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Remembering Welfare as We Knew It: Understanding Neoliberalism through Histories of Welfare

Abstract: The political transformation that culminated in the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act fueled scholarly interest in welfare history. As politicians dismantled welfare, scholars discovered long histories of raced and gendered social control, intertwined public and private interests, and fixations on work and personal responsibility. They also recovered more promising possibilities of cash assistance. This article examines foundational welfare histories published between 1971 and 2018. I suggest that this somewhat isolated body of work has shed bright light on the history of neoliberalism from the perspective of people never fully included into social citizenship. It exposes how neoliberalism is and is not different from mid-century liberalism and recovers a long history of resistance. In an era when few talk about cash assistance, welfare historiography is vital for restoring fading memory of its redistributive potential.

Keywords: US welfare policy, Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)

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Twenty-six years ago, with the assistance of a Republican congress, Democratic President William Jefferson Clinton fulfilled his campaign promise to “end welfare as we know it.” Clinton signed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) on August 22, 1996, replacing the then sixty-one-year-old Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), the federal cash assistance program that Americans had long referred to as “welfare,” with Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). Under AFDC, the federal government had granted states matching funds to support dependent children and caregivers (usually single mothers) they found eligible.¹ The PRWORA removed the welfare entitlement and instead funneled federal money through block grants states could allocate however they saw fit. It strengthened work requirements, capped cash assistance at a five-year lifetime limit, and allowed states to impose stricter sanctions and time limits. The PRWORA promoted marriage and ramped up tracking of so-called absent fathers and child support enforcement. It restricted the benefits available to documented and undocumented immigrants. The PRWORA was the apex of welfare retrenchment and represents the triumph of neoliberal social policy.

Some suggest that the expansion of other social welfare programs, including tax credits and public health insurance, offset the PRWORA and other welfare state contraction.² Since creating the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) in 1975, the federal government has steadily expanded the program, which provides credits (and in some states refunds) to taxpayers working for low wages—one historian called it a “supplement to wages” rather than a safety-net program.³ Public health care spending also increased.⁴ The Children’s Health Insurance Program, created in 1997, covered 9.7 million children by 2019.⁵ The 2010 Patient Protection and the Affordable Care Act (ACA) gave states the option to expand Medicaid to cover adults whose incomes reached 133 percent of the federal poverty level, adding about twelve million US citizens and permanent residents to Medicaid rolls by 2019.⁶

But increased spending on health insurance and tax credits does not discount the severity of welfare reform. Cash support is unique and the elimination of AFDC irrefutably dire for single women and children, as many scholars and journalists have shown. Immediately following the PRWORA, many former AFDC recipients did not find jobs; some earned such low wages that they stayed below the poverty line, even after receiving the EITC. Welfare reform further immiserated women. Between 1995 and 1997, the poorest 20 percent of female-headed families lost \$580 in income.⁷

In the longer term, welfare reform shortened the life expectancy of women receiving benefits. In 2012, 74 percent of low-income families were not receiving TANF and in 2015, more than 1.5 million households (including three million children) in the US subsisted on less than US\$2 per person a day, a 159 percent increase since 1996.⁸ States have poured TANF dollars into marriage counseling and antiabortion pregnancy “crisis centers.”⁹ Kansas banned TANF recipients from using benefits to go to the movies or swimming pools in 2015, and as of July 2016, the lifetime eligibility limit for TANF in Arizona is one year.¹⁰

