CITIZENSHIP AND SOCIAL POLICY:
T. H. MARSHALL AND POVERTY*

BY LAWRENCE M. MEAD

I. INTRODUCTION

T. H. Marshall, a British sociologist, gave a series of lectures in 1949 under the title “Citizenship and Social Class.” To many American intellectuals, his analysis still offers a persuasive account of the origins of the welfare state in the West. But Marshall spoke in the early postwar era, when the case for expanded social benefits seemed unassailable. Today’s politics are more conservative. In every Western country the welfare state is under review. Yet Marshall’s conception can still help define the issues in social policy and the way forward.

In Section II, I summarize Marshall’s argument for social provision as a dimension of citizenship. I then describe, in Sections III and IV, the two main challenges that have arisen to the welfare state—criticism of its costs and the contention that “welfare” promotes entrenched poverty in the inner city. This second charge, I argue, is the more serious, because it attacks the heart of Marshall’s civic case for social provision. After elaborating on the problem of entrenched poverty in Section V, I go on, in Sections VI through IX, to consider several approaches to assuaging poverty, two that are consistent with Marshall’s vision and two that are not. I argue that a policy of enforcing work and other civilities is the truest to Marshall’s idea and also the most effective. I conclude, in Section X, with some reflections on the implications of the social problem for politics. I believe that dysfunctional poverty threatens the traditional politics of justice, and that only if it is overcome can a debate about justice resume.

II. MARSHALL’S ARGUMENT

By “welfare state” we mean the set of income transfers (public assistance, pensions), in-kind benefits (food, housing, health care), and other services that, in affluent societies, protect citizens from the vicissitudes of capitalism. Some of these benefits are designed to replace earnings when

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workers are unemployed, disabled, or retired and presume an earnings history, while others are means-tested, designed to ensure that everyone in the society has enough income and other essentials, such as health care, to live a civilized life.

Marshall argues, first, that the welfare state is an expression of citizenship. Citizenship means the collection of public claims and duties bestowed on people by the political order. It is not changeless. The claims people make on the state have grown over time. In Britain in the seventeenth century, citizenship connoted the civil rights of equality before the law, free labor, and press freedoms. The nineteenth century expanded the suffrage and other political rights until, by 1918, all adults could vote. The twentieth century added social rights such as public education and minimum-income guarantees. In Britain in the late 1940s, at the time Marshall spoke, the Labor Party added guaranteed health care and children’s allowances. The welfare state, then, is the operational expression of social citizenship. It provides the material minimums that people now expect as members of the society.

Second, Marshall argues that citizenship is egalitarian as class is not. Something about citizenship commands that public rights and duties be essentially the same for all full members of the political order. Hence, social provision tends to be egalitarian. While some benefits may vary with income, the principle of a “floor” beneath which no one sinks is the same for all. But the very people who are equal as citizens occupy very different economic positions, and thus differ vastly in their income, wealth, and other advantages. Thus, tension develops between citizenship and class. In part, equal citizenship compensates for social inequality and makes egalitarian social reform less imperative. But the political order also pursues “class-abatement.” It seeks over time to shift more dimensions of life from class to citizenship, from inequality to equality, or at least to ameliorate inequality. That pressure explains why the content of citizenship has grown over time.²

Marshall’s conception powerfully expresses the sense many intellectuals have that, at least in rich countries, the welfare state is inevitable. Partly, that sense reflects the argument of Marxists that capitalism inevitably undermines itself, leading to collectivism. A market economy must concede a welfare state in order to shield the populace from economic insecurities and stave off revolution. Even within the non-Marxist social democratic tradition, however, social provision is seen as the inevitable expression of democracy. The welfare state recreates through government the protections against the marketplace that existed in precapitalist society.³ The politics behind social provision is complex. In some instances, social programs were inaugurated by the anticapitalist left, in other cases

² Ibid., pp. 86, 116-17.
(notably in Britain and Germany) by aristocrats concerned to forestall industrial poverty or the radicalization of workers. Modern statistical analyses suggest that the welfare state arose to meet prosaic needs to support growing elderly populations and protect societies from international economic pressures.⁴

The Marshallian account is, perhaps, especially applicable to the United States. Citizens of European countries can base their sense of belonging on shared history or ethnicity. Citizens of the United States, with its brief existence and polyglot population, derive their sense of belonging much more from political membership. “Americans” are those who adhere to the individualist creed of the Founders and participate in a democratic political order.⁵ There is evidence that, just as Marshall suggests, equal citizenship in America “comforts” inequality. Americans are sufficiently satisfied with equal citizenship that social and economic inequality is seldom resented. Most people think equality is equal citizenship; they do not demand equal income or wealth. Status differences are usually ignored in politics provided they do not obtrude on how people are treated by government.⁶ What matters, for example, is not that everybody be able to afford the same kind of automobile but that the rich get no precedence in renewing their driver’s licenses. Equal citizenship means that they have to queue up at the local Department of Motor Vehicles office like everyone else.

Occasionally, however, the sense that economic disparities violate essential rights and opportunities does arise. That feeling was a powerful impetus to the expansion of government in the United States during the Progressive, New Deal, and Great Society eras. The manifesto of Progressivism was Herbert Croly’s The Promise of American Life, first published in 1909. Croly’s main point was similar to Marshall’s: some public intervention in the economy is necessary to vindicate democratic citizenship.⁷ Many American academics agree. Equal citizenship in the U.S., Judith Shklar writes, requires equal social “standing,” even for out-groups such as racial minorities, and that might require greater social protections than we have.⁸ The American welfare state is still incomplete by Western standards, many feel. It does not provide some of the benefits, such as guar-

anteed jobs or child care, often found in Europe. Whether they know it or not, those who assert this argue Marshall’s case, that American citizenship should entail greater social rights.

III. Economic Costs

Despite the popularity of social benefits, however, the welfare state is currently in retreat throughout the West. One reason is its cost. Governments find that they cannot afford all the social benefits that politicians have promised, particularly pensions and health care for the elderly. Either they cannot balance their budgets, or the burdens on the economy appear to be excessive. American conservatives charge that exploding social spending is a reason for economic problems in the United States, such as low investment and declining competitiveness. So eligibility for social benefits, and the benefits provided, have been somewhat trimmed in most Western countries since the 1970s. Social spending continues to grow, but mainly because populations are aging, and hence are more in need of health and pension benefits, and because of the skyrocketing cost of health care. In the United States, even the cuts Ronald Reagan inflicted on social programs only momentarily reduced the upward curve of social spending.

As this modest outcome suggests, the economic criticism of the welfare state has not been persuasive enough to date to shake support for social spending in any fundamental way. Skeptics respond that, while social benefits do strain budgets, whether they harm the economy is doubtful. Any link between a nation’s social spending and its economic prowess is unclear. Some countries, notably Germany, are socially generous as well as competitive. There is no clear economic limit to the welfare state, only political limits to society’s willingness to tax itself.

Even if the cuts were severe, if they were made on economic grounds they would leave the heart of the Marshallian conception unshaken. Even if social provision must be curbed due to scarcity, it still embodies the values of citizenship. It remains a realm of equality relative to the strat-

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ifications of class. It vindicates democratic values. Perhaps citizens decide via politics to rely more on themselves, less on government, but that still is a collective decision that defines terms for belonging for the society. Benefits can always be expanded again if economic conditions improve.

