12-2017

A History of Welfare Policy in the United States: To Feed or Blame the Hungry?

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University of Tennessee Honors Thesis Projects

15,111

Introduction

Welfare states emerged in western nations in the late 19th century and were fully established by the middle decades of the 20th centuries as a fundamental aspect of modern governments. They were expected to operate as vital tools to ensure that capitalist economies would remain socially and economically sustainable. From their creation, welfare states have been primarily about social insurance, social rights, social provision, and the social regulation of economic action (Garland 3). Social science experts argue that food is one of the most basic necessities in modern society, but do welfare states treat food access as a social right?

In the United States, the welfare state emerged as a functional response to the problems of urban, industrial market societies; most importantly, the new risks and insecurities spawned by untrammeled market capitalism (Garland 29). Social assistance, also known as welfare, in a welfare state is composed of the safety net of noncontributory income support programs that relieve those whose income is insufficient for their basic needs (Garland 47). Welfare programs in the United States are aimed at mitigating poverty and decreasing its debilitating affects concerning these basic needs, especially centralized on the access and availability of food for the poorest members of society.

Through the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP), Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), the US government appears to be addressing the basic inequality of food access through many avenues within social assistance programs. However, realities of hunger in the United States paint a different picture. In 2016, 41.2 million Americans lived in foodinsecure households, and only 59% of American households were participating in these food access assistance programs ("Hunger and Poverty Facts"). The other 41% of households were left to depend on emergency food access through private charities and food banks, highlighting an important gap in the true reach of federal food access assistance programs in the United States.

In this paper, I am investigating the relationship between government assistance in Tennessee and the realities of food access in low-income communities in Knoxville to find out if the purpose of welfare policy is being fulfilled or if it is falling vastly short of its goals. I analyze the history of US welfare policy to understand its manifest purpose. In my analysis, I focus on food provision, specifically on how political and economic institutions that have signaled historical shifts in attitudes and behaviors of the welfare state government in the United States toward the poor and hungry. Through a political-economy perspective, one can conduct an investigatory approach to explain certain behaviors in the context of power relationships and the economic arrangements in a society for the production and distribution of goods and services to society's members. A political economy is the way in which decisions are made to ensure the society's economic sustenance and survival, which is why it is important to research the current infrastructure in place to feed the poorest and hungriest individuals in the most developed nation in the world.

Feeding the Poor: From Independence to the Great Depression

We find the first political economy in the inception of the modern world, and it was tied almost exclusively to religion and sharing, of which food was the main concern

(Day 61). This communal belief shared throughout hunting and gathering societies was quickly replaced following the onset of horticulture and the rise in private property and a private mindset about the food one owned (Day 63). As individuality consumed civilizations, the first instances of poverty began to surface for the first time in 6000 – 3000 BC (Day 64).

Some of the first reactions to and solutions for poverty were not tied to altruism, religious belief, or human sympathy, but depended more on the facts of human coexistence and the power relations to which they give rise: relationships of interdependence. The belief in reciprocity, that those who can work must provide for others who cannot, extended across generations (Garland 15). The idea of mutual need explains why social provision has always had multiple sources and has been entangled with a variety of relationships (Garland 16). In early hunting gathering societies, the answer to social provision was church and charity, and their turn to religious centers allowed charitable giving to become closely tied to the role of religion and the belief of a God. This shift in the early days of poverty from local responsibility for feeding the poor to a larger, institutionalized program within the church marked the first transformation of public responsibility to the poor. Gaining strength in 4th century AD with the global rise of Christianity, the church became the state agency for charity, instead of voluntary local aid (Day 82). When the Christian church declared the poor "blessed" and deemed charity a virtue, giving to the poor became a broader social imperative and the church became the great engine of redistribution of charity to those in need (Garland 17).

Transformation from religious charity occurred under Henry VII and Elizabeth I in Britain with the Elizabethan Poor Laws of 1601. This legislation marked the historical transformation away from volunteerism and religious institutions to the government's interventions on behalf of the poor, as the laws defined social welfare as part of the national labor policy (Day 109-110). Britain wanted to modify the system of religious gifts and arrange it on a more secular basis (Garland 19). This shift from religious help to a secular aid program not only altered the role of the state toward the poor, but also influenced a change in attitudes toward the poor.

These original poor laws were met with hesitation from the capitalist-minded nation because its economy depended on poverty to keep wages low and ensure a ready workforce, and a campaign to gradually eliminate poor relief began (Day 115, 117). Separation within members of society ensued as their role in helping their poor neighbors disintegrated into routinized aid from the state. Attitude changes were highlighted in a study published by the Royal Commission on Poor Relief in the late 1700s and early 1800s, which claimed that poor relief was responsible for "permanent paupery," and this publication influenced those who were hesitant of poor relief to pass the New Poor Law of 1834, which declared that public assistance was no longer a right and the poor were to blame for their own poverty (Day 118).

This Poor Law Amendment went a decent way towards minimizing social protection and maximizing market freedom, as relief was offered on much more restrictive terms (Garland 22). This economic turning point showcases the constant tension of the state in trying to balance between facilitating capitalism and providing a social safety net—this balancing act is still a battle faced today. The changing of social welfare from “ideals of social justice and charity as a right to a redefinition of poverty as a crime, and its administration becoming civil rather than religious” was implemented by the British in their colonies in the United States (Day 120).

The New Nation

Although the colonies in the United States adapted the British Poor Laws, there were stark differences on how they were implemented since the resources in the colonies were severely limited, and the responsibility for feeding the poor once again became a voluntary task instead of one on the public (Axin 16). The most important sectors of help for the poor in the colonies became local responsibility, relatives and community, and categorization (Day 142). The importance of religion in the New Nation, especially the Puritan belief in individual status and economic reward as a manifestation of predestined grace, allowed the church to use the Puritan work ethic as a conceptual tool for minimizing what was readily available to the public (Axin 18). By 1642, colonial towns had given authority to parish supervisors to collect poor taxes, determine the poor’s worthiness for aid, and dispense poor relief (Day 142). The influence of the Puritan work ethic allowed the suggestion that poverty was a character and moral flaw that should not be supported by common welfare. In the early years of the colonies, giving within reason was encouraged, but was centered around being “stewards of God’s wealth” instead of out of concern for the poor (Axin 18).

Twenty years later, the colonies adapted the English Law of Settlement and Removal, which required all colonial towns to supply food, firewood, clothing, and household essentials to the poor (Day 142). But as disapproval of seemingly ancient

Elizabethan Poor Law principles arose, the need to address poor relief for the able-bodied poor became a central issue, and the classification of the poor emerged with new categories: impotent poor, able-bodied poor, and dependent children (Axin 143).

The impotent poor were those who could no longer work, while the able-bodied poor were those employable in some capacity but who still solicited aid from the community in some form. Dependent children were targeted by towns and courts with hopes of ensuring they did not follow in the "degenerate footsteps of their pauper parents" (Day 145). These classifications of the poor influenced new approaches to charitable giving, specifically the move away from the pre-Civil War era belief in the Puritan doctrine of pre-ordained societal structure to a scientific charity approach based in the belief that achievement was limited only by the failure to fulfill individual potential (Axin 64).

The scientific charity approach used the theory of social evolution proposed by Charles Darwin to abandon those who could not sustain themselves or add resources to society, in that people who believed in social welfare would end up weakening mankind by prohibiting the "fittest" people from rightfully becoming the richest (Axin 101). Combined with the Calvinist belief in determinism, much of early US society believed that individuals could respond to the godliness of their own nature and could control their economic and social welfare destinies (Axin 46). To many early-Americans, religion played an unequivocal role in the public perceptions of the poor in US colonies, supporting the idea that poverty was almost always caused by individual blight, and the role of the church to aid the poor was small and nearly obsolete.

After the Civil War, the absence of a public or private welfare system to draw support from left the South in a dire situation (Axin 94). Expounding on its dire situation was the rising belief in the South and throughout the nation that the poor were outside the normal social order and in need of reform (Axin 37). This influenced the practice of poor assistance to believing that states were the third choice for aid; it was felt that a person should be self-sufficient; if they became in need of aid the first avenue of help should be private charity; and only if those two things failed should the state become responsible for administering help (Axin 51).

This three-tiered assistance system was falling vastly short of the South's needs for Reconstruction, especially since, despite there being an enlargement of the role of state government in issues of expenditures for social welfare and education, no comprehensive programs of state welfare emerged. Following the failure of Southern states to support the tens of thousands of newly freed slaves, the president authorized an experimental relief and rehabilitation program. Two volunteer organizations from the North saw to the distribution of food and clothing to the needy freed people. Despite the federal experiment's success, the needs of the South were beyond the resources and abilities of these volunteer organizations. In response to the failures of limited state design and the endemic of local responsibility following the Civil War, the first federal welfare agency, the Freedmen's Bureau, was formed (Axin 95).

