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Punishing the Poor: America's Use of the Welfare System as a Means of Controlling the Impoverished

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Punishing the Poor: America's Use of the Welfare System
as a Means of Controlling the Impoverished

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Abstract

Throughout America's history, various welfare assistance programs have been implemented in an attempt to prevent the poor from coordinating a social uprising to overturn capitalism. Applying sociologist Karl Marx's theories on capitalism and the presence of a false versus a class consciousness one can trace the growth of industrialization in American with the increasing efforts devoted to subduing the impoverished. Actions ranging from the imprisonment of the poor to child saving in the 1700 and 1800s to the use of police force to dissipate uprisings of the indigent in the 1900s provide evidence of the government's continued efforts to prevent both capitalism and its benefactors. This thesis employs the use of a historical comparative method of research to examine the American public's-particularly the government's-attitude toward the impoverished and the actions taken to prevent the poor from disrupting the capitalistic system.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Consider for a moment the following news story. In Flint, Michigan a six year old boy carried a handgun into his first grade class at Buell Elementary School and shot his classmate, six year old Kayla Roland. Within an hour of the incident Roland died, leaving behind family, friends, and a future. The shooter was brought into custody where (while he drew pictures with crayons for the police officers) an outcry was raised by the public to try the six year old as an adult in court for the shooting. One week after the shooting the National Rifle Association, led by Charlton Heston, assembled a pro gun rally in Flint to ensure that the individual right to bear arms would not suffer further revocation.

Although this news story has been used on both sides of handgun debate to either support or refute handgun ownership further examination of this tragedy reveals several facts made unaware to the public. The guardian of the shooter, single mother Tamarla Owens, was a participant in Michigan's Welfare to Work program. Every morning Owens would travel by bus with other welfare to work participants 40 miles to work two low paying jobs at a shopping mall (Moore, 2002). Under Michigan law, Welfare to Work was implemented to eliminate the public welfare system through means of placing welfare recipients in jobs. Often (as in the case of Owens) Welfare to Work participants faced losing both healthcare benefits and food stamps upon refusal to work. This meant that Owens was faced with the decision of working minimum wage, low skill jobs with little to no prospect of advancement 40 miles away from her family; or, refuse to work at these jobs and lose healthcare and food stamp benefits for both herself and her children. Despite working over 70 hours a week Owens was unable to make enough money to pay

her rent. Consequently, Owens and her family were evicted from their home. In order to avoid homelessness Owens and her children moved in with her brother and his family. It was at this residence that Owens's son found the handgun that he later used to shoot Roland. Owens, who caught the bus for work in the mornings before her children left for school, was unable to prevent her son from carrying the gun to school.

This event, which was both tragic and preventable, raises an important question. How did the United States, the wealthiest nation in the world, arrive at a place where impoverished families are forced to work minimum wage jobs that do not provide the income to afford the basic necessities such as food and housing? Shouldn't welfare programs include an adequate means of financial survival in an environment conducive to job training and ample educational opportunities? After all, the more opportunities an individual has to earn more money the chances of that individual recycling that money back into the economy increase. Unfortunately, welfare programs often fail to provide participants with access to opportunities that increase the likelihood of earning a substantial income.

Given the fluctuations of the economic system under capitalism (continuous changes in methods of production and skill level of workers) unemployment does occur. Since unemployment has historically led to worker unrest, the expansion of welfare relief has often served as a means of preventing civil disorder. Welfare relief is created to serve several different functions. Relief provides a means of controlling the poor and preventing a possible uprising when mass unemployment occurs (Piven & Cloward, 1971). Welfare clients also serve as a reserve workforce when the need for workers presents itself to society. Additionally, relief efforts serve to punish the poor,

stigmatizing poverty and dependence upon the welfare system an undesirable occurrence worthy of humiliation. In this way, relief serves to instill a fear of poverty in the members of society. Furthermore, welfare acts as a way of providing for the disabled and insane in society, preventing the visibility of these groups in society. In these ways welfare relief is a system developed to benefit capitalism rather than advance the interests of the impoverished in society. This description of capitalism (and its solution to poverty) raises an important question: do workers recognize the welfare system as a program that serves to pacify the complaints of the unemployed and poor? Furthermore, if individuals experience unemployment does welfare relief really prevent an uprising to overturn the economic system of capitalism?

One alternative to the growth of capitalism as a means of a society's economic stability can be found in the theories of Karl Marx. With the rise of the Industrial Revolution (and the subsequent fall of agriculture) in Europe many individuals were forced to leave their agricultural roots to pursue employment in factories. Constrained by long work hours and unsafe working conditions quality of life quickly dwindled for workers. Affected by the inhumane treatment of the working class sociologist Karl Marx set out to explain the events occurring in society. Workers, lacking many of the social supports present in their former rural homes, faced the possibility of selling their labor as a commodity in order to make a living. In this way, it could be argued that workers became the property of business owners. Campaigning for the ability of the working class to change society, Marx identified capitalism as a system in which the wealthy (bourgeoisie) in society own the means of production that the poor (proletariat) rely on for economic survival (Ritzer, 2000). Instead of an accurate understanding of how

capitalism affects society, developing a false consciousness (or, an inaccurate perception of how capitalism affects society) develops (Collins & Makowsky, 1998). This false consciousness prevents the working class from understanding the source of their impoverishment or mobilizing to change social structures for the betterment of society. Only when the working class bands together in the realization that the system of capitalism contributes to the inability of individuals to reach their full potential can better working conditions emerge.

One aspect of Marx's theory, the economic impact of capitalism, helped clarify why society disregarded its working class and how workers could change this. Employing the economics of Adam Smith Marx developed the labor theory of value as an explanation of production and exchange in an economy (Collins & Makowsky, 1998). The labor theory of value operates on the principle that the amount of labor put into producing an object should determine its value. In other words, if it takes one week to produce a bicycle and two weeks to produce a car then two bicycles are equal to one car. Over time the market will start to reflect the real value of labor and two bicycles will be priced the same as one car. Thus, workers in society receive the just benefit of their labor.

The labor value theory raises the question of how profit is made. How does one begin to receive more profit than his/her labor brings in? The answer to this question lies in the fact that humans can sell their labor for a profit in a capitalistic society. In doing this workers sell their labor as a commodity to an employer who owns the means of production for producing a product. Therefore, an employer can force an employee to work for ten hours and only pay the individual for eight hours because, after all, the

employer owns the equipment (means of production) and can fire the worker at any time. This situation allows the employer (exploiter) to make a profit while the worker (exploited) is now stripped of his/her ability to reap the true value of his/her labor. Essentially, the employee is exploited for the benefit of a select few.

Now that the employer has discovered a way to gain excess profit and derail the practice of labor value capitalists join the workers in becoming a class in itself. Unaware of the potential dangers in exploiting workers for profit the capitalists begin competing with one another for more labor (profit) to exploit. In the quest to become the richest capitalist (and owner of the means of production) employers start to raise wages so workers will work for their business. But the increased wages decrease profit, so capitalists begin using machinery to replace workers. Thus, the rat race of competing with one another continues until capitalists are left with few workers (profit) and machinery that is costly to maintain and produces an excess of goods. In order to sell all of the goods produced capitalists must lower the prices on the goods, decreasing profit further. In the process of competing to sell excess goods at lower prices, several small capitalists are bought out by larger capitalists, adding to the growing number of jobless.

Now society is faced with a concentration of capitalists that monopolizes the job market creating a growing number of workers in need of jobs. The remaining capitalists are in a prime position to exploit the workers further by lowering wages. Workers, desperate for money to buy basic necessities, are left with no other choice but to take the jobs at whatever wage is offered by the capitalist.