In a way, welfare reform continued a long, well-documented history of welfare policy failing to meaningfully address poverty or inequality. The Social Security Act of 1935, a vital piece of New Deal legislation and the epitome of the liberal welfare state, established Aid to Dependent Children (ADC)—later changed to Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC)—alongside its old age and unemployment insurance programs, though ADC had earlier roots in nineteenth-century relief and Progressive Era mothers’ pensions. From its inception, ADC enacted gendered and raced ideas about work and dependency, imposed social control on recipients, and nurtured inequality. Still, the program offered unprecedented benefits (and according to some, rights) for many. But as ADC swelled to include more divorced, never-married, and African American women on its rolls in the post-WWII period, antiwelfare sentiment gained momentum and mechanisms of social control expanded to include “man-in-the-house” laws, which denied benefits to women found to be consorting with men, and legislation incentivizing work. In the explosive social movement milieu of the 1960s, a massive welfare rights movement demanded the right to welfare as a guaranteed income, the power to choose whether to work outside the home, and dignity and respect at the hands of the government. After the movement achieved limited success, including Supreme Court rulings establishing AFDC as an entitlement, the state responded with retrenchment and punishment—a trend epitomized by state-level reforms adding work requirements during the 1970s and, on a national level, President Reagan’s Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (OBRA) of 1981.¹¹ The Family Support Act of 1988 added child support enforcement to the state’s arsenal of social control strategies. The neoliberal PRWORA was in some ways the logical conclusion of an older, liberal social welfare system that was punitive, prejudiced, and paltry—a common theme in the historiography of welfare.

From the height of the welfare rights movement through the passage of the PRWORA, scholarly interest in welfare seemed to grow in an inversely proportional relationship with welfare itself. As state and federal governments waged a war on welfare, scholars raised questions about the history of the nation's most stigmatized social program. In the early 1970s, when income redistribution seemed possible, activist scholars Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward criticized liberal welfare programs for being capitalist tools of labor discipline and social control.¹² This early work set a critical tone for the scholarship that followed. As the New Deal order receded further into the past and antiwelfare virulence worsened in the 1980s and early 1990s, historians like Michael B. Katz excavated the roots of the stigmas surrounding welfare.¹³ Feminist scholars such as Linda Gordon, Barbara J. Nelson, and Gwendolyn Mink looked more directly at AFDC's history and how liberal reformers helped engender a two-tiered welfare system premised on the breadwinner wage and the racial and gender stratification of labor. They also gestured at the positive potential of welfare and alternatives for a more effective, less controlling system.¹⁴ Implicitly, these scholars situated their own neoliberal contexts as outgrowths of a restrictive and exclusionary liberal order.

But the catastrophic PRWORA prompted questions about how welfare under neoliberalism was *different* from what came before. Michael B. Katz, who wrote about poverty and welfare from the 1980s until his death in 2014, reflected on how the changing political climate had shaped his work. He remarked on "how odd it felt," after Clinton signed the PRWORA, "to find myself on a panel at Bryn Mawr actually defending AFDC instead of trashing the program for its shortcomings."¹⁵ Katz's comment captured the trajectory of welfare scholarship. Writing during the dismantling of welfare and the ascent of neoliberalism, welfare scholars had offered exceptional insights on continuities with earlier eras—perhaps seeking to alter the course of welfare policy. But the 1996 welfare reform bill (and indeed decades of welfare policy leading up to it) had marked a decisive change.

Welfare reform also changed the way scholars wrote about welfare history. After the PRWORA, two distinct bodies of feminist scholarship emerged. One, including historians Premilla Nadasen, Felicia Kornbluh, and others, documented the history of the welfare rights movement to recuperate arguments in defense of welfare.¹⁶ Political historians such as Jennifer Mittelstadt and Marisa Chappell made up a second corpus. They looked to the recent past to probe the roots of welfare's demise, concluding that liberals helped manufacture welfare's contradictions and failings.¹⁷ But after this burst of research on welfare history following the PRWORA, the

study of the more expansive welfare *state* largely supplanted interest in the history of cash assistance. Historical investigation of welfare waned in the age of TANF.

A small group of scholars kept at it. And amidst the recent resurgence in movements favoring a more robust state response to persistent social and economic inequalities, a handful of pivotal texts are packed with fresh insights. The works of scholars including Karen M. Tani, Julilly Kohler-Hausmann, and Felicia Kornbluh and Gwendolyn Mink recognized the limits of A(F)DC that welfare scholars before them identified while also highlighting its democratizing and empowering effects. They also recounted the backlash that ensued to discipline the rights claims resulting from that empowerment.¹⁸ Centering cash assistance programs serving poor women and children, this five decades of scholarship offers a uniquely revelatory account of late twentieth-century politics.