The Freedmen's Bureau was the major source of public welfare in the south from 1865-1869 and its only criteria for offering relief was need, unlike the prior classification system that had infiltrated the colony's welfare ideals (Axin 97; Day 201). In 1867, in response to the threat of famine in the South, Congress authorized the use of funds to help all destitute Southerners, despite their wartime loyalties (Axin 96). In 1886, President Johnson tried to veto an extension of the life of the bureau when he openly stated his objection to the federal government's assumption of responsibility for social welfare. Although he tried to place the responsibility of recovery from slavery on its victims, his veto was overridden and the Freedmen's Bureau was extended for two more years. Lawmakers recognized that the Bureau had helped address the extreme hunger and poverty of both whites and blacks, better than any local volunteer organization was able to accomplish. This Congressional response to citizen's needs would set a precedent for federal participation in social welfare during emergency periods (Axin 96).

The most important ramifications that the Freedmen's Bureau had on the future of social welfare was that it acted as a model for private and public cooperation, and that it required high standards of accountability from its cooperating agencies (Day 202). Notwithstanding the gargantuan amount of good services the Bureau was conducting, it was subject to endless criticism and question, especially the concern about large-scale federal aid to the needy (Axin 97). Although these fears eventually led to its demise in 1872, the foundations that the Freedmen Bureau created for federal intervention on behalf of the citizen's basic needs would influence the ensuing welfare debates in the future. This mix between private and public welfare agencies would reshape the belief, debate, and practice of welfare in the United States for generations to come.

The Industrial Revolution and the Progressive Movement

By the end of the 19th century, the two competing principles in discussions over welfare remained economically based in the logic of free-market liberalism versus the logic of moral economy and social protection (Garland 25). Market capitalism threatened the end of moral and social constraints, which would allow an untrammeled economy to freely compete in open markets. This marked the shift in concern of the state from social protection and regulation, to economic regulation (Garland 20). The shift to a liberalized market society erased the social protections on which the poor relied, and through the demoralization and dehumanization of economic life that resulted from the Industrial Revolution, by the 1880s it became clear that most of those in poverty were poor through no fault of their own (Garland 24, 21).

Until 1912, despite the success of the economy operating under unregulated capitalism and the added labor of wives and children, over half of the working-class families were poor, and a third of them lived in abject poverty (Garland 33; Axin 132). The situation became so expansive that only the national government could provide adequate solutions (Garland 34). To offer a solution, following the confidence of the reach of public welfare being able to out-serve private philanthropy in the 1880s, state governments were encouraged to start building their own service systems (Day 226). These centralization efforts by state governments brought the creation of state boards of charities and corrections which would later transform into state departments of public welfare (Day 227). The state organized and funded techniques designed to address structural problems at an appropriate national level, thus developing the state into a stronger power and influence over economies and emergency assistance during the turmoil of the war decades in the 20th century and beyond (Garland 37).

The increase in success in government intervention in alleviating poverty wreaked havoc on the historical trust in the laissez-faire system. The lowered viability of laissez-faire practices influenced the Progressive Movement in that proponents believed individual freedom was best fostered not by leaving people to their own devices, but securing for them education, welfare, and security to become truly independent (Garland 35). Progressives advocated for the government to reduce the distress of the poor as more people began to view poverty as a primarily economic, not moral, condition (Axid 138). Many Progressives believed that poverty was increasingly being caused by the social and economic structures arising from industrialization (Day 216).

Industrialization hit full swing in the onset and aftermath of World War 1, and completely threw the Progressive mantra of increased government intervention for a loop. As the American economy surged in industrialized operations after World War 1, the demand for social insurance and public relief were considered a betrayal of the American way, and those who continued to help the poor were also viewed as un-American (Day 248). In post-World War 1 America, public assistance experienced a resurgence of scientific charity. Science and religion joined together to legitimize and institutionalize inadequate poor relief, and even went as far to take children from families, and in the case of poor people of color, murder (Day 217). Social policy would become more universal in its reach and less stingy in its provision to reestablish people's trust in the government; and, economic policy would aim to manage markets and their outcomes rather than simply set them free, thus ending the long-standing trust in the laissez-faire process (Garland 41).

The Birth (and Death) of the Welfare State

The early years of the 1930s and the Great Depression brought universal realization that poverty was no longer rooted in the doctrine of personal fault, but was now caused by economic conditions (Day 247). The Great Depression was defined by "the paradox" because Americans were going hungry in the face of an overabundance of inaccessible food (Poppendieck 14). Many human needs and desires during this era went unmet and unfulfilled not because society was unable to produce the goods and services to satisfy them, but because the distribution of income did not permit those in need to purchase what they needed (Poppendieck 15). This paradox continued as millions of unemployed workers cut meat, milk, and fresh produce from their diets in attempts to get by on savings or scanty relief, while the food they could no longer afford piled up in warehouses or rotted in fields (Poppendieck 36).

By the spring of 1933, approximates totaled the number of unemployed Americans to 15 million, or a third of the viable workforce, and despite years of efforts by Progressives, no state had unemployment insurance laws enacted when the Great Depression began (Poppendieck 39). Eventually, these millions of Americans and their families were forced to swallow their pride and apply for aid from local governments, or more often from voluntary, private social agencies (Poppendieck 40). Many local governments and community agencies tried to take advantage of wholesale food prices by establishing commissaries where clients in search of relief could receive food; however, only families with homes were qualified to receive cash grants, food orders, and commissary privileges. For all other needy Americans during the Great Depression, the only form of relief available was soup kitchens, breadlines, and flop houses. While some cities pitched in to create public kitchens, most free meal programs were funded by private charities (Poppendieck 44).

In the long run, during the 1930s and the Great Depression, neither the economies reluctantly implemented by established relief agencies nor the spontaneous activities of the well-intentioned could squeeze out enough funds to meet the need for feeding the poor. This failure to close the gap of food access assistance brought severe distress among the poor and the stark unemployment became evident nationwide (Poppendieck 45). Private charities struggled to ease the distress of poverty, and private casework of welfare operations rarely guided the poor out of poverty. Finally, by the end of the 1930's, the private welfare sector had to surrender the responsibility of aiding the poor to the federal government (Day 273). In response to the Depression, government activity vastly expanded and it took on new social responsibilities (O'Connor 36). And then, following the economic collapse of the 1930s, welfare policy became aimed at the middle classes as well, with the consequence that it fundamentally changed its character (Garland 41).

During this time in the welfare state in the US was "one of contradiction: of growth and conflict, of affluence and the rediscovery of poverty," and the reforms of our welfare state varied greatly in their scopes, purposes, and goals, as is evident in the response to the Great Depression with the New Deal programs (Axin 227).

The New Deal and the War on Poverty

The most urgent problem President Roosevelt faced when he arrived in office in

1933 was to address the federal government's role in poor relief. Inspired by his social justice belief that the government was obligated to help the distressed, he offered three solutions to the plight of the poor caused by the Great Depression: grants to states for direct relief, public works programs to stimulate investment, and immediate public employment programs (Day 279, Axin 186-190). His most monumental program, that theoretically birthed the welfare state in the United States, was the New Deal (Garland 26). In the early stages, Roosevelt's welfare state programs acted as a structured response to the new risks and insecurities brought on by the uncontrolled market capitalist post-World War 1 society (Garland 29). He brought immense change in government thinking about its role in the economy and as a provider of a social net. This monumental birth of the welfare state in the United States through Roosevelt's New Deal policies would forever alter the realities of American politics, as it allowed the government to formulate policies that went beyond the role government had adopted up to that point in the country's history (O'Connor 36).

For the first time, the Great Depression publically showed that as a result as a poor-functioning society, one could be poor and employed (Axin 175). The rise of this "new poor" influenced lawmakers and economists to move away from the trust in laissez-faire tactics, and nationwide agreement ensued that there was a need to stabilize the market and assure full employment (Garland 37). President Roosevelt wanted to make social provision more universal in its availability and less stingy in its offerings (Garland 41). One of the most important legislations to come from the New Deal was the Social Security Act, which was signed in 1935 and contained provisions for old age insurance, welfare, and unemployment insurance ("Unemployment Insurance 75th Anniversary").

