Introduction

With the passage of the Great Society legislation in the 1960s, politicians’ attitude on poverty seemed to reflect a community centered view, that poverty was, “a breakdown of the community” (Guetzkow 191). In the decades that followed, politicians’ as well as the public’s attitude toward poverty began to shift from this community centered view to a more individualized idea, that poverty was a result of, “a breakdown of the family, which itself was the result of the generosity of the welfare system” (ibid). As a result of this shift, from the late 1980s through the 90s, welfare legislation began attempting to “change the behavior of families receiving government assistance” (Jost). Recently, with the election of President Obama, some changes and shifts in attitude have occurred most prominently, a shift back towards viewing poverty as a community centered problem (Small, et al.6).

The thesis will investigate the shifts in politicians’ and the public’s attitudes toward social welfare policy and an assertion will be made that social welfare policy is shaped primarily by these attitudinal shifts. It will be demonstrated that a community focused approach to poverty is the most effective and ethical means to alleviate poverty and the failures of the 1996 welfare legislation will be extensively scrutinized for its failure to properly address these issues. Additionally, the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act of 2009 will be accessed along with additional suggestions about how to stem the “Culture of Poverty.”

A brief history of welfare policy

The first major wave of social welfare policy in the United States came about during the Great Depression under the leadership of President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Due to the stock market crash of 1929, the number of, “unemployed or marginally employed people grew dramatically” (Cooper). From 1929 to 1933, the number of unemployed people had risen from eight million people to fifteen million people (Black). This alarming increase in the number of out-of-work individuals prompted the
government to push for the first major social welfare package known as the New Deal. Programs were developed during the 1930s in an attempt to stem the tide of the unemployed and the underemployed including, “employment-related programs, notably unemployment insurance and workers' compensation” (Cooper). The most important aspects of this legislation were the Social Security Act of 1935, the Housing Act of 1937, the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 which established a minimum wage, and Aid to Dependent Children [ADC] which was passed in 1935 and was amended in 1939 (ibid). The Social Security Act and ADC were radical developments in the field of welfare policy. The Social Security Act established a system of post-retirement benefits as well as benefits to those who could not work due to disabilities while ADC was passed in order to provide benefits to mothers who had to care for children, however, this was limited only to, “families in which the father was dead or disabled” (ibid). Other programs, such as the Works Progress Administration which was created by an executive order in 1935, provided work for unemployed Americans by putting them to work in a “wide variety of programs, including highways and building construction, slum clearance, reforestation, and rural rehabilitation” (WPA). With the establishment of a minimum wage, a federal post-retirement program, and federal assistance to disadvantaged families, a solid foundation for social welfare was developed in the United States; for the first time in the history of the United States there were programs enacted which assured some level of social assistance to struggling individuals.

Although many in the United States experienced a post-war economic boom during the 1950s, there was a serious minority of individuals in the rural south as well as in urban areas who were experiencing intense poverty (Cooper). All of this culminated in 1959 where the poverty rate in the United States peaked at 22.4% (Billitteri). President Kennedy began a push to eliminate poverty in the United States through new governmental initiatives and first changed ADC to Aid to Families with Dependent Children [AFDC], however, did not get a chance to do anything tangible before his assassination in 1963 (ibid). The new AFDC was primarily defined by a change in the policy which allowed families with a second parent who was, “incapacitated or unemployed,” were now eligible to receive assistance (Brief History AFDC).
Kennedy’s efforts were picked up by his successor, President Lyndon Johnson who announced his “war on poverty” and developed what is now known as the Great Society Legislation (Cooper).

As a part of the changes implemented during the Great Society, President Johnson created The Office of Economic Opportunity as part of the broader Economic Opportunity Act in the summer of 1964 in order to more thoroughly address the issues that mass poverty was causing by creating an office whose sole purpose is to investigate and solve issues associated with poverty (Cooper). That same year, the federal government established a permanent food stamp program and, with that, created an income threshold in order to easily label someone as impoverished (Billitteri). Additionally, congress enacted the Job Corps which sought to provide, “residential training for school drop-outs,” the Head Start program which offered, “preschool education for disadvantaged children,” and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 which provided, “special education programs for school-age children” (Cooper). Perhaps the most important piece of legislation enacted during the Great Society was Medicaid. This is a program that is still very prevalent today and was meant, at that time, to provide healthcare to low-income individuals (Billitteri). The last major program enacted during the Great Society was the Work Incentive Program which required, “states to establish job-training programs for adults receiving welfare” (ibid).

The programs enacted in the 1960s were significant steps forward in the development of social welfare policy and still proves to be a template for the current welfare system as programs such as Medicare and programs similar to Job Corp and Head Start are still used today.

During the 1970s there was very little governmental action on poverty as a large amount of time and energy was spent on other issues. With national distractions such as the Nixon Watergate scandal as well as a turbulent situation internationally, domestic issues such as welfare reform were temporarily set aside. In 1975, however, President Ford signed the Earned Income Tax Credit [EIC] into law which intended to, “offset rising payroll taxes and make work pay…it is a refundable tax credit [which the recipient would] receive a refund check for the amount of the credit” (Sklar et al. 15). Throughout the 1980s, under the guise of a cost-cutting necessity, large portions of AFDC were cut through various budgetary decisions in
Congress (Guetzkow 188). The only notable piece of legislation that actually changed the way social welfare policy was conducted during the Reagan Administration was the Family Support Act of 1988 which, “required states to increase the number of welfare recipients participating in job training programs, increased federal funding for those programs and added other liberalizing benefit provisions” (Jost). This was one of the first federal programs which fully endorsed welfare-to-work programs which would ultimately come to completely characterize welfare in the United States. Many of the leaders at the forefront of the movement to add specific work-to-welfare programs held that it was the only way to incentivize welfare recipients to no longer be impoverished; it promoted the belief that if an individual was working they would be less likely to engage in illegal activities and would be able to provide for their family because they were working, not subsisting on the welfare system. This type of attitude became the most prevalent argument in the discussion on social welfare policy which carried on through the 1980s into the 90s.