IV. THE COSTS OF POVERTY

Far more threatening to Marshall’s vision, I believe, is the current social problem. I refer to the entrenched poverty that, since the 1960s, has plagued most American cities. More recently, similar problems have appeared in Europe. “Poverty” here connotes not only people living below a recognized social minimum but the dysfunctional lifestyle often associated with low income—crime, drug addiction, unwed pregnancy, child abuse, and school failure. Such problems are closely linked to welfare, meaning not the welfare state in general but public assistance and other means-tested benefits. It is families living on aid who most often display a dysfunctional lifestyle.12

The challenge poverty poses is very different from the economic problems of the welfare state. The main cost of social provision comes from large benefit programs aimed at the general population, especially unemployment and pension benefits and health care. Such benefits are typically not means-tested or are only partially so. That means that a large proportion of the population receives them, making their cost formidable. The programs thus impose economic strains, but few would call them responsible for the social problems of the inner city. With welfare and other antipoverty programs, the situation reverses. These benefits are means-tested and serve only the neediest, so their monetary cost is minor compared to the middle-class entitlements. The criticism, rather, is that these programs impose social costs by tempting the poor to live improvidently.

Table 1 shows federal spending on major American social programs in 1995.13 Vastly the most expensive program is Social Security, a huge federal pension system which supports over 40 million retired and disabled people, only a small minority of them poor or on welfare. The next cost-

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12 To avoid definitional disputes, I understand that poverty and welfare dependency are not the same, and that both labels designate larger groups than the “underclass,” or the most disordered poor. The “social problem” I refer to here is that of the long-term poor, meaning individuals not elderly or disabled, and their families, who are poor by the federal government’s definition for more than two years at a stretch. Within this group, I focus particularly on people on welfare for spells of more than two years. The underclass is another subset of the long-term poor. The long-term poor are a small group, perhaps 5 percent of the population in the United States, but they are still strategic to American urban problems. See Lawrence M. Mead, The New Politics of Poverty: The Nonworking Poor in America (New York: Basic Books, 1992), pp. 14–15.

13 The figures in Table 1 are drawn from Office of Management and Budget, Budget of the United States Government, Fiscal Year 1997 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1996), Budget Supplement, pp. 141, 168, and Appendix, pp. 240, 494, 677, 940. Note that figures in Table 1 come from different budget tables and are not precisely comparable.
TABLE 1. Federal spending on U.S. social programs, fiscal year 1995

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Spending (billions of dollars)</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Social insurance</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Security</td>
<td>$333.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicare</td>
<td>156.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment insurance</td>
<td>25.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Means-tested programs</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicaid</td>
<td>89.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All means-tested guarantees</td>
<td>92.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>except Medicaid</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aid to Families with Dependent</td>
<td>17.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supplemental Security Income</td>
<td>26.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food Stamps</td>
<td>25.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education, training,</td>
<td>54.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>employment, social services</td>
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</table>

liest program is Medicare, a federal health insurance program for the elderly and disabled.

Social Security, Medicare, and unemployment insurance for the jobless are all financed largely by payroll contributions paid by the beneficiaries and other workers while employed. Together, the three programs dwarf in cost all the noncontributory programs. And of the latter, by far the costliest is Medicaid, a health program for the needy whose major benefits again flow to the elderly, for hospital care and nursing homes. Other than Medicaid, all means-tested benefits where all eligible persons are covered cost Washington less than $100 billion a year.

This total includes all of what most people mean by “welfare,” or income grants to the younger and more controversial poor. Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), the main butt of welfare reform efforts, supports female-headed families. Supplemental Security Income (SSI) supports needy persons who are elderly, blind, or disabled, while Food Stamps provides coupons to buy food to poor people of all descriptions. Federal spending for education, work programs, and other social services, most of them targeted on the poor, is only about $54 billion. State and local funding adds somewhat to these totals. While the cost of means-tested programs is significant, it is fair to say that expense is not the main objection to American “welfare,” or equivalent subsidies in

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Europe. Far more significant are the effects these programs may have on the social functioning of the poor.

Dysfunctional poverty threatens the Marshallian conception in a fundamental way, as economic stringency does not. For the argument that equal citizenship necessitates social provision operates only on behalf of people who are accepted as full citizens. Intellectuals emphasize the claims of citizenship, but Marshall also mentions obligations. Modern states impose duties to obey the law, pay taxes, and serve in the military. Education is both a right and a duty, in that government both provides schools and expects citizens to attend them.¹⁵ The current disordered poor, however, commonly violate these expectations. They have significant difficulty in obeying the law and getting through school. For this reason, they are often seen by the nonpoor as less than full members of the society—as “undeserving.” In Marshallian terms, this means that they cannot demand aid as a matter of right. Government may still give assistance to them, but as charity, not as something to which they are entitled.

V. THE WORK PROBLEM

Most academic discussions of the welfare state make little mention of the dutiful side of citizenship. It is simply assumed that the recipients of social benefits are “deserving.” In establishing desert, however, work discipline is fundamental, and here many of today’s poor adults have a problem.

A. Work and “deservingness”

What legitimizes the social insurance programs is their strong tie to employment. The beneficiaries of unemployment, pension, and health benefits, or their employers, pay premiums while they are working. They then may claim support from the programs with few questions asked when, due to layoff, age, or infirmity, they cannot work.

Historically, the claim of the working class to social protections rested on the disproportion between what it contributed to the society and what it received. Workers, it was presumed, labored harder than the upper class. In the Marxist version, they were exploited, even expropriated, by capitalism. In the populist version more native to America, capitalism is accepted but bosses and Wall Street are resented. If workers received economic guarantees from the society, that was only recompense for the burdens they bore. That conviction generated most of the moral force behind the labor movement and democratic socialism. Social insurance makes it a basis for social policy.

Nevertheless, the founding theorists of the welfare state worried that the premise of work discipline would be forgotten. Marshall and others were concerned, for one thing, that the enactment of rights for unions, an aspect of the welfare state, would make them unwilling to accept wage bargains consistent with the general interest. The refusal of unions to honor wage restraint, even when socialist parties were in power, is a serious problem for collectivist regimes in Europe. It is one aspect of a general problem of free government: the use of political freedoms by economic interests to organize against a free economy.

There was even a danger that people would be less willing to work or otherwise function at all. Beatrice Webb, a founder of British socialism, worried that society would ensure health care and unemployment benefits to workers “without any corresponding obligation to get well and keep well, or to seek and keep employment.” William Beveridge, whose wartime planning shaped much of the British welfare state, warned that “[m]en and women in receipt of unemployment benefit cannot be allowed to hold out indefinitely” for preferred jobs; they should have to accept lesser positions or, at least, enter an employment program. Marshall himself feared that work, which was enforced by self-interest as long as there were no social protections, would be tougher to enforce when it was merely “attached to the status of citizenship.”

B. Nonworking poverty

In our own time, that danger has come to pass. The chief problem is not that the presence of unemployment benefits makes many of those who lose jobs slower to find new positions, although that is true. It is rather that many adults today do not work regularly enough even to qualify for unemployment coverage, and the dignity that it implies. In the early 1960s in the United States, nearly 60 percent of the unemployed received unemployment insurance, but by the 1980s only a third did, mainly because fewer jobless had held their jobs long enough to qualify. A similar decline in coverage, for similar reasons, is apparent in Great Britain.
This is not to say that the work ethic has lost its grip. American adults are in fact employed at the highest levels in history. Men have taken extra jobs and their wives have entered the labor force in an effort to keep family income ahead of inflation. They had to do this because wages adjusted for inflation have not risen much for most Americans since 1973. The economy, fortunately, has created jobs in large numbers, albeit often at disappointing pay. In Europe, trends are similar, although the economy, due to a more regulated labor market, creates fewer, higher-paying jobs. Yet in the midst of the work obsession, long-term joblessness for a minority of adults is a serious problem in the U.S. The same tendency has arisen in Britain, provoking official inquiry.

Unfortunately, the work dearth is worst among the poor, who need social provision the most. In the U.S. in 1959, when concern over poverty was just beginning, over two-thirds of the heads of poor families reported working sometime in the year, and almost one-third worked full-time and full-year. But most of the working poor were lifted out of poverty by the rising earnings of the 1960s and early 1970s. Work levels among the remaining poor fell, until by 1975 only half of the heads of poor families reported any earnings and only 16 percent worked full-year and full-time. Those numbers have changed little since, even as the working proportion among the nonpoor has risen.