Two years later when the Supreme Court upheld the Act as constitutional, all 50 states had enacted their own Unemployment Insurance Laws. As mass unemployment was one of the major structural problems created during the Great Depression, the Unemployment Insurance System was created with hopes of stabilizing the economy and alleviating personal hardship caused from involuntary job loss. Although enacted on a federal level, the temporary cash benefits for individuals unemployed through no personal fault are administered on a state level. To help secure one's purchasing power in a consumer-driven society, these cash handouts were spent on necessities, one of the largest being food ("Unemployment Insurance 75th Anniversary").

These policy makers in the 1930s under Roosevelt experimented with approaching the American welfare state as a consumer program that would work off individual's Keynesian interests to stimulate a larger economy (Moran 1004). The "purchasing power" coalition of unions demanding higher wages and housewives demanding lower prices directed New Deal policies toward supporting consumerism; as wages throughout the Great Depression decreased, the trust in Keynesian economics convinced policy makers that all Americans, even those on relief, were still consumers (Moran 1003). All the New Deal programs upheld capitalism much more than they challenged it, and this consumer-driven government assistance sparked the creation of the first Food Stamp Program in 1939 (Moran 1001).

The 1939 Food Stamp Program was based in Keynesian theory because it promised to transform poor people from meager relief recipients into viable consumers

(Moran 1008). By improving the consumption abilities of the poorest Americans, Keynesian policy makers believed the entire economy would benefit (Moran 1009). Unlike any previous social provision programs in the US, the 1939 Food Stamp Program demanded recipients buy their relief, essentially ending the poor's entitlement to aid without any stipulation (Moran 1018). The program operated by permitting people on relief to buy orange-colored stamps equal to their normal food expenditures, and for every $1 of orange stamps purchased, 50 cents worth of blue stamps were received. The orange stamps could be used to buy any food, and the blue stamps could only be used to buy food that had been determined by the Department of Agriculture to be surplus (USDA "A Short History of SNAP").

The most important outcome of the Food Stamp Program from the New Deal era was its unique pairing of the consumer, Keynesian politics and welfare clients. The welfare recipient was reframed as a consumer, and the low-income citizen was therefore allowed benefits but not entitled to them, as benefits came quite literally with a price (Moran 1022). The poor and hungry were no longer promised food access coverage, rather they had to devote percentages of their meager or nonexistent earnings to a chance of stretching every dollar a little further by purchasing orange stamps. Over the next four years, the first Food Stamp Program would reach around 20 million people in nearly half of the counties in the US (USDA "A Short History of SNAP"). The end of the 1939 Food Stamp program came in 1943, not because of its shortcomings, but rather to the start of US involvement in World War 2, as the conditions that brought the program into existence—unmarketable food surpluses, widespread unemployment, and a federal commitment to agricultural priorities— no longer existed (Moran 1021, USDA "A Short History of SNAP").

During World War 2, while the US government was entangled in supporting a vast army across the Atlantic, the responsibility for food supply and access fell to the people. For many Americans, the changes of government assistance during the wartime brought feelings of anxiety and a fear that the country's stability would be gone forever, especially after the widespread starvation and hunger during the Great Depression (Bentley 11). Virtually all the images and messages the government was trying to show during wartime was that all citizen's actions would serve the needs of the war effort, and for food access this meant federally instituted rationing (Bentley 14). Rationing originally started as a way for the US government to offset costs of entering World War 2, and quickly became a way for officials to determine equitable access to all food resources among each economic group (Bentley 15). Officials also saw rationing as a method to ease citizens' anxiety about possible food shortages (Bentley 17).

Another method the US government used to influence the population to participate in food production was using victory gardens. By calling food production "the first line of defense," the government hoped to encourage millions of Americans to grow and eat their own fruits and vegetables. Government officials hoped that victory gardens would free up the commercially available food for the military and Allies oversees. In the peak year of home front production in 1943, three-fifths of the population produced more than 8 million tons of food, some 40% of all the vegetables Americans consumed (Bentley 114). Although not fully buying into food assistance, victory gardens were used as tools to create wartime patriotism and support of government actions on the local and national level (Bentley 120). Food became “Everybody’s weapon—not only for those on the fighting front but for those on the production front at home” during World War 2, at a time when the government was less concerned with its people at home, and more focused on its people abroad (Bentley 127).

While Roosevelt worked tirelessly to ensure consumption abilities for the unemployed and poor Americans, when Eisenhower took office, the growth of the welfare state in the US was severely halted. Eisenhower wanted to restrict the eligibility of recipients, and by giving rights and control of welfare programs back to states, punitive administration of policies became commonplace (Axin 243, 244). During these decades, thousands of recipients were removed from welfare rolls, and thousands more were deterred from beginning new applications, despite needing assistance (Axin 244).

The years following the war became riddled with economic prosperity, in which unseen numbers of Americans benefited from an expanding economy, creating a huge middle class (Gans 1995). Mirroring the growth of the middle class was the creation of the “underclass” in the early 1960s, as people who were “unprivileged, unemployed, and hopelessly set apart from the nation at large, and do not share in its life, ambitions, and achievements” became a larger percentage of the population (Gans 28). While city centers began to rise financially, there remained some 40-50 million Americans who were devastatingly poor. For the expanding middle class during this decade the millions of poor people in America became increasingly invisible, physically and politically (Harrington).

Using liberalism with a distinctly Keynesian emphasis, Kennedy became a forward-thinking optimist focused on economic growth, contradicting Eisenhower's conservative reforms (Gans 41). He spoke of the "New Frontier" that America would breach with the help of Keynesian stimulated growth, and he believed in American capitalism as a revolutionary force for social change. Kennedy was so adamant about economic growth because he predicted that sufficient growth would do away with the need for redistribution, thereby ending all social conflict surrounding government assistance (Gans 50). The Kennedy administration approach to public welfare proposed a return to seeking the cause of poverty within the individual and a return to helping individuals change themselves to operate successfully in an apparently well-functioning economy. These efforts were consummated in his signing of his first Federal Bill in 1962, which aimed to retrain jobless victims of industrialization and chronic underemployment through encouraging states to provide social services leading to self-care and self-support (Axin 249).

On his first day in office, President Kennedy doubled the Surplus Commodity Program, which required the Department of Agriculture to purchase surplus food from farmers and distribute it to the jobless Americans, thus supporting increased output and profit for farmers to help increase availability and quality of food access for the poor. Concerned that the diet of those in poverty lacked nutrition, he reintroduced the Food Stamp Program in 1961, also conducted through the Department of Agriculture (Day 334). Kennedy began the reintroduction through pilot programs in several states; his pilot programs still required individuals to purchase food stamps, but eliminated the concept of special stamps for surplus foods (USDA "A Short History of SNAP"). Notwithstanding these heroic efforts in addressing the plight of the poor, in 1964 it became evident that an even more vigorous attack on poverty appeared necessary (Axin 251).

Kennedy's efforts to address the plight of poor Americans was rippled with hesitation and slow-moving ideas, but in an attempt to differentiate himself from Kennedy's legacy, President Johnson took a dramatically liberal position in his declaration of a War on Poverty, in which he described poverty as "a domestic enemy which threatens the strength of our Nation and the welfare of our people...," and that for the first time in the US's existence, the state had "the power to strike away barriers to full participation" in society (Axin 251).

Johnson would be committing himself to the most ambitious program of domestic reform since the New Deal, a broad mix of measures aimed at creating what he would call the Great Society (Lawrence 2017). His aims for the Great Society would be to complete and extend the old Roosevelt programs that had stalled in 1938, with legislation on education, poverty, cities, and the environment (Bator 11). At the beginning of his declaration, Johnson was confident that the majority-ruled Democratic House and Senate liberal faction would support and pass his monumental legislations without delay (Lawrence 2017).

Johnson's War on Poverty introduced new theories that highlighted structural reasons for the poor's lack of unemployment besides the widely-held belief that they were unmotivated (Day 321). He extended the federal government's role in social welfare through passing the Economic Opportunity Act in 1964, and in the same year Congress passed the Food Stamp Act to help meet the nutritional needs of the poor (Axin 252-254). The Economic Opportunity Act's declaration of purpose established public policy in the relation to the elimination of poverty through continuing Kennedy's thrust of work training, work incentives, social services, and special programs for certain regions (Axin 252). This act helped break down the walls hiding the poor in America, making them not only increasingly more visible, but more audible as well (Axin 253). Johnson's act eventually created the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) which housed many of his War on Poverty programs: Job Corps, VISTA, and the Community Action Program whose local chapters ran Upward Bound, Legal Services, Foster Grandparents, Migrants, Head Start, and Health Service Centers (Epstein 55-56).

