools, and of Catholic nuns and others to operate private schools. Federal aid did not flow to hospitals or colleges until after World War II, through the G.I. Bill and the Hill-Burton (hospital construction) Act. Federal aid did not flow to such institutions, or at all to clinics, social service organizations, or lower schools until the Great Society legislation that followed the death of President John F. Kennedy, a Catholic.

Rodgers does make some striking observations about the role of religion in some policy debates. The Social Gospel facilitated exchanges among American, British, and northern European Protestants, he notes. In the 1920s, European visitors sometimes mocked the utopian

Calvinism of U.S. prohibition. Rodgers acknowledges Thomas Haskell's *The Emergence Of Professional Social Science*. Yet, he has little to say about Haskell's most important theme: the late nineteenth-century shift in the authority of policy advocates from Protestant ministers to secular "experts." Rodgers is probably correct when he suggests that Haskell exaggerated the success of the academic experts' efforts to gain authority for their ideas. But Haskell does persuasively argue that northeastern Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Congregationalists, and Unitarians had lost much of their ability to define the social policy agenda by 1900. Thereafter, many of the leading social policy forums—especially in the northeastern, upper midwestern, and north Pacific coast areas that Rodgers emphasizes—were nonsectarian, secular, and "scientific" in self-conception. Catholic, Jewish, Southern Baptist, Southern Methodist, and other forums also played increasingly important roles after 1900. *Atlantic Crossings* tells part of this story, but leaves more for others to develop.

Gender, Race, and the Comparative Project in *Atlantic Crossings*

by Sonya Michel

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Partly in response to the challenges of comparative historical sociologists, partly to promptings from within their own discipline and field, historians of the U.S. have recently begun to adopt a more internationalist and comparative approach. With the publication of *Atlantic Crossings*, Daniel Rodgers sets a new standard for this sort of work. Capacious (to use Natalie Zemon Davis' well-chosen word) yet fine-grained, this study places the history of American social policy in a new light, offering insights and provocations that others will be grappling with for years to come.

As Rodgers' early chapters document, the export trade in progressive European social politics was robust, with most of the impetus coming not from Europeans eager to impose their ideas on the U.S. but from Americans seeking new approaches to perceived problems at home. Comparing their politics to those of Europe, these progressives came to understand that although the U.S. could boast a higher level of democracy in terms of suffrage and property rights, it offered far less by way of material goods and services; they recognized, in other words, a discrepancy between "the democracy of form and the democracy of act" (158), between political and social citizenship, to use T.H. Marshall's terms, and this was what they sought to correct.

But do America's responses to proposed transplantations indicate that a particular pattern of social politics was emerging, a pattern that was not evolutionary (as a stark typology might imply), but was instead formed by the very accretions of those responses, admixed with domestic developments (what sociologists Ann Orloff, Theda Skocpol, and Margaret Weir would call "policy feedback")? A focus on the gendered and racialized dimensions of U.S. social politics would suggest this. But neither race nor gender figure significantly in Rodgers' analytical scheme. Though only a handful of middle-class white women (most prominently Jane Addams and Florence Kelley) and minority men (W.E.B. Du Bois) make their appearances in the early chapters, Rodgers does not use race as a political factor until the New Deal, and he minimizes the distinctiveness of maternalist politics. To be fair, he does refer to the ethnic heterogeneity that made it more difficult for Americans to accept universalistic principles honed in homogeneous European societies, but mentions only in passing the deep racial cleavages of Jim Crow America that underlay ethnic conflict.

As Joanne Goodwin, among others, has demonstrated, racism as well as nativism skewed the administration of early social policies like mothers' pensions and left them permanently stigmatized.

Rodgers scants the structural conditions that allowed primarily white male elites to become travelers in the first place, and at the same time he overlooks those that facilitated women's activism at home. While pointing, quite rightly, to the importance of urban venues for early social politics, he does not mention that cities also allowed women to enter the political field more conveniently and gracefully. His interest in world-traveling women tends to marginalize those who labored anonymously in the urban trenches. Though the influence of figures like Kelley and Addams cannot be denied, it remains the case that much of the momentum for early social legislation came from the rank and file of organizations like the National Congress of Mothers and the General Federation of Women's Clubs—women whose maternalist vision, far less cosmopolitan than that of the world travelers, imbued provisions like mothers' pensions with a tone of middle-class condescension and reinforced a male breadwinner ideal.

Indeed, though progressive reformer William Hard relied on the universalistic principles enunciated by British New Liberal L.T. Hobhouse in advocating for pension laws, it was a combination of sentimental maternalist appeals to motherhood and hardheaded thrift that ultimately carried the day with state legislators. Such provisions established a paradigm for the social-political inscription of women that was reproduced in the Social Security Act and its amendments and persisted at least until the welfare "reform" of 1996. This paradigm, I would argue, constituted a distinctive and continuous element of American social politics which, while perhaps not

unique or "exceptional," repeatedly served to deflect models from abroad for more progressive policies toward women such as child care and paid maternity leave.

Perhaps less germane to Rodgers' agenda but more disconcerting to historians of women and gender is his reversion to a definition of the welfare state that privileges policies targeted toward wage-earning men such as unemployment insurance and workmen's compensation as "social insurance," while treating provisions that primarily benefit women and children, such as mothers' pensions, as secondary or subsidiary. Feminist analysts have repeatedly exposed this definition as inherently male-biased and criticized it for reproducing precisely that which must be deconstructed, namely the very formation of a "male-breadwinner state." Rodgers' predilection here is all the more unfortunate since he cites but does not adopt Barbara Nelson's notion of a "two-channel welfare state," a model that more accurately captures not only the genealogy but also the dynamics and impact of the U.S. welfare system from the Progressive Era onward.