Among welfare recipients, almost all of whom are poor, reported work levels run even lower, with only 6 percent of welfare mothers saying that they worked in 1992, even part-time. Researchers say that the actual level is somewhat higher, with half of welfare mothers working at some time while on the rolls, often “off the books”; but work is rare among the long-term dependent, who dominate the rolls at any one time. The dependent mothers contrast sharply with single mothers not on welfare, of whom around 85 percent are employed.

Table 2 contrasts work levels among poor and nonpoor American adults in 1991, with separate figures for family heads and female family heads.

Table 2. Employment status of poor and nonpoor American adults, 1991

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Nonpoor</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Percentage of individuals 15 and over who</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worked at any time</td>
<td>39.8</td>
<td>72.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-year and full-time</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>45.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Percentage of family heads who</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worked at any time</td>
<td>50.4</td>
<td>80.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-year and full-time</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>61.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Percentage of female family heads who</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worked at any time</td>
<td>42.4</td>
<td>76.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-year and full-time</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>54.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In all categories, the difference is enormous, particularly for full-year, full-time work.

The Marshallian rationale for social provision, I submit, cannot survive work contrasts as great as these. For such figures reverse the moral presumption of social democracy. If work effort is the measure of deservingness, the affluent now seem more virtuous than the low-income. According to one government study, in 1986 working hours among families in the top fifth of the American income distribution were almost seven times as great as among families in the bottom fifth. 28 High work levels for the general population sustain the citizenship rationale for the social insurance welfare state, but low work levels for the poor put that case in question for welfare and other antipoverty programs. The wide perception that the current poor no longer satisfy the moral presuppositions of citizenship helped justify cuts in means-tested benefits since 1980, although overall spending on these programs, as on social insurance benefits, has continued to expand.

C. Grappling with poverty

Some contend that Marshall’s case remains valid without change. Social benefits are still a component of citizenship that everyone should get, and they are needed to inculcate citizenship. 29 Most intellectuals, however, recognize that the current dysfunction at the bottom of the society

poses a serious political dilemma. Unless the poor display better citizenship, especially by working, generous antipoverty policies could become indefensible.\textsuperscript{30} Liberal politics in general has become tarred with the brush of welfare, and that is one motive for the rethinking of liberalism now going on among political theorists.\textsuperscript{31}

Either order and effort must be restored at the bottom of society, so that the citizenship argument for antipoverty benefits again persuades, or some non-Marshallian basis for social policy must be found. Figure 1 arrays four possible approaches to the problem of poverty: entitlement, investment, privatization, and enforcement. The two dimensions of the table concern whether solutions focus on rights or obligations, and whether the argument for them rests mostly on citizenship or on the antipoverty effectiveness of the policies. Each approach claims both rationales to a degree, but a difference in emphasis is clear. In the following four sections, I consider briefly the case to be made for each of these strategies.

VI. ENTITLEMENT

Most social policy experts seek to solve the poverty problem with further benefits. They propose additional dimensions of social citizenship. Poverty exists, they contend, because the welfare state is not yet generous or extensive enough. Provide new entitlements and poverty will decline. The main arguments rest on rights, but some experts also claim that new rights would ameliorate the social problem.

A. Universal programs

One version of this case attacks the distinction between social insurance and public assistance. In the United States, that division is profound. The contributory programs, such as Social Security, are work-connected, and hence respectable, but welfare programs, such as AFDC, are mean-


tested, so that dependence on them carries imputations of failure. Social insurance is also distributed according to impersonal rules. Welfare is more demeaning because eligibility hinges to some extent on judgments about the personal “deservingness” of the claimants. As I note below, welfare has asked fewer questions about desert in recent decades, but it is still not respectable.

Proponents of universality want to overthrow this distinction, or at least blur the line between social insurance and welfare. In European countries, people who run out of unemployment benefits have much easier access to welfare than in the United States. Such continuity means that, in Europe, aid recipients tend to be defined as “unemployed,” with the dignity that implies, whereas in the U.S. they are seen as nonworking.

Better still, they argue, replace means-tested benefits with universal programs aiding the entire population. Especially, supplement or replace AFDC, the most controversial aid program, with children’s allowances, child tax credits, and better child support for the entire population. Replace Medicaid, the costly and troubled health program for the poor, with national health insurance for all. Replace means-tested employment programs aimed only at the poor with wage subsidies and training vouchers for all low-paid workers, and so on.

Universal programs, the contention is, would be better supported and funded than programs just for the poor, which will always be poor programs. The enormous popularity of Social Security and Medicare attests to this. Just as important, to include the poor under the same benefits as the middle-class would dignify them. It would submerge the indigent in a larger and better-functioning population. Their problems would become less visible. They might even function better because they were treated less suspiciously. From greater respect would flow greater self-respect. Universal programs would thus help realize, as well as reflect, equal citizenship.

One objection, of course, is that universal programs cost vastly more than welfare, because so much of the subsidy goes to affluent people who, economically, do not need it. Policy analysts tend to prefer means-testing because of its greater “target” efficiency. More important, however, there is no evidence that universalizing benefits without work stipulations would, by itself, edify the recipients. The dysfunctions of the poor have deep roots in family and ethnic history. They may be exacerbated by invidious treatment; but they are not caused by it, and to replace welfare with

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universal but permissive benefits would not overcome them. In Europe, passive, long-term dependency is growing even though the social insurance/welfare division is far less clear than in America. Universal programs would be more edifying if, like social insurance, they presumed work effort. But then they would fail to reach many of the poor, just because they are nonworking.

The case for universality assumes that changing the image of programs can change the reputation of the poor. Unfortunately, the reputation of the recipients seems rather to shape the image of programs. In the U.S., Social Security is respectable because the beneficiaries are retired working people who have “paid their dues.” Welfare is disrespectful because the clients are widely seen as “undeserving,” and not because their programs are means-tested. The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), a wage subsidy for low-paid workers, is means-tested and thus technically welfare. Yet it is popular in Congress. Family Credit, a similar subsidy, is popular in Britain. In both cases, this is because the subsidies premise support on employment, thus ensuring that aid is “earned.”

Combining benefits for the needy and the better off is also difficult to do in practice. In the U.S., the aged, blind, and disabled needy were traditionally covered under welfare programs akin to AFDC—partially financed by Washington but with benefits set locally. In 1972, Congress created the more generous, federalized Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program for these groups, on the view that they were more “deserving” than the female-headed families covered by AFDC. SSI was to be administered by the agency running Social Security, in hopes that it would acquire something of the same respectability. But the lives of the people covered did not thereby become less erratic. Their income continued to fluctuate rapidly, as is typical with welfare populations. Benefits had to follow suit, as in any means-tested program. Unused to tracking income, the Social Security Administration had great difficulty determining and updating SSI eligibility, a blow to its morale.

Further, SSI covered the disabled on the presumption that eligibility based on impairment would raise no questions about “deservingness.” In the later 1970s and 1980s, however, the rules and procedures that determined eligibility for disability became more lenient. Many people obtained coverage whose impairments were more judgmental or mental.

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35 Some would fear, as well, that to create new universal aid programs would expose many of the working poor to the incentives to misbehave that now impinge on the dependent poor. This objection is discussed under the privatization option below.

36 Riccio, From Welfare to Work among Lone Parents in Britain, pp. 16-19.

37 States may still supplement the SSI benefit, and most do, so that benefits still vary across the country; but the federal benefit establishes a significantly higher “floor” than existed before.

than physical. Moreover, by 1993, the disabled had grown from a minority of SSI recipients to 74 percent of the total.\textsuperscript{39} SSI now arouses many of the same questions about "deservingness" as AFDC. Similar doubts have arisen about Disability Insurance, which covers disabled workers as an aspect of Social Security.