President Johnson's Community Action Program (CAP) was the OEO's lead warrior, and its initial task was to develop a constituency of the poor themselves to pursue systemic changes in states and localities, which combined would presumably be powerful enough to kick-start federal spending. All the other programs out of the OEO targeted the deficiencies of the poor that presumably accounted for their poverty, feeding off the folk legend that to teach a man to fish would feed him for a lifetime (Epstein 56). Without addressing the structural imperfections of the society at the time, the OEO programs lacked the resources to successfully raise people out of poverty, as job preparation programs tried to "teach people to fish at a time when fishing had become an obsolete occupation" (Epstein 57).

The other programs out of the OEO were variably successful, yet all focused on generally the same populations: poor young people in America. The Job Corps was arguably the OEO's most successful program and probably the most expensive of the publically funded manpower training programs. It was created to improve the labor market and social outcomes for socially and economically disadvantaged out-of-school youth (Epstein 80). Upward Bound sought to provide education support that would encourage eligible high school students to stay enrolled, graduate, and go on to complete college (Epstein 90). Less victorious than Job Corps, only about 40% of Upward Bound students completed the program (Epstein 93). Head Start attempted to provide disadvantaged preschoolers with tangible benefits in health and nutrition as well as social skills and self-esteem, but as early as 1969 there were signs that the program was failing (Epstein 95). The remaining OEO programs were relatively small and starved of funds, and as a result they were only able to perform "cultural ceremonies" of helping the poor, instead of institutionalized victories (Epstein 101).

In the beginning of 1964, President Johnson requested that Congress pass legislation to make the Food Stamp Program permanent. The goal of the Food Stamp Act was to achieve a more effective use of agricultural overproduction, improve levels of nutrition among individuals with low-incomes, and strengthen the agricultural economy (USDA "A Short History of SNAP"). The purchase requirement of food stamps was considered essential to ensure that the food stamp benefit would equal the cost of a healthy diet for the family's size (Caswell and Yaktine). This time, the federal government would fund the program and license the retailers, but the states were still able to authorize applications for food stamps and distribute the benefits (USDA "History of SNAP"). Households not already on public assistance could apply at local state welfare agencies, and by April of 1965 there were more than half a million participants. Leading up to the next major reform to the program in February 1971, there were 10 million participants (Caswell and Yaktine).

Overall, President Johnson's Great Society, his War on Poverty, and his Office of Economic Opportunity's programs offered narrow coverage, suffered from inadequate funding, untrained and unmotivated staffs, and inappropriate strategies of service (Epstein 104). Aside from President Johnson's signing of the amendment to the Social Security Act of 1935 to create Medicare, even the largest of his new programs had little effect on poverty, as most of the programs offered services that were barely improvements than the situations the poor were already in (Epstein 111).

Yet, in 1966, the Advisory Council on Public Welfare declared that the federal government should set nationwide standards for relief grants and take away control from the states to eliminate the discrepancies of welfare among state standards. These recommended changes hoped to allow states to fully concentrate on meeting human needs, and they were cited as "the last hurrah of social welfare professionals who had long dominated public assistance policy development," opening the door for reversing Johnson's legacy as soon as he would leave office (Axin 256).

The Neoliberal Attack on the Welfare State

The 1970's marked the end of a progressive welfare reform era, the death of America's welfare state, leading with President Nixon's ideological attack on social welfare programs (Axin 277). Critics began to worry about the cost of providing food stamp benefits, and the main issue became trying to figure out how to balance program access with accountability, as they began to fear that people would slip through the cracks and abuse the program. A law passed in early 1971 to amend the Food Stamp Act, and it established uniform national standards of eligibility and work requirements, required that allotments be equivalent to the cost of a nutritionally adequate diet, and limited households' purchase requirements to 30% of their income (USDA "A Short History of SNAP").

In this decade, the welfare state was threatened by stagflation—high unemployment with high inflation and low growth (Garland 94). The recession of 1973-1975 coupled with stagflation had experts beginning to doubt the strength of Keynesian economics in modern society. At the start of the recession, the Agriculture and Consumer Protection Act of 1973 was created to require states to expand the Food Stamp Program to every political jurisdiction. It also required the Department of Agriculture to establish temporary eligibility standards for disasters. A year later, a new law authorized the Department of Agriculture to pay half of all states' cost for administering the program and established the requirements for efficient and effective administration by the states. By 1974, the Food Stamp Program began operating nationwide, and in its first month participation reached almost 14 million Americans (USDA "A Short History of SNAP").

Nixon's conservative welfare reform would nearly dismantle all the Great Society programs by offering a new vision of how power should be shared between the federal government and the states through his New Federalism (Katz 2014). Nixon's New Federalism sought to return authority to states and localities and money formerly used for national social programs was handed to states in block grants general revenue sharing, to decentralize while also improving intergovernmental communication (Walker 53). As a direct reaction to the centralized, pro-categorical and middle management programs of the Johnson era, Nixon's New Federalism wanted to bring discretion back to the state level (Walker 54). He stressed that his New Federalism proposals would offer "more money with less interference" to states and local governments and would act "not as a way of avoiding problems, but as a better way of solving problems" (Katz 2014).

Nixon's main support came from the rise of the "New Right," which was a combination of Christian religious leaders, and conservative business moguls who claimed that environmental and labor regulations were undermining the competitiveness of American firms in the global market. The group agreed that, after the progressive liberal programs of the 1960s, Americans were facing a moral decline. Some members of the New Right identified as ultra-libertarian groups who attacked the American government for being far too invasive (Anon. "U.S. History").

Coupled with the "New Right's" suspicion of all government programs, the success of the block grants was minimal in addressing the needs of the poor. State welfare programs operated inefficiently in inaccessible offices, offered scarce information on recipient eligibility, and created difficult certification requirements (Day 353). Although most programs under Nixon experienced huge cutbacks, he did expand funding for the Food Stamp Program, raising expenditures from $550 million in 1970 to $4.4 billion in 1975, a sevenfold increase, which more than doubled again by 1980 (Day 345).

Heated debate over the Food Stamp Program ensued in 1977, and marked a year of party separation in ideas for the program's future. Republicans proposed a bill to Congress which stressed targeting benefits to the neediest, simplifying administration, and tightening controls on the program. Contrastingly, the Democrats proposed a bill that focused on increasing access to those most in need, and simplifying and streamlining a complicated and cumbersome process which delayed benefit delivery to reduce errors and curb abuse. Although these two sides proposed seemingly different legislations, there was a commonality among both to eliminate the purchase requirement, and this was enacted in the Food Stamp Act of 1977. This referendum would also increase federal support for the implementation of the program at the state level, while restricting access to benefits for college students (USDA "A Short History of SNAP"). This expansion of food assistance in the 1970s would be the last, widely supported expansion of welfare into the foreseeable future (Axin 290).

President Reagan fed off the rising popularity of the "New Right" movement and used the early years of his presidency to legally shift power of social welfare from the government to the states, from the public sector to voluntary organizations, and from open-ended entitlements aid to time-limited block grants (Axin 278). He attacked the welfare state for treating people as groups and not individuals, so his solution was a return to individualism and a more laissez-faire society (O'Connor 56). His economic proposals began the shift from Keynesian to trickle-down, supply-side economics (O'Connor 111). The central theme for supply-siders is the promotion of the free market as a more just arbiter than the government; thus, the beginning of a neoliberal welfare reform (O'Connor 119).

Neoliberalism is defined by its policies, which include privatization, deregulation, austerity, attacks on unions, tax cuts for the rich, and trade treaties. Neoliberal reforms prioritize market mechanisms and introduce performance indicators, budget controls, and purchaser-provider arrangements as means of incentivizing efficiency in the public sector (Garland 87). Reagan's neoliberal programs began with the call for small government, as he believed "the most important cause of our economic problems had been the government itself" (Albo 2001). His call to restore faith in market capitalism as a provider for the industrious helped him gain support for cuts in welfare expenditures by disguising them as part of a wider plan to boost growth, prosperity, and family values—all three factors extremely important to the New Right (O'Connor 122). From the 1980s onwards the US abandoned its goal of full employment and commitment to the Keynesian demand management in favor of first "monetarism" to provide inflation control and sound money, and then "supply-side" policies, which would reawaken the business sector by cutting social spending and taxation (Garland 103).

New Federalism continued under Reagan, and his block grants created competition among welfare agencies for scarcer resources, which forced them to fight for their existence rather than serving clients (Day 379). Reagan's two pillars of New Federalism included: reprivatization of services for the poor by private charities and churches; and the assumption by states governments of Aid to Dependent (AFDC), Supplemental Security Income, and food stamps, leaving the federal government to only be responsible for Medicaid. While these goals were not ratified by Congress, the recommendations still resulted in massive cutbacks to these welfare programs (Day 376).