An important issue to discuss here is Marx's ideas on the alienation of workers in capitalism. According to Marx, alienation occurs when workers work for somebody else,

work only to satisfy basic needs, have little contact with their fellow workers, and cannot fulfill their human potential (Ritzer, 2000). Capitalists are also alienated because exploiting workers goes against human nature. Under these conditions, workers are forced to work in a capitalistic society not to fulfill a talent, but rather to buy food and other basic necessities. Moreover, given the threat of layoffs and horrendous working conditions, workers are unable to form friendships with fellow workers in the way that coworkers of thirty years in modern society are.

This cycle of smaller capitalists being bought out by larger capitalists continues until there is an elite capitalist class that monopolizes the market and requires surplus workers to compete for low paying jobs. The workers, tired of living in poverty, band together and rise against the capitalistic society, thus becoming a class for themselves. Capitalism, weakened by constant competition and a small reserve of supporters, submits to this mass worker uprising (Ritzer, 2000). This transition from false consciousness to a class consciousness confirms Marx's belief that the working class, not the capitalist, is capable of transforming society (Ritzer). With the shift in power from the minority to the majority communism can emerge.

The growth of America as a nation demonstrated the effects of industrialization on social class, particularly the poor and working classes. As both industrialization and population experienced rapid expansion in a short period of time attitudes toward the growing number of indigent individuals changed to accommodate the needs of the wealthy. This change poses two questions: is Marx correct in asserting that the impoverished workers (the proletariat) in society would band together in an attempt to change society for the better, or will capitalists find a way to suppress a potential uprising

from occurring (and disrupting the economic stability of capitalism). This thesis attempts to employ a historical comparative analysis in order to examine various ways in which welfare programs have served to regulate the actions of the poor within the context of sociological theory. Rather than providing assistance to impoverished individuals in order to improve their lives, restrictions were implemented throughout American history to inhibit the growth and freedoms of the poor. By examining existing statistics, interviews, government documents, and observations within the context of social theory evidence will be provided to support the notion of social regulation of the poor as a means of protecting the interests of wealthy individuals.

Chapter 2: Colonial Period to 1900

In order to understand America's welfare system one must first become familiar with the English Poor Laws, a system devised in England in the 16th century to deal with poverty. Under the Poor Laws those individuals deemed capable of work were obligated to find employment while local communities were to provide for the needy (e. g. widows and children) who were unable to provide for themselves. This arrangement assured local landowners that cheap laborers would be available for hire while the mobility of the poor was controlled. As England evolved from an agricultural society where the poor were provided for by local charitable organizations and employment to a capitalistic system where laborers were needed in urban areas to work in factories attitudes toward welfare and the poor became more stringent (Axinn & Stern, 2001). An increasing number of individuals in local communities throughout England were unable to obtain employment the English government feared potential for civil disorder among the masses. This fear of an uprising from the unemployed led to the development of two amendments to the Poor Laws: allowances were made to permit individuals to move to urban areas for employment and increased restrictions on who could receive assistance. Additionally, punishment for not working (usually in the form of floggings) was implemented (Axinn & Stern).

During the early settlement of colonial America the poor were not viewed as a threat to social order. The social structure in colonial America-a population that consisted of several scattered farming communities in an agrarian based economy-meant that farmers and their families depended upon each other to deliver basic needs. Given that many settlers faced hardships such as food scarcities, disease, widowhood, physical

disability, and high childbirth mortality rates implementation of the English Poor Laws to support the destitute was a logical choice for many communities. In the beginning of settlement in America the labor of every individual was demanded in order to survive. Therefore, the Poor Laws largely ensured the security and protection of local communities by maintaining stable family settings and providing a means of survival for those who might succumb to the harshness of colonial life (Axinn & Stern, 2001). The Poor Laws also served to provide for individuals (such as widows and war veterans) whose services were deemed important to the community-women for their ability to bear children (who could later work and contribute to society) and veterans for their contributions in skirmishes with Native Americans and the English.

As communities grew in colonial America distinctions began to be made between classes with a wealthy, middle, and lower class emerging. With this growth of population the Poor Laws began to serve as a means of protecting the developing colonies (particularly the wealthier colonists) from the growing number of needy widows and immigrants. The Poor Laws led to the appointment of overseers of the poor who resorted to different tactics in order to shame poor members of the community. In New York, for instance, welfare recipients were obligated to wear badges with the inscription N.Y. to display their inability to support themselves (Mohl, 1969). The Poor Laws also began to include amendments such as, “[Those] who would not work must not eat,” and “[f]or those who [i]ndulge themselves in [i]delness, the express Command of God unto us, is, [t]hat we should let them [s]tarve” (Quigley, 1996). Statements such as these clearly demonstrate an unsympathetic attitude towards the impoverished. In other communities newcomers endured a screening process in which it was determined

whether or not they were capable of supporting themselves. If the newcomers proved their economic security they were permitted to stay in the community, while poor newcomers were escorted out of the local jurisdiction (Axinn & Stern, 2001). Colonists also dealt with an increasing number of poor families by indenturing the children of these families out as apprentices in order to prevent the corruption of these children by their poor families (Axinn & Stern). The intent was to mold children from poor families into respectable members of society instead of idle individuals who could threaten the economic stability of all individuals in a community.

It is important to note that some positive contributions surfaced from the implementation of the Poor Laws. The development of training schools (such as spinning schools) to teach women and girls a trade to support themselves and their families with became commonplace (Axinn & Stern, 2001). This allowed for a means of economic independence to become available for young and widowed women. The implementation of these schools were welcomed in the colonies due to idea that the number of destitute individuals would decrease and consequently the threat of public disorder imposed by these individuals would decrease (Axinn & Stern). Furthermore, the influx of immigrants led to the development of several charitable organizations (such as the Friends Almshouse established for poor Quakers in Philadelphia) in order to respond to those with special welfare needs (Axinn & Stern). Although a considerable number of these organizations developed, they offered few resources to new settlers.

Another consequence of growing colonial populations was the different approaches to the need for social welfare programs taken by the northern and southern colonies. Over time the northern colonies depended on trade, shipbuilding, and

manufacturing rather than farming to support the local economy. When the number of immigrants, disabled veterans, and elderly increased, communities were faced with the quandry of how to cope with the needs these individuals displayed. The Poor Laws presented themselves to communities as an appropriate measure for preventing large masses of poor individuals from forming. Southern colonies (boasting warmer climates, fertile land, and less stringent religious sects) relied primarily on farming for economic stability (Axinn & Stern, 2001). This led southern colonies to harbor a more tolerant attitude towards poor individuals (excluding slaves, Native Americans, and indentured servants). Southern colonies also never experienced the large influx of immigrants that sweltered the populations of the northern colonies. Consequently, the Poor Laws (coupled with apprenticeships) served to provide for poor men, women, and children in communities.

It is also important to note the emphasis that was placed upon education as a means of preventing pauperism. Since poverty was considered a personal flaw education was considered the answer for converting impoverished individuals into contributing, working members of society. In New York, for example, education was advertised in news articles as one of the best means available for ridding the streets of impoverished individuals (Mohl, 1971). Often, these schools for poor children were funded by parochial organizations (in 1824 New York 15 out of 22 schools for impoverished children were funded by churches) that stressed the role of religion in daily life (Mohl). It was also a common practice (particularly among Protestants) to establish Sunday school classes in urban slums (Boyer, 1978). In this sense education was an institution that served to instill morality while at the same time preventing a potential future uprising

of the poor. Southern states did not devote as much time and energy to building and maintaining schools. Furthermore, emphasis was not placed on the formal training of the educators hired to teach students (Jernegen, 1931). Because poverty was not as prominent of an issue in southern states the lack of attention placed upon education as a means of controlling the poor was absent.