Thus, covering the needy with universal programs does not forestall the controversies that surround welfare. A work connection is the touchstone of respectability in social policy, not universal coverage. Unless the recipients who can work do so regularly, the effect of covering them with a broader program will only be to tar social insurance with the brush of welfare.

B. Welfare rights

Another form of the entitlement argument is that welfare should become a right even without becoming a universal benefit. The best-known version, developed by Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward, is that welfare "regulates" the poor, supporting them apart from work when the economy is depressed, as in the 1930s, then cutting back support to force them to accept unattractive jobs when times improve. Alternatively, welfare is seen as a concession that government makes to the poor to stave off unrest.\textsuperscript{40}

Whether welfare exerts "social control" in this way is controversial among historians,\textsuperscript{41} but what is significant here is the Marshallian structure of the argument. Piven and Cloward say, in essence, that the welfare poor are really working people after all. They may not be working now, but they will when conditions improve. They constitute a "reserve army," in Marxist terms. They should be seen as "unemployed," as in Europe, not as malingers. Thus, AFDC is equivalent to unemployment benefits, and should be given in the same spirit, with no questions asked about lifestyle. Unfortunately, few adults who receive welfare have a steady enough work history to be construed as employees. Few work consistently even when times are good. The level of dependency has only a weak relationship to the state of the labor market. The most noted expansions of the American welfare rolls—in the late 1960s and late 1980s—occurred during economic booms, when unemployment was low rather than high.

\textsuperscript{39} Committee on Ways and Means, Overview of Entitlement Programs: 1994 Green Book (supra note 14), p. 209.

\textsuperscript{40} Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare, updated ed. (New York: Vintage, 1993). Piven is a political scientist, Cloward a professor of social work.

\textsuperscript{41} Walter I. Trattner, Social Welfare or Social Control? Some Historical Reflections on Regulating the Poor (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1983). See the rebuttal in Piven and Cloward, Regulating the Poor, pp. 456–66.
Another version of the argument is that welfare recipients should be construed as "deserving" because of their disadvantages. They might not have a work history, but they have suffered racial discrimination and other injustices, and that is morally equivalent to employment as a claim to aid. The trouble with this is that it differentiates citizenship obligations by class. Less is expected of the poor by virtue of their hardships than of the better off. That violates the Marshallian premise that citizenship is egalitarian. If work is taken to be an obligation of citizenship—and in the U.S. it unquestionably is—one cannot exempt the poor from it if one wants to justify provision for them on the basis of citizenship.

A final version of the welfare-rights argument maintains, in effect, that work should be deleted from among the common obligations of citizens. Charles Reich and other law professors argued in the 1960s that some minimum of income and other benefits should be guaranteed under the U.S. Constitution as indispensable to full citizenship, without any demands on citizens in return. The Supreme Court ruled that welfare is not constitutionally mandated, only permitted. It did, however, accept the more limited argument that welfare was a form of property that agencies could not revoke without granting the recipients due process. And it struck down some other rules that conservative states had used to restrict access to aid, particularly in the South.

The effect of these developments, along with liberalizing trends in national and state policy, was to institute a kind of welfare rights by the late 1960s. Aid was given to the vast majority of recipients on the basis of need alone, with fewer questions asked about lifestyle than had been asked formerly. Among the poor, the stigma against dependency broke down and the AFDC rolls doubled. But the victory of entitlement was never accepted by the bulk of voters or politicians. Liberal plans to expand welfare to new groups on the same basis were defeated in the 1960s and 1970s. Similarly, in Britain, the sharp growth of dependency is...
deeply unpopular despite welfare policies that to date award aid essentially on the basis of need alone.\(^{49}\)

To suspend the work obligation overtly, one would have to make a political case that it is no longer possible to expect work of the poor. In the prosperous 1960s, it was plausible to argue that automation was destroying low-skill jobs and that society could afford it if the redundant adults received income without employment.\(^{50}\) The future, however, turned out quite differently. The economy in recent decades has provided many low-skill jobs, while at the same time stagnant real wages for most workers have forced most families to raise their working hours to keep pace with inflation. It is an economy more favorable to the poor than to the middle class, but it also makes most voters want to enforce work on the poor more, not less, than they did before.

C. Opportunity policies

Given the weak support for universal programs or welfare rights, those who wish expanded assistance for the poor have no choice but to attack the employment problem. Traditionally, social democrats made a case for redistribution, but said little about opportunity. They contended that the wages and other conditions available to workers under capitalism were unjust. They argued for regulations and union rights to raise wages, and they wanted social benefits to support the jobless. But they assumed that workers could generally find jobs. If they could not, the reason was unemployment due to the business cycle, as in the Depression. Government should prevent this through activist fiscal and monetary policies, as Keynes advised. The purpose of detailed interventions in the labor market was much more to raise incomes than to create employment.

Under current conditions, the situation reverses. In the United States today, recessions are shallow by the standards of the 1930s, and job creation is prodigious. Unemployment runs higher in Europe, but is cushioned by more generous jobless benefits. The social problem stems less from starvation wages or mass unemployment than from long-term non-work and dependency for a part of the labor force, particularly youth and racial minorities. This has caused thoughtful liberals to shift their criticism away from wage exploitation to “barriers” that they say prevent poor adults from working at all.

The debate about poverty and welfare among American experts is dominated by discussion of these impediments.\(^{51}\) Many difficulties have been thought to explain why poor adults seem not to work for long

\(^{49}\) Riccio, From Welfare to Work among Lone Parents in Britain, ch. 1.


\(^{51}\) The following discussion relies heavily on Mead, New Politics of Poverty (supra note 12), chs. 4-6.
periods when most other adults are employed. The oldest theory, dating to the 1930s, is that this is due to a lack of aggregate demand to sustain a tight labor market. Other theories hold that racial bias shuts the poor, most of whom are nonwhite, completely out of employment, that a lack of available child care prevents welfare mothers from working, and so on. Conservatives, and some liberals, also contend that welfare itself sets up "disincentives" against marriage and employment. Mothers on the rolls are, in effect, paid not to marry or work, for if they did so they would lose benefits.

The most influential "barriers" theory in recent years has been the complex, structural understanding of the inner city developed by the sociologist William Julius Wilson and his followers. Wilson admits that job creation is adequate in the economy as a whole and that racial bias today is a minor cause of nonwork. Nevertheless, the poor face a "mismatch" between the skills they offer and the available jobs. Employers hire mainly in the suburbs, and they demand increasing skills. Poor adults, however, mostly live in the inner city and have limited education. They cannot reach the jobs, or they cannot qualify for them. The inability to work destroys the status of black men in particular. Unless they have steady work, their partners will not marry them, preferring to raise their children on welfare. Failure feeds a culture of defeat and self-destructive behavior, such as drug addiction, on the part of both men and women. The children born of such parents are not raised well, so they tend to fail in school and succumb to nonwork and welfare in their turn.  

Another prominent argument, pressed by the economist David Ellwood and others, is that low wages are the chief problem. Work may be available, but earnings have increased little for average Americans since 1973. They have actually fallen for the low-skilled, especially younger men of high school education or less. Thus, even if the poor find jobs, the positions do not pay enough to support families. So again men tend not to work regularly, while mothers go on welfare.  

Liberal experts contend that opportunity policies could break down these barriers. Government should guarantee employment by suppressing racial bias in hiring, providing training to the low-skilled, and, if necessary, creating government jobs for people who cannot find their own. Government should "make work pay" through wage subsidies and guaranteed health care. These steps would allow poor men and their partners to work and marry, live regular lives, and thus unwind the pathologies of the inner city.