Perhaps the reason Rodgers gives programs such as mothers' pensions and child welfare such short shrift is that they seem to lack the internationalist dimension that is, after all, his main concern. But these programs were in fact the subject of international discussions, and imported ideas played a role (albeit often a limited one) in U.S. debates. Writing in 1913, the progressive William Hard, mentioned above, sought to transform the discourse surrounding mothers' pensions by interjecting New Liberal principles, but he largely failed to convince his fellow Americans that the measure should be considered "payment for a civic service" rather than a "dole." A few years later, New York City reformer Katharine Anthony, influenced by the radical feminist

visions of Swedish writer Ellen Key and British reformer Eleanor Rathbone, called for an honorific "endowment of motherhood" rather than stigmatizing pensions. Rodgers compares American formulations unfavorably with those in France, where pronatalism gave policies toward mothers "a civic and political spin" (241), and he mentions that American mothers' pensions provided British feminists with a precedent, but he misses the influences that flowed in the opposite direction. Though such omissions are rare for Rodgers, in this instance, they leave a telling gap.

Indeed, the eventual bottoming of the U.S. mothers' pension debate on sentiment and "women's weakness," as Rodgers puts it, is instructive, for it demonstrates how the radical gender implications of certain imports could become blunted within a political culture that lacked the universalizing potential of an indigenous socialism or liberalism (I say "potential" because I am well aware that neither France nor Britain, where these political strains were markedly stronger, produced model policies toward women during this period, though in both, social provisions for mothers, if not civil rights for all women, tended to be more generous than in the U.S.). If, as Kathryn Kish Sklar argues, "gender did the work of class" in forging U.S. social policy, then Rodgers would have profited from engaging more deeply with women and gender politics in explaining the mixed outcomes of attempted European transplantations.

Does Rodgers' relative inattention to race and gender undermine his fundamental arguments, or am I simply carping, falling into the usual reviewer's stance of wishing that the author had written a different book? I am glad—very glad, indeed—that Rodgers has written *Atlantic Crossings*, but I wish he had grappled with these issues more fully, not only for the pleasure of seeing his

discerning mind at work on them, but because their absence inevitably shapes his interpretation. While his claims about the continuities between the Progressive Era and the 1930s are convincing, his marginalization of the "women's welfare state" and delayed attention to race leads him to overemphasize the European roots of certain New Deal ideas while neglecting the racialized, gendered paradigm that the indigenous politics of the earlier period also cast over this remarkable body of legislation. His privileging of transatlantic over indigenous factors also causes him to overstate the discontinuities between the New Deal and postwar social politics.

Finally, while Rodgers is no doubt right that World War II and the Cold War sent the transatlantic exchange into eclipse, I would argue that it did not disappear entirely. Though not terribly viable politically, it continues now in the fields of comparative historical sociology and comparative policy history—fields to which *Atlantic Crossings* is a major contribution. With its wealth of documentation, methodological innovations, and historiographical challenges, this fine book will not

only add new rigor and richness to the field, but it bids fair to inaugurate a new chapter in the ongoing history of the transatlantic exchange.

Atlantic Crossings: Close Encounters, of What Kind?

by Victoria de Grazia
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Daniel Rodgers's book emphasizes the supply side as opposed to the demand side of social reform. It foregrounds the press of new ideas and experiments circulating through the North Atlantic world as giving rise to reformist impulses as opposed to the pressures from below arising from social struggles, the collective awakening to notions of social risks, or the implacable drive on the part of aggressive nation-states to engage in hygienizing bio-politics; all of the latter are arguments that European historians of similar phenomena have advanced to explain the origins and character of early twentieth century social reform movements. Vigorous if a bit ingenuous, serendipitous and piecemeal, the U.S. reform movement, as it is characterized here, ultimately seems very distant from the projects of capitalist

reform in Europe. This is notwithstanding that it drew so insistently upon them as an inspiration.

We might debate whether the supply of ideas is as crucial to reformist undertakings as Rodgers makes out here. We could also discuss whether he adequately addresses the paradox of why American reform, which appeared to be converging with the European then diverged from it. Irrespective, he convincingly shows how much contact there was among turn-of-the-century critics of market society and how important this cross-Atlantic circuit was to the education of American reformers.

My own queries turn here on two issues related to this traffic in ideas and institutions. My first question regard Rodgers' characterization of the cross-national terrain over which it moved. The second one regards his interpretation of how this traffic was received in milieu so very distant from the original place of conception. These same issues arise, though from a very different vantage point when, in the wake of World War I, continental Europe began to face the challenge of American models of market culture. Sweeping over the old problematic of capitalist reform, this U.S. wave of social invention carried with it notions such as the worker's right to a "decent standard of living," conceived in the American sense as income-driven and satisfied by mass consumption goods. This would eventually become, if not hegemonic, at least very influential in European reformist currents aligned with the United States post-World War II.

More generally, a study of institutional transfers like this raises what is perhaps the foremost problem comparativists address, namely, why innovations appear more or less simultaneously and with common features in what might seem like different contexts, and why, over the longer term, such



Appalachian mountaineers in front of a cafe in Pikesville, Tennessee. Many unemployed people during the Depression could do nothing but wait for better times to come.

innovations could produce drastically different outcomes. In his famous 1928 essay on the comparative method, Marc Bloch, basing his examples on the spread of the feudal system, suggests three possibilities: namely, that commonalities across different cultures could be explained by virtue of originating in a shared mode of production, such as industrial capitalism, by having a common original source of dissemination (like all cowboy movies coming from Hollywood, or by performing analogous functions, assuming that all societies act according to similar logics.)

The key move for comparativists if they want to argue on behalf of the first possibility, which is that the reform movements that bind Americans and Europeans arise out of the same dynamic capitalism, which Rodgers seems indeed inclined to argue, would lie in characterizing the broad historical context in which they occurred. However, Rodgers' characterization strikes me as unconvincing, what he labels the North Atlantic "field of force." True, the U.S. and Europe were both subject similarly to the intensification of market relations, prodigious urbanization, and rising working class resentments. Still, the movement of reform across the Atlantic from east to west, then reversing from west to east, might just as well be understood if the Atlantic area were treated not as placid waters, open to traffic hither and yon, but as the eye of the hurricane of a conflictual global capitalist world-system. If the North Atlantic is viewed as a site of rising and declining hegemonies—passing through two catastrophic wars that would shake Europe from its global leadership and annihilate classical liberal visions of progressive reform—certain features of Rodger's analysis stand in sharper relief.