The major shift in social welfare policy occurred in 1996 with the passage of the Personal Responsibilities and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act [PRWORA] which held a provision in the law which took AFDC and replaced it with Temporary Assistance to Needy Families [TANF] (Guetzkow 174). This change is especially notable because it took an entitlement program that had been in effect for approximately sixty years and replaced it with a program, “that imposes work requirements and puts time limits on cash benefits” (Billitteri). One side effect that was not necessarily considered was how a sudden and dramatic change in the way in which welfare policy operated could negatively affect other welfare programs and the recipients of those welfare benefits. The scope of TANF is still being evaluated as the program is not even fifteen years old yet, but critics have been vocal in describing the insufficiencies of it. In addition to PRWORA and TANF, congress also raised the federal minimum wage in 1997 to $5.15 an hour and enacted the State Children’s Health Insurance Program [SCHIP] which was meant to provide subsidies in health insurance for single mothers (ibid).
In the past ten years, there have been few changes to social welfare policy in the United States, but the changes that have occurred have been notable. During the Presidency of George W. Bush, a great deal of time was spent focused on issues of national security, and as a result, a small amount of attention was put into issues of domestic politics, particularly welfare. Congress did, however, reauthorize TANF in 2006 as part of the Deficit Reduction Act despite the many criticisms about its effectiveness, most notably that it only allows for sixty months of coverage over a recipient's lifetime (Billitteri). Instead of developing a new welfare system, or at the very least significantly reforming TANF, Congress opted to reauthorize the program with stipulation only outlining additional work requirements which, “set difficult benchmarks for state programs” (ibid). This was an incomplete evaluation of the effectiveness of TANF and only furthered a program with many problems. Additionally, congress raised the federal minimum wage to its current level of $7.25 an hour in 2007 under the Bush Administration, an amount which is considerably below the living wage (Labor Law Center).

Perhaps an unintended result of the passage of PRWORA and TANF has been the increased discussion on the role of government in social welfare policy. This topic has been noticed by many academics, most notably sociologists and political scientists who put out a special issue of The Academy of Political and Social Science entitled The Annals. These scholars are investigating the changes in society’s view of social welfare policy while criticizing and evaluating the effectiveness of social welfare policy in the United States. Since the election of Barack Obama, there have been some changes in the approach to social welfare policy. This materialized with the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 which has added or increased many facets of welfare in the United States. The law increases the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program [SNAP] which was formerly known as Food Stamps by $20 billion, increased Neighborhood Stabilization Funds and Homelessness Prevention Funds by $2 billion and $1.5 billion respectively, increased job training funds through the Workforce Investment system by $3.95 billion, increased Unemployment Insurance $25 per week for recipients, Social Security Income $250 per payment, and provided additional tax credits for children and working families with the Make
Work Pay program (White House - Poverty). All of these programs were enacted during the president’s first year in office.

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act can best be seen as a knee-jerk reaction to the most recent economic downturn which is being labeled the ‘Great Recession’ because it was a bill that simply increased funding for many programs without evaluating their efficiency or creating new programs that would amend the problems of the old programs. The expanded governmental funding that is outlined in the law is conceivably the beginning of an attitudinal change toward social welfare policy. As one expert theorizes, “The Great Recession may eventually lead to a change in American public opinion and popular discourse on the casual attributions about poverty and joblessness” (Danziger 542). Conversely, it can be asserted that this change is already occurring even if the American public isn’t yet aware of it.

Attitudinal History of Poverty

In the past fifty years, one of the leading factors in changing social welfare policy has been the varying attitudes of politicians and the public. During the 1960s when welfare reform was developing into what many are familiar with today, one of the key influences on the policy makers was the extraordinary poverty of many individuals in rural and urban areas. At that time, poverty was framed as a problem within a community, and that problem would only be alleviated if everyone within the community would take interest in making a change, to reverse endemic problems within their communities (Moynihan 90).

One of the early influences that spurred the Kennedy Administration to react to the growing poverty problem in the US was Michael Harrington’s book The Other America in which he dramatized the “plight of the poor in urban ghettos and urban areas” (Jost). Because of this account, the Kennedy Administration began to develop anti-poverty programs; Kennedy, however, did not get the chance to pass any anti-poverty legislation before his assassination in November 1963 (ibid). Comprehensive reform was in the development as President Johnson declared an “unconditional war on poverty” during his first State of the Union address in January of 1964 (ibid). These efforts were headed by the Office of Economic
Opportunity whose purpose was to administer programs and policies that would help alleviate the situation of those living in poverty (*ibid*).

One of the major influences on the Great Society legislation was the Assistant Labor Secretary under Johnson, Daniel Patrick Moynihan who coined the phrase ‘The Culture of Poverty’ meant to describe the reasons individuals live in poverty as well as ways to end the ‘Culture’ (Cohen). Moynihan, in recalling a conversation with Frank Mankiewicz, noted that Mankiewicz described some of the programs, such as Job Corps, as a, “Community Action Organization which is developed and conducted with the maximum feasible participation of the residents of the areas” (Moynihan lviii). With that, Moynihan notes that he and his colleagues envisioned the programs to be intertwined with the effort of the residents. The belief was that poverty could be alleviated and change could occur if everyone took part in the effort. In another sense, the influence that the Great Society legislation created nearly became a stigma, as if the welfare system was an enigmatic being which caused problems instead of solving them. Critics noted that, in the 1960s, “a social rights ethos,” developed where, as critics call it, “a paternalist structure of welfare policy developed” (Soss et al. 536). This axiom dictated that the government was to blame for the issues with the welfare system, that the government had bred dependence based upon the nature of the programs.

Sociologist Joshua Guetzkow investigated the perspective of the government in creating social welfare policy during the Great Society legislation as well as during the devolution period of the 1980s and 90s. Unlike the dependency theory which gained steam during the 1980s, Guetzkow described the situation in the 1960s as a breakdown of the community. He asserted that, at the time, there may have been an, “apparent variation in explanations;” of the problems, yet there still was, “a common understanding that all these ills grew out of the problematic conditions of urban ‘slums’ and their breakdown” (Guetzkow 180-181). On the whole, Guetzkow asserted that Congress predominantly looked at issues of poverty as problems that stemmed from endemic social conditions such as rampant pessimism and disillusionment. In a testimony over the Economic Opportunity Act, US Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy stated that, “lack of education, old age, bad health or discrimination--these are the causes of
poverty and the way to attack it is to go to the root” *(ibid).* Through assertions such as this, it was a commonly held belief among the Johnson Administration that poverty was a result of the way in which people live, that factors such as education, housing, employment, and healthcare played a strikingly more dominant role than the day-to-day choices of individuals. This attitude was reflected in the type of policies that were produced at the time. Head Start and Job Corps were created because the Johnson Administration as well as Congress felt that a good education and access to jobs were vital components that were missing from many impoverished communities.

As a result of this assertion, many individuals within the government began to view those living in poverty as, “hopeless victims,” whose, “psychological state of being was seen as a consequence of the social conditions [in which they lived],” which was highlighted by, “hopelessness and despair” *(Guetzkow 181).* This view can best be characterized by the account of a government worker who worked in Harlem during 1964 who stated:

> Social and economic discrimination against the Negro manifested itself physically in the deterioration of his housing and his schools, and psychologically in the tension between his community and the outside world. The physical appearance of central Harlem thus became a monument to the psychological imprisonment of its residents *(ibid).*

This type of attitude was reflected in the type of policy that was enacted during the Great Society such as Job Corps, the Work Initiative Program, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as well as Medicaid and the Food Stamp Act which all sought to eliminate what the lawmakers believed to be sources of poverty such as poor education and limited access to jobs.