Historians can and ought to look to this rich body of work to better understand neoliberalism. Neoliberalism is a pervasive and nebulous late twentieth-century political paradigm that unraveled social programs, deregulated industry, heightened surveillance and social control, intensified worker discipline, constrained democracy, financialized daily life, and expanded inequality.¹⁹ Early accounts of neoliberalism's history centered the late twentieth-century fates of industrial workers, trade and monetary policy, and mainstream ideological realignment—perspectives that favored white men, implied that this period marked a sharp decline from the mid-century “golden age” of American liberalism, and suggested consensus.²⁰ Some recent scholarship reveals longer, rangier roots of neoliberalism, originating in the segregationist, “public-choice” politics of Virginians, the Federal Reserve's anti-inflationary postwar fiscal policy even New Deal infrastructure projects and Great Society housing programs, to name some examples.²¹ Others chart the rise of neoliberalism through histories of the carceral state, which swelled in response to surplus labor created by deindustrialization and an increasingly militant Black liberation movement.²² A few show how the exploitation of women's caring labors was integral to ushering in the new political and economic paradigm.²³ Scholar Melinda Cooper explicitly interrogates neoliberal social policy, arguing that policy makers responded to the breakdown of the Fordist family wage (and the social movements that criticized it) with the “strategic reinvention of a much older, poor-law tradition of private family responsibility, using the combined instruments of welfare reform, changes to taxation, and monetary policy.”²⁴ Some historians of racial inequality, including N. D. B. Connolly, reject the category of neoliberalism because it implies

that liberalism was good for everyone, thereby eliding the experiences of Black Americans.²⁵

This article suggests that, for decades, scholars of welfare history—many assuming roles as “social critics” or even activist scholars—have been shedding light on the history of neoliberalism, from the perspective of people never fully included into social citizenship.²⁶ Though seldom focused explicitly on neoliberalism, historical writing on welfare, published as politicians were dismantling welfare, provided a trove of insights—and, crucially, ones that kept marginalized people, usually women, at the center of inquiry. By analyzing cash assistance programs that served poor single women, at times disproportionately women of color, this scholarship shows that attributes usually associated with neoliberalism had roots in liberal policy-making and reform efforts. Liberal social policy used social control to uphold capitalism and racist and sexist labor regimes. But state discipline and control existed alongside the promise to provide.

At the same time, through its attention to race and gender, welfare scholarship exposes what is distinctive about neoliberalism.²⁷ Many scholars have rightfully looked to the rise of the carceral state to parse what the neoliberal turn meant for marginalized populations. Welfare scholarship charts a parallel trend. It shows how neoliberal social policy set out to discipline poor women of color to fulfill growing demand for low-wage labor and, perhaps most importantly, in response to welfare recipients’ claims to cash support as a right. Focusing on political economy and social programs that, if stingily and coercively, remunerated women’s caretaking labors, this work unearths the complexities of the liberal state as a source of both care and coercion. It also shows how the neoliberal state abandoned its tenuous mandate to care, leaving many single mothers “without reserves,” in the powerful words of historians Salar Mohandesi and Emma Teitelman.²⁸ The overly isolated corpus of welfare scholarship offers trenchant analysis of neoliberalism’s history and a model of activist scholarship. From the frontlines of the war on welfare, shoulder-to-shoulder with welfare rights activists fighting to transform, expand, and in some ways defend welfare, these scholars offered unflinching critique of the welfare system and evidence of its necessity. It is vital that historians reckon with welfare historiography because it demonstrates the lack of consensus on welfare reform or neoliberalism.

A quarter century after the PRWORA, this article reflects on the state of the field of welfare history from 1971, when Piven and Cloward published the foundational *Regulating the Poor*, through 2018, with Kornbluh and Mink’s *Ensuring Poverty*, a history of welfare reform. It is not comprehensive but

instead focuses on histories of welfare in the twentieth century and centers foundational texts representative of critical moments in welfare historiography.²⁹

There are political stakes to revisiting welfare scholarship twenty-five years after welfare reform. Where neoliberalism has made redistribution appear to be a political impossibility, this historiography restores fading memories of the feminist, antiracist, and redistributive possibilities that cash assistance might have offered—and might offer now in a moment of ongoing crisis.³⁰ Welfare sits outside the imaginations of even many progressive political figures, who instead posit workforce participation as the only means to an adequate income.³¹ In recent years, policy makers have propped up means testing and incentive to work in debates over whether they should grant Americans benefits during an unparalleled public health and economic crisis. Understanding welfare history can help restore positive visions of cash assistance and its role in empowering people to escape abusive partners, shelter from deadly pandemics, and survive.³² In fact, I suggest that failing to consider this work is a concession to the efficacy of the neoliberal assault on welfare, which has so stigmatized and dismantled cash assistance that few historians discuss it.