The first is periodization. World War I should be underscored as a

real turning point. Before that, Europe's attractiveness is indeed very great. Afterward, the U.S. and the USSR emerged as the main poles of social invention. Before the War, Germany and Britain competed mightily for primacy in the field of reform as in other endeavors, and American reformers, as Rodgers documents, established a special relationship with German reformers at Halle, Leipzig, and other university centers and especially around the *Verein für Sozialpolitik* at Berlin, the young Americans sharing with their German professors and contemporaries a common interest in neo-mercantilist political economy suited to big (and closed) national markets and a common distaste for the tired Manchesterism and imperial high-handedness of the British. After the war, German statism was indelibly associated with the Kaiser's war-mongering, and German reformism tinged with the menace of bolshevism. Before the war, nationalism and liberal reformism could coexist. After the war, nationalist ideologies were incorporated into right-wing authoritarian programs and Fascist corporatism presented itself as a new "third way" toward reform, and its positions on demographic policy, maternity and child care, as well as leisure, enjoyed great influence within international reform circles, among their U.S. participants as well.

If we see the Atlantic as an arena of competing and uneven development, the relationship of national and internationalism acquires a different salience from the relatively open and progressive world Rodgers portrays. Though ideas did indeed crisscross national frontiers and were nurtured in international congresses by cosmopolitan minds, reform was essentially a nationalizing, if not nationalistic phenomenon. The passage of social reform legislation was an element of competition among national states, its implementation a factor of national redemption, its contribution to

improving the human factor calculated more or less scientifically in national accounts on wages, fertility, pensions, public health and migration. Paradoxically, the very implementation of reform on a national basis acted as an element of national cohesion, working not only against the internationalism of the labor movement but also against the cosmopolitanism of progressive ideas. Foreign examples might spur innovation. But their foreign nature, whether that was characterized as statist, authoritarian, socialistic, or other, could just as easily obstruct it.

My second point regards the institutionalization of ideas generated in such a freighted broader context. Globalization has engendered a vast literature on the "contests of interpretation" unleashed by cross-national encounters. Rodgers speaks of a "fluid politics of borrowing" (249), and in his forceful conclusion of the "expanded world of social-political referents and solutions (that) made politics out of mere economic fate" (508). What I miss in this vast canvas of the cross-Atlantic politics of citation is a sense of the discursive power, the fraught processes of inclusion and exclusion that are suggested in notions of "identity formation," "creolization," "dialogical encounter," or "hybridization," just to mention a few terms commonly used in such studies. Not much is necessarily gained from new-fangled borrowing from anthropology, linguistics, or social psychology the old-fashioned empiricist might say. But something surely is to be said for heightened awareness that a nuanced and systematic assessment of cultural-institutional transfers is very problematic, all the more so when real issues of translation are involved.

One problem whose answer eluded me here is the degree to which experiments from Europe did actually set terms of debate and/or shape alternatives. We know from European responses to the challenge

of post-war U.S. models of production that experts were in effect forced to debate whether high productivity necessarily went hand in hand with out-of-control consumption and rationalized kitchens would necessarily engender unmanageable American-style housewives. We know that sooner or later non-anglophone Europeans, the overwhelming majority, in the process of adopting new words like "service" and "marketing" had to assimilate whole new conceptual relationships. To what degree, say, did German social reformist ideas, imbricated as they were with statism, solidaristic ideas of market, sharp class hierarchies, or social radicalism, reshape the meaning of "social"? The answer might well be that Americans relatively speedily suppressed the original frame of reference, eliminating the foreign and alien far speedier than Europeans could expurgate the American influence. The near-total erasure of the German intellectual influence not just from the public, but also from the academic collective memory is in itself stunning testimony to this capacity.

The issue of appropriation takes us back to Rodgers' description of American experimentation as eclectic, local, even innocent or at least ingenuous. This is of a piece with his overall negative view of the propensity in the U.S. to marry reform to commercial capitalism, unlike Europe, where reform was allegedly solidly wedded to social democracy (408). The fact is that by the interwar period, progressive reformism was everywhere in crisis, and mass consumer-oriented capitalism presented itself as a strikingly rich vein of reform in the face of cutbacks of state provision, vast unemployment, and the pinched notions of workers' lives that prevailed in reformist circles. It is also true that in some measure all reform in the Atlantic area was piecemeal until after World War II when the Atlantic markets reopened,

stabilized, and grew strongly under U.S. hegemony, and indigenous social-democratic and Catholic social-market ideas were wedded to American models of production and consumption.

Above all what I learned from Rodgers' erudition is that Americans were quick learners. The cosmopolitanism of turn-of-the-century reformers was an important contribution to American ascendancy. The eclecticism of their style of appropriation and the intensely local way in which reform was practiced far from making the U.S. marginal to the mainstream, contributed to the social inventiveness that would lend so much dynamism to the U.S.'s informal empire over the next three-quarters of the century.

If, to conclude, we recognize that the U.S.' old strength came from making connections abroad, from going outside to acquire "a spark of philosophy," what does it say now for U.S. leadership that American elite culture is so scornful of social reform abroad? If it is not oblivious to it, the attitude today toward the giant mixing bowl of projects and measures of the European Union - around leisure, job training, gender parity, child care - is "been there, done that." Under the new world order, the level playing field is the name of the game, and the only arbiter of public policy seems to be consumer choice and opinion polling, expressed in American, please.

A Tale of Pendular Times

by Pierre-Yves Saunier
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In our research, we mention too often the existence of a "foreign model"—German, Spanish or Chinese, according to circumstances—to explain a new set of governmental measures, a new artistic trend, a new way of writing novels or a new social movement in the

country we study. Like a *deus ex machina*, the "foreign model" comes unmediated, miraculously unwrapped, as neat as when it left its point of departure. But ideas, values, skills, words or visions of the world are not manufactured products, packaged and shipped in containers. Daniel Rodgers urges us to wrestle with a whole set of arguments to deal with this international commerce.

He shows us how to consider the indigenous circumstances, which shape each model's creation and its legitimization abroad as something worth importing. Here, his insistence on the subtleties of the rhetoric of backwardness is especially valuable. He points to the necessity to pay attention to the shipping crate in which ideas traveled, the circumstances of the journey, the points of arrival and departure. Above all, he reminds us that no Atlantic crossing left the ideas unchanged, and that importation (of words, ideas, policies, laws) means translation and reappropriation. His careful analysis of what happened to several social policies of "foreign" origin also underlines how the context of the importing country matters in understanding what comes out of the importation process.