The changes that occurred during the 1960s marked a major step forward in the development of social welfare policy. Although it was a landmark time for social welfare legislation some, such as Daniel P. Moynihan one of the crafters of the policies, believed that, “A program was launched that was not understood and not explained, and this brought about social losses that need not have occurred” *(xiii-xiv).* Perhaps it was for this reasoning that critics of the Great Society were eager dismantle its core principals.
Although there had always been ideological opposition to the Great Society, the first major backlash to the Great Society occurred in the early 1980s with the election of Ronald Reagan. In 1981, congress passed the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act which outlined provisions that allowed states to create welfare-to-work initiatives, an action that can be seen as an attempt to pull some of the legislative power of federal welfare programs away from the federal government because it takes a program that was once under the sole guise of the Federal government and allows the states to extol their influence on the programs (Jost). This law was seen as, “an embodiment of the Reagan Revolution,” a time in which much of the power of the Federal government was cut and given instead to the states or dissolved completely (Guetzkow 188). The belief of the Reagan Administration as well as other conservatives was that the Federal government was the source of the problem with the welfare system. Instead of focusing on the setbacks of the welfare system and discovering tangible ways to reform it, the system itself was immediately put to blame. Furthermore, the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act also outlined, “significant cost-cutting measures for AFDC and other social programs” (ibid). Ultimately, these policies began to alter much of the public’s perception on welfare policy, as the rhetoric of these policies, “became the emerging conceptions about the causes of poverty and about the poor”(Guetzkow 189). This most likely occurred because this adage became the dominant argument on welfare policy that the public was exposed to.

Much of the charge that started to develop during the early years of the Reagan Administration – rhetoric that had developed while Reagan was governor of California – was heightened by the publishing of the book Losing Ground by Charles Murray, a conservative sociologist who also wrote The Bell Curve and was working with the Manhattan Institute (Jost). In Losing Ground, Murray argued that due to the welfare changes in the 1960s, it was, “profitable for the poor to behave in the short term in ways that were destructive in the long run,” and that this, according to Murray, resulted in an increase in poverty (ibid). Murray’s assertion ran parallel to the conservative movement of the time, the policies the government enacted were in fact contributing to poverty because those on welfare were incentivized to
stay on the welfare rolls. The primary assertion Murray was making declared that welfare programs
singularly promote dependence and contribute to poverty. This affirmation furthered the belief that work-
to-welfare programs were a complete necessity, that to receive any type of government assistance,
regardless of personal circumstance, an individual ought to work for it.

All of the changes that were being made to welfare policy directly related to an intense attitudinal
shift by politicians. This change occurred on two fronts. First, the role of the government in running
welfare programs was scrutinized. Critics argued that, “government intervention itself was the cause of
these social ills,” that, “social spending slowed economic growth and fostered welfare dependency”
(Guetzkow 185). The belief behind this rhetoric was that the more the government became involved in the
affairs of anything, the less incentivized people would become, that people would no longer feel the need
to save money, spend money, or even help themselves (ibid).

Transitions based upon these beliefs changed the argument on welfare policy that it was no longer
about what welfare could do to help get individuals out of poverty, but rather how welfare was, “breeding
dependence,” and, “provided an alternative to work” (Guetzkow 185). This, according to these critics,
transformed the, “idea of the cycle of poverty into the cycle of welfare,” that, “welfare, not poverty,
became the trap, the disease” (ibid). An interesting cognitive shift occurred here. The idea that poverty
was something that was endemic in certain communities was replaced with the jaded belief that
individuals were impoverished because they were the recipients of one too many handouts, that they
could not succeed because they were victims of governmental oversaturation.

A result of this new perception on poverty was a change in the government’s focus on the lives of
welfare recipients. In the 1960s, the main concern was the community, that people were poor because
they lived in disadvantaged areas. During the 1980s, this idea transformed into a moralist sentiment, that,
“government intervention had led to the breakdown of the family,” which, “was unable to instill ‘family’
values into its children,” and that, “continued illegitimacy was the result” (Guetzkow 187). This assertion
fosters the belief that individuals were persistently in poverty because they lacked situations which conservatives deemed necessary. Having children out of wedlock was one of the main focuses as well as unemployment and a perception that those on welfare were dependents to the system all played a role in the way in which conservative politicians viewed the role of welfare policy. These perceptions became a dangerous mixture of moralist philosophy and governmental intervention.

These ideas were pushed further when, in 1988, congress passed the Family Support Act which outlined requirements states had to abide by in implementing, “education, job training and placement programs for welfare recipients” (Jost). The legislation during the Reagan Administration, as well as the welfare legislation that followed in the 1990s were interesting developments in that they consistently pushed power away from the federal government and relied more and more heavily upon the individual states to operate welfare programs. These were all ways in which the role of welfare policy was being challenged. Because welfare had come to be viewed as a source of the problem, the thought was that if welfare policy was spread throughout the states it would be an inherently weaker and less influential program thus helping stem a part of the problem.

The trend of blaming the government for forcing individuals into welfare dependency continued on into the 1990s. This compounding attitude culminated in the complete overhaul of the American welfare system in 1996. The thought that dependency was the root cause of poverty resulted in a welfare program that, “ended welfare as we knew it” (Cohen). As TANF replaced AFDC, a federal welfare program was replaced by a block-grant funded program in which time limits were imposed on cash benefits and welfare-to-work programs became institutionalized (Billitteri). Changing a longstanding welfare system with an unproven system based upon largely ideological tenets was poor planning. The ideal that governmental intervention in the lives of welfare recipients is bad was institutionalized in TANF as recipients were limited to 60 months of benefits in their entire lifetime (P.L. 104-193). This marked the first time where a distinct and real limit was imposed on a cash welfare system.
Because TANF marked such a major shift in social welfare policy, there has been a great deal of criticism about the policy. Much of this criticism revolves around the notion that TANF fails to adequately address the issues of poverty and that it does not meet the needs of many individuals and families because of the limit on its benefits. A result of this opinion is the resurgence of the idea of the culture of poverty, perhaps a sign that welfare reform is on the horizon yet again. As a panel of sociologists wrote, “Over the past decade, sociologists, demographers, and even economists have begun asking questions about the role of culture in many aspects of poverty and even explicitly explaining the behavior of the low-income population in reference to cultural factors” (Small, et al. 6). This quote succinctly reflects much of the research and thought on welfare policy that has surfaced recently; many scholars in multiple disciplines are beginning to subscribe to the theory that poverty is a result of cultural factors in low-income communities. This belief is shown in many of the criticisms of the 1996 legislation, that if fails to address all the issues associated with poverty.