WELFARE AS SOCIAL CONTROL

Scholarly critiques of welfare emerged from activist scholarship in the 1970s and cast a long shadow. Leftist sociologists Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward published *Regulating the Poor* in 1971, on the heels of the mid-1960s explosion of welfare rolls and amid their involvement in the welfare rights movement (the book is dedicated to George Wiley, director of the National Welfare Rights Organization [NWRO]). They wrote in a moment of possibility; the NWRO and its allies were fighting for a guaranteed annual income (GAI)—and thought they might get it. Though legal challenges failed to “constitutionally establish the right to a minimum welfare payment,” according to Premilla Nadasen, struggles for a GAI were gaining traction in progressive circles.³³ Libertarians also backed a basic income support program, though with the intent to roll back other facets of the welfare state. Even President Nixon introduced a GAI program, the Family Assistance Plan (FAP). The NWRO, who demanded \$5,500 annually, opposed Nixon’s proposed \$1,600 as too low and denounced work requirements; they ran a campaign against it, catchily calling to “Zap FAP.”³⁴

In this context, Piven and Cloward looked to history to understand the means-tested, federalist, wholly inadequate welfare system they sought to transform. They devised a theory about the relationship between welfare and capitalism: “Relief arrangements are ancillary to economic arrangements,” they wrote. “Their chief function is to regulate labor.”³⁵ Since the sixteenth-century transition to capitalism in Western Europe, they found, relief was used as a tool of social control. Capitalism’s volatility produced periods of mass unemployment, which led to unrest. “To restore order,” the government expanded relief programs; when the economy stabilized, the state contracted relief, forcing people back into the labor market. Piven and Cloward proposed a schema to explain this process: periods of instability (the Great Depression, the postwar mechanization of Southern agriculture) caused unrest (unemployed mobilizations in the 1930s, urban uprisings in the 1960s); the state responded by increasing social welfare provision (the New Deal, the Great Society).³⁶ The state made ongoing relief degrading, “to enforce work, especially very low-wage work.”³⁷ During periods of relative quiet (the 1940s and 1950s), they posited, welfare programs focused on reinforcing work norms through statutes including “man-in-the-house” rules, which barred AFDC recipients from living with men the state perceived as would-be breadwinners; work requirements; and administrative practices such as intentionally not advertising programs, “fantastic paperwork,” under-budgeting, and surveillance. Public relief was not meant to help people, they argued; instead, it was a necessary complement to capitalism and, in recent decades, to American liberalism.³⁸

Piven and Cloward set their sights on critiquing the existing system, maintained by liberal policy makers, that controlled and degraded the poor. They were writing against the “progressive liberalization” of welfare and from the belief that a universal and substantial federal income program was necessary to eliminate poverty and provide dignity to all.³⁹ Piven and Cloward advocated mass organizing for a federal guaranteed income. “The size of the welfare rolls is not a response to the needs of the poor,” Piven and Cloward coaxed their readers, “but a response to the trouble they make.”⁴⁰ *Regulating the Poor’s* structural critique of welfare and its call to action are emblematic of the historical moment in which it was produced. But although Piven and Cloward supported and anticipated large-scale reform, they were writing amidst neoliberalism’s ascent (if before this terminology came into common use), as the state refused welfare rights activists’ legal claims to a guaranteed income and put more disciplinary measures in place. This context may have helped them recognize the longer history of the state using social policy to

fulfill capital's needs. Indeed in recent years, after watching policy makers openly debate how much money the government could distribute without disincentivizing low-wage work, Piven and Cloward's overarching framework was prescient.