I want to concentrate on two points that repeatedly occurred to me while I was reading the book as a "participating reader" who had to face some of the same questions and choices that Rodgers faced. The first is about a choice he made to privilege printed material and inter-individual connections, rather than the structures that framed these contacts. It is a choice that has produced tremendously interesting results, but that also leaves us with many opportunities. The second is about the geographical focus of Rodgers' study and raises questions about the difficulties in doing the kind of "world history" that he has attempted.

Considering the prominent resources of Daniel Rodgers, it seems to me that he has made two major choices among the vast possibilities that were open to him. The first choice was to focus on the role of individuals in the Atlantic connection. This choice produced detailed and fascinating accounts of the energy, skill and faith of the progressives. By focussing on such individuals as Richard Ely, Albert Shaw, Frederic Howe, Florence Kelley, Charles McCarthy, Elwood Mead, Edith Elmer Wood and Catherine Bauer, Rodgers gives us a thick description of how American international idea brokers discovered Europe, interpreted it and tried to bring back the best of its social achievements.

More importantly, Rodgers deliberately left out a closer examination of all the structures that organized the "world in between." Ideas and models often cross the pages of *Atlantic Crossings*, but we certainly need to know more about the specific rules, constraints, and the work of congresses and exhibitions; of the structured connections created by the socialists, the Catholics or the Protestants; of the quests organized by U.S. federal structures, such as the Bureau of Labor, or by reformers and business societies, such as the National Civic Federation or the Chambers of Commerce; and of the action of organizations, such as the Institute of Educational Travel. As Rodgers points out, the "market of connections" became more and more organized in the 1930s, but even before that it seems to me that the choices an individual could make, and the things that he could carry home with him, were not free of all organizational constraints and concerns. Among these constraints were "societies" that specialized in the international trade of social policies, and managed the definition of what was possible to import. For example, Paul Kellogg's *Survey* led a conscious campaign to give Americans their "marching orders from the older civilization to the new" (267).

There were many agencies with this kind of organized will to develop connections. Among them were the foundations, a world of their own with their staff and programs. Rodgers mentions the Oberlander Trust that specialized on Germany, the American-Scandinavian Fund, and also the "golden donors," such as the Russell Sage, the Carnegie and the Rockefeller Foundations. But they only appear when he tells the story of an individual trying to get some funding. Nowhere are they considered in light of their structures and the framing effect they might have had on American connections with Europe.

For sure, the main concerns of the big foundations can be said to have been child care, public health, the peace movement or the social sciences, but I suspect that their size and power shaped the way the Atlantic connection worked even outside of these specialties. As far as the Rockefeller Foundation is concerned, this seems to be especially true for the New Deal period, since the people connected with the "1313 Center" and the Rockefeller philanthropies were major figures of the brain trust and the new federal agencies. It was Daniel Rodgers' right to leave the philanthropies outside of his already-rich landscape. It will be the duty of others to bring them back into the picture with the other structures that consciously organized the Atlantic connection.

One reason why Rodgers left the structures out may have to do with his second major choice, working with printed sources rather than with archives. Private papers are almost the only archival pieces he uses, and with great parsimony. I would have expected more use of journals such as John Ihlder's about the study tour he directed in 1914 for the National Housing Association, or a deeper analysis of the papers left by transatlantic travellers, such as John Nolen, in order to have a clearer understanding of the mechanisms of

U.S. tours of Europe, or of the meaning and consequences of having personal contacts with European reformers. Daniel Rodgers chose to privilege the public writings arena by U.S. idea brokers, rather than the elements documenting the process of brokering, its limits and components. That is very coherent with his aims, his priority being to describe what has been brought from Europe, and how the importers tried to change matters on the other side of the Atlantic. Doing this, he also urges us to contribute to the puzzle he has begun to assemble.

Nevertheless, this preference for printed materials might have other consequences, as a result of the emphasis Rodgers places on Germany and Great Britain. Germany and the United Kingdom are the salient points of the geography of exchanges, flows and importations drawn by the book. Though Denmark, Sweden, Italy, France, Ireland or Belgium also step onto the scene here and there, the German and British elements dominate the book. For sure, this is not scandalous at all. Apart from the language question that eased the U.S. quest in the United Kingdom, Germany and Great Britain are arguably at the forefront of the shocks created by the age of capitalism, and offered natural breeding grounds for the invention of social politics that American progressives were in search of. Above all, as the major purpose of the book is to recover the process of importation, it is fair to give priority to the countries that were privileged by the U.S. importers themselves. If these were Germany and the United Kingdom, why should we bother? But if we, as the book deserves, consider Rodgers' work as something more than a piece of U.S. history, and see it as an attempt and a call to study connections, to bring more light on how ideas circulated and were changed in this circulation process, then we may want to explore the question further.

At first sight the German-British privilege can be exaggerated in two ways. As Rodgers carefully points out, the American progressives in search of solutions tended to focus on achievements instead of considering the processes and contexts that made these achievements possible. Thus, by focusing on Germany and Britain, it is also possible that the modern historian misses the former moves of a scheme or an idea, and also the contexts and processes that shaped this scheme and idea in its first travels, and thus conditioned its later trajectory. The chapter on rural reconstruction offers the reader an opportunity to explore this issue. Only in this chapter does Rodgers consider such a vast sample of countries, from Germany to Italy, Denmark, France and Belgium. Once again, it might be that these countries paid the most interest to rural reform, and that the U.S. importers focused on them. But this chapter is also the one where Rodgers has found very little research available in English, and hence was forced to make the most with first-hand materials such as reports and diaries. The cosmopolitanism of this chapter is especially obvious in the part devoted to the cooperative movement, as a replica of the cosmopolitanism of the international cooperative movement itself. This movement does not seem to have been dominated by a single country or a culture, as was the case in other spheres (city planning, for example, was widely "controlled" by the British). Since the cosmopolitanism of rural reform has been noted by Rodgers, this raises the question about the other spheres of reform he examined. I just wonder whether he might have been influenced by the strong domination or imperialism of the British and German in these spheres that overshadowed the contribution of less "aggressive" cultures.