The case is partly an instrumental one, that such policies would work. But advocates also want opportunity programs understood as a dimen-

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sion of the welfare state, to be guaranteed to all. Wilson emphasizes that the benefits should accrue to the entire population in need, not simply to blacks or ghetto dwellers.\textsuperscript{54} This is another version of Marshall’s case for social citizenship. In response to this kind of reasoning, training and employment programs aimed at low-income individuals have grown in importance in the U.S. and Europe since the 1960s.\textsuperscript{55}

The argument for attacking “barriers” is vulnerable, however, because it is so brutally empirical. The traditional leftist criticism of capitalism made a case for redistribution based on moral values. The case for opportunity policies is less redistributive and thus raises fewer issues of principle. It depends crucially, however, on showing that the “barriers” are real. This liberals have not done well enough to sustain their case. An ocean of research has sought evidence that lack of jobs or child care, or welfare disincentives, can explain low work levels or the high incidence of unwed pregnancy among the poor. Limited support has been found. It is true that poor adults typically command worse jobs and child care than other people do, and there still is some bias against minorities in employment. But these conditions mostly explain why the poor work at low wages if they work. They do not explain well why so few work regularly at all.

The force of welfare disincentives, which seems strong in theory, has little actual influence on whether poor adults work or marry.\textsuperscript{56} Programs that provided training or jobs on a voluntary basis have also shown only small effects. These programs assume that their clients lack only the skills or the opportunity to work, but experience has shown that what they chiefly lack is personal organization. Training programs are aimed less at imparting skills than at trying to motivate their clients to take and hold available positions. Most of the earnings gains they record come from the clients’ working more hours at jobs they can already get, not getting better positions.\textsuperscript{57} Other efforts to “make work pay,” such as allowing welfare recipients to keep more of their benefits when they take jobs, also fail to show much effect on work levels. British experiments in work incentives suggest much the same conclusion.\textsuperscript{58}

\textsuperscript{54} Wilson, \textit{The Truly Disadvantaged}, ch. 7.


\textsuperscript{56} See Moffitt, “Incentive Effects of the U.S. Welfare System” (supra note 26).


\textsuperscript{58} Riccio, \textit{From Welfare to Work among Lone Parents in Britain}, ch. 2.
Nonwork and unwed pregnancy are hard to explain, chiefly because they are dysfunctional. It is difficult to grasp why people would get into these behaviors, which make their lives harder, whatever conditions they faced. Low or stagnant earnings would seem to be a reason to work more, as the nonpoor population has done, not less. Dysfunction cannot be a simple reflex of adversity. More likely it reflects the defeatist subculture of the ghetto—what the poverty theorists of the 1960s called the "culture of poverty." The seriously poor share orthodox values and want to get ahead, but feel unable to do so in practice. Since the 1960s, society has become fairer to the poor and nonwhite, but hopelessness lives on in the defeatism parents communicate to their children.

The chief origin of this feeling appears to lie, not in unusual barriers, but rather in the difficult assimilation of some immigrant groups in Western countries. To newcomers, America offers unprecedented opportunity, but it is also a competitive society that makes great demands for work effort and self-reliance. Some members of every incoming group have prospered, as is still true today, but others have succumbed to disorganization. The more successful groups on average, such as English-speaking whites and Jews, have been those that stressed education and were already urbanized in their countries of origin. The less successful were those coming either from rural settings (the nineteenth-century Irish) or the Third World (most Hispanics). Blacks were victims of slavery, but they were also migrants from the rural South to Northern cities, where their adjustment problems have paralleled those of the Irish. Serious poverty in Europe exhibits similar patterns, in that much of it is concentrated among ethnic minorities with origins in former colonies outside the West.

Since the evidence for special barriers is weak, so is the case for further opportunity programs. Employment and training programs have gained a foothold in the United States and Europe, but they have not become in most places a major dimension of the welfare state. That reflects a lack of convincing results, and is not merely a consequence of the conservative politics of the last twenty years.

VII. INVESTMENT

The other benefit-oriented approach to poverty involves various sorts of investment in the personal lives of the needy. By this is usually meant

61 For a further development of this understanding, see Mead, New Politics of Poverty, ch. 7. I rely heavily on Thomas Sowell's Race and Economics (New York: David McKay, 1975), and his Ethnic America: A History (New York: Basic Books, 1981). An ethnic understanding of poverty is more persuasive than a racial one, because the variation in income or status within American racial groups is enormous, far greater than the difference in the averages between groups.
improved child care, health care, early childhood education (such as Head Start in the U.S.), or better schooling. These measures differ from opportunity programs since the focus is on building up the personal capacities of the needy during childhood and youth, rather than on breaking down impediments facing adults. The proposals would improve the health and child care and education that the poor already receive, partly by expanding the amount received but mainly by improving quality and targeting the new resources on the first years of life. While some argue that such benefits should be universal, the case for them is usually not Marshallian. Rather, the benefits would be targeted on the disadvantaged, and the case for them is instrumental—that they would, over time, reduce the incidence of serious deprivation.

The investment approach rests on the perception, which goes back to Aristotle, that the family is the foundation of the political order. Even a regime that values freedom and equality depends for the socialization of citizens on institutions that are unchosen and hierarchical, including the family and also the church and the neighborhood. In the words of columnist George Will, a liberal polity must discover some "sociology of civic virtue" sufficient to produce good citizens, or it will be "ill founded." Involuntary rule, however, is excusable provided its objects are children during their formative years. Once well-formed, individuals will be able to associate freely as equals in a democracy's public arenas, which include the workplace as well as politics.

The argument for investment is similar to the case traditionally made for education as a precondition for democracy. In the nineteenth century, when the suffrage was expanding to universality in Western countries, enlightened leaders of the old order said, "We must educate our masters," meaning the new electorate dominated by the working class. Governments therefore invested in education, which was previously provided privately, on a scale never before seen. In the twentieth century, public education through elementary and secondary school came to be guaranteed and also compulsory.

The contemporary case for investment is focused more on the family and early childhood and less on regular schooling, because of evidence that the incapacities of many poor people develop in the earliest years. Liberals contend that public programs to build up child and health care, guarantee early childhood education to all, and intervene in families in crisis would improve the later capacity of children to profit from schooling and employment. They would recoup their costs many times over

through reduced welfare and law-enforcement expenses. The case made by some conservatives is that society may have to take over child-rearing from the most troubled families, either placing children in orphanages or foster care, or requiring that single mothers and children live in supervised housing.

It is true that some children and family programs have shown success in evaluations, but their effects are not large enough to make a visible difference in the social problem. Small impacts are also found in the compensatory education and training programs for adults referred to above. Although modest, the effects may be large enough to justify the programs’ costs, but that is not a sufficient argument for them. Efficacy is the big problem in antipoverty policy, not expense. The great problem is to find any strategy that has a large enough effect truly to improve inner-city conditions. If one were found, justifying the cost would be secondary.

The main drawback of family programs appears to be their limited authority. While they may be informally directive, they do not overtly require that the beneficiaries do anything to help themselves. Most significantly, they do not require that the parents work, and nonwork among the poor largely explains why fathers abandon families and mothers spend years on welfare. Instead, the programs attempt to help children by getting around the parents. The results make clear that the parents usually cannot be gotten around. Unless parents do more to help themselves, there is little prospect of helping the children.

VIII. Privatization

The traditional conservative response to the social problem of poverty was libertarian. It argued on principled grounds that, even if serious poverty exists, government has no business doing anything about it. Either it is wrong to redistribute wealth from the rich to the poor, or to do so involves unacceptable interference with the free economy. Some thinkers still make that case today.

Most conservatives, however, prefer the instrumental argument that the entitlement and investment approaches considered above are futile. An extreme version says that the problems of urban poverty have cultural origins beyond the reach of government, and that therefore a policy of

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neglect is best.68 Less fatalistic is the view that benefit-oriented programs are counterproductive. Whereas liberals see barriers in the society that stop the poor from functioning, conservatives blame government for unhinging the moral and personal lives of the poor. They especially indict the welfare system, whose disincentives to marriage and work, they believe, largely explain the dissolution of the family in the inner city.