**Backlashes to the 1996 Legislation**

Soon after the enactment of PRWORA, there were numerous backlashes which fought against what many felt was an unfair set of restrictions on welfare. These challenges materialized the quickest in the court system.

In the case of the California Department of Social Services v Roe which was decided on 17 May 1999 by the Supreme Court of the United States, the court ruled that a section of PRWORA was unconstitutional because the residency requirements in the law imposed an unconstitutional burden upon newly moved citizens. The residency requirements dictated that in the State of California, an individual had to be a resident of the state for at least a year before receiving state welfare benefits as outlined in PRWORA. The court asserted that the section of the law in question violated the Fourteenth Amendment of the US Constitution under the Equal Protection Clause citing that length of residency within a state is irrelevant and that every citizen has the equal protection thereof under the law. Concordantly, in the
Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article Thirteen, section one states: “Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each State.” This case is important because TANF, through PRWORA, was designed to give states the control to adapt their own guidelines to their welfare system but failed to address issues such as interstate residency changes.

The case of United States v Velazquez is another challenge to the 1996 welfare legislation. This case was ruled on 28 February 2001 by the Supreme Court of the United States. The court ruled that the Omnibus Consolidated Recessions and Appropriations Act of 1996 was unconstitutional because it violated the First Amendment of the US Constitution as well as the Separation of Powers Principle. In the majority decision, the justices asserted that Congress had “impermissibly restricted free speech,” by putting a limit on judicial challenges welfare recipients were allowed to make to about their welfare benefits. This, according to the court, was a violation of Velazquez’s First Amendment right to redress her grievances. Furthermore, the court ruled that Congress had attempted to insulate its own laws from judicial challenge, a violation of the Separation of Powers Principle. By demonstrating that Congress had acted impermissibly, the court illuminated how Congress was intent on taking power away from recipients thinking them to be dependents. This case can also be seen as a judicial check on Congress which attempted to extend its influence too much in an effort to protect the welfare legislation.

In addition to the few legal challenges that have come up against PRWORA, there have been many administrative problems in the legislation that critics have scrutinized. One of these issues which is constantly discussed is the issue of deregulation. Critics assert that the creation of a limited, block-grant welfare policy ineffectually addresses the full scope of the poverty issue. This deregulation of a longstanding federal program has caused a great deal of organizational difficulties because it transferred a centrally located, bureaucratic initiative with fifty, slightly differing programs. “This wide discretion allowed by the federal legislation has led some analysts to suggest that welfare is now more state than federal policy and that there are now fifty different welfare programs” (Danziger 527). Moreover, because
the criteria to qualify for TANF varies from state to state, it take a great deal of analyzation and thus needs requires a significant amount of income testing (Ozawa 308).

TANF was put into place because it was believed to be a program that would help push those on welfare to be more proactive and no longer need the government’s assistance to get by. This can be seen in the fact that TANF is essentially a large scale work-to-work program and was supposed to be broad enough so that each state could individually address their issues. Conversely, in the fourteen years since TANF’s enactment and subsequent reauthorization, government spending on welfare has remained rather stagnant if not growing and this has been reflected in the ballooning non-cash benefit sector of social welfare.

The most alarming statistics that have surfaced since the latest economic downturn – The Great Recession – has been the inflation of non-cash welfare benefits and a sudden spike in poverty. People who have never been on the welfare rolls before are inundating the system with new claims as the number of American’s living in poverty has hit a fifteen year high at one in seven or approximately forty-four million individuals, approximately 14% of the total population (Cohen). As TANF intended to do from its enactment, cash welfare benefits have, “become a relatively small part of total spending on the US safety net programs” (Danziger 524). The unintended side-effect of limited cash welfare benefits has been the growth of other programs such as food stamps and Medicaid which are reaching all-time highs. In fact, the number of food stamp recipients, a number, “which fluctuates with unemployment rates,” hit an all-time high during 2009 (ibid). This reflects not only the nation’s economic troubles but the insufficiencies of the welfare programs in effect. Additionally, there are now approximately seven times more children on health assistance (Medicaid) than on cash assistance (TANF), another sign of the failures of the current welfare system (Danziger 525).

These statistics are alarming but, in another sense, are predictable outcomes of TANF. The program was designed to allow recipients only sixty months – or five years – of benefits; the entire intent was to
limit the amount of welfare individuals receive while pushing them through institutionalized welfare-to-work programs with the belief that individuals would be able to completely lift themselves out of poverty with this assistance. This result clearly did not materialize. Instead of receiving benefits from a program such as AFDC, welfare recipients now heavily rely upon other, non-cash benefits which are equally as costly and ineffective at eliminating poverty. This is was seen as early as 2007 where, by the end of that year, “there was an average of 23.5 million children on Medicaid per month, 12.7 million children on food stamps per month, and only 3.1 million a month on TANF” (Danziger 525). Instead of implementing programs that would more proactively reduce poverty, Congress passed PRWORA in 1996 which, due to its imposed welfare limits, drove welfare recipients toward other programs which provided services instead of cash. Although PRWORA succeeded in reducing the number of individuals on welfare, it failed to address the entirety of the problem as many individuals are now using other services.

Perhaps the question can be asked, how did the US welfare system get to the point of having such an insufficient program? The answer relies simply in the ineptitude of politicians from the 1980s onward.

Decades of public confrontation involving business leaders, right-wing ideologues, centrist politicians, and liberal policy experts had placed U.S. welfare policy – and a highly selective slice of the welfare recipient population – under intense scrutiny (Morgen, et al. 316).

This scrutiny, which was defined by this ideological strife, ultimately led to the concession of the liberals and the success of right-wing congressional coalition led by Newt Gingrich. Even if PRWORA was based on solid, well thought out, academic bases, making the jump from academia to political practicality is not a transition that should be made without extensive investigation and consideration.

Politicians often seek immediate results from a program that should take years to develop and frequently put through programs that are not ready or dissolve programs that were not developed properly in the first place. One obvious result of this is that many programs in the United States are not nearly as effective as they should be. Daniel P. Moynihan, the academic and politician, in reflecting on the failure of the Great Society legislation acknowledges that the program should have been, “a prolonged national
undertaking," which turned into a mere fraction of what could have been accomplished (6). With the failures of the Great Society, there were many aspects that were developed upon good intentions but were not properly developed and implemented and, therefore, were doomed to fail. Furthermore, Lane Kenworthy, a sociologist at East Carolina University who conducted a cross-national assessment on the effectiveness of social welfare policy, states in his analysis that, “contrary to the view of skeptics, social-welfare policies do help to reduce poverty,” and goes on to say that the reason there is so much disagreement over American welfare policy is that, “that American social-welfare programs are less effective than those in most of the other nations” (1135). Similar to the assessment of the Great Society, Kenworthy demonstrates the point that the key disagreements and issues about the American welfare system can be placed solely in its inefficiencies. Like Moynihan stated, American welfare programs are often a heated topic of debate because they are rushed into enactment without proper study and often fail to address the full scope of poverty as a result. This, unfortunately, is something that most politicians fail to recognize and can be seen in questionable decisions such as reauthorizing TANF in 2006.