During the first three years of his reign, all social programs lost an average of 7% of funding, but cutbacks to child nutrition reached 29%, and food stamps and AFDC got cut by 13% (Day 378). Experts claimed that the cutbacks to the AFDC, which provided more food on a regular basis than poor people could obtain otherwise, "threw millions into hunger" (Day 389).

The large and expansive Food Stamp Program came under scrutiny of both the Executive Branch and Congress in the early 1980s, and legislation passed in 1981 and 1982 issued many cutbacks (USDA "A Short History of SNAP"). The "New Right" coalition of the 1980's and 1990's called for abolition of the welfare state and a return to free markets, self-help, and private charity (Garland 99). The "New Right" fed on the moral decay of America by basing the "fall" on welfare's role in breaking down the traditional family system, and they used this argument to dissuade people from supporting the liberal welfare system (O'Connor 121). During this time, public opinion became accepting of government intervention to aid those with lifelong service to the workforce, but attitudes toward expanding governmental role in direct relief for the nonworking poor remained unchanged (Axin 234). Conservatives felt that the liberal nature of the American welfare system resulted in giving too much money to the poor while demanding too little from them in return; it became a system that lacked the necessary mutual obligations (O'Connor 120).

Recognition of the severe domestic hunger problem in the late 1980s inspired incremental improvements in the food stamp program in 1985 and 1987. The Hunger Prevention Act of 1988 and the Mickey Leland Memorial Domestic Hunger Relief Act in

1990 together created many gargantuan changes, such as establishing severe penalties for violations by individuals and establishing Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) as an issuance alternative. EBT would allow recipients to authorize the transfer of their governmental benefits from a Federal account to a retailer account, much like a debit card, to pay for products received. This milestone change would take full effect by the beginning of the 21st century, and would help increase participation to new heights (USDA "A Short History of SNAP").

In the late 1980s, President Bush Senior began campaigning for an increased appreciation and larger role of citizens serving their fellow citizens. In his inaugural address, he invoked his vision of "thousand points of light," and in 1990 he established the Daily Point of Light Award for individuals making a different (pointsoflight.org). His focus on individual servitude to address the plight of poor neighbors attempted to replace the role of the federal government in caring for the poor. Like Presidents Nixon and Reagan, President Bush Senior opposed the War on Poverty programs and vowed to replace federal welfare spending with the work of volunteers, especially in places of worship, an emphasis which was embraced by those of the "New Right."

Political leaders, especially Presidents Nixon, Reagan, and Bush, emphasized the unpopular aspects of welfare, such as social assistance for the poor instead of the broadly-supported middle-class centered programs like Social Security (Garland 99). The various attacks on public assistance programs in the 1970s showcased a transformation in the public belief of a worthy poor, to one of the unworthy, unpopular, young and able-bodied unemployed poor, who became welfare program abusers (Axin 244). The behaviorist approach to welfare has been a hallmark of the conservative welfare outlook since it focuses on individual motivation and on the failings of individuals on welfare (O'Connor 133). By altering focus, Nixon, Reagan, and Bush created a "welfare state 2.0" which was rooted in neoliberalism, and operated by deregulating the style of economic government and conducted a market-oriented reworking of social policy, and brought a death to the welfare state created by Roosevelt just half a century earlier (Garland 99). In just a few decades, neoliberal welfare reforms undid the "equalizing, democratizing effects that the New Deal had" and killed the welfare state in the US (Garland 111).

Birth of the Workfare State

For most of the post-WW2 period in the US, there was a fierce divide in the welfare debate. Discussions surrounding the question of self-sufficiency versus assistance to those in need were occurring across party lines ("Welfare-A Brief History). Liberals opposed work requirements, stating that it was unfair to require welfare-receiving mothers to work if the same expectation was not placed on non-welfare mothers (Handler 25). Conservatives felt the opposite, blaming welfare mothers for their moral shortcomings compared to mothers who were man-dependent or self-sufficient (Handler 25). This sharp divide in the opinions of how or whether to implement work requirements began to dissolve in the late 1980s when both sides of the debate came to agree that the federal Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) had turned welfare into a way of life rather than just short-term assistance ("Welfare-A Brief History). This increasingly held widespread belief had the liberals jumping ship and beginning to agree with Conservatives that recipients of AFDC should be expected to work (Handler 25).

This bipartisan agreement was fulfilled with the passing of the Family Support Act in 1988 which was designed to strengthen work requirements (Handler 25). The Family Support Act would allow states to implement a variety of strategies for reducing welfare rolls, as it granted states “waivers” to experiment with time limits, work requirements, family caps, and a host of other devices (Poppendieck “Sweet Charity” 68). This act would eventually influence the nationwide-adoption of “welfare-to-work” programs, which demanded that all states implement education, job training, and job placement programs for welfare recipients (“Welfare-A Brief History).

Majority of Americans were against the welfare state because they thought that majority of recipients were becoming system abusers, yet statistics dispute these beliefs. In the 1990s, the clear majority of people who collected welfare only remained enrolled for two years, while a small minority collected welfare for eight years. Notwithstanding these statistics, the belief in the rise of a permanent welfare-dependent population heavily influenced the welfare debate, and during the 1990s it was centered around the issue of costs for the states, which had seen a much higher percentage of their budget going to welfare rolls that the federal government was (Axin 298).

In 1992, federal costs for food stamps was $22.5 billion, and in 1993 the average monthly participation was at an all-time high of about 27 million people, which was more than 10% of the entire population of the US (Day 421). At the same time of rising public assistance expenditure, the national wealth and economy was blossoming. As most of the population benefitted from the growing economic market, they became increasingly in favor of decreasing spending of public assistance, especially with the belief that this would increase the available money to the national wealth pool and thus their pockets. This juxtaposition suggested a paralleled disdain for redistributive policies and the declining priority of addressing economic deprivation (Epstein 165).

To provide solutions to these new side-dividing issues, both sides of the welfare debate agreed that stronger work requirements and time limits would potentially solve the rising cost and participation, along with giving states more discretion in creating welfare policy (Axin 327-328). The main platform to come out of this seemingly bipartisan appeal was a reform that would restrict federal aid public assistance programs in attempt to end entitlement to aid, require the recipients to seek work, and set a five-year time limit on the receipt of aid (Axin 287).

President Clinton fed from this bipartisan conservative rise of welfare reform ideals of the mid-1990s to lead to a fundamental restricting of public assistance in 1996 with his creation of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA). His welfare reform would act as a departure from previous Democratic presidents, as his willingness to agree to more conservative policies was more fluid than his advisers were in support of (O'Connor 200). The PRWORA would theoretically end welfare as we knew it to birth a workfare state, as it reflected widespread displeasure with the enormous increases in the number of public assistance recipients (Axin 285, Epstein 165).

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA)

On August 22, 1996, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) was signed and enacted by President Bill Clinton. His vow to "change welfare as we know it" would work to dramatically reshape the cash and food welfare programs to help lower federal welfare expenditures (Burke 2003). Clinton's legislation stated starkly that welfare would no longer be an entitlement (Handler 25). The right to welfare disappeared and was replaced with the obligation to demonstrate personal responsibility and economic self-sufficiency. The end of welfare entitlement would mean an elimination of a legislated right based on national principles, and the disappearance of a guaranteed minimal reward with purposely limited public charity. In most instances, welfare became available only to those who worked (Epstein 166).

This welfare reform was designed with intentions of moving adults "quickly and permanently into the workforce, promoting family stability, and allocating greater flexibility to states in designing public-assistance programs" (Anon. 2002). The major goal of American welfare reform was to get families off welfare rolls and back into the paid labor market (Handler 20). Clinton claimed that it was time to reward the people who had "worked hard and played by the rules, and it was his goal to "make work pay" by making work more attractive, and, conversely, to make life on welfare temporary (O'Connor 198).

PRWORA emphasized not only welfare reform, but also recipient reform, as Congress capped spending, set up even harsher work requirements, and block-granted programs to defederalize them (Day 423). Coupled with the elimination of entitlement status of welfare benefits, states would no longer be obligated to expand programs in times of greatest need (Gunderson, LeBlanc, & Kuhn 1999). PRWORA would also create strictly enforced work requirements by using threats of sanctions and time limits, one being a cap to cash assistance to two consecutive years with a five-year lifetime limit. Clinton's reform would require states to move an increasing percentage of welfare recipients into the workforce over the next six years, starting with 25% of able-adults in 1997 to 50% able-bodied welfare receivers by 2002 (Handler 26).