I gather from personal experience that what leads us towards the choice of studying, for example, the French-German connection in municipal

government, rather than the French-Belgian connection, is as much the "strategical interest" in being a specialist on Germany in the French academic world as the intrinsic quality of this connection. The existence of specific grants etc. contributes to this interest. For example, it has proven easier for me to work on U.S.-European connections in the field of "urban issues" than on intra-European contacts, and this can lead me to neglect the connections among European countries, especially countries such as the Netherlands, Switzerland or Belgium, though they held the leadership in international voluntary associations and connections until at least the 1930s. I may be wrong in thinking that our work on connections can be biased by such material considerations. If not, then we have to keep that in mind if we aim to follow Rodgers and study the "worlds in between" nations. With a scout-master of the quality of *Atlantic Crossings*, followers must work hard to improve the record. *Atlantic Crossings* can affect the research and reflection of all those who pay interest to comparative history, to the world of reformers or to social policies. I mean, if they read it.

The Lessons of *Atlantic Crossings* for Europeanists

by Seth Koven

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Preferring the safety and specificity of archives, historians all too rarely grapple with "Big Structures, Large Processes and Huge Comparisons," as historian Charles Tilly called it. *Atlantic Crossings* is a notable exception to this generalization and invites comparison between Rodgers' methodology and those used by leading historical sociologists, such as Gøsta Esping-Andersen, who have studied comparative welfare state development. Esping-Andersen, in his celebrated book *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*, deploys transnational categories such

as "liberal," "corporatist" and "social democratic" welfare "regimes" to discipline his data so that he can make meaningful comparisons across national cultures. Whilst Esping-Andersen acknowledges that none of these regimes ever existed in its "pure type" as a point of historical fact, the categories, once defined and imposed on the data, take on a life of their own. Rodgers, by contrast, never squeezes the countries he examines into invented categories. He takes great pains to use the rhetoric specific to each of the national cultures he surveys and to attend to the constantly shifting climate of political opportunity within each country.

Rodgers dismantles the myth of American isolationism by thrusting Americans into the heart of nineteenth-century Europe as students in German universities, sociological tourists and policy investigators. At the same time, he breathes life into the case for a new kind of American exceptionalism. America's early immersion in democracy, what Rodgers calls the "democratization of office," paradoxically inhibited the "democratization of service" and hence the growth of public provision (158). Similarly, the American legal system, in particular courts, zealously guarded the rights of property owners, hence checking the impulses of a nation in which political citizenship was divorced from property rights (207). As arresting as this thesis is, I wondered if it might need to be qualified in light of the widespread use of poll taxes, grandfather clauses (with property qualifications built into them), and sometimes, as in South Carolina and Louisiana, outright property qualifications to disenfranchise many African-American and poor men during this era, as John Hope Franklin and Alfred Moss, Jr. have noted in *From Slavery to Freedom, A History of African Americans*. Rodgers reperiodizes American welfare history and reconceptualizes its sources by underscoring the

essential continuities between the ideas and programs of progressive reformers from the 1880s to 1920s and the work of the New Deal. He does this by constructing a two-part argument. First, he shows that American progressives and their policies were deeply marked by their encounters with Europe; second, he argues that, faced with the crisis of the Depression, architects of the New Deal turned to the accumulated ideas and policies of these American progressives in seeking policy solutions. As a consequence, Rodgers concludes that were we to "seal the United States off from the world beyond its borders, the New Deal is simply not comprehensible" (428).

In a book so ambitious and so full of astute judgments about complex historical pathways, there are inevitably some interpretations and omissions with which each reader will disagree. Rodgers offers an exceptionally rich portrait of white intellectual life, but he fails to do justice to the international perspectives and borrowings that figured so prominently among writers and ministers of African American churches and organizations, most notably the African Methodist Episcopal Church that Lawrence Little explored in his scholarly work. Rodgers contends that systems of state welfare focused mostly on the working class, not the poor. "Social insurance — the working-men's insurance, as it was called at its birth — was as distinctly for the working class as the workhouse, the labor colony, and the bourgeois friendly visitors were for the nation of the poor" (216). But is it possible, at least in the British context, to differentiate so starkly between these populations, given the insecurities of most working people's lives and their movements during the course of their lifetimes between the free labor market and the clutches of state poor relief? As Rodgers' own treatment of old-age pensions suggests, until the twentieth century, huge numbers of working-

class men and women faced the poor house as the inevitable, humiliating conclusion of their working lives. Furthermore, the personnel who shaped and enforced these policies also overlapped considerably. Bourgeois friendly visitors working on behalf of the Charity Organization Society, settlements, and care committees worked side by side and sometimes moved into municipal and state welfare bureaucracies, though the opportunity structures for men and women differed considerably. For all that social investigators were keenly aware of the complex and highly differentiated nature of poverty and of working-class life, reformers and journalists alike often offered the public sensational representations of the very poor in lobbying for social welfare programs and policies intended to benefit the working class. British elites were simultaneously aware of distinctions between the working class and the poor and all too ready and willing to lump them together.

Substituting common sense eloquence for academic jargon, Rodgers is as attentive to the nuances of language and the politics of representation as the most ardent disciple of the "linguistic turn" and the not-so-New Cultural History. He also consistently attempts to incorporate the findings of historians of gender into his arguments, though he never engages very successfully with the social welfare debates around protective labor legislation and maternal and child welfare that preoccupied many European women reformers. By contrast, he divorces entirely sexual politics from social politics. Thus we get a strong dose of the social gospel and its impact on social politics, but nothing about the sexual politics that galvanized W.T. Stead's career in Anglo-American journalism. Similarly, Rodgers emphasizes that Britain led the way in providing publicly designed, subsidized housing for its working class, but ignores the key

role played by widespread British fears and fantasies about incest and promiscuous sex in single room dwellings in fueling public interest in the topic. The insistent eroticization of poverty by British social reformers, many of whom like Beatrice Potter Webb found in the slums a "certain weird romance," left a deep imprint on the way agents of public and private welfare defined social problems and sought solutions to them.