The belief in the Puritan Ethic was an important aspect concerning welfare in colonial American. Originating from Calvinistic roots Puritanism in colonial America adhered to the belief that social mobility was acceptable in order to benefit the common good of the colonies (Foster, 1971). Essentially, the need for labor in order to survive the harsh living conditions of colonial life made it morally acceptable to work and accumulate resources. Moreover, differences in power, wealth, and intelligence were considered natural elements of society with certain individuals ordained by God to occupy a specific “calling” (Foster). The combination of requisite labor and a distinct group of socially ordained individuals defined in society it is understandable how impoverished individuals in society could be viewed as morally flawed. If certain individuals were ordained to hold certain positions that were sanctioned for the accumulation of wealth then those living in poverty must not be ordained by God (and thus were morally flawed). Poverty could therefore be considered an individual deficiency rather than a product of social structure.

In the early 19th century the demographic composition of the newly formed United States underwent many changes. Several waves of immigrants (mostly from Germany and Ireland) filtrated into the northern regions of the country, settling in the urban areas of Philadelphia, Boston, and New York. This rapid increase in population (it

is estimated that three thousand immigrants settled in New York per year) placed an enormous strain on urban resources (Mohl, 1971). Given that the majority of immigrants entering into the United States arrived without financial or material resources, the threat of poverty-stricken individuals grew. The average life expectancy also increased from age 16 constituting the median age of Americans in 1790 to age 20 constituting the median age in 1860 (Axinn & Stern, 2001). This implied that an increasing percentage of the population was living longer, thus posing the potential threat of being a future financial burden. Land expansion (e. g. the Louisiana Purchase) also characterized early American life, with the opportunity to move as far west as the Pacific Ocean presenting itself to settlers.

These changes influenced the way different regions of the United States viewed welfare policies in different ways. The Southern states viewed slavery as a solution to welfare issues. After all, slaves had to work-regardless of age, illness, or education with the implied guarantee of provisional necessities. Therefore, slaves, who constituted 30% of the South's population, were of little concern as a welfare issue (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1960). Given that the South relied on farming crops such as cotton and tobacco rather than factory jobs to earn a wage, many poor individuals were able to provide a meager life for themselves and their families. Many farmers in the South also favored westward expansion in order to increase the amount of accessible farmland. Therefore, many southern communities were spread out, thus reducing both the visibility of large numbers of poor individuals gathering together in public sight and the potential for poor individuals would mobilize and threaten social order. Overall, the South adopted a more relaxed, accepting policy towards Caucasian poverty stricken individuals.

The Northern states, on the other hand, developed a dramatically different approach to welfare programs. The economy of the Northern states consisted primarily of factory employment (to accommodate the cotton growth in the South). This meant that an increasing number of workers were employed in the factories. Consequently, many individuals, responding to the shift from an agrarian to industrial economy, relocated from their family farms into the growing cities. Although the westward expansion of the United States presented itself as a means of mobility few workers (especially immigrants) could afford this option. Out of the North's industrialization a distinct middle class of skilled artisans, tradesmen, and small business owners continued to develop. The composition of the Northern population also changed dramatically, with the majority of immigrants settling in urban areas and over half of the population of the United States living in the North (U. S. Department of Commerce, 1960).

The rapid growth of the immigrant population (it is estimated that the immigrant population multiplied six times between 1800 and 1860) in an increasingly urbanized area marked several changes in the Northern society (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1960). Since many immigrants lacked financial resources and family support, entrepreneurs often employed these new Americans for cheap wages. This move to hire cheap immigrants pushed many female factory workers into the realm of domesticity and teaching. After all, many female factory workers were accustomed to working for a certain wage that was higher than that of immigrant factory workers and they had family support to fall back on for financial support (Axinn & Stern, 2001).

The growing number of immigrants presented both positive and negative consequences for Northern society. Although immigrant workers often worked for cheap

wages many remained in poverty, posing the threat of a possible uprising and/or civil disobedience. Northern communities responded to this threat in several ways, one of which being the formation and implementation of the Yates Report. Authored by New York's secretary of state John V. N. Yates in 1824, the Yates Report stated that areas with a higher population of individuals also has a higher level of poverty as opposed to smaller, more dispersed populations ("Poverty, U.S.A.", 1971). In response to this report several organizations evolved (e.g. New York's Society for the Prevention of Pauperism and The New York Society's Sub-Committee on Ignorance) to develop programs to foster an appreciation for education, work, and religion. The growth of these organizations was concentrated in areas with a high influx of immigrants. These organizations, in deeming society responsible for preventing poverty, developed a system of almshouses throughout the northern states. Loosely defined, almshouses were houses erected for the poor with the goal of confining the poor to a disciplined regimen of employment and labor to instill a work ethic within these individuals (Axinn & Stern, 2001). Within almshouses distinctions were made between the worthy and unworthy poor, with a more understanding attitude being extended to worthy individuals (worthy individuals consisted of women, children, the elderly, workers between jobs, and those individuals with disabilities preventing them from work). Often, the living conditions in the almshouses were deplorable, leaving individuals occupying dirty, overcrowded buildings with little food, clothing, and medical attention (Axinn & Stern).

In addition to almshouses, the practice of child saving arose to deal with the issues surrounding child poverty and delinquency. Concerns that the democratic principles that encompassed the newly formed American government-freewill and

independence- would spill over into child rearing (especially among immigrants with children) institutions were erected to save children from themselves and their families (Axinn & Stern, 2001). Thus, the concept of child saving was born. Many of the children housed within these institutions were restricted from visits with family members and subjected to strict instruction and labor with the goal of instilling proper values. It was hoped that this regimen would prevent future social turmoil. When these children were judged as properly rehabilitated they were placed into job openings with males becoming apprentices in various trades and females becoming indentured servants. Although apprenticeships were still in practice some children were sent to western settlements as farmhands. Not surprisingly, many of the children in these institutions were juvenile delinquents and/or the children of impoverished immigrants (and therefore judged incapable of raising their children).

It is also important to discuss the feelings and beliefs held by many individuals in the decades preceding the Civil War. Various reform movements (usually in the form of trade associations, encouragement of religious involvement, and increased emphasis on education) focused on the belief that individuals controlled their own destinies. Therefore, it was possible for individuals to change their present economic conditions for the better. The growth of a distinct middle class in northern states and the growing belief in Manifest Destiny (the belief that Americans are divinely ordained to expand westward) helped to foster this belief in individual possibility. If an individual suffered from poverty it was because of a lack of initiative on their behalf to change their situation. Little attention was given to the possibility that social forces influenced the lives of

individuals. Welfare measures, therefore, continued to focus on punishing individuals for being poor.

The advent of the Civil War, however, changed the depth of welfare coverage. While the Northern states prospered from increasing industrialization, Southern states felt the devastating effects of military defeat courtesy of the Civil War. This led to changing attitudes towards the economically disadvantaged. The South witnessed a breakdown from large plantations with slave labor being replaced by smaller tenant owned farms and sharecropping. This switch from large plantations to smaller farms was aided by the promise of a mule and 40 acres (due to the sequestering of larger plantations by the Union) for poor whites and freed blacks (Axinn & Stern, 2001). Therefore, earning a sustainable living by means of farming became increasingly difficult as farms shrank considerably in size. Moreover, disabled war veterans and widows added to the growing number of individuals living in poverty. In response to this growing need, the individual states in the South dealt foremost with the immediate needs of veterans and their families through cash pensions and orphanages and /or apprenticeships for the orphaned children of deceased veterans. African Americans, despite their newly found freedom, fared considerably worse in terms of welfare coverage. Black codes restricting the employment and property rights of African Americans were implemented in many states proscribing punishment for poverty. The sanction for vagrancy was servitude on a chain gang or contraction to employers for a specific amount of time (Miller, 1958). Black children suffered a similar fate. Children of poor black families were often apprenticed to former masters with no guarantee of education, clothing, or food (Miller). Essentially, the Poor Laws favored in Northern states during the early 1800's became commonplace

in Southern states faced with freed blacks. Although the Freedmen's Bureau attempted to aid freed black men in obtaining employment and forming labor unions the bureau faced increasing criticism from white southerners northerners who objected to funding being funneled into southern states for welfare purposes. As southern agriculture became more mechanized (and therefore more industrialized) implementation of the Poor Laws became an increasingly popular means for dealing with most impoverished individuals.