Clinton's reform expanded the already considerably large state authority in welfare by replacing grant-in-aid funding with block grants to the states (Handler 25). A block grant can be defined as "a program by which funds are provided chiefly to general purpose governmental units in accordance with a statutory formula for use in a broad functional area, largely at the recipient's discretion." The idea behind transitioning to block grants was to promote state government flexibility and autonomy in delivering social services with federal funding (Waller 2). By returning public assistance funds to the states through block grants, Clinton's administration was clear in demonstrating that the government had no obligation to continue assistance after the money disappeared (Epstein 166).

Block grants to states came with a wide amount of freedom, as states were free to design how to provide the assistance (Gunderson, LeBlanc, & Kuhn 1999). Increase state freedom in using federal funds was coupled with lowered administrative requirements than previous federal funding ensued. Supporters of block grants believe the revamped funding method provided states and local governments with additional flexibility to meet unique needs (Dilger & Boyd 11). Yet research has found that many block grants are generally ineffective in achieving policy goals, overtime the real value of block grant funding gradually declines, and state flexibility erodes as Congress responds to patterns of state implementation (Reich et. al. 2017; Finegold, Wherry, & Schardin 4). As we would see with the block grant structure that was created by PRWORA, services offered for the nation's poor, unemployed, and most dependent population would be adversely affected. Specifically, replacing food stamps with block grants would eliminate an important means-tested entitlement program (Finegold, Wherry, Schardin 6).

The Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) was established under the Social Security Act of 1935 (Gordon & Batlan). It was established as a grant program to enable states' ability to provide cash welfare payments for needy children who had been deprived of parental support for a myriad of reasons (Anonymous 2009 "Aid to Families"). For the first three decades of its existence, AFDC operated much like a private charity as the federal government gave majority of the power to caseworkers in investigating recipients and cutting off those who they determined to be unsuitable or in violation of any of the program's regulations (Gordon & Baltan). As the federal government began to disappear from the forefront of AFDC, more power was written to the states: they could define "need" and set area-unique benefit levels. Despite this autonomy, all states were required to provide aid to any applicants who were eligible for aid under federal law (Anonymous 2009 "Aid to Families").

Under AFDC, food assistance programs were not considered "welfare" programs, rather they were viewed as nutrition programs. These programs were designed to support low-income families in affording a better diet (Anonymous 1998 “Aid to Families” 8). All families enrolled in AFDC benefits were qualified to receive food stamps unless they lived under a larger household. To determine the amount of benefits of food stamps under AFDC, the Food Stamp Program was treated as countable cash income. This meant that when AFDC payments declined, food stamps were increased by about thirty cents per decreased AFDC dollar (Anonymous 1998 “Aid to Families” 9).

The PRWORA would replace the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training (JOBS), and Emergency Assistance (EA) with the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) (Anon. 2002). TANF and the rest of PRWORA did not simply reform AFDC, it eliminated a legislated right based on universal principles, and replaced a guaranteed minimum of aid with a severely fund-limited private charity. The most historical shifts from AFDC to TANF were federal time limits of five years, and the elimination of open-ended funding through the introduction of block-grants. These two changes highlighted the transformation in the federal government attitude toward welfare in that it was no longer obligated to continue assistance after the money in the block grant ran out (Epstein 166).

TANF’s requirements and policy structure would completely transform the United States’ welfare system, with especial impact on the food aid welfare component (Gundersen, LeBlanc, and Kuhn 1999). TANF programs sought to lower public dependence on welfare, and in most cases, federal assistance became available only for those who worked, usually those who had been partnered with a caseworker to craft a plan for “independence” (Epstein 166). The block grants under TANF would offer states open flexibility in providing social assistance dependent on them imposing work requirements and strict time limits (Anonymous "Welfare-A Brief History"). While the idea of work requirements was in no means revolutionary to welfare reform in the US, under TANF the differences emerged in the program's significant ideological and policy-centered commitment to employment enforced by recipient time-limits (Handler 26).

Although public assistance had never been generous to the poor throughout the US's history, the reforms to TANF allowed it to become actively abusive by reducing dependent Americans to true subsistence levels, and subjecting them to childlike supervision (Epstein 167). TANF gave states new authority to discourage families from applying for welfare and to raise barriers to their receiving benefits (Axin 328).

The reauthorization of the Food Stamp Program occurred in the 1996 Farm Bill, although many changes were brought about by PRWORA and TANF. (USDA 2017). The 104th Congress eliminated the Food Stamp Program at the national level, and instead merged it into public assistance block grants, and the funding cap was met by reducing the budget (Day 426). Under the TANF, eligibility for food stamps became more restrictive, thus resulting in a significant participation dropout (Anon. 2002). These changes caused participation to decline throughout the late 1990s (USDA 2017).

TANF block grants cut more funds from the food stamp program than any other welfare program, and most of the cuts supported reductions in household benefits and restrictions in eligibility for able-bodied adults (Gundersen, LeBlanc, and Kuhn 1999). Clinton's introduction of TANF would transform the Food Stamp Program to only provide coverage for five days of food each week; this change was based purely in the rationale behind American self-sufficiency (Epstein 167). Experts estimated that a reduction in food stamp benefits would cause low-income families to decrease spending on food and other goods necessary for a stable, healthy life, showing that the effects in cuts to the food stamp program would ripple through the economy (Gunderson, LeBlanc, & Kuhn 1999).

Impacts of Workfare

Despite its seemingly revolutionary reform, the official birth of workfare in the US was a long time coming. Workfare would make it easier to continue blaming the victim rather than addressing the structural issues that were causing poverty in the first place (Handler 27). Workfare reform in the US would introduce a dramatically expanded range of circumstances in which a family could have its welfare benefits reduced or canceled. While federal law mandated at least a partial benefit reduction for families who failed to meet work requirements, states were left with the option to impose more stringent penalties, and most states chose to implement strict sanctions. Sanctions and time-limits have become commonplace in most state Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) programs, which can affect food stamp benefits for the entire family (Handler 46). Sanctions on TANF programs are stated by the federal law which restricts using TANF money for assistance for ongoing basic needs longer than sixty months (Handler 47).

Because the PRWORA eliminated the entitlement status of welfare benefits, states were no longer obligated to expand welfare programs in times of greatest need (Gundersen, LeBlanc, and Kuhn 1999). President Clinton's campaign slogan to "make work pay" had been proved insufficient, as the number of Americans whose work did not pay enough to bring them out of poverty increased during his administration (Axin 318). Although there were declines in the average AFDC caseloads, the wide variations of declines across states suggested that they were not the result of an overall improvement of the economic status of the poor, but rather caused by the state's increased ability to use welfare rules to push poor families off the rolls or discourage them from entering (Axin 301). Data showed that despite TANF's goal of permanently moving welfare recipients into the workforce, the changes in the caseloads were brought about by factors other than work requirement policies. Instead, it has been found that the greatest reason for the decline in caseloads was per economic expansion in the 1990s, rather than the supposed success of welfare reform (Gleason et. al. 2001).

On the state level, the result from having to start "work first" policies and adding sanctions has been an enormous increase in the complexity of implementing welfare. In most states, the process of enrolling a participant requires a case manager to make many separate contacts with recipients over a long period of time to ensure work requirements are being met. Also, a variety of services are required by case managers, which can include separate individual agencies, private and public, complicated processing systems, and a non-user friendly tracking and information system (Handler 48). This complicated system inhibits case managers' ability to track and record a recipient's success in proceeding into the paid labor force, putting majority of responsibility in finding employment in the hands of the individual instead of being aided by a welfare office.

Workfare's encouragement to keep doors of welfare agencies closed and instead send applicants into the job market prohibits families from receiving the necessary information on what is available to the working poor (Handler 49). The main message behind welfare sanctions has become that recipients must participate in work to continue receiving benefits (Handler 50). The success of sanctions in promoting compliance to welfare policies is inconclusive, as even if sanctions can influence the behavior of many TANF recipients, there is an equal parallel of recipients who are seemingly not fazed by the looming threat of sanctions on their eligibility for welfare (Handler 55).

As state and local administrations worked to push poor families off welfare, PWRORA allowed opportunities for religious congregations to fill the gap. These efforts were spearheaded by governments in support of rising research showing the benefits and importance of churches in aiding the poor and to actively help in reducing poverty (Axin 303). This shift to private religious philanthropy was continued under the Bush administration under his call for “compassionate conservatism” in expanding the role of religious institutions in providing social services (Axin 304). On top of the rising role of private institutions in providing poor assistance, President Bush also worked for greater workforce participation, calling for an increase by 5% per year until 70% of welfare recipients in the workforce and off welfare by 2007, and he would also enforce a required forty-hour work week for every welfare recipient (Handler 27).