But do these disagreements of emphasis and interpretation call into question the value and validity of Rodgers's overall arguments? Most assuredly not. Rather, they suggest the richness of this field of inquiry, the many different approaches it both invites and can accommodate. Daniel Rodgers has produced that rare book, one that should satisfy specialists with sparkling nuggets unearthed from territory we imagined we had mined entirely ourselves, and general readers, for whom he provides deft vignettes made intelligible by cogent summaries of the existing scholarship. He has championed an intellectually ambitious kind of comparative social welfare history: one whose questions are driven by the history of a single nation-state, but whose answers can be found only within the much broader framework of the interconnected North Atlantic world. *Atlantic Crossings* is an elegant and intelligent performance Europeanists should not only applaud but emulate.

Reviews & Resources

Joanne L. Goodwin, *Gender and the Politics of Welfare Reform: Mothers' Pensions in Chicago, 1911-1929* (University of Chicago Press, 1997)

by Robyn L. Rosen

Americans have not yet been forced to assess the human costs of the Clinton welfare reform program. Statistics and studies conveniently point to the achievement of our shrinking welfare roles, but neglect to inform us about the fate of those who no longer receive public assistance. What we are left with is an almost entirely fiscal portrait of our shredded safety net, with little attention to its human face. In particular, we lose sight of overburdened working mothers and the children who must be cared for. Since the politics of welfare reform arrived on the scene with the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980, historians have attempted to offer insights into the origins and growth of our peculiar American welfare state. Historians of women in particular have studied the ideological context within which public policy was generated to see the ways that gender has influenced its shape. Joanne Goodwin's book, *Gender and the Politics of Welfare Reform*, adds to this discussion in innovative ways. In particular she offers an integrated analysis of both the human face and the fiscal politics of welfare policy that few studies have attempted.

Goodwin studies the development and implementation of mothers' pensions in early twentieth-century Chicago as a case study for understanding the politics of welfare reform. Building on the insights of scholars such as Molly Ladd-Taylor, Seth Koven, Sonya Michel, Linda Gordon and Theda Skocpol, she

contextualizes and complicates our understanding of the maternalist ideology that gave birth to mothers' pensions. Goodwin convincingly asserts that policies need to be understood in the proper context of local politics—that women's social welfare strategies must be assessed in relation to existing political circumstances. This perspective promotes the discovery of new and important information about mothers' pensions.

Goodwin makes three arguments in her text, which get progressively more convincing and innovative. The first, which is the least convincing of the three, asserts that mothers' pensions were initially conceived by "social justice feminists" (and not a maternalists as argued by others) as a means toward expanding married women's rights. Goodwin goes so far as to claim that mothers' pensions "were promoted as a means to rectify gender inequalities at home and in the marketplace" (15).

Recent work by Sonya Michel on the history of child care argues more persuasively that these same Chicago settlement house workers and social scientists were far from feminist in their advocacy of pensions over child care for

working mothers; that their perspective was clearly more maternalist than oriented toward social justice for women, and finally that the policies they created prioritized children's interests over mothers' rights. Goodwin's attempt to recategorize these policies makers as social justice feminists falls short in light of Michel's work and considering that Goodwin herself acknowledges that "of all the arguments for this new social policy, the maternalist claim for a pension for service had the broadest appeal. It complemented turn-of-the-century essentialist ideas of sexual difference and 'women's nature,' and it promoted an ideal of social order premised on stable family life" (185). Despite taking issue with her labels, however, Goodwin deserves high praise for the care she takes in sorting out and presenting the discourses surrounding the interlocking issues of "dependent motherhood," juvenile delinquency, cit-



Mrs. Annie DeMartins, 46 Laight St., New York City, nursing a dirty baby while she picks nuts with three other children—Rosie, Genevieve, and Tessie

Photograph by Lewis Hine, 1911
Source: Library of Congress LC-USZ62-90348

izenship, and women's wage earning in this period.

Goodwin's second argument challenges historians of women to move beyond questions of ideological motivation to confront the political circumstances that shaped policy development and implementation. Specifically, she traces the fate of mothers' pensions through the often treacherous terrain of local politics. For example, although the Fund for Parents Act was passed by the Illinois legislature without much opposition in 1911, it became embroiled in a contest for political control that severely limited its potential. What had been envisioned as a policy departure from poor relief ended up being mired in the same fiscal conservatism and restrictive eligibility rules. Unlike

previous studies that have highlighted the moral and racial criteria for eligibility, Goodwin's emphasis on the political process shapes her argument that fiscal politics go far to explain the stinginess of pensions.

Goodwin's final and most innovative argument is that mother's pensions acted as a wage subsidy, rather than a replacement. Despite claims that this program would keep mothers at home with their children, Goodwin's evidence proves that this was often not financially possible or even promoted by program administrators. Thus, here she most clearly shows that the motivations behind and the rhetoric surrounding mothers' pensions cannot provide a complete portrait of this early foray

into gendered welfare policy. Her analysis cogently illuminates the distance between policy intent and outcomes.

This study of mothers' pensions in Chicago offers a complex portrait of this important policy development; one that highlights the need for historians of women to reconnect their work to political history. Goodwin's work shows that in the process our understanding of women's activism, women's lives, and the political process will be enriched.

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Internet Resources

<http://wtw.doleta.gov/>

Detailed information on the welfare-to-work program by the U.S. Department of Labor with statistics and reports about the success of the program.

www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs

The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) at the Department of Health and Human Services informs about its programs. Of special interest are Head-Start, Family Assistance and the welfare reform link.

<http://www.welfareinfo.org/>

Home page of the Welfare Information Network with information about programs and references about topics related to welfare, social security, labor force, immigration, domestic violence, poverty, and others.

<http://www.ssa.gov/history/history.html>

The Social Security Administration informs about the history of social security in the United States. A good introduction with timeline and definitions. Links to sites with video and audio clips.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/local/longterm/library/rosalee/background.htm>

For this award-winning story reporter Leon Dash followed Rosa Lee Cunningham, a black single mother from Washington, D.C., and her family from 1991 until 1994 and reported her struggle with poverty. This series of articles first appeared in the *Washington Post* from September 18-25, 1994.