Northern states, enjoying increasing industrialization thanks to reconstruction efforts in the South and the growing western frontier, dealt with poverty in a different way. The precedent for workers' wages continued to offer cheap wages for a growing population of impoverished workers. In response to this workers in several different trades began forming labor unions in the hopes of improving working conditions. War veterans and widows who fought in defense of the Union (regarded as worthy welfare recipients) received cash pensions from the federal government. The remainders of those individuals in need of welfare assistance (with the exception of children and non immigrant widows) were regarded as being morally flawed.

The social climate in Northern states in the aftermath of the Civil War provide an understanding as to why poverty was increasingly considered a individual flaw. Given the rapid scientific advancements during the late 19th century society increasingly looked towards science to explain everyday phenomena. This scientific boom, combined with the advent of Darwinism (particularly Herbert Spencer's theories on social Darwinism) contributed to the belief in individual responsibility for poverty. Loosely defined, social Darwinism consists of the belief that as a society evolves into an industrial society its members must also evolve in order to maintain this industrial state (Ritzer, 2000).

Essentially, the growth of Darwinism lent scientific support to the philosophy that poverty is an individual flaw rather than a social problem. Applying this theory to the situation in discussion it is clear how some individuals may have viewed poverty stricken individuals as casualties of industrialization. Poverty was a clear indicator of an individual's inability to conform to modern standards. Social Darwinism, combined with the continued belief that individuals in America controlled their own destiny, played a major role in reinforcing the belief in personal responsibility for poverty.

As outlined above the distinctive growth of northern and southern states allows observers to compare and contrast differences in the treatment of impoverished individuals in agricultural and industrial societies. Northern states, experiencing both rapid urban population growth and industrialization, set the scene for growing numbers of poverty stricken individuals to be seen in public. In contrast, southern states (with a dispersed population composed of farm owners) did not experience a visible and concentrated growth of impoverished individuals. Consequently, the expansion of welfare agencies to counteract issues surrounding poverty varied greatly in northern and southern states. Northern states reacted quickly to restrict the impoverished in several ways, including constructing almshouses, placing children in alternative homes on a permanent basis, publicly punishing poor individuals, and forcing employment (often in low paying, low skill occupations). After all, if the poor were not in public view (courtesy of almshouses and employment) the threat of rebellion seemed to be an issue that is unlikely and easily controlled. Southern states, on the other hand, were not as quick to enact regulations against the poor. It was only when the South experienced

defeat in the Civil War (leading to a large number of freed publicly visible African Americans needing financial help) that regulations against the poor evolved.

Another contributor influencing the growth of capitalism is the role of religion in daily life, particularly the idea of the Protestant Ethic. Sociologist Max Weber asserted that Calvinism affected the rise of capitalism in the West (Weber, 1958). Because Calvinism believes that all actions serve to glorify God, all individuals are predestined to enter either heaven or hell, and individuals have a calling to fill a certain occupation in an expedient manner without complaint (Johnstone, 1983). This implies that individuals must work diligently in their calling and attempt to act morally in all aspects of life in order to glorify God. Furthermore, Calvinists assumed that although everyone is predestined to eternal salvation or damnation working harder and living frugally one was evidence of one's salvation (Johnstone). Furthermore, if riches are accumulated in the process of working the surplus funds should be used to reinvest in the production of more goods to continue working and making more profits (in order to continue working at one's calling) rather than spending surplus funds on personal pleasures (Johnstone).

It is understandable how these beliefs can support the economic system of capitalism. If hard work is considered a key element in glorifying God and a disciplined workforce is required by a capitalistic society both Calvinism and capitalism are in accord in both fulfilling the duty of Calvinists and the demands of capitalism. It is also understandable how the unemployed came to be considered as perhaps unwillingly to glorify God by filling a specific calling and obtaining work to fulfill that calling. After all, if individual wanted to serve God they would obtain employment (despite the status of the occupation) and work to maintain that employment to the best of one's ability. In

this way Protestantism served to maintain, and justify capitalism as a legitimate means of making a living while at the same time providing state and local governments a means of punishing and humiliating the impoverished in the name of religion.

Chapter 3: 1900-1960

As America greeted the year 1900 the demographic composite was changing in many different ways. Mechanical advances in farming led to fewer employment opportunities in rural farming areas. Therefore, many individuals continued to migrate to the city for manufacturing jobs. Continued immigration from other countries added to the growing number of urban inhabitants competing for employment. Adding to this growth was the influx of African Americans from southern states hoping that a move to the north would provide an escape from growing harassment and discrimination the Ku Klux Klan presented. The growing numbers of different ethnic groups hoping to find employment led many employers to continue to reduce wages in order to attract the cheapest labor possible. Although labor unions continued to be created in response to this problem minority workers and immigrants were used as strikebreakers to prevent the payment of higher wages by corporations. On a local note, minority workers in the coal mines of West Virginia and Kentucky were commonly used as strikebreakers to negate the effects of organized labor in order to ensure cheap, submissive labor. On a national level sanctions such as the anti-Chinese legislation of the 1880's and The National Origins Act of 1924 served to limit the number of immigrants that could enter the United States from each country (Axinn & Stern, 2001). As these measures were introduced, social inequalities widened with 1.6% of the population owning 19% of the national income and over 50% of working class families living in poverty (Lubove, 1972).

The new century brought with it changes in the ways that welfare benefits (or lack thereof) were distributed. As the immigrant population continued to grow, technological advances (such as the exploitation of natural resources, advances in farming equipment,

and the popularity of the automobile) created the need for more workers in growing urban areas. Consequently, this rapid growth in manufacturing cities led to increased poverty as workers competed for employment and deteriorating living conditions as more individuals and families resorted to inhabiting inadequate apartments and houses. Cramped living quarters led to increasing numbers of illness (such as tuberculosis and food poisoning) among urban residents. In response to this growing concern for such conditions several organizations developed to aid in reforming society's ills. The objective for many of these organizations was to increase the opportunities of those individuals living in poverty so as to achieve the American dream of financial security through individual merit (Axinn & Stern, 2001). This belief in individual merit was coupled by the growth of psychology as an explanation for individual flaws. Professional social workers, a newly created occupation, attempted to ease the burden of poverty on society and encourage social changes. One of the ways that social work achieved this goal was through the implementation of social surveys to define the magnitude of the task and map possible strategies for change. Out of the growth of social work several positive changes occurred in communities throughout the United States. Some of the biggest changes were the passing of laws to improve housing conditions in urban areas and a reduction in the number of weekly work hours permissible.

Unfortunately, not all of the changes brought about by social work were in the best interest of its recipients. Mary Richmond, a prominent figure in the social work movement, asserted that it was a woman's duty to fill the role of "helpmate" within the domestic arena via providing an adequate home life for her family (Stadum, 1992). Keeping the house clean and presentable, raising obedient children, preparing nutritious

meals, and saving money were the core of this home making domain. Consequently, this led to the perception by many in society that a woman's place was defined solely as a position of domestic obligation rather than the workplace. Of course given that over 50% of all working class families could be labeled poverty stricken it was impossible for women to fulfill this homemaker role. Additionally, women who had lost their spouse due to desertion or death were also faced with the question of how to provide for their families.