Through TANF, the federal government would provide a block grant to the states, which can use the funds to operate their own programs that address any four goals of the PRWORA: providing assistance to needy families so that children can be cared for in their own homes; ending the dependency of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage; preventing and reducing pregnancy outside of marriage; or encouraging the formation and maintenance of two-parent families. Since these requirements are super broad, states can use TANF funds more broadly than the original core of welfare reform areas of providing a safety net and connecting families to work. In attempt to cap state freedom in deciding eligibility, they are still required by federal law to implement time limits, immigrant eligibility, and work requirements (Anon. 2015 "Policy").

The basic block grant to TANF has been set at $16.5 billion each year since 1996, and because of inflation its real value as fallen by about one-third. TANF has greatly weakened the safety net and does far less than AFDC did to alleviate poverty and hardship, and despite a caseload decline of over 60% in the last 18 years, poverty and deep poverty have worsened, as most families did not leave the program because they found work, but because of time limits or sanctions for failing to comply with the program's requirements (Anon. 2015 "Policy).

The PRWORA gave states more control over food stamp operations which, with coordination of cash aid, would add work rules for adults without dependents and expanded existing work requirements, cut future benefits, place greater limits of eligibility, and increased penalties for violating rules (Burke 2003). Under these new changes, which were introduced in the reauthorization of the Food Stamp Program under the 1996 Farm Bill, able-bodied adults without dependents could only receive food stamps for 3 out of 36 months unless they were working at least 20 hours a week, or participating in a work training program (USDA "A Short History of SNAP"; Landers

1947).

After the changes to the food stamp program under PRWORA, participation declined seemingly more rapidly than was expected based on falling unemployment. Entering the 21st century, program access and simplification of program rules become the focus of proposed legislations and reforms to the Food Stamp Program (USDA “A Short History of SNAP”). By May 2002, the Food Security and Rural Investment Act was enacted and brought a reauthorization of the Food Stamp Program with many major changes with an amendment to the Farm Bill under the Department of Agriculture.

This amendment would increase spending for the Food Stamp Program by $5.7-$5.9 billion over the next ten years, and it would also attempt to return the Food Stamp Program to an entitlement program. This would contradict the prior desire of PRWORA reforms to relinquish concerns of eligibility in states’ policy control (Burke 2003). But by re-federalizing the Food Stamp Program, experts expected to see an improvement in payment accuracy to occur because of the strong partnerships with States administering the program (USDA “A Short History of SNAP”).

In the end of 2002, funding for both the Food Stamp Program and TANF were expiring, and after several short-term extensions, Congress reauthorized TANF funding in 2005 for another five years (Anon. 2015 “Policy Basics”). Following a decline of caseloads in the early 21st century, by August 2008 participation in the Food Stamp Program reached an all-time high. To match the increase participation, the 2008 Farm Bill would increase the commitment to Federal food assistance programs by more than $10 billion over the next 10 years. This 2008 Farm Bill would change the name of the

Food Stamp Act of 1977 to the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 in efforts to fight the rising stigma of welfare abusers.

Under this new name, states still maintained flexibility but were encouraged to change the name of their program to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP (USDA "A Short History of SNAP"). The primary purpose of SNAP is to support low-income households to obtain adequate and nutritious diets through providing electronic debit cards that can be redeemed for food with few restrictions (Yen, Bruce, & Jahns 2012:1). Working with the Department of Health Services, and influenced by the goals of PRWORA, the focus of SNAP is to both alleviate hunger and help establish or reestablish self-sufficiency (Anon. "Supplemental Nutrition").

Since its name change, SNAP and the nutrition title has been the largest of the 12 titles covered in the Farm Bill; SNAP accounts for 95% of all spending in the Farm Bill. Because SNAP is so central in reducing poverty and mitigating food insecurity in the US, it has historically received backing from both political parties, but the 2014 Farm Bill was a departure from this track record.

The version passed in the House by Republicans called for a cut in spending for SNAP by $40 billion, and it planned to impose mandatory drug testing on recipients, and would require all adults from 18-50 to work or enroll in work-training programs before they could receive benefits ("SNAP in the Farm Bill"). Changes this drastic could pose a serious risk because SNAP is regarded as one of the most important safety net programs in place to soften the impact of any economic recession, and to also help generate economic activity. Fortunately, in 2014 less severe cuts were made and the SNAP budget only lost $8 million in funding. The original proposed cuts highlighted the shortcomings of having SNAP included in the Farm Bill, as often policies become influenced by the interests of other organizations focused on the farm bill ("SNAP in the Farm Bill").

Overall, TANF would become the individualized state-level reactions to the neoliberal welfare revolution spearheaded by President Clinton's Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act; a case study of TANF and welfare reform policies in Tennessee is to follow.

The Neoliberal Trickledown to Tennessee

Following the federal government's implementation of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), in the same year of the passage of the PRWORA, Tennessee enacted its state-welfare program called Families First in 1996. Like the federal goals behind TANF, Families First is a workforce development and employment program, structured through temporary participation with a primary goal of gaining self-sufficiency through employment (Anon. "Families First"). Tennessee's idea behind Families First was to develop a welfare reform plan that would emphasize "cutting unemployment among welfare recipients by promoting responsibility, self-sufficiency, and parenthood" (Rudolph and O'Hara 2002). In 2001, five years after the implementation of Families First, Tennessee's work requirement policies and encouraging work polices were both ranked as high intensity, and time limit policies were defined as medium intensity. The state's work requirements included immediate participation in the workforce with more than 20 hours per week, a required job search, and the risk of full lifetime sanction for a failure to comply, and combined with work encouragement and time limit policies, the state saw a larger number of food stamp recipients with earnings (Gleason et. al 2001).

Aside from aiming to get participants into the workforce, Families First also supplies qualified participants with cash handouts in the form of EBT cards to ease the burden of purchasing goods to support a family (Anon. “Families First). Despite what began as states filling in the shortcomings of federal programs, Tennessee’s Families First has its own shortcomings as well, especially in the realm of providing accessible food for its participants. Faith-based organizations have continuously contributed to every county in Tennessee to provide the essentials that the state government does not, such as child-care centers, second-hand clothing stores, homeless shelters, emergency relief, family counseling and support, and food pantries (Rudolph and O’Hara 2002).

A survey of welfare leavers in Tennessee from 2002 highlighted how lowering numbers of Families First participants is not necessarily equating a higher number of successes; moving off welfare does not always lead a family to self-sufficiency. The increased focus of employment following the influence of the 1996 welfare reform has unfortunately fallen short of its promise in that many families who leave Tennessee’s welfare program compile an income too high to receive welfare benefits, but too low to make ends meet, thus transforming from a welfare receiver to a member of the working poor (Perkins 1). Specifically, for Families First leavers in Tennessee, the survey found that almost one-quarter of all leavers’ food security worsened after leaving the welfare program (Perkins 33). Even though Families First leavers are still often eligible to continue to receive food stamps, over one-half of these leavers admitted that occasionally their food does not last the entire month and they find themselves without the needed money to purchase more. Furthermore, one-third of food stamp receivers who left Families First found themselves having to skip meals because there was not enough food (Perkins 34).

SNAP has historically been a counter-cyclical program, meaning that as an entitlement program, enrollment and program expenditures are expected to increase during economic downturns (Melton 1). During the recession of 2008-2009, SNAP would see a temporary 15% increase in benefits until 2013. Tennessee's state-level administering of SNAP would also making it easier for residents to qualify for SNAP during the economic downturn. Under a federal provision, Tennessee waived work requirements to ensure that residents would not have to juggle a failing economy with required work to receive benefits. The state even expanded the waivers three years longer than the federal limit, but this would come to an end in 2018 (Wadhwani 2017).

In September 2017, Governor Haslam explained that after three months of falling unemployment rates, the easement of work requirements for SNAP back in 2008 to combat high unemployment and limited job opportunities would no longer be necessary for Tennessee. These new work requirements will mandate able-bodied adults to work at least 20 hours per week, participate in a volunteer program, or be enrolled in a qualified education program to receive SNAP benefits. Although 36,000 people are currently meeting these standards, these new requirements are expected to impact 58,000 of the approximately 1 million Tennesseans currently receiving SNAP (Wadhwani 2017).