Several conservatives have made this case,69 but it is most associated with Charles Murray, whose Losing Ground became a manifesto for the Reagan administration’s attack on liberal social policy. Murray does not question antipoverty programs on grounds of principle or cost. Rather, he contends that rising social spending since the 1960s halted the nation’s progress against poverty. Welfare and other aid programs paid their clients to behave in antisocial ways, and they did so. Policy changed the “rules of the game” for them in destructive ways. To overcome poverty, the rules must be changed back so that self-reliance is again affirmed. To this end, Murray would raise educational standards and abolish racial preferences, but above all he would end all welfare for those who are of working age.70

Other conservatives argue that the federal government should devolve antipoverty programs to state and local government or, better still, to nongovernmental bodies such as churches or neighborhood associations.71 These “mediating structures” are more responsive and efficient than public agencies,72 and they can exert more influence over inner-city culture. Religious bodies have a power to involve the poor in a true community, both aiding them and challenging them to live better, as no public program can do.73

If assistance were privatized there would remain no public claim to assistance. One might still justify aid on the basis of charity, as a moral duty that the strong owe to the weak.74 But not all ethical codes have clear distributional implications. The injunctions of the Old and New Testament are addressed to strong and weak alike. On a moral basis, the rich should help the poor, but the poor equally should help themselves. Only a conception of justice, such as Marshall’s, can truly justify the welfare

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68 Edward C. Banfield, The Unheavenly City Revisited: A Revision of the Unheavenly City (Boston: Little, Brown, 1974), chs. 3, 10.
state. In the world of antigovernment conservatism, no such argument can be made.

The antigovernment case proved persuasive enough after the Republican takeover of Congress in 1994 to provide the main basis for the new welfare reform enacted in August 1996. Whereas the old law guaranteed funding for all applicants eligible for aid, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 gives federal funding to states as a block grant, with no guarantee that all eligibles will be funded. It limits families to five years on the rolls, although states may exempt a fifth of their caseloads from this limit. States receive much more control over eligibility for welfare, including a right, if they choose, to deny aid to unwed mothers under eighteen and to children born on the rolls. But at the same time, they have to meet stringent new work requirements. As a condition of federal aid, they are directed to move at least half of the adults on aid into work activities by the year 2002.

The libertarian argument, like the liberal case for entitlement or new services, is hostage to the facts. The evidence connecting welfare to the dysfunctions of the inner city is weak. Levels of unwed pregnancy do not vary appreciably around the United States with the level of welfare benefits. Social problems have continued to worsen in the last generation even as the generosity of welfare has fallen. Few poor men live on aid, yet their problems of nonwork and drug addiction are as serious as single-motherhood among women on welfare. Thus, merely to cut back welfare and other benefits would do little to resuscitate the inner city, quite apart from causing hardship.

It is also unimaginable that private institutions could cope with poverty without public resources. Advocates of privatization portray non-profit service-providers as standing outside government and prepared to take over its responsibilities. In large cities, however, many such organizations are already contractors to government. Typically, they provide


76 Some poor single men live unofficially off welfare mothers and their benefits. But since a man’s earnings would not reduce the mother’s benefits unless he were married to her, welfare disincentives cannot explain why such men do not work more regularly. Some conservatives believe that welfare at least relieves a father of the need to support his children. But poor fathers blame their failure to provide less on welfare than on their own inability to work and earn enough to support families. See Elliot Liebow, Tally’s Corner: A Study of Negro Streetcorner Men (Boston: Little, Brown, 1967); and Frank E. Furstenberg, Jr., Kay E. Sherwood, and Mercer L. Sullivan, Caring and Paying: What Fathers and Mothers Say about Child Support (New York: Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, July 1992).
child care, training, or other services to welfare clients or other poor people, financed by the many social service programs established in the 1960s. Thus, they are virtually part of government already, and the amount of new energy they could bring to overcoming poverty is limited.

It is still true that much of welfare administration can usefully be subcontracted to nongovernmental bodies. Some of the most effective welfare work programs in the United States are run by nonprofit and even profit-making organizations. Even in these cases, however, the programs depend for their effectiveness, not only on public funding, but on their ability to require that recipients participate and go to work as a condition of eligibility for aid. The authority to demand this, and to deny benefits in cases of noncooperation, must ultimately be wielded by public officials. Administration, therefore, must remain essentially public, at least as long as the funding is.

The antigovernment case is also impolitic. While the American people fear the ghetto and do not believe that new benefits or services could overcome it, they still want to protect needy families with children. They will not, as Murray wants, abandon them to the marketplace. For this reason, actual cuts in social benefits have so far been slight. Legislatures may not raise AFDC benefits in step with inflation, causing them to decline in real value, but they seldom cut them. Far more than wanting to reduce the welfare state, the voters want it to work better.

IX. ENFORCEMENT

The final option for antipoverty policy represents a return to a citizenship rationale, but this time with the emphasis on obligations rather than rights. The argument is that, if nonwork and other incivilities have weakened the welfare state, then work and other duties should be enforced. If the dependent poor become better citizens, especially by working, then

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the Marshallian case for aiding them is restored. To do this is also, instrumentally, the best way to solve the poverty problem.80

A. Social contract

A notion of “social contract” or reciprocity has displaced entitlement as the leading rubric for welfare reform among U.S. policymakers. The idea is that the needy should receive aid, but only in return for some contribution to the society and not as an entitlement. The public strongly endorses that notion, and most politicians for the last decade have accepted, at least in principle, that adults receiving welfare should have to work for their aid. In the U.S., federal legislation to require adults receiving welfare to enter work programs goes back to 1967; but the idea became dominant only in the mid-1980s, when it provided the political basis of the Family Support Act (FSA) of 1988. FSA’s main purpose was to expand mandatory work programs aimed at adults receiving AFDC.81

The new requirements were implemented in succeeding years. They have as yet touched only a minority of adults receiving welfare. However, a few states—most notably Wisconsin—have been able to use work programs to drive their welfare caseloads down.82 Others have gained special permission from Washington to add other requirements that welfare mothers must meet to get aid—such as getting their children vaccinated and keeping them in school.83 The welfare reform passed in 1996 will force states to expand work programs further, if they are to meet the new work standards. Enforcement programs are explicitly directive, as investment programs are not. They tell the clients how to live. While welfare still remains simply a benefit for most recipients, the day is foreseeable when it will become a regime, able to exact at least some behavioral changes from the recipient.

Similar trends are visible in other Western countries, although they are less advanced. In Britain, the current Conservative government has taken modest steps to require the long-term jobless to look for work or enter training programs as a condition of support.84 In Ontario, Canada, a

81 Mead, New Politics of Poverty, ch. 9.
84 Department of Employment, Training for Employment (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, February 1988); Department of Employment, Employment for the 1990s (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, December 1988); Riccio, From Welfare to Work among Lone Parents in Britain, ch. 3.
conservative government has cut welfare benefits but also plans to enforce work for the remaining adults, if necessary through government jobs. Active discussion of work enforcement is occurring in other European countries. 85

Critics on the left regard these steps as no more than an attempt to undo welfare rights. Before the American welfare-rights movement of the 1960s, social workers often arrogated to themselves the authority to tell welfare mothers how to live as a condition of aid. The new enforcement, critics say, would merely restore that discretion. 86 It is true that, to the extent that behavioral stipulations are attached to aid, it is no longer an entitlement. However, the procedural protections for benefits established in the 1960s remain in place. The goal is to complement welfare rights with obligations, both of them legally codified. While some discretion in implementing rules is unavoidable, it is far more limited than before the welfare-rights movement. It is now liberal experts rather than conservatives who argue for a return to a discretionary, decentralized system, as a way of preserving some aid to the needy that they do not have to earn. 87

B. Work requirements

The first argument for enforcement is political. It accords with public opinion. As mentioned above, the voters want to hold adults on welfare accountable for effort without denying aid to needy children. The best way to do that is to enforce good behavior within the welfare system, rather than either giving or denying aid without conditions. This approach is so popular that the political mystery is not why policy is following it but why it did not do so until recently. The answer is that policymaking elites were polarized in the more extreme positions of entitlement versus opposition to welfare as such. Enforcement involves a more subtle effort, neither to expand aid as it is nor to deny it, but to change its nature so that support is coupled to employment. 88

Liberal social-policy experts tend to see public opinion as a “constraint” on the antipoverty policy most of them favor, one that would spend generously on supporting poor families and investing in their

85 I often receive inquiries from European journalists interested in these issues, as do other American experts on poverty.
88 See Mead, Beyond Entitlement (supra note 21), chs. 8–11; Steven Michael Teles, Whose Welfare? AFDC and Elite Politics (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1996), ch. 4.
skills. Popular distrust, however, is aimed more at the undemanding character of antipoverty programs than at the principle of helping the poor, which remains popular. The main objection is to the permissive nature of welfare, not its cost. Most people are prepared to spend generously on a reformed welfare system—provided it truly enforced work.