In response to these needs these women presented caseworkers offered assistance in the form of advice and occasional offerings of food, clothing, and/or heating fuel. Unfortunately, most of the advice offered to these women was in the form of reprimands and reminders that women had a duty to provide for their families, raise respectful children, while at the same time fulfilling acceptable female occupations (such as nursing and domestic work). This led to what today is termed the feminization of poverty for many women. In one example, a widow living in Minneapolis, Minnesota in 1907 was discouraged by her caseworker from keeping boarders in her home to earn a substantial living (Stadum, 1992). Instead, this widow was offered information on employment in various domestic jobs that paid minimal salaries. As a result she moved from job to job with continual support from different charitable organizations in her community for several years until she married. This stereotype of women as domestic keepers served as a tool to keep this woman in poverty, not to improve her life. In addition, many caseworkers encouraged women to seek financial help from other family members as a means of survival. In some instances, caseworkers took it upon themselves to contact the

family members of their clients without any type of consent (Stadum). This left women with little hope of financial independence.

Another deficit of social work was the apparent lack of concern for the anonymity of its recipients. Often, if an individual received assistance from a caseworker and/or charitable organization judgments were made (and consequently shared with others) concerning the moral character of the individual (Stadum, 1992). Even the Buffalo Charity Organization Society (one of the premier charitable organizations at the turn of the century) stated relief should be offered in such a manner as to embarrass and ridicule its recipients as a way to make welfare an extremely unattractive option (Mohl, 1985). Pressure (in the form of advice and embarrassment) to lead a moral, self-reliant lifestyle was the preferred method of aiding the impoverished.

Although not as obvious, social controls were placed upon the poor in several different ways. Employing tactics such as humiliation, reprimands, and ridicule were a staple of the emerging social work agencies trying to force the unemployed into employment. After all, if a person is busy working everyday at a low paying job in order to support themselves it is difficult to meet with other workers and plan a potential uprising against the economic system in place. Given the popularity of Social Darwinism as an explanation of poverty many impoverished individuals continued to be labeled an individual flaw that required punishment, even requiring mandatory imprisonment at a settlement house in order to teach proper moral values to the poor. It was also a common practice in some overcrowded cities to force new immigrants to live in settlement houses in order instill American values. This process of “Americanization” included teaching values such a hard work, church attendance, and alcohol abstinence as a means of being a

good American (Mohl, 1985). The emphasis on religion as a means of controlling the poor gives merit to Karl Marx's theory on religion being the opiate of the masses. Marx believed that religion was used by capitalists in order to subdue the frustration of many impoverished workers by promising them the reward of going to heaven upon their death for their hard work. Many religious organizations (stressing morality and hard work as a means of being a good person worthy of God's love) operated the settlement houses.

Despite the growth of social work as a profession and the employment of casework as a means of providing assistance most impoverished individuals continued to feel ashamed and confused by their financial situation (Piven & Cloward, 1993). This changed with the advent of the Great Depression in 1929. America was faced with thousands of once respectable members of the community without work and money. Adding to this situation were the thousands of individuals who had relied on credit to purchase homes and other material possessions in the 1920's only to be faced with foreclosure and repossession once the Depression began. With increasing destitution and insolvency (it is estimated that over one in four employable individuals were out of work by 1932) it is understandable to see how people started to view poverty not as an individual flaw, but rather a social problem (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1960). Thousands of unemployed men began congregating at local relief agencies to demand monetary help. Marches were organized throughout the country to demand free meals, health care, and assistance with tenant evictions (Piven & Cloward, 1993). Hoovervilles (makeshift communities named after president Herbert Hoover to accommodate the housing needs of the poor) sprang up across the country as individuals and families were faced with becoming homeless. Communist groups began leading national hunger

marches in Washington, D.C. and, in some instances, restored furniture and apartments that had been taken by creditors (Piven & Cloward). Veterans, denied a promised cash bonus, gathered and set up camps at the White House with their families in the thousands to request answers. In response to this massive demonstration, President Herbert Hoover used force in the form of soldiers led by Dwight Eisenhower to break up the encampments and policemen to disengage hunger riots) in an attempt to quiet the growing call for relief. However, this show of force did little in the way of ameliorating the growing assemblage of angry citizens.

The Presidential election of 1932, resulting in the election of President Franklin Roosevelt, ushered in many changes in the way impoverished individuals were dealt with. Relief in the form of financial assistance to pay home mortgages, provide government jobs to the unemployed, and incentives to assist troubled leading lending institutions was offered as part of the Federal Emergency Relief Act (FERA). This initiative was welcomed with little resistance from government officials, whom were themselves pleading with the national government to provide monetary assistance (Brown, 1940). By the beginning of 1933 it appeared as though FERA was on its way to reduce the civil strife caused by unemployment. Even though some Communist groups were still active, FERA reported that fighting off feelings of dependence rather than fearing the rise of Communism should be the government's focus (Schesinger, 1960). Although FERA helped to dramatically improve the financial situation of thousands of individuals, many others were left to continue to fend for themselves. President Roosevelt himself made a distinction between the deserving and undeserving poor, stating that those individuals who were dependant on public relief before the Depression should

continue to be supported by the public whereas the temporarily unemployed should be aided in finding employment (Axinn & Stern, 2001). Allowances were made for labor unions to bargain collectively with businesses, consequently leading to several worker strikes. On a local note, the United Mine Workers (UMW) led resistance efforts against the eviction of coal miners from homes built on company property.

Once the economy started displaying signs of recovery (courtesy of the United States gearing up for World War II) the focus centered on curtailing many of the relief acts in existence (Schesinger, 1960). Business leaders tended to be the chief proponents for scaling back relief efforts, lobbying for the elimination of higher taxes for the rich and help with the growing labor movements. Largely unsympathetic to the issues facing the unemployed (automobile manufacturer Henry Ford is quoted as saying of homeless boys hitching rides on the railroad that traveling around the country in this manner is one of the best educations these boys could receive) business leaders pushed for reforms (Piven & Cloward, 1993). In response, President Roosevelt discontinued the Civil Works Administration (which provided employment for the building of roads and school) in order to free up work projects and workers for business owners. Additionally, the National Industrial Recovery Act of 1933 served to permit price and production fixing. Social Security was developed to provide a way for older individuals to retire (rather than be a possible burden on the workplace). Mandates were set limiting the numbers of hours per week individuals could work and the age at which individuals could obtain employment.

With the dawn of the Great Depression it would appear that Marx was correct in assessing that the poor would band together to advance their economic interests. The way

of life that many individuals were accustomed to changed, reaching a point of destitution, therefore providing a common ground for a potential class consciousness to emerge. Millions of unemployed individuals, faced with homelessness, starvation, and disintegrating families began congregating to demand help and change from the local government. Marches and rallies were held with increasing frequency despite retaliation by the federal government. Hoovervilles continued to spring up across the country as families lost their homes, making homelessness a more visible problem. Poverty was beginning to be deemed a social issue worthy of examination rather than an individual problem. However, capitalism did not submit to the growing mass of dissatisfied workers. Instead, those holding power in society formulated a plan that allowed for relief in the form of government jobs, loan assistance, and monetary assistance. The result was a reduction in the amount of rioting and a continued appreciation of capitalism. Although some New Deal programs (such as Social Security) served as a manifest function to provide a means of economic survival for the growing elderly population, on a latent level social security benefited business owners by freeing jobs for new, younger employees. Once again, welfare served as a means of controlling the impoverished in society and benefiting the goals of capitalism rather than attempting to understand and find solutions to poverty. Furthermore, several New Deal programs (such as limiting the amount of hours one could work per week and implementation of the National Industrial Recovery Act of 1933) served to protect the interests of business owners rather than promote the well being of workers.