The glaring truth in the issue is that the US system is clearly broken and only addresses limited aspects of the true problem at hand. Another interesting qualm with the welfare system is the fact that the official measure of poverty used by the US government has remained mostly unchanged since its development in 1965 (Eberstadt 1). A result of this is that poverty measures no longer represent the proper portion of the population who actually live in poverty. Eberstadt notes, “With more access to credit, greater income swings from year to year, and improved nutrition, housing, and health care, the life of America’s poor is radically different today” (ibid). One unfortunate consequence of this disparity is that there are currently millions of Americans who can barely get by after suffering from massive credit debt or lofty healthcare bills but do not technically fall under the impoverished category. With increases in the cost of living and rapidly raising rates of insurance in all categories, there are many individuals completely struggling to get by despite the fact that they are both not labeled as impoverished and do not
receive government assistance. These problems persist despite the fact that they are clearly struggling to subsist.

Critics of the effectiveness of social welfare policy would note that these programs are ineffective because the capitalist system in which the US operates atones for the gap between the rich and the poor because the ‘trickle-down’ effect provides an ample amount of capital for an individual to subsist off of. One proponent to this belief states, “Notably, growth in the incomes of the rich reduces the effects of poverty proportionally more than is the case for increases in the incomes of the poor” (Norton 13). Although Norton attempts to make his point by using statistical data, he overshadowed the fact that, in the United States, corporate profits grew in the 1980s while poverty rates also grew. Recently, in the past year and a half, unemployment and poverty have been on the rise while businesses are still remaining profitable. If the trickle-down theory would actually take care of everyone in society, situations such as these would not occur because everyone in society would be reaping the benefits of profitable businesses. Conversely Holly Sklar puts the growth of poverty solely on large businesses. She states,

Real wages are dropping because of global corporate restructuring, deunionization, the shift toward lower-paying industries, the lower value of the minimum wage, increased part-time and other contingent work, upsized employment and underemployment, automation and other trends (Sklar 19).

In this assertion, Sklar believes that businesses intentionally allow worker’s rights to suffer for profit. The stagnation of wages, the cutting of hours, and even changes in the industry all increase the profit of companies, however, they do not translate to improvements in worker’s pay or benefits. This assessment serves as a counter to the trickle-down argument that is a commonplace in corporate circles, however, does not fully address the relationship between individuals and corporations in the United States.

The failure of TANF to address the major components of social welfare policy has only contributed to the large amount of criticism about the American welfare system. All this scrutiny is bringing welfare reform to the front of many academics’ research agenda. Is this a sign of the return to the “Culture of Poverty,” the idea that compelled the White House and Congress to enact so many groundbreaking
programs during the 1960s? There has been increased dialogue on the issue, and famous individuals such as Bill Cosby and President Obama have made points talking about the necessity of “responsible fatherhood,” explaining that if a father takes a proactive role in the life of his children those children will be much more likely to have a better life than their parents (Cohen). This point has been harped upon for years by conservatives who assert that it is necessary to encourage, “work and marriage,” instead of, “unconditional handouts” (Haskins et al.). Although poverty is most rampant among single mothers, there are much more poignant reasons for the persistence of poverty besides unmarried individuals.

There is an undeniable fact, however, that transcends ideological lines, that in areas of extreme poverty there are endemic features which continue to drive these communities toward negative ends. Issues such as crime, expensive healthcare, poor education, and underemployment are all contributors to this problem. In this sense, there is indeed a culture of poverty, a culture that can be addressed with proper social and welfare programs.

**Problems in “The Culture”**

Unquestionably, the social problems that are widespread in areas of extreme poverty are perpetuated by the attitude and environment of the community as much as each individual’s problems. Sociologists assert that issues that are endemic in certain communities such as unemployment, underemployment, and crime all increase the severity of problems in the community while issues such as expensive childcare, healthcare, taxes, and poor education hamper down the opportunities available in the community and prevent many from seeking other opportunities. These ideas developed into the perception of poverty as a culture of poverty meaning that these problems promote further problems such as, “moral cynicism and disorder,” all of which cyclically repeats itself causing the problems associated with poverty to amplify and multiply. These problems are only causes of poverty and often turn into perpetuators when social welfare policy fails to address the needs of those suffering.
Unemployment is a very straightforward issue in regards to poverty. If one does not have a job one cannot provide for oneself or their family; there is no income coming into the family except for perhaps unemployment insurance or some type of welfare benefit. On the other hand, underemployment is often overshadowed by figures of unemployment. While unemployment can hover around 5% during a fairly stable economic cycle, underemployment can push to be a much higher percentage. As an example, according to a Census Bureau study in 2007, approximately 18% of the American population lives in a household that had difficulty satisfying basic needs (US Census Bureau - Household Income). The alarming fact is that, “Many Americans living above the official poverty line cannot meet their basic needs,” and that, “there is a growing gap between what the government says you need to get by and what it actually costs” (Sklar, et al. 25). Many say that the federal government is to blame for the disparity between who is employed and underemployed. These critics state that the way in which the government measures unemployment does not factor in many of the problems associated with finding a job such as, “discouraged workers, involuntary part-time workers,” and the simple fact that those making minimum wage are not living on a living wage (Sklar 60).

A contributing factor to underemployment is the absence of a federal living wage or even, at the very least, state-wide living wages.

Living-wage laws require any company providing a service to a city or county, or businesses receiving a city or county subsidy, to pay wages high enough to keep a family of four above the federal poverty line without having to rely on charity or having the breadwinner work two jobs (Tanner).

As a comparison between an individual who earns minimum wage and a living wage, is that an individual who earns the living wage can make approximately 40% more than the individual who is employed making the federal minimum wage (ibid). Although the federal minimum wage was raised in 2007 and has incremental increases scheduled over the next few years, this still fails to meet the living wage as the minimum wage rarely keeps up with the inflation rate and increases in the cost of living.
Although issues of employment are important in all areas, one area where unemployment and underemployment is a particularly alarming issue is the inner-city. Typically in these areas unemployment of young adults – 18-24 year olds – hovers as high as 25% with underemployment – “the percentage of persons either jobless or with part-time, low-wage jobs” – usually even higher (Reiman 29). This group of individuals has, as Reiman puts it, “no realistic chance, for any but a rare individual, to enter college, amass sufficient capital, to start a business, or to get into the high-wage, skilled job market” (ibid). Social scientists are beginning to attribute this type of attitude, “not to inherent moral character,” as it was during the 1980s and 90s, “but to sustained racism and isolation,” which is characteristic to the culture of poverty (Cohen). In many of these locals, it becomes a norm to expect a certain level of, “moral cynicism and disorder,” something that is related to their sense of a dysfunctional community (ibid). The unfortunate side-effect here is that it breeds other social ills, namely crime.