The second argument for enforcement is instrumental: work requirements look like the best way to deal with the employment problem. Since serious welfare work programs appeared in the 1980s, a number have been rigorously evaluated, chiefly by the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC), a nonprofit research firm in New York. Most of these programs tried to train clients or place them in private jobs. Most of the programs mandated participation, but they were not particularly severe. Little use was made of unpaid government jobs to enforce work, and usually only 10 percent of clients incurred cuts in benefits for failure to cooperate.

MDRC uses experimental evaluations, where the effect of a program is gauged by measuring outcomes for a sample of recipients against the same outcomes for a second sample with equivalent characteristics but outside the program. In finished MDRC studies of AFDC work programs to date, clients of the programs gained 16 percent more in earnings and reduced their welfare income by 6 percent more than did the control group. While those effects are still limited, they are larger than those typically recorded by voluntary education-and-training programs. The main reason probably is that mandatory programs can reach a more disadvantaged clientele and thus have more power to cause change.

Mandatory work requirements show more power to raise work levels among the poor than any benefit or incentive where work is left as a choice. The impacts are also understated, because the evaluations do not capture diversion effects, or the power of demanding work programs to deter some people eligible for aid from applying for it. Localities that enforce work firmly can reduce dependency more than the evaluations would suggest. Strong work enforcement plus a strong economy helped Wisconsin drive down its AFDC rolls by a third between 1987 and 1995.

Much of the decline appears to be due to diversion. It is unclear who the diverted are or what happens to them, but to date anecdotes do not suggest unusual hardship.\(^9^4\)

The perception of effectiveness, as well as the social-contract rationale, were the main reasons why the Family Support Act focused on expanding welfare employment programs. Despite the current vogue for privatization in Washington, work requirements remain the dominant approach to welfare reform. Bill Clinton promised to “end welfare as we know it” when he ran for president in 1992, and his own welfare reform plan duly sought to enforce work requirements on recipients after two years on the rolls. The Republican Congress elected in 1994 rejected that plan and proposed cuts in welfare unacceptable to Clinton. But the two sides agreed that work enforcement should be strengthened. Any bill they agreed on, then, was bound to include tougher work requirements. Welfare is moving toward a regime where few adults will get aid without having to do something to help themselves.

The implementation of work enforcement, admittedly, is difficult. It means spending lavishly on child care and other support services for the recipients required to work, although the cost is more than recouped in effective programs due to caseload reductions. Just as important, it requires developing administrative systems able to assign clients to varying activities and then monitor their attendance. The most effective programs motivate staffs to enforce participation closely, and then motivate the clients to search for work, and to keep jobs once found. Only programs that do this truly undo entitlement, raise work levels, and produce change.\(^9^5\)

To date, only a few welfare work programs perform at this level. To achieve widespread enforcement would mean that the welfare state became a state in reality, not just in name. For then welfare would be able, not only to pay out aid, but to enforce the associated obligations, much as government enforces other civilities such as tax payment or obedience to the laws. The welfare state would become a structure for governance as well as for redistribution.

A more civil welfare state might once again expand. That prospect explains why the enforcement strategy, though originated by conservatives, has proven attractive to some moderates and liberals. It would, they hope, reaffirm federal leadership in social policy in an age suspicious of federal

\(^9^4\) The work programs were oriented mainly to private job placement. Since 1994, Wisconsin has implemented more demanding policies involving time limits and government jobs in some counties, but these are too recent to explain more than a small part of the caseload reduction through 1995. See Mead, The Decline of Welfare in Wisconsin (supra note 82), pp. 1–25.

\(^9^5\) Eugene Bardach, Improving the Productivity of JOBS Programs (New York: Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, December 1993); Lawrence M. Mead, The New Paternalism in Action (supra note 78).
power. While liberal social-policy experts do not endorse enforcement overtly, some accept the idea of time-limiting aid without work, and that, in practice, means enforcing work when the grace period runs out.

X. Poverty and Politics

Work enforcement offers the best hope to solve the current social problem, but we should not imagine that it would restore the welfare state as an expression of citizenship in the sense Marshall meant. It might restore civility enough for more generous antipoverty benefits to be justified, but the very need to improve functioning casts a dark shadow over the future of Western politics.

A. Progressive politics

Marshall took for granted a traditional view of politics: that it is a debate about justice, or the proper treatment of citizens. Every definition of citizenship embodies a decision about distribution, because it specifies the claims that the members of the community will have. In Marshall’s scheme, the meaning of justice becomes steadily more ambitious, as the content of citizenship expands to embrace political and then social guarantees. At every stage, however, the question faced by the polity is the same: What shall be the terms of belonging in the society? What as a citizen do I give and receive?

That same conception is used by John Rawls and other recent liberal theorists of justice. Several of them conceive politics as a debate among equal citizens about justice. They accept, as Marshall did, that the nature of the economy is to produce inequality but that citizenship is egalitarian. The question is how far, if at all, government should intervene in the society to even out uneven rewards.

This is what I call the progressive issue. Progressive politics—the traditional politics of class in the West—is a debate between those who want more equality through more government intervention and those who want less using a smaller government. Both stances make an appeal to the interests of ordinary people. Liberals promise more redistribution at the

97 Ellwood, Poor Support (supra note 53), ch. 5. Ellwood was President Clinton’s chief welfare planner.
98 The following discussion extends the discussion in Mead, New Politics of Poverty, chs. 1-2, 10-11.
hands of government; conservatives promise an economy less burdened by taxes and regulations and hence more able to generate jobs and rising incomes. Depending on social and economic conditions, either conception may have greater appeal.

However the progressive debate is resolved, it embodies two premises. First, the issue is the goals of the society rather than facts about social conditions. Nobody disputes that people are unequal; the question is whether to try to make them more equal through some public policy. Second, leaders and voters can make the competence assumption. That is, they can presume that the people they are trying to help are able to advance their own self-interest, if not society’s. The progressive debate is an argument among citizens with different preferences about government but a common respect for each other’s capacity to run their own lives.

B. Dependency politics

These are precisely the premises violated by current controversies about poverty, which I call dependency politics. The debate about today’s social problem is not, in the main, a debate about justice. Conditions in the society are much more in dispute than its values. The question is not what sort of country to have but why some people commit crime and fail to work within a social order that is unquestioned. The issue is not whether to have capitalism but whether poverty is due to an absence of jobs or to misbehavior. Where progressive politics is ideological, a contest among competing social visions, dependency politics is moralistic, a contest among competing views of the opportunity structure and the competence of the poor.