<http://www.urban.org>

The Urban Institute is one of the largest nonpartisan social policy research organisations in the United States. This home page gives a good account of the different projects related to welfare the Urban Institute supports.

<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/>

A great site about American history. Articles, pictures, quizzes — a lot of information on teaching and learning American history and the history of welfare in the United States.

Further Readings on Social and Welfare Policy

by Axel R. Schäfer

The scholarly literature on U.S. social policy is rich and varied. This short bibliography, which can only suggest a small selection of books in this vast field, includes both "classics" and recent titles.

Among the countless general books on the history of social policy, I found Michael B. Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse: A Social History of Welfare in America* (1986) and Edward D. Berkowitz, *America's Welfare State: From Roosevelt to Reagan* (1991), the most incisive and stimulating. Other classic texts include Walter I. Trattner, *From Poor Law to Welfare State: A History of Social Welfare in America* (1994), and James T. Patterson, *America's Struggle Against Poverty, 1900-1994* (1994).

For the Gilded Age and the Progressive Era (©1877-1917), I would recommend Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States* (1992), and Paul Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820-1920* (1978). The Progressive Era, in particular, has left a rich legacy of auto-biographical texts of those involved in social reform. One of the most intriguing is Jane Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull House* (1920). Ronald Schaffer, *America in the War: The Rise of the War Welfare State* (1991), examines social policy during World War I.

The Great Depression and the New Deal changed the face of American social policy. Somewhat outdated, but perceptive and highly readable are Roy Lubove, *The Struggle for Social Security, 1900-1935* (1986) and Paul Conkin, *The New Deal* (1975). For a more recent analysis see Steve Fraser and Gary Gerstle, *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order, 1930-1980* (1989). For some first-hand material on the effects of the Great Depression, do not pass up a copy of Studs Terkel, *Hard Times* (1970).

For a useful account of social policy development in the years after World War II see Robert H. Bremner and Gary W. Reichard, eds., *Reshaping America: Society and Institutions, 1945-1960* (1982). The "Great Society" programs of the 1960s have inspired

a growing literature. One of the best interpretations is Allan M. Matusow, *The Unraveling of America: A History of Liberalism in the 1960s* (1984). For a more recent analyses see John A. Andrews, *Lyndon Johnson and the Great Society* (1998).

Among the plethora of books on welfare reform since the 1970s, I would recommend Mary Jo Bane and David T. Ellwood, *Welfare Realities: From Rhetoric to Reform* (1994) for a liberal view, Stuart Butler and Anna Kondratas, *Out of the Poverty Trap* (1987) for a conservative assessment, and Herbert J. Gans, *The War against the Poor: The Underclass and Antipoverty Policy* (1995) for a left-wing analysis. I consider Michael Katz, *The Undeserving Poor: From the War on Poverty to the War on Welfare* (1989) the best scholarly perspective.

Gender and social policy has been the focus of much historical research in the last few decades. Good accounts can be found in Seth Koven and Sonya Michel, eds., *Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Policies and the Origins of Welfare States* (1993), Linda Gordon, *Pitied But Not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare* (1994), and Gwendolyn Mink, *The Wages of Motherhood: Maternalist Social Policy and Women's Inequality in the Welfare State* (1995).

Recent scholarship has also shed light on the relationship between race and social policy. Elizabeth Lasch-Quinn, *Black Neighbors: Race and the Limits of Reform in the American Settlement House Movement, 1890-1945* (1993), Dona and Charles V. Hamilton, *Dual Agenda: Race and Social Welfare Policies of Civil Rights Organizations* (1997), and Jill Quadagno, *The Color of Welfare: How Racism Undermined the War on Poverty* (1994) provide insightful recent analyses.

Private charitable institutions play a much larger role in providing social services than in Germany. An excellent overview can be found in Donald T. Critchlow and Charles H. Parker, *With Us Always: A History of Private Charity and Public Welfare* (1998). For recent developments see David C. Hammack and Dennis R. Young, *Nonprofit Organizations in a Market Economy* (1993).

Classroom Clips

The Mutable American English Language

by Leslie Herring

Introduction

The English language has come a long way since Old Anglo-Saxons arrived in Britain in 449 AD. The significant influences of its growth can be attributed to a variety of events that contributed greatly to its irregularity in spelling, grammar, and phonology.

After the Norman invasion in 1066, 10,000 new words derived from French enriched the language. By the beginning of the 15th century, English spelling was a mixture of Old English and French. In the late 15th century, William Caxton, neither a linguist nor a literary scholar, printed the first English language book, which contained both irregular spelling and punctuation. Consequently, the printing of books “corrupted” the spelling of the language. During the Renaissance, William Shakespeare experimented with the language by making verbs from nouns and by borrowing words from other languages.

Once the language reached the shores of the United States, through its contact with other languages, it began to take on a “character” of its own. In 1783, Noah Webster published the first American dictionary in his attempt to standardize spelling. (Interestingly, at first he was a proponent of British spelling, but later on decided that additional letters in words such as “favour” and “colour” were unnecessary and therefore went about to make the language “easier” to spell.) Some of his changes survived and some did not. Needless to say, he lost popularity in Great Britain due to this change.

Other influences also contribute to the diversity and irregularity of American English. Since the United States has no “official” language and there is no organization which attempts to preserve the

“purity” of American English, it tends to wander in a variety of directions. Geography has influenced lexical usage to some extent. For example, in some parts of the east “soda” is more commonly heard to refer to a “pop” in places in the mid-west. In addition, nonstandard varieties have appeared, which will be discussed later.

As a result, this continual change has not been easy for non-native English language teachers. English vocabulary is said to increase by the thousands every year due to advances in technology and closer contact with other languages which makes one wonder how non-native speakers are able to keep up with these changes. The purpose of this article is not intended to be an in depth survey of recent developments in American English, but rather a survey of grammatical and lexical changes that have appeared recently.

Discussion

Data. Originally the plural form of *datum*, this word is now often used with singular verbs especially when referring to computing.

Dice. Originally the plural form of *die* (the small cube with numbers on its face). It is now used as both singular and plural.

Less vs. fewer. The standard rule is *less* is used before uncountable nouns and *fewer* before countable nouns. However, in spoken English the trend is to use *less* with plural countable nouns.