Poverty and crime are two topics which are commonly associated with one another, although there seems to be few tangible solutions brought up to try and stop either of these social problems. Poverty and crime are indeed interrelated as crime rates are commonly much higher in places of extreme poverty. As Reiman asserts, “poverty contributes to crime by creating need” (30). This means simply that if you have so little, often times, desperation overcomes other motivations. Furthermore, Reiman also states that, “poverty, slums, and unemployment are sources of street crime” (29). This information paints a picture that was already there; that crime rates in inner-city and poorer areas are higher. What this information doesn’t depict is the number of individuals this impacts and how it hurts the families of those incarcerated.

By 2003 in the United States, roughly seven-hundred out of every one-hundred thousand people were in prison not including individuals on parole and probation (Reiman 24). Of that total percentage generally about 70% of the prison population has been in jail before demonstrating that these fathers, mothers, potential role models, and providers are spending more time in prison and less time with their families (Reiman 32). Recent statistics show that, “by the time [black men] reach their mid-30s, a majority of [them] without a high school diploma have spent time in prison,” and that, “in 2008, black
males were imprisoned at a rate six-and-a-half times higher than white males” (Herbert, Nov 16). Because crime is a result of poverty, and that individuals in impoverished areas are so much more likely to end up in prison, there is clearly a great deal of social change that must occur to reverse this alarming trend.

Two other factors that are significant obstacles to an impoverished individual or family is the access to and cost of healthcare and childcare. In 2007, approximately two-thirds of Americans have some type of private healthcare coverage while an additional 13% of individuals were covered by Medicare (US Census Bureau – Health Coverage). This left a gap of approximately 15% of the population which had no type of healthcare coverage (ibid). An additional factor to the issue is that just because an individual is covered does not mean that the healthcare is necessarily affordable. Depending on where an individual lives, healthcare costs can vary greatly (Tanner). Furthermore, issues such as payment ceilings where healthcare providers would only pay for medical care to a certain point along with expensive co-pays and premiums caused many individuals and families to suffer economically due to the healthcare system. With the passage of the Affordable Care Act in 2010, there are now factors in place such as banning lifetime payment limits, banning healthcare providers from dropping a recipient, and the enforcement of healthcare coverage for all Americans could help stem some of the healthcare issues (White House – Healthcare). As these provisions come into effect, there may be relief to many who struggle with healthcare issues.

As much as healthcare is a necessity, childcare is also an extreme necessity for working mothers, fathers, and couples. The need for reliable childcare is immeasurable as a child could thrive, learn, and develop under positive care; without proper care, children would be much worse off. This care does not necessarily need to be limited to certified daycare centers but also loving relatives or even independent childcare homes. Regardless of the situation, childcare requires a significant financial undertaking. Nationally, the average cost of childcare for a toddler was roughly $10,000 a year in 2007 and approximately $8600 a year for school-age children (NACCRRRA). Childcare, like healthcare, also varies depending on location (Tanner). There is no way a parent would be able to leave a child at home while
they are working to support their family, as a result, childcare has become such a necessary commodity with rapidly inflating prices.

It is easy to see what significant financial strain both of these necessities would cost. Additionally, if you take these costs and then factor in the absence of a parent, these social problems are significantly illuminated. Situations such as this only highlight the need of the Earned Income Tax Credit [EIC] which, “raises more families with children above the poverty line than any other government program” (Sklar, et al. 118). The EIC helps to, “offset rising payroll taxes,” because it is a refundable tax credit; recipients, “receive a refund check for the amount of the credit,” which the government provides (ibid). If the EIC was expanded to include individuals of higher incomes than the bare minimums, it would do a great service to the poor and working classes. With an expanded EIC, many will more easily meet their budgetary needs and would have more money to spend or save on worthwhile investments.

Perhaps the greatest investment a society or individual can make is through education. Without a solid education serving as the base of our cognitive processes we would struggle as a society. In the United States, education is compulsory to a certain age and public schools are available in all areas to serve the needs of the populace. It would be expected, then, that education would be a fundamental right in the United States. Unfortunately, this is not so. In the case of the San Antonio Independent School District v Rodriguez, ruled by the Supreme Court of the United States on 21 March 1973, a part of the majority opinion stated that, “education is not a fundamental right of liberty,” according to the US Constitution. In a dissenting opinion, Associate Justice William Brennan stated, “since education was inextricably linked to the right to participate in the electoral process and to the rights of free speech and association, any classification affecting education should be subjected to strict judicial scrutiny” (SAISD v Rodriguez).

It is strange to think that in the United States, education is not technically a fundamental right despite the fact that it should be. Establishing equal educational opportunity is key to making this happen. As a
result of the Rodriguez case, school districts could legally appropriate more funds to schools in areas with higher property tax bases. This, however, is a grave injustice because every child has the right to the same level and quality of education; an axiom of education which is closely related to the budget of a school. Additionally, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights bluntly states under Article 26 that, “Everyone has the right to education.”

Clearly, something has to be done to change the education system to create young adults who rationally think rather than simply individuals who regurgitate information for a standardized test. Moreover, the draconian practice of pulling money away from struggling schools do to performances on standardized test must also change. As Bob Herbert recently wrote,

For all the talk about the need to improve the public schools and get rid of incompetent teachers, school systems around the country are being hammered with dreadful cutbacks and teachers are being let go in droves, not because they are incompetent but strictly for budget reasons (Nov 20).

There is an attitude surrounding problems such as education which is that many would rather sit and watch the system to see if it will correct itself instead of proactively doing something to make a change. This type of attitude must change, and Americans must realize this through, “shared sacrifice” (Herbert, Nov 20).

Proposals for Change

The lower strata of the middle class sinks gradually into the proletariat, partly because the diminutive capital does not suffice for the scale on which modern industry is carried on (Marx 70-71).

Karl Marx first wrote the Communist Manifesto in 1848 and yet this statement from the first chapter is still relevant today. In the United States, “the top 10 percent [of earners] control more than 70 percent of Americans’ total net worth,” while, “the bottom 90 percent owns just 29%” (Kristof). The United States is now the place where one in seven Americans live in poverty and the standard of living is declining (Cohen; Herbert, Nov 20). It is clear that there are glaring social inequalities in this country and it largely has to do with the inability of the government to properly address the issues. If we as a society
choose to extend the benefits and securities of our governance to protect those citizens who are struggling, then we must improve healthcare, education, and welfare in order to reverse the culture of poverty. Ultimately, the best way to build this society is from the bottom up.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau stated in *The Social Contract* that, “As soon as the multitude is united thus in a single body, no one can injure any one of the members without attacking the whole, still less injure the whole without each member feeling it” (63). In stating this, he means to say that you cannot do harm to an individual or even to society as a whole without hurting society and, thus, everyone in it. Similarly, Locke stated in Chapter 2 of *The Second Treatise on Government* that man should, as much as he can, “preserve the rest of mankind,” and went on to assert that, “we are naturally induced to seek communication and fellowship with others,” promoting a sense of community amongst all. The overall sense Locke strives towards demonstrates that it is indispensible for each member of society to strive to help the rest.