When policy makers in the 1970s responded to more forceful rights claims like the ones Piven and Cloward were making with cuts and restrictions, they defied the schematic Piven and Cloward had outlined. The welfare rights movement continued to organize in the tumultuous years following the publication of *Regulating the Poor*, and for a time benefits expanded.⁴¹ But antiwelfare sentiment came to dominate mainstream political discourse. Amidst rising inflation and growing unemployment, state governments created increasingly punitive welfare policies. Nixon's FAP and Carter's even less ambitious Program for Better Jobs and Income both failed. Instead, in 1975 the federal government created the Earned Income Tax Credit, which provided tax relief to workers whose earnings fell below a certain threshold.⁴² In spite of persistent economic hardship, the Reagan Administration passed OBRA in 1981, narrowing AFDC eligibility and strengthening work requirements introduced in the 1960s. The rightward-moving Democratic Party increasingly embraced welfare reform. By the 1980s, something about the nature of US welfare policy and American liberalism had changed.⁴³

Scholarship during the 1970s and early 1980s, a pivotal period in the politics of welfare, was divided. Some work amplified Piven and Cloward's claims about social control through case studies of different facets of the welfare state.⁴⁴ Many recounted more redemptive histories of the nation's welfare system. William I. Trattner's multiedition *From Poor Law to Welfare State* (1974, 1979, 1984, 1989, 1994, 1998, and 2017) offered a sympathetic, synthetic examination of social welfare, and James Patterson's *America's Struggle against Poverty, 1900-1980* (1981) defended the US welfare system as more substantive and better intentioned than many had surmised.⁴⁵ Some recovered the welfare capitalist roots of the welfare state.⁴⁶ Other notable scholarship explicitly advanced the conservative, antiwelfare goals that were gaining prominence during this period. Charles Murray's *Losing Ground* (1984) argued outright that welfare was bad for its recipients.⁴⁷ In retrospect, Michael B. Katz saw a lacuna in historical welfare scholarship from this period—a gap with political consequences. He reflected in a 1998 historiography essay, “when President Ronald Reagan wanted to roll back the welfare state, historians by and large lacked the evidence with which to assess the assumptions about the historic roles of family, community, and state that underlay his

proposals.”⁴⁸ Later in the decade, with attacks on welfare mounting, scholars set out to fill that gap—Katz included.

Disparaging tropes like the “welfare queen” and the “underclass” increasingly occupied the popular imagination in the 1980s; cuts and mandatory work requirements followed. Katz’s *In the Shadow of the Poor House* (1986), a synthetic history of US welfare from the nineteenth-century poorhouse to the 1980s “war on welfare,” defines the historiography of this dark era in welfare’s history. The increasingly punitive and demeaning nature of welfare policy lent resonance to Piven and Cloward’s social control thesis. Their influence on Katz, who argued that antiwelfare sentiment was not new but “echoes nearly two centuries of criticism,” is indisputable.⁴⁹ But Katz distinguished his work by emphasizing historical contingency: “welfare policy results from the choices among alternative possibilities,” Katz wrote.⁵⁰ Unlike Piven and Cloward, whose analysis of welfare as a system of liberal social control derived from optimism about impending change, Katz’s ideas emerged from a deeply pessimistic historical moment. *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse* opens, “Nobody likes welfare.”⁵¹

Still, Katz offered other possibilities, and many of his conclusions matched those reached in *Regulating the Poor*. Looking back from the 1980s, Katz found likeness between the relief system set up to sustain the classically liberal economic system of the nineteenth century and his conservative antiwelfare moment when politicians ignored structural forces like unemployment, blamed the poor for their poverty, and ratcheted up disciplinary systems like fraud detection. In fact, he found continuity across the twentieth century. During tumultuous periods in US history, public officials and reformers pursued welfare policies that refused to “tamper with the structure of American capitalism.”⁵² Instead, they implemented forms of public assistance that only went so far as to keep people from starvation while preserving the existing social, labor, and political order.⁵³ Katz argued that since the creation of the poorhouse, relief was bent on “detering the poor from asking for relief and making them willing to work hard for low wages.” The widespread fear that relief bred idleness led to these contradictory goals—compassion and deterrence—that distinguished the worthy from the unworthy poor.⁵⁴ The New Deal state adopted aspects of Progressive Era welfare programs like mothers’ pensions and contributory systems of social insurance developed in the private sector, using “the power of the federal government to crystallize the distinction between social insurance and public assistance and reinforce income inequality.”⁵⁵ Officials abandoned more universal, federal, high-paying public works programs in favor of relief programs that were

means-tested, decentralized, and inadequate.⁵⁶ The architects of the War on Poverty adhered to these “conventions of American liberalism,” favoring opportunity over redistribution.⁵⁷ In the 1970s, inflation, oil shocks, and rising unemployment made “voters receptive to the war on welfare.”⁵⁸ Katz traced change over time, but his argument highlighted the strange continuity of welfare, in spite of its many contradictions.