None. There is disagreement as to whether this word is singular or plural. Prescriptive grammarians claim that it is singular. Latinists believe it is equivalent to the Latin *nemo*, which is singular. Logicians claim that *none* cannot be more than one; hence, it cannot be plural. However, since 1917, there has been an increasing use of *none* with a plural verb, to the extent that *none are* is preferred.¹

Shall vs. will. *Shall* is used less frequently in American English where it is used in three areas: "requests for a decision or for advice from the addressee, in tags with *let's*, or in statements establishing new topics,"²

e.g., Shall we go?
Let's eat, shall we?
In a few moments we shall learn about....

In addition *shall* is used in invitations or suggestions and in formal commands,

e.g., Shall we dance?
You shall not eat meat on Friday.

According to Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999), the old rule which states to use *shall* with *I* and *we* in the future and *will* everywhere else, no longer applies to American English.³

When vs. while. The rule for their use according to many grammar books is *when* is used in the simple past clause and *while* is used in the past progressive clause. On the contrary, this is not the trend for native speakers. There appears to be some overlap between the words with the exception of the case of long duration, where *while* is preferred.⁴

Who vs. whom. The use of *who* in place of *whom* is becoming more common. When the pronoun appears at the beginning of the question, native speakers of English use the nominative regardless as in "Who did you want to speak to?" As a matter of fact, it can be concluded that *whom* has almost vanished from standard *spoken* American English.⁵

Gender/Politically Correct Language. English is historically a male-orientated language. However, the feminist movement in the 1970s sparked revision in the English vocabulary. We can group the recent changes in two parts: those words susceptible to modification and those not susceptible to modification.

| Susceptible Words | |
|--------------------------|------------------|
| chairman | chairperson |
| salesman | salesperson |
| fireman | fire fighter |
| mailman | mail carrier |
| waiter/waitress | wait staff |
| steward/stewardess | flight attendant |

| Non-susceptible Words | |
|------------------------------|----------------------|
| manhole | utility access hole? |
| freshman | frosher? frosh? |
| manmade | humanmade? |
| first baseman | first baseperson? |
| fisherman | fishcatcher? |
| *history | herstory? theirstory |

*Indicates the extremes that one has to take to eliminate language bias. The mere thought of suggesting alternatives requires change and although English has a strong history of linguistic change this does not mean that these changes will be easily accepted or even carried out.

Some of the most loaded words in the language are those associated with the way society talks about itself, and especially about groups of people whom it perceives to be disadvantaged or oppressed. The most sensitive domains are to do with race, gender, sexual affinity, ecology and (physical and mental) personal development.⁶

How far must a language go to be "pleasing" to the general population? Certain words have, over time, come to have a negative connotation and therefore have been modified to sound "less?" negative.

| Politically incorrect | Modified version |
|------------------------------|--|
| mentally retarded | developmentally challenged people with learning disabilities |
| third world countries | developing nations |
| blind | visually impaired |

A drawback of this movement are the "extremes" to which the language can go. The mere thought of adding the following words to the language causes one to laugh a little.

| Politically incorrect? | Modified version? |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------|
| ugly | aesthetically challenged |
| lie | logical inexactitude |
| short | vertically challenged |

Conjunctions. There has been some disagreement among editors regarding the best way to punctuate a text regarding conjunctions *and* and *but*. Some feel that beginning a sentence with one syllable words such as *and* or *but* stresses the difference in meaning. This is a question of personal style.

Non-standard Language Varieties. The English language is clearly not restricted to one variety. The kind of English spoken by African Americans called “Black English Vernacular” (BEV), is also commonly heard throughout the United States, and has been under close observation by linguists in both grammatical and phonological realms. However, speakers of BEV do not use non-standard forms exclusively.

| <i>Non-standard grammatical examples</i> | <i>Non-standard phonological examples</i> | |
|--|---|--------|
| He didn't do nothing. | test | /tEs/ |
| *He busy. | wild | /wa'l/ |
| He not in now. | wind | /win/ |
| *He be busy now. | | |
| They gonna go. | | |

*This sentence with the copula refers to the present continuous tense.

Conclusion

Given the ease with which words have freely entered the English language, one cannot overlook the complexities involved and repercussions for non-

native English speakers. Given the speed at which new words and phrases enter the language, one can only wonder how non-native speakers, especially teachers of English, are to keep up with the changes. This brief listing of changes is only the beginning. What was standard yesterday, is nonstandard today and vice versa. Judging from the information presented, one piece of advice is clear and that is, English is not absolute, and therefore the radical belief that “rules are made to be broken” can apply.

Notes

1. Bergan Evans, “Grammar for Today,” in *Varieties of American English: A Reader*, ed. Dennis R. Preston and Roger W. Shuy (Washington, D.C.: USIA, 1987), 131.
2. Marianne Celce-Murcia and Diane Larsen-Freeman, *The Grammar Book* (Heinle & Heinle Publishers, 1999), 149.
3. Ibid, 149.
4. Richard Firsten and Patricia Killian, *Troublesome English* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall Regents, 1994), 94.
5. Dennis Preston and Roger Shuy, *Varieties of American English* (Washington, D.C.: USIA, 1976), 13.
6. David Crystal, *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 194.

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What Does My Map Say?

A Communicative Activity for Students of English

Level: Beginner-Upper Intermediate

Materials: U.S. Map Worksheet, color pencils or markers, magazines, scissors, glue

Time: 30-45 minutes

Instructions:

First select a U.S. theme for the map (e.g. regions of the U.S., food, history, government, etc). Have students write their names at the top of the map with an adjective that they think describes them (e.g., Happy Henry, Gorgeous Gudrun).

Give each student a map and tell them to draw, write or cut out pictures that relate to the theme. For example, if your theme is "A survey of the U.S." you could have the students write, draw, or cut out pictures of...

1. two or three places they would like to see in the U.S, and put this information in the relevant state.

2. two words that they feel describe the U.S.

3. two or three facts that they have learned about the U.S.

4. two or three states and their capitals, and put the information in the relevant state.

The tasks can be altered to suit the level of your students. After all students have completed their maps put them into small groups and have them explain their maps to each other or present them in front of the class.