Putting these two ideas together, one sees how by contributing to the whole, they are doing the entire society a service. By paying your fair share of taxes, you can assure that the government is able to pay for the services which they need to provide to protect the whole. This is what social welfare policy in the United States ought to be, not just a safety net or a budget augmentation but a complete societal change brought about by expanded social programs and a long, committed effort.

One of the major causes of poverty – or at the very least economic hardship – in the United States is underemployment. Too many individuals are working jobs which have no security, benefits, or flexibility. Additionally, there needs to be a concentrated effort to raise the minimum wage to a living wage. This change alone would ensure that all working Americans would have the ability to pay for the necessary services and expenses for themselves and their families.

The Affordable Care Act that was enacted recently is a decent step forward for healthcare legislation. The law, however, comes drastically short of the type of coverage and care that should be available. It is clear that employee health benefits are the most prevalent and stable healthcare packages although it is
only available to a limited number of Americans, a number that shrinks drastically as you go down the income bracket. Furthermore, without many jobs available the number of Americans who have employment based healthcare available to them also drops. There needs to be a viable public healthcare option that is administered and funded solely by the federal government. This system needs to be in place to lower the price of healthcare and provide millions of uninsured or underinsured Americans a practical alternative to expensive care or no care at all.

Similar to healthcare, childcare needs to be subsidized by the federal government to the point where ensuring care for a child is no longer a financial strain on a family. Parents should not have to worry whether or not they will have someone to take care of their children. As it is written in Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, “Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services.”

Additionally, the EIC should be extended to include more individuals. The EIC has proven to be the single most effective anti-poverty measure; there is no reason not to extend the benefits of this policy to individuals in more income brackets and to open up larger quantities of money to individuals already eligible for the EIC. For a tax credit that is not discussed much in the public sphere, the EIC has proven to be extraordinarily useful.

Furthermore, the education system in the United States must be revised. No longer should schools loose funding for poor performance on standardized tests. In order to improve, schools need more and better resources, effective teachers, and lower teacher to student ratios. Additionally, standardized testing often encourages teachers to ‘teach for the test’ instead of developing critical thinking and analytical skills of students. Programs in high schools which take students at risk of failing or dropping out due to academic or personal reasons and provide them with more attention and study time should be explored more as it could be the saving grace for many students to get through high school. Additionally, schools
always do better when the community takes interest in the success of the school; responsibilities for the development of schools must lie not just in the hands of the government, but also the parents and students.

Lastly, TANF must be repealed and replaced with a more socially responsible welfare policy such as European models where social services are provided for all and welfare is only used for those who absolutely need it. AFDC was not a perfect program by any means, but TANF’s shortcomings are immense. Going on welfare should be a last resort after all other programs have failed; that will only happen if all social programs are changed to promote progress within communities and raise standards of living like it is in Europe. Welfare will only become a true last resort if social services and programs are put to work within communities putting the advancement of these impoverished areas in the hands of the individuals who live there. Whether any of this is possible lies in the commitment of the government and individuals who wish to see changes in the United States.

**Conclusion**

Social welfare policy in the United States has been shaped predominantly by the majority opinion of politicians in Congress. The Great Society was a result of progressive lawmakers who saw the need to put a more stable safety net underneath the poorest Americans. Unfortunately, these policies were hastily written and failed to address the grand scope of the issues at hand. As a result, the principle argument of lawmakers in the 1980s and 90s was that these policies were ineffective and that the government can be blamed for poverty in this country. From this shift emerged the 1996 welfare legislation which completely altered welfare policy in the United States. Due to the poor crafting of PRWORA, critics have been analyzing the policy over the past ten years and, as a result of this, it appears the idea that poverty is a result of a certain culture within impoverished areas is returning.

With the “culture of poverty” comes a long list of social and economic problems which are commonly seen in poor areas and often perpetuated by a shared notion of “moral cynicism and disorder” (Cohen). Problems within the culture such as improper education, bad healthcare and childcare, as well as
crime and underemployment all play distinct roles in hampering down communities and impeding progress through cyclical social problems.

The only means for creating positive change that will actually lift individuals out of poverty is to employ the entire community in improving areas where the culture of poverty has taken over. Changes in education, housing, and the development of community centers will only occur if a majority of a population decides to make a conscious, concentrated effort to change their community. These programs can be augmented and even overseen by the government but change will only remain if the community embraces it and is augmented through the hard work of grassroots organizations. This type of social change is extraordinarily difficult to come by only because it takes such a great undertaking and a long amount of time. If the government and others decided to invest in the poorest Americans instead of the richest institutions we will grow exponentially as a society.

Works Cited

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- Billitteri, Thomas J. Domestic Poverty: Is a New Approach Needed to Help the Poorest Americans? Rep. 31st ed. Vol. 17. CQ, 2007. CQ Researcher. Web. 27 Sept. 2010. This report put out by Congressional Quarterly outlines some important aspects of poverty in the United States. The growing gap between the rich and the poor is discussed as well as the possible tie to the growth of extreme poverty. The report then turns to government spending as to whether a cut in spending is to account for the rise in poverty or if it hinges on other factors. A history of the issue is also provided.


- California Department of Social Services v Roe. Supreme Court of the United States. 17 May 1999. LexisNexis. Web. 1 November 2010. Roe asserted that a section of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 was unconstitutional because the residency requirements written into the law created an ‘unconstitutional burden’ on newly moved citizens. The Court ruled that the law violated the Equal
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Protections Clause in the Fourteenth Amendment of the US Constitution stating that the length of residency was not a basis for discrimination.

  This news article discusses the shifting attitudes of sociologists and politicians about referring to poverty as endemic of a certain culture. The article frames the issue to be relevant to current situations and states some of the social experiments conducted.

  Although this report was put out by Congressional Quarterly in 1995, it is still a good resource because it provides a solid overview, background, and chronology of the working poor in the United States.

  Danziger has two main segments to the argument in this article. First, she gives an overview of cash welfare policy and makes a distinction to the policy before and after 1996. After, she uses this information to show how these trends contributed employment and poverty in single-mother families.

  This is an article sponsored by AEI and a version of this article was printed in the Washington Post on 3 September 2006. This article has two main points: 1) That the United States measure of poverty in its own country is inherently inaccurate; and 2) That measures of alleviating poverty will is ineffective and it will only change with a reevaluation of how poverty is assessed and solved.