Katz’s book drew a straight line from classical liberalism to his neoliberal moment, passing through the heart of the New Deal and Great Society. Connecting nineteenth-century poor relief to the stigmatized welfare programs of the 1980s (and everything in between), Katz suggested that state refusal to use social policy to value dignity over capitalism was age old. But Katz failed to grapple fully with the public assistance program that mostly served families headed by single mothers and was practically synonymous with welfare: Aid to Families with Dependent Children.⁵⁹ Thus, he largely missed women, whose experiences demonstrated how late twentieth-century welfare policy was unique. Feminist historians writing in early 1990s would begin to illuminate the gendered and raced history of welfare—and what it told us about the political order we now call neoliberalism.

FROM SOCIAL CONTROL TO SOCIAL REPRODUCTION

In the 1990s, feminist scholars cast light on the racialized gender politics that had long animated US welfare policy. Where those before them had centered attempts to discipline productive labor, feminist scholars focused on programs that have been instrumental in defining women’s distinct relationship to work: Aid to Families with Dependent Children, formerly known as Aid to Dependent Children, and its predecessor, state mothers’ pensions. For feminist scholars writing in the 1980s and 1990s, the “feminization of poverty” and the political assault on welfare created a sense of urgency—not only to explain women’s unique relationship to welfare but also to defend it. In her groundbreaking edited volume *Women, the State, and Welfare* (1990), the historian activist Linda Gordon articulated feminist historians’ misgivings about what she called the “New Left social-control” model of theorizing welfare.⁶⁰ (In the volume’s Preface, Gordon acknowledged Piven and Cloward for “unintentionally” giving her “not only a model of committed scholarship but an argument against which I was able to develop my own feminist analysis.”⁶¹) The explosion of feminist welfare scholarship provided two critical insights: it added gender and race analysis to the social control thesis, thereby enriching it, and it complicated the social-control thesis—ill-suited

for their goal to defend welfare—by naming welfare’s potential to support work inside and outside the home.

Rapidly disintegrating due to the bipartisan efforts of policy makers, welfare drew the interest of feminist researchers in the 1980s and 1990s. In 1988, Reagan signed the Family Support Act, which emphasized “work, child support, and family benefits.” Feminist scholars mobilized alongside recipient activists, what scholar activist Gwendolyn Mink later called “a feminist mobilization against punitive welfare reform.”⁶² They used their scholarship to make sense of and, it seems, mount a case against the antiwelfare moment they were living through. Activist scholars Felicia Kornbluh and Mink called this research “historical spadework.”⁶³

This “historical spadework” involved explaining why AFDC, a program serving mostly single mothers and children that never constituted a very significant portion of the government’s social spending, had become public enemy number one.⁶⁴ Feminist scholars traced the gendered distinctions between public assistance and social insurance programs back to the early twentieth century. Political scientist Barbara J. Nelson’s foundational essay, “The Origins of the Two-Channel Welfare State” (1989), recovered the differences between two Progressive Era programs: workmen’s compensation, a forerunner to New Deal social insurance programs, and mothers’ pensions, state programs that granted meager cash payments to fatherless families.⁶⁵ In the archives of female reformers and policy makers, Nelson found the roots of a two-channel welfare system. The first, created for white male industrial workers in the context of welfare capitalism and scientific management, was “male, judicial, public, and routinized in origin.” The second, intended for poor white widows, had roots in the “poor law tradition” and was “female, bureaucratic, administrative, private, and nonroutinized.”⁶⁶ The “entitlement process” for the workmen’s compensation was transparent and predictable, with simple paperwork and “formulaic” tables letting beneficiaries know how long their benefits would last.⁶⁷ Mothers’ pensioners, in contrast, were subject to the discretion of the moralizing caseworkers who administered the program and enforced norms about women’s work and policed recipients’ “capacity to care.”⁶⁸ When the Social Security Act “nationalized” mothers’ pensions in 1935, forming ADC, the gendered distinction became a cornerstone of the burgeoning welfare state.⁶⁹ Nelson provided a framework for understanding why AFDC was so stigmatized during the 1980s and early 1990s, whereas social insurance programs “nearly sacrosanct,” in the words of sociologist Ann Shola Orloff.⁷⁰