Overall, the programs included in the New Deal did provide relief to certain individuals in society. Those deemed worthy of relief received help in the form of

employment while those deemed unworthy or flawed maintained their status. Those newly unemployed individuals received assistance whereas those familiar with the welfare prior to the Great Depression were delegated to remain on welfare system. Perhaps the most popular aspect of the New Deal (social security benefits) provided a means of economic survival for the growing elderly population. The premise that welfare was largely a local rather than a federal issue dissolved as the fear of social upheaval pressed government to provide economic support to millions of destitute individuals. This attitude of government support faded with the advent of the 1940's and 1950's and increasing economic stability. America returned to the belief that individuals in need of economic relief were morally flawed and in need of punishment. However, a greater effort was made to pressure impoverished individuals to work (usually in low paying jobs) rather than receive monetary help. This type of welfare reform was practiced largely with single mothers who were viewed as morally incompetent for bearing a child/children out of wedlock and families whose breadwinner was imprisoned (and therefore unworthy of assistance). In Louisiana, for example, impoverished women with children over the age of seven were required to obtain employment (usually as farm hands) rather than receive monetary and social support (Bell, 1965). A distinction was also made concerning the race of the welfare applicant, with African American women receiving more pressure to obtain at least part time employment (usually the pressure to work was in the form of lower amounts of monetary assistance) than Caucasian women (Burgess & Price, 1963). By distinguishing these women from other welfare recipients on the basis of potential worthiness for receiving assistance, an example was set for other welfare recipients: these women were individuals who were undeserving of

understanding and assistance. Therefore, a barrier was created between certain groups of welfare recipients (preventing a possible gathering and uprising of poor individuals). However, this attitude concerning welfare worthiness would change with the advent of the 1960's.

Chapter 4: 1960-Present

With the beginning of the 1960's the composition of the American population was continuing to experience changes. Courtesy of the Immigration Act of 1965 and the Great Depression, the number of immigrants entering the country (with the exception of Mexicans) decreased dramatically. The end of World War I and the homecoming of millions of soldiers resulted in an increase in both marriage and birth rates. These events, coupled with a increasing life expectancy and a decreasing death rate (courtesy of continued improvements in medical technology), ushered in a change in makeup of American demographics. The rapid expansion of technology during World War I I resulted in a need for workers in urban areas. This expansion of technology not only affected urban employment, but also allowed for an increasing amount of mechanization to be employed as substitution for farm workers (Axinn & Stern, 2001). Consequently, many rural residents (particularly African American males from southern states) migrated to urban areas in hopes of finding better paying employment.

The migration of African Americans to urban areas was generally met with hostility by white residents. The need for unskilled laborers was not as great as it had been when European and Asian immigrants entered the country (Silberman, 1964). This lack of job offers was coupled with a decline in the use of African Americans as strikebreakers (Piven & Cloward, 1993). No longer was it necessary to alienate workers in order to exploit cheap labor. It is also important to note that increasing mechanization demanded a more skilled labor force, something that many African American (particularly those living in southern states) lacked experience in. Therefore, urban areas were faced with an increasing number of residents who lacked employment at a time

when welfare relief was restricted to a selected group of worthy individuals (the elderly, widowed, and disabled).

In response to the growing number of African Americans in urban areas several changes occurred. Caucasians, resentful at the increasing taxes believed to be a cause of the African American migration and fearing possible uprisings, began migrating out of cities to suburban areas as African American ghettos grew. Disorder among African Americans manifested itself in the form of rioting, attacks on Caucasian police officers, business owners, and landlords, marches, and the burning of Caucasian owned establishments (Piven & Cloward, 1993). This rise in disorder was concentrated in cities in which the African American population had doubled in size (such as Detroit, Philadelphia, New York, and Jersey City) (Center for Research in Marketing, 1965). Accordingly, Caucasian business owners and residents began lodging complaints to government officials concerning the growing number of incidents. As a result, welfare programs began extending monetary and job training assistance to African Americans in urban areas. Additionally, during this same time frame the Gun Control Act of 1968 was passed as a response to the growing riots (Jacobs, 2002). Interestingly, this welfare coverage was extended to African Americans only after the most intense rioting occurred in 1969 (Schram & Turbett, 1983). Once again, welfare is used as a means of controlling the poor, rather than advancing their interests.

The increase in welfare coverage extended beyond serving to control the growing mass of impoverished African Americans. A growing recognition was granted to specific depressed regions of the nation (such as Appalachia) that experienced poverty due to a depletion of natural resources. The Social Security Administration established a national

poverty index detailing the amount of groups living in poverty (Axinn & Stern, 2001). The Civil Rights movement, by exposing the practice of discriminatory hiring procedures, aided in the growth of welfare benefits for minority groups. Poverty was presented to the American public as an issue worthy of attention and examination. Furthermore, the working poor became identified as a poverty group in need of assistance. In response, several programs (such as Head Start and Upward Bound) evolved to meet the needs of impoverished individuals seeking employment. These programs focused on acting as support systems for working parents (the focus of welfare reform centered on finding employment and job training for employable members of society). Indeed, it appeared that a war of poverty had been declared. However, the face of welfare would change with the continued presence of American soldiers in the Vietnam War. Funding for welfare programs was restricted in order to fund the war effort. As a result, restrictions were placed on the amount of benefits divorced families, children, and unwed mothers received.

Although welfare funding received a boost in the 1960's it is obvious that the increase was a response to growing discontent among impoverished individuals. Welfare benefits were extended to unemployed individuals only after rioting and social upheaval occurred. Consequently, after the provision of welfare benefits, the rioting subsided restoring public order. Additionally, the Gun Control Act of 1968 (the same year that rioting hit it's peak) was enacted to control gun ownership in America. Once again the law is used a means of controlling the actions of the impoverished rather than advancing their best interests.

The 1970's and 1980's in America began with continuous changes in composition of both the population and issues facing the nation. The economy, which prospered in the 1950's and 60's, began to slow its growth. As a result unemployment rose substantially (which fostered the need for increased funding for welfare programs). The traditional family composition was experiencing change as the number of female-headed households, single parents, divorces, and smaller households rose. Women began entering the workforce at a rapid pace with 49 % of adult women working in 1970 (Axinn & Stern, 2001). Homelessness became a more visible issue that warranted welfare funding. Additionally, the AIDS epidemic entered the scene as a serious medical issue demanding funding for research. These issues it would appear warranted a continued increase in welfare funded programs. However, monetary funding for the poor decreased with funding efforts focused on assistance in the form of food stamps, healthcare, and employment training programs rather than monetary assistance.

The major driving factor in decreasing welfare funding was the veto of the Economic Opportunity Act by the Nixon Administration. The Economic Opportunity Act, created as part of the 1960's war on poverty, emphasized the importance of job training in strengthening the family structure through providing daycare and Head Start programs. This veto left many families faced with dwindling welfare resources in an economy that boasted high unemployment rates. As a consequence of this veto poverty among children rose to 20% by the end of the 1980's (Axinn & Stern, 2001). Poverty also increased among single parent households, particularly female-headed households. However, poverty levels experienced declines among the elderly population courtesy of the continued support for social security benefits. These changes in poverty rates

contributed to the increasing gap between the haves and the have-nots in American society, with one percent of the population controlling four percent of the nations wealth by the end of the 1980's.