Even though Governor Haslam claimed an economic recovery in Tennessee, it has been an uneven one. While some counties no longer qualify for the waivers, there remain 95 counties which have not experienced a full recovery, and would therefore still qualify for a federal waiver. Despite this reality, the Governor's administration chose to use more stringent requirements than required by federal law by only seeking waivers for 16 counties. While Governor Haslam is putting a lot of attention to the record unemployment in Tennessee, he is ignoring the very real struggles faced by many Tennesseans (Tennessee Justice Center 2017).

Data from the Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development shows that there are more unemployed workers than available jobs in the 64 counties where the time limits will soon take effect (Tennessee Justice Center 2017). This means that Governor Haslam's reinstatement of work requirements for SNAP will negatively impact the state's most vulnerable, dependent population—in 2015, almost 20% of Tennessee households received SNAP, with an average of $254 in benefits a month, which amounts of 39% of the maximum benefit amount (Melton 4). Many SNAP recipients in Tennessee who comply or make good-faith efforts to comply with current requirements will be subjected to additional burdens on their workforce participation, and thousands will be terminated from the program. This is especially damaging because it is hard to work or find work when you are malnourished (Tennessee Justice Center 2017). Governor Haslam's plans to pursue fraud, waste, and abuse among individuals receiving public assistance is beginning with his attack on food stamp debit cards as a central focus will fail to support the notion of moving off welfare to self-sufficiency (Wadhwani 2017). Rather, his implications for work requirements inspired by TANF protocol will bring new hardships, more hunger, and less independence to Tennessee's most vulnerable population who are dependent on SNAP to combat their situations of food insecurity.

In Knoxville, Tennessee alone there are at least 20 food deserts, or neighborhoods without ready access to fresh, healthy, affordable food (Alapo 1). These food deserts are disproportionately located in Knoxville's low-income census tracts. Inaccessibility to fresh fruits and vegetables is caused by more than one's income or socioeconomic status. To address these issues, The Knoxville-Knox County Food Policy Council was created in 2002 with goals of finding innovative solutions that will promote sustainability, economic development, and social justice within the local food system (Alapo 4). In 2011, The Knoxville-Knox County Food Policy Council saw the potentiality of community gardens to help feed hungry residents, and captured this power in their "Knoxville Area Guide to Community Gardening" brochure (Knox County Health Department 2011). The council hoped to provide eager residents with the necessary checklist to develop, grow, and maintain sustainable gardens in their communities.

Then in 2013, Knoxville Mayor Madeline Rogero furthered the community garden vision when she became a finalist for the Mayor's Challenge Grant. Her proposed project was to fund the creation of an Urban Food Corridor by converting vacant, city-owned lots into community gardens to help address food access diversity in some of the city's disinvested areas (Rogero 2013). One of Knoxville's most successful community gardens is Beardsley Community Farm, which is in the heart of one of Knoxville's economically-poorest neighborhoods. Beardsley Community Farm produces over 10,000 tons of fresh produce each year which is then donated to many local Knoxville soup kitchens and food pantries ("Food Security in Knoxville").

Where federal food access assistance programs fail to feed the poor and hungry, and community gardens cannot close the healthy food access gap in Knoxville's poorest neighborhoods, a program funded by AARP has been introduced as a hopeful solution. AARP Foundation's Fresh Savings Program is a healthy-food incentive program that has been funded by a grant from the USDA. The program operates by encouraging SNAP recipients to spend up to $20 at participating farmers' markets and produce retailers by buying fresh fruits and vegetables with their SNAP card because they will receive the equivalent amount in "Fresh Savings" tokens. SNAP shoppers can use these tokens on fresh fruits and vegetables at future visits, or on the same trip (Gooden 2017). In Knoxville, the Fresh Savings Program has been implemented at two local farmers' markets, in Market Square and at New Harvest Park, and at the Three Rivers Market Co-Op. Participants are hopeful that the Fresh Savings program will stretch their SNAP dollars twice as far, and the specific requirement of buying fresh fruits and vegetables will hopefully close the gap that many welfare receivers face in access fresh, affordable, healthy foods.

Discussion and Reflections

Welfare reforms in the United States are centralized among the political and economic climate. In times of economic prosperity, poverty becomes blatant and unignorable, and liberal political leaders and governments are more inclined to offer a helping hand. And in times of economic trouble, conservative leaders are more interested in saving the budget rather than investing in improvements for the most economically vulnerable. And no matter the economic situation on a national or local level, the poor are continuously blamed for their situation.

Welfare states were created as an answer to modernization and industrialization. Their goal was to create economically equal and sustainable development across all socioeconomic groups, and to ensure that the social and economic experiences of everyone were well-kept and tended to. Yet, as we are well into the 21st century, it appears that the new role of our welfare state is one of social control and to maintain order. When the poor leave welfare programs it is more often because of time limits or failures to meet requirements, not because they have brought themselves out of poverty.

The welfare state in America has been stuck in a neoliberal state since the 1970s, and the emphasis on workfare is still central to its operations. Almost a decade after the worst economic crisis to hit the US in modern times, federal and state governments alike are moving to end widespread, accessible entitlement to welfare assistance in favor of reinstating stringent work requirements. This continued focus on workforce development leaves the structural issues of poverty and food access inequalities unaddressed. The current workfare state in the US claims that poverty is a deficiency of the individual, instead of the social problem that it truly is.

In Tennessee, the impacts of the most recent welfare reform by President Clinton's Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) were detrimental to equitable food access. SNAP now leaves a huge gap among need and benefits received, especially since as income increases, welfare benefits decrease at a quicker, unproportioned rate. Almost 20% of Tennessee's population participants in Families First and SNAP. For the fiscal year of 2017-2018, Tennessee expects to need almost $2 billion to support the demand of the state's SNAP participants, yet a family of four can expect to receive under $300 a month of SNAP benefits. The Fresh Savings program that has begun in a few locations in Knoxville highlights not only how SNAP benefits fail to last the entire month, but how the program also fails to reach its goals to make equitable healthy food access a reality.

The drive and desire for work requirements to receive welfare are still alive and current in Tennessee. Sanctions and punishments for failure to meet these requirements are becoming stricter, yet those who choose or are forced to leave are immediately at higher risk for food insecurity and going hungry. For a welfare state that was supposedly created to address access adversity, the realities of food access for low-income people in Tennessee is far from equitable.

The current state of federal and state level food assistance programs demand the poor to be self-sufficient, yet allow huge gaps in need versus aid to develop. The gaps are trying to be filled by emergency food centers and community gardens, yet the structural complications of unequal food access persist. The current structure of the welfare state in the US fails to reach its purpose of sustaining and supporting the most vulnerable populations. And when it comes to food access and well-rounded diets, our welfare food provision falls vastly short of its intended purpose to rid our nation of hunger.

The major issue among food access programs and welfare policies are that, even at a statewide level, local unique issues and concerns to food access go unaddressed. The federal government believed that a transfer of welfare responsibility to the states would do a better job of addressing the unique circumstances in each area. Yet, as we can see through Governor Haslam's emphasis on economic recovery while ignoring the plight of small, rural communities, this transfer of power has been detrimental to the most vulnerable Americans, especially among food access.

To combat the individualized situations of each region in America, specifically in city districts and poorer neighborhoods, I see the responsibility and ability to feed the poorest citizens being entrusted to local organizations instead of widespread welfare policy reform. As the US becomes more entrenched in capitalist modes of economic prosperity, the desire for work requirements will only become larger, and will push millions of needy Americans out of the welfare program. I believe that if the federal government is unwilling to fund increased budgets for state-specific TANF programs, then there needs to be a requirement for governments to financially support local food pantries and community gardens. Although emergency food programs are not the longstanding answer to inequitable food access in the poorest neighborhoods, I believe the change they can create on a short-term scale is more useful than the long, drawn out process of policy reform.

While I was limited in my data analysis of raw statistics of Tennesseans on welfare, and could only locate a few sociological studies on food access in Tennessee, I think the national trend of SNAP failing to solve the food access issue are easily observable in Tennessee. More research needs to be performed in Tennessee among the basis of the shortcomings of SNAP and possible solutions to fill the gap that is left behind. Many of these themes are researched in larger cities and in more liberal-leaning states, but there is a lack of research performed in conservative leaning states.

Overall, this historical analysis of welfare policies in the United States has shown that the poor are always blamed for their situation, and thus are responsible for causing their hunger and inabilities to access adequate food supplies. The debate on who the responsibility falls on to close this gap, whether federally mandated programs or private sector charities, remains at a constant tug. With the continued rise in conservative welfare reforms, and the starkest cuts to food access assistant programs, the gap between the stated purposes of welfare policies in feeding the hungry will continue to widen, and the realities the poorest and hungriest Americans face well into the 21st century will continue a path of inequality and inaccessibility.

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