  This page outlines the statistics on recent changes to the federal minimum wage outlining when the raises have occurred and when the others are going to occur and by how much. The Labor Law Center is a website which helps provide services to business who need to figure out how to comply with labor laws.

  Taking an alternative approach, sociologist Guetzkow examines the culture behind the Great Society movement in the 1960s and the devolution movement in the 1980s/90s stating that the attitudes of the lawmaker influenced them to make certain decisions, decisions that are meant to steer the recipients of welfare toward certain ends.

  Taking a more conservative standpoint on poverty, this brief authored by two members of the Brookings Institute state that some of the main causes of poverty revolve around unmarried, uneducated individuals. In this approach, the authors attempt to demonstrate that poverty is something that can be avoidable if individuals exhibited more personal responsibility and made better decisions.

  This page published by the White House on their website outlines the changes in healthcare as dictated by the new healthcare legislation. In text, this citation reads “(White House – Healthcare).”

This opinion-editorial piece written by Bob Herbert was published online on 15 November 2010 but was published in print 16 November 2010. In the text, this article was cited as: (Herbert, Nov 16). The article outlines some of the major racial and economic troubles facing African-Americans in the United States.


This opinion-editorial piece written by Bob Herbert was published online on 19 November 2010 but was published in print 20 November 2010. In the text, this article was cited as: (Herbert, Nov 20). This article outlines some of the socio-economic problems facing the United States today and how, in the opinion of the author, congress fails to properly address these issues.


This is a report by Congressional Quarterly released in April 1992. It’s most useful function is discussing the question of whether welfare policy should coerce recipients of the benefits to behaving in a certain way. This article gives extensive history of the changes in welfare before 1992 including information on the Great Society legislation.


In examining several different countries welfare policies, Kenworthy seeks to discover whether or not social welfare policies actually reduce poverty. The analysis in the study indicates that social welfare policies do in fact reduce poverty, it is simply the attitude and culture in the United States to blame the system for bad economics.


In this editorial-opinion piece, Kristof discusses some of the economic inequalities in the United States while concordantly talking about Congress’ decision to end the Bush tax cuts and/or to extend unemployment benefits.


This classic work by Locke will be used to help apply the theoretical aspects of the argument. Specifically, chapter 11 will be used to further the argument.


This web page outlines the major provisions to the Personal Responsibilities and Work Act of 1996 in relation to TANF. This includes specific statistics on how the law is administered and who would receive benefits. In the text, this page was cited as (P.L. 104-193).


Similar to the other classics, this work will be used to help apply some of the theoretical aspects of the argument.

This article looks at the rise of neoliberal policies and how the advent of this type of thought is counterintuitive for proper welfare levels. They find that the decision of then President Bush to pass more restrictive welfare policy was a poor idea.

  This book written by the former assistant-labor secretary under President Johnson is a reflection and explanation of some of the poverty legislation enacted under the Johnson Administration. Moynihan uses his own experience working in the administration as a way of describing his intentions and ultimate, the setbacks he saw as these his ideas as well as others became law.

  This was a press release by the National Association of Child Care Resources where they reported their findings from their 2007 survey of the costs of childcare in the United States. The NACCRA is an advocacy organization that works to reform childcare by making it more affordable. In text this citation reads “(NACCRA).”

  Norton, a business professor, believes that trickle-down economics works particularly in developing nations to reduce poverty. In this article, using various statistical evaluations, he feels that he proves this, however, there are elements of his rhetorical argument which can be used against him and other conservative viewpoints on poverty.

  This article is a comparative report on the differences between social policy and spending in the United States and Sweden. The study finds that with the changing family structure in both countries that each country needs to revaluate their social policy, especially the United States. With a strong emphasis on TANF, this investigates the prominent welfare measure of the past 15 years and shows how a mandated federal system is more inclusive and successful than varying state designs.

  This page is listed under an issues subset of the White House’s website and simply outlines the President’s view on poverty and what he has done to help alleviate poverty through the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act of 2009. In text, this citation reads “(White House – Poverty).”

  This book investigates the US prison system and how it is often an overloaded system. In the discussion of the prison system, there is also a side discussion on poverty, how poverty contributes to crime and vice versa. There are some useful statistics in the book and it also talks about the cutting of welfare benefits by the Reagan administration and how that affected poverty and crime rates.

  This classic work by Rousseau will be used as part of the theoretical argument of the paper discussing some of the protections of society.

In this case, the court overturned a decision in a lower court stating that a Texas state law in reference to a SAISD policy was unconstitutional. The court asserted that the law was indeed constitutional because it did not meet the criteria of the Equal Protection Clause and also stated that education is not a fundamental right or liberty.


  Talking about how the widening gap between the rich and the poor is causing a stratification as well as a lack in proper discussion of pertinent issues and policies. Sklar outlines some of the problems with the government’s social policy and seeks to give some solutions that the government and all of us can do to level the economic playing field.


  In another discussion of economic and social issues, Sklar et al discuss the working poor, harping on the necessity of a living wage and the importance of restructuring businesses and the system to reflect the need of the lowest paid.


  This special edition of The American Academy of Political and Social Science covers the issue of poverty and in this article the change in the culture of poverty is discussed. This article describes the primary attitudinal shift in the public’s perception of poverty.


  This article asserts that early forms of welfare in the mid-twentieth century were often avenues for white Southerners to discriminate against African-Americans. The authors assert that while modern devolution has some localized positive effects it also still has some of the negative racial implications of the past. This article looks at some of the endemic problems of the welfare system in the US.


  This report put out by Congressional Quarterly investigates the living-wage movement in the United States. The report looks into whether or not a living-wage will actual make a tangible difference in the lives of the poor and it also talks about the resistance against the living-wage movement. With a great deal of history also in the report, it explains and contextualizes the issues around the living-wage.


  The data provided in this table was gathered by the Census Bureau made available through their website. This is the most up to date information concerning healthcare insurance rates. In text, this citation reads “(US Census Bureau – Health Coverage).”


  This data provided by the Census Bureau through their website reflects the most up to date data on household income available through the census bureau. In text, this citation reads “(US Census Bureau – Household Income).”

Velazquez asserted that the Omnibus Consolidated Recessions and Appropriations Act of 1996 was unconstitutional because it violated the First Amendment of the US Constitution and the Separation of Powers Principle in the US Constitution. The court ruled that Congress had acted impermissibly in restricting free speech by placing a limit on arguments welfare recipients were allowed to make to the judicial branch and that congress had attempted to insulate itself from judicial challenge.


This page is a part of a series of short articles about different aspects of American history. The database is run by the Lilly Library as part of Indiana University. This particular page outlines some information on the Works Progress Administration. In text, this will be cited as “(WPA).”