Many of the laws passed during the 1970's and 1980's served the function of controlling the actions of the poor in society. The same year that the Economic Opportunity Act was vetoed (eliminating welfare funding for several programs designed to fund children living in poverty) abortion was legalized with the Supreme Court's examination of Roe vs. Wade. One could speculate that the passage of this law served the function of reducing the number of potential children living in poverty (and therefore in need of financial support). The Family Support Act of 1988 required all welfare recipients with children over the age of six to either obtain employment, job training, or additional education. Failure to comply with this requirement would result in the refusal of any type of welfare benefits. Sanctions were imposed regulating (even reducing) the privacy and due process of welfare recipients. Additionally, restrictions on immigration were implemented in order to restrict the number of immigrants entering the United States (and possibly adding to a already growing poverty rate at a time when unemployment was growing). The passage of these sanctions served to both reduce the amount of people in need of welfare assistance and punish welfare recipients who refused to comply with government regulations.

The 1990's greeted the American public with uninterrupted changes in the composition of the family and population structure. Increasing visibility of homosexual relationships, single mothers, the AIDS epidemic, and divorce rates led to changes in the traditional family structure. Immigrants, particularly from Mexico, continued to obtain

welfare and health care benefits. Additionally, the increasing entry of women in the workforce amplified the belief that is acceptable, even commonplace, for women with children and families to obtain employment. These events led to a changing attitude concerning the distribution of welfare benefits. Despite the prosperous economic circumstances welfare programs did not fare as well financially. The Clinton Presidency, beginning in 1992, sought to end the current welfare programs by increasing participation in education and training programs and limiting the length of time an individual can receive benefits (Seefeldt, 2002).

This effort to end current welfare policies led to the replacement of AFDC with the implementation of the TANF (temporary assistance for needy families) welfare to work program which placed limits on the amount of time an individual can receive government funding, increased work requirements of participants, and an increased amount of discretion for state and local governments to define and operate cash assistance programs (U. S. Congress, 1996). The same year that the welfare to work program was made into legislation America was experiencing both a strong economy and a need for workers in the growing service industry. Eliminating welfare programs meant that the availability of individuals lacking education and/or skills training would need employment. Furthermore, these potential workers (desperate for a way to provide essentials such as food and housing) may work for reduced wages. Perhaps one of the most damaging propositions of TANF regulations was the lack of any requirement for job training prior to or in conjunction with entry into the workforce. With the states in control of defining the amount of time individuals can continue to receive TANF benefits,

several states opted to impose time limits that are shorter than the recommended five-year limit.

Although the new regulations surrounding TANF funding did achieve its goal of reducing the number of individuals receiving assistance (for example, in Florida and Georgia, TANF enrollment dropped by one-third within four years) the poverty status of TANF participants obtaining employment remained intact (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1999). According to a study performed by Edin and Lein, over 80% of women entering the workforce after receiving TANF funds had to resort to depending on friends, family, and/or boyfriends to support them financially for at least 20% of their monthly expenditures (Edin & Lein, 1997). Additionally, 24% of these now working women reported food shortages for their family, 42% reported a loss of health care insurance for themselves, and 15% reported a lack of any money to buy winter clothing and shoes for their children (Edin & Lein). However, when these same women were receiving TANF benefits they were provided with health insurance, clothing vouchers, and food stamps. This would indicate that obtaining employment for many women after welfare does little to lift female-headed households out of poverty status. Many women (86%) in the Edin and Lein study reported that although they wanted to work, they feared that a lack of education would prevent them from making enough money to support themselves and their families (Edin & Lein). Another scary scenario facing TANF recipients is that many victims of domestic violence depend on these welfare benefits to enable them to leave their abusive spouse/partner (Brandwein, 1999). With a time limit imposed on TANF recipients that force many to take low paying, dead end jobs, many of these TANF participants may resort to returning to an abusive

relationship in order to avoid poverty. In other words, women and their families may be faced with a frightening decision-remain on poverty or risk physical and/or emotional abuse. Another practice that has gained popularity in some states is continuance of partial welfare benefits provided that the individual receiving the benefits maintains part-time employment. This means that individuals are left dependant upon welfare in exchange for partial employment rather than receiving job training for a better paying job.

The implementation of the TANF welfare to work program imposed several different types of social controls on impoverished individuals. With females (who make up the majority of welfare recipients) left working in low paying jobs that do little to lift the poverty status of it's employees it is easy to see how domestic violence is maintained via welfare to work programs. In several case stories cited in Sharon Hays book Flat Broke With Children Women in the Age of Welfare Reform several women depended upon welfare benefits to provide a means of economic survival in order to leave an abusive partner (Hays, 2003). Without the availability of welfare benefits (courtesy of the welfare to work program) victims of domestic violence may not be able to secure the financial means to leave the relationship. Remaining in an abusive relationship may provide females with a sense of economic security that is lacking under welfare to work regulations. Regulations of the welfare to work program concerning the reduction of funding for females who give birth to additional children while receiving welfare benefits serves as a punishment for poor individuals who wish to have children. Females on welfare are faced with the dilemma of have a child and lose welfare benefits or not have a child and maintain current welfare benefits. One could argue that this regulation serves to restrict the amount of children impoverished families have. Additionally, the increased

restrictions on welfare benefits that immigrants receive serve to make earning a living in America more difficult for new immigrants to achieve. It is interesting to note that although welfare benefits for immigrants decreased in the 1990's funding for border control on the American-Mexican border increased in order to restrict illegal immigration into the United States. These regulations make immigrating to the United States a less appealing option.

The discontinuation of welfare benefits places women recipients (who make up over 80% of the welfare population) in a controlled situation in several ways. Before the 1996 welfare to work program was granted approval repeated dependency on the welfare system by women (a situation where women leave the welfare system only to return within a short time span) remained at 63% (Harris, 1996). This means that over half of the women leaving the welfare program return to the welfare system to receive financial assistance due to either an inability to find employment and/or lack of a sufficient salary once employed. The women who stay out of the welfare system either have sufficient education and/or job training to find a job that pays a livable salary or supplement their income with money and material goods provided by family members or charitable organizations (Edin & Lein, 1997). Women in essence find themselves dependent upon other people to survive financially. Essentially, women receiving welfare must decide to either remain on welfare or find employment and social supports that will pay enough money to support both the welfare recipient and her family. With the time limit placed on welfare assistance many women will be forced to work at perhaps more than one job with an indefinite amount of hours per week in order to support themselves and their families. Or, these women (finding it difficult to support themselves at a low wage job)

may enter or return to an abusive relationship in order to achieve financial stability. It is estimated that over 30% of women rely on boyfriends to support them partially financially when they do not receive welfare benefits (Edin & Lein). If these boyfriends are abusive the women relying on them for financial support may be faced with the choice of being abused and receiving help paying for necessities, or leave the abusive situation and not have enough money to support themselves. Additionally, women who rely on welfare to support them while they leave an abusive relationship many be faced with a limited time frame in which to become financially stable enough to not be dependent upon others for financial support. The lack of a requirement for educational/job training under the welfare to work program also serves to control the actions of women. Without ample job skills women may not be able to find a job that will support themselves and their families. Once again, women are left depending on others to support them financially. By having to choose between working long hours in order to support their families and/or depending on others to provide financial assistance women are placed in a situation where they can be controlled by other in order to survive.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The evidence provided in the previous chapters support the idea that throughout American history welfare programs have served to regulate the actions of the poor. By implementing the English Poor Laws colonists were provided with a standard to judge and deal with the issue of poverty. As the colonies grew, presenting colonists with more diverse opportunities to provide a living, poverty was increasingly considered a personal flaw. Religion, particularly the Puritan following in northern colonies, also helped to influence this belief. Work ethic (or lack thereof) became one of the key indicators of devotion to God. This attitude varied in northern and southern colonies, with the north requiring a flexible workforce to accommodate the growth of industrialization. Southern colonies, on the other hand, consisted of a spread out population that depended upon farming (particularly the growth of cotton) to survive economically. Additionally, slavery provided southerners with a means of maintaining a workforce that did not receive monetary compensation for its services. The growing western frontier (given its spread out population) reacted to poverty similarly to the south. Consequently, regulation of the poor occurred with more frequency in northern colonies, with impoverished individuals receiving punishment in the form of mandatory housing in state and locally sponsored homes, refusal of entry into certain communities, and being forced to wear distinguishing articles of clothing that denoted dependence upon public assistance. Children living in poverty were often removed from their homes and placed in apprentices (sometimes as far away as the growing western frontier) and, at times, forced to live in state and local sponsored homes that stressed the importance of religion and hard work in living a decent, respectable life.