The effect of the poverty problem, in fact, is to drive issues of values and justice off the agenda and bring questions of social disorder on. This tends to conservatize politics, not because society becomes antigovernment, but because issues of justice cannot be raised. Issues of equity have not gone away. The economy continues to generate inequalities as it has in the past. In the United States, global competitive pressures make business less able to provide the public with benefits such as health care than it once was, and wages and incomes have become more unequal. Many intellectuals would like to see those problems get more attention in politics than they do. An old-left case for public intervention in the economy can still be made.100

But sharp changes in policy tend to be suppressed by cross-cutting arguments about the inner city. Rising crime and welfare played a major role in halting the social reforms of the 1960s and electing conservatives to office, first in the White House and then in Congress. Conservatives, however, are not necessarily the gainers. Concern over the poor was one

of the forces preventing Ronald Reagan and now Newt Gingrich from cutting social spending as much as conservatives want. The poverty problem tends to dampen changes in the scale of government either up or down.

Above all, dependency politics is not self-respecting; that is, the claimants who seek aid arouse questions of personal morals and mastery that are suppressed in the structural politics of class. The disputes in poverty politics may appear to be empirical, about whether jobs exist or work is feasible, but much of the real division is about the personality of the poor. Competence is disputed, not assumed. Those who see "barriers" in the society tend to view the poor as victims of whom nothing can be expected, while those who think opportunity exists have a higher view of the competence of the poor and, thus, of their responsibility for their own predicament.

In antipoverty policy, the trends are toward paternalism, or the efforts described above to link support with behavioral requirements. This assumes that adults as well as children need guidance in order to live constructively. Such policies may help restore good citizenship and thus help legitimate welfare. But the very need for them, and the controversy about them, is foreign to Marshall's universe and the central political traditions of the West.

C. How poverty is new

I do not say that poverty is a new issue. It is an old issue, extending back at least to the Elizabethan Poor Law of 1601, which first made assistance a public responsibility in England. The themes of poverty politics—moral responsibility, "deservingness," social control—are timeless. What is new is the seriousness and prominence of the issue. Liberal intellectuals tend to say that welfare is a red herring, a bogey trotted out by conservatives to suppress discussion of the inequities of capitalism. But the social problem is hardly imaginary. In New York City, a million people out of a population of seven million are living on welfare. The society cannot be unified unless poverty and dependency decline.

Before 1960, welfare in America was an issue principally at the local level. In Britain, it became a leading issue only sporadically, preeminently during the controversy over the New Poor Law of 1834, which abolished mass relief outside workhouses. National politics have usually been dominated by issues of class and, in the United States, race. These were the chief disputes that raised the progressive choice between more and less government. Since 1960, however, the inner city has displaced class as the most divisive issue in America, and race, while still urgent, has become

an issue more linked with poverty than with inequality. In Europe, similarly, immigrant minorities have become more controversial than the proletariat. The greatest disputes concern social problems such as crime or dependency rather than economic inequality.

Nor is the point even that incivility marks the dividing line between the old politics and the new. Violence—protest, even revolution—has sometimes been a dimension of progressive conflict. In America, the 1930s and the 1960s, and labor politics in all eras, sometimes involved marches, demonstrations, and battles with police. Britain, notwithstanding its deep commitment to the rule of law, harbors an ancient tradition of popular unrest aimed at the redress of grievance. In Marshallian terms, an old citizenship must sometimes be violated to establish a new and more extensive one.

What divides dependency from progressive politics, rather, is the self-defeating quality of the new disorders. In reviewing a book on British political violence, The Economist recently wrote that

the most striking contrast between 18th-century England and 20th-century inner-city America (and, come to that, 20th-century inner-city England) concerns the adaptation of means to ends. Violence in the 18th century was almost never savage or anarchic. Looting and arson were rare. . . . The 18th-century mob usually had goals and directed its violence to the achievement of those goals. It was aware that too much force would provoke counterforce and end up being self-defeating.102

The riots in American and British inner cities, in contrast, are mostly self-destructive, burning down the rioters’ own neighborhoods while obtaining few if any concessions in return.

Piven and Cloward attempt to show that disorder is a political virtue. Popular movements must threaten chaos to maximize their effects. If they organize parties or lobby groups, or assume any responsibility for government or policy, they achieve little change.103 The case persuades only in the most tactical sense. Disorderly violence may startle the authorities and obtain subsidies in the short run. It cannot, however, achieve greater equality. Citizens who harm themselves cannot earn the respect of others and thus cannot negotiate a new dispensation of justice.

The War on Poverty might have produced much more change than it did. What ended it was not so much the election of Richard Nixon as the urban riots and the welfare explosion of the late 1960s. Both dramatized that the poor were not in control of their own lives. The competence assumption was violated, and the poor could no longer be regarded as

102 “Then and Now,” The Economist, August 8, 1992, p. 81.
103 Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, Poor People’s Movements: Why They Succeed, How They Fail (New York: Pantheon, 1977).
regular citizens. They were not entitled, therefore, to demand equalizing reforms.

It is not the danger posed by the inner city but its incoherence that pushes fundamental change off the agenda. The traditional working class had far more capacity than today’s poor to threaten the status quo. It had the indispensable resources, political as well as economic, that come from employment. During the industrial era, the working class served its own interests extremely well. Through unions and reform parties, it challenged the rest of society to make a place for it. Workers had to be placated with higher earnings and a welfare state. The civil rights and feminist movements showed equal acumen. These, too, were movements on behalf of functioning citizens, and they obtained their major goals. Today’s poor, in contrast, are more threatening to themselves than to the society. The main response to dependency is not concession but repression and paternalism. Strikes and marches move politics to the left; crime and welfare move politics to the right.

D. Poverty and community

The expansion of social provision that Marshall celebrated honored the innermost values of Western politics—the individual and community. The growth of the claims of citizenship over time tended more and more to knit up society into a single polity of equal members. Looking to the past, the political scientist Hugh Heclo writes, “inclusion” is “the defining feature of our Western identity,” but today that ideal is in danger. 104 Community among citizens can only be built on a basis where individuals show enough self-command to merit the esteem of others. The danger raised by poverty is not that the poor will make excessive demands. They are too few in number to cost impossible sums or to change the society as the labor and feminist movements did. It is rather that the new social minorities no longer display the personal organization that makes a community of equal citizens imaginable.

Throughout the West, division will probably no longer arise in the future chiefly from class but from minorities on the periphery of the society. In Europe, the chief problem is immigrant minorities who seem alien to these largely homogeneous societies. In the United States, the problem is not so much ethnic pluralism, which is long-standing, as the tendency of today’s poor to be nonworking. Before 1960, poverty levels were much higher than now, but most poor adults were employed, and this tended over time to integrate them. Today, there is less poverty, but the separation of the poor from the economy makes integration more doubtful. Therefore, social programs must promote work, and even enforce it, assuming the function that the workplace did before. Whether

they can do that will largely determine whether “inclusion” remains an operative ideal.

It is difficult to recall an era in Western history when the restoration of order was so much an imperative in and of itself. Looking back centuries, there have been eras of violence, even civil war, but disorder mostly reflected conflict over political ends. It arose from the great issues of nation-building or religious or class conflict. Today’s urban disorder is less threatening, in the sense that it no longer betokens any fundamental division in the society. We have disorder linked to poverty but not linked to any larger political agenda, of either the left or the right. Destitution no longer raises issues of justice. By the same token, however, conventional reformism of either a liberal or conservative kind is no longer a solution. The only answer to poverty is a slow building up of community institutions, including antipoverty programs, to the point where they can again enforce the common obligations of citizenship.

The prospect is for a long struggle to restore the self-reliance assumed in Western politics. Only if order is restored in cities, and especially if work levels rise, could the poor become more self-respecting. Only then could they stake claims on the collectivity as equals, rather than seeking charity as dependents. In restoring some coherence to the lives of the poor, the new paternalist social policies, if well-implemented, could make a critical contribution. But as long as they are needed, a truly Marshallian debate about citizenship and equality will be unimaginable. The virtue of poverty politics—perhaps its only virtue—is that it disputes and thus dramatizes the assumption of personal mastery among citizens that traditional politics never questioned. Only when it is again unquestioned and thus drops from view could a debate about justice resume.

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