After the Civil War poverty in the south (with its newly freed, poor slaves and increased usage of technology) increasingly became considered a social problem. As a result, the quantity almshouses and child apprenticeships increased. Northern states continued view poverty as an individual flaw in need of reform. The advent of Social Darwinism maintained the belief that poverty was the result of the individual rather than society. It was only near the end of the nineteenth century that poverty began to be considered a social issue and the profession of social work emerged as a means of dealing with the rationing of assistance to impoverished individuals. The advent of the Great Depression in the 1930's changed the nation's attitude towards poverty. As millions of individuals were faced with unemployment mass uprisings grew throughout the country. Once respectable members of society coping with unemployment were making poverty an issue that anybody, not just the immoral, in society could experience. In response the national government began providing financial assistance to the poor in a variety of ways, including the creation of jobs and implementation of the Social Security program. These actions served to quiet the growing discontent the impoverished felt towards the powerful in society. This also marked the first time in American history that welfare relief was controlled at a national rather than a state or local level.

Despite this progress in reducing the amount of poverty 1950's American witnessed a return to the familiar attitude that poverty is an individual issue requiring individual efforts to eliminate it. This changed with the increased attention given to economically depressed regions of the country in the 1960's. A War of Poverty was declared, with funding made available for the provision of job training and increased financial assistance for welfare recipients. It was also in the 1960's that rioting occurred

in urban areas across the country due to poverty among minority groups. The government responded to this uprising by providing increased monetary assistance to these groups. However, with America's continued involvement in the Vietnam War, funding for welfare assistance was reduced. Welfare assistance in the following two decades received little increase in funding. The face of welfare assistance changed with the passage of the Welfare to Work program in 1996. Under this piece of legislation a five-year time limit was imposed on the amount of time a welfare recipients could receive financial assistance. States molded this ruling to their own preference, with some states opting to lower the time limit. Little emphasis was placed upon job training as a means of increasing the likelihood that welfare recipients could obtain higher paying jobs. This legislation left many welfare recipients accepting low paying, dead end jobs in order to attempt to make a living.

Although Karl Marx theorized that workers would eventually grow tired of their work and living conditions and organize a mass uprising in order to change the economic composition of their society this did not occur. From the beginnings of American history impoverished individuals were distinguished from the general population via labels such as lazy, immoral, and unwilling to work. Poverty became a status to be avoided (usually through hard work) rather than understandable situation. Furthermore, the development of a middle class further aided in distinguishing and separating individuals in society on the basis of income. This distinction helped to prevent the potential gathering of disgruntled individuals in an attempt to overturn capitalism. Also, wearing the label of middle class citizen gave many individuals a positive status in society. By not working

(thus losing class status) one would lose the privileges associated with being in the middle class.

As America greeted the beginning of the twentieth century several movements (such as the labor and feminist movement) emerged as a means of providing certain groups in society a voice for gaining equal rights and privileges. Although some of these movements succeeded in gaining certain rights (such as the right to vote for women) for particular groups, they also served to separate individuals and prevent a possible uprising. The women's movement for example served as a distraction to Marx's goal of all workers joining together in a worker uprising (MacKinnon, 1989). The growth in labor unions also served to separate workers (instead of bring them together. In fact, it was common to use one particular group of workers (such as African American workers) to break work strikes. Essentially, these striking workers served to provide capitalism with cheap labor instead of allowing all groups of workers to unite for improved working conditions. Rather than gaining equal work conditions for all groups in society, these groups served to maintain capitalism. Marx's dream of all workers uniting to form a new economic system of communism remains unrealized.

The concept of labeling aided in distinguishing poverty as negative status to be ashamed of and avoided. According to labeling theory, an individual is singled out, defined, and considered deviant by society due to a lack of conformity of societal norms (Newman, 2002). By labeling impoverished individuals as lazy and immoral due to lack of financial stability over time these individuals become viewed by society as lazy and immoral. This stigma that is attached to being poor has several consequences for groups in society. The negative label attached to poverty serves as a deterrent for other groups in

society (such as the middle and upper class) to become unemployed and become dependent on society. The middle and upper classes (who believe that individuals should earn money) view impoverished individuals as unworthy of financial assistance.

Furthermore, labeling impoverished individuals as bad or unworthy of help serves to separate, even isolate, this group from society. It also serves to separate poor individuals from each other. Take, for example, a single mother of two receiving welfare and housing assistance. When this individual uses food stamps to pay for food she receives dirty looks and /or comments from individuals around her. When this individual tries to apply for a job and writes down her address (which happens to be a government subsidized housing project) she receives possible discrimination from an employer or human resource office that believes that poverty is an indicator of laziness or immorality. Additionally, members of society express the attitude that poverty is a personal flaw in need of reform. Over time, this attitude may lead to an increased risk of depression and low self-esteem in this woman. Depression and/or low self-esteem may prevent this woman from interacting with other individuals, thus decreasing the risk of a possible uprising of impoverished individuals. Or, the negative label placed on this woman may lead this woman to engage in criminal behavior because, after all, most of society already believes this person is bad and not deserving of respect.

One aspect of the welfare system that has been given little attention in this examination is the economic benefits provided by regulating the poor. By enforcing the importance of work in being a valuable, productive member of society capitalists are provided with a workforce that will work for lower wages (and longer hours). This is clearly displayed in the growing disparity that occurred in Northern and Southern states

prior to the Civil War. Northern states, experiencing rapid industrialization, required a large workforce. Consequently, poverty was viewed as a personal flaw, commanding strict social reprimands in order to ensure that all able bodied individuals worked (despite the practice of offering low wages that did little to advance the economic situations of its workers). Southern states, on the other hand, did not require a large workforce (courtesy of slavery and a primarily agricultural economy). Therefore, regulations on the impoverished were not as stringent. This contrast in the treatment of the poor demonstrates the effects of capitalism on attitudes toward poverty. Additionally, by refusing financial assistance to the impoverished it is possible for industrialists to offer lower wages for work. After all, the poor (needing money to pay for basic necessities) are left with little choice but to accept the lower paying job. Workers essentially became a commodity that could be used to serve the needs of capitalism rather than human beings deserving of understanding.

Operating under an economic system of capitalism America has successfully regulated the actions of poor in a variety of ways. Labeling the act of poverty as negative, refusing entry into certain communities, separating families, increasing police action, and passing legislation have all been used as means of preventing a mass uprising of impoverished individuals. Instead of viewing human beings as individuals deserving of respect and lack of judgment in receiving financial assistance the poor have repeatedly been accused of being lazy, immoral, and undeserving of assistance. This has left millions of impoverished individuals struggling to make ends meet on a day-to-day basis. Workers are viewed as a commodity for capitalism rather than individuals possible of finding stimulating employment. With the recent creation of the welfare to work program

millions of welfare recipients (the majority of whom are women) are faced with the possibility of working at low paying jobs with little opportunity for advancement and depending on family and friends for financial assistance. This presents America with the continuing challenge of finding means of controlling the actions of the poor to prevent a possible uprising to overturn capitalism.

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