Feminist welfare scholarship was also part of a flourishing body of work on race and the New Deal.⁷¹ The nonuniversal welfare system, feminist scholar Gwendolyn Mink suggested in her essay in Gordon's volume, conditioned women's labor and upheld white, Protestant values. White reformers' anxieties over emancipation and immigration led them to embrace racial uplift and assimilation.⁷² In this context, social programs sought to bolster mothers' roles in reproducing the existing social order. Mothers' pensions "broke through the rigidities of laissez-faire capitalism to make the creation of 'sound mothers' a social responsibility," but in the service of imposing particular values on immigrant women. Caseworkers granted mothers' pensions only after surveilling potential recipients' housekeeping, cooking, and childrearing practices, thereby enforcing "temperance, nuclear-family households, American cooking."⁷³ In *Pitied But Not Entitled* (1994), Linda Gordon similarly depicted mothers' pensions as moralizing and disciplinary; "mothers' aid was never meant to be open armed or trusting to those it helped."⁷⁴

Although late twentieth-century antiwelfarism was inextricable from anti-Blackness, welfare originally excluded Black women from receiving benefits, feminist scholars showed. By denying Black women mothers' pensions, reformers would not recognize them as mothers and left Black women to rely on poorly paid work alone. Southern congresspersons refused to support the Social Security Act unless local officials "retained control over the distribution of benefits," sociologist Jill Quadagno wrote.⁷⁵ The SSA codified white women's dependence, guaranteeing working white men entitlements like social insurance and designating women's programs as needs-based, thus enshrining a different form of citizenship.⁷⁶ It excluded outright many Black Americans from social insurance, public assistance, or labor protections, denying them social citizenship. Liberal reformers built a welfare state that perpetuated and deepened social inequalities. There was no golden age of American liberalism.

Feminist scholars showed how the entire welfare system was premised on the white male breadwinner wage, exposing the deeper history of policies presenting marriage as a solution to poverty. Many attributed this system to the "maternalist" politics of white female reformers, who strategically advocated for mothers' pensions as a replacement for an absent breadwinner. Political scientist Theda Skocpol analyzed maternalism in the context of an antiwelfare reaction to Civil War pensions. As opposition to building a robust welfare state grew, still-disenfranchised women adhering to the tenants of maternalism were able to influence policy.⁷⁷

Other feminist scholars, perhaps watching mainstream feminists fail to rally against welfare reform in the 1990s, analyzed maternalism as part of a more complicated part of feminist history.⁷⁸ Advocating to “protect” native-born white and European immigrant mothers’ roles as caretakers was strategic; feminists thought deploying traditional notions of womanhood would make it easier to find support for state pensions. But instead, Gordon argued, reformers constructed poor single mothers as widows deserving of pity and charity, inadvertently imposing stigma onto nonwidowed single mothers and the program as a whole.⁷⁹ Where aid for unemployed men “aimed to preserve the male breadwinner status and to keep wives and children at home,” aid for single mothers “aimed to prevent its recipients from being too comfortable on their own.”⁸⁰ Aid was too meager to keep women out of the paid workforce and did not recognize cash support as a right. Historian Joanne Goodwin called mothers’ pensions “a wage subsidy.”⁸¹ They were not meant to adequately compensate women’s work at home but rather to subsidize her poorly paid work outside the home—suppressing women’s wages helped maintain the family wage model. By ensuring women’s immiseration, pensions and later ADC encouraged recipients to find husbands to financially support them. The disconnect between the stingy support welfare provided and reformers’ efforts to protect (and police) women’s caretaking labors at home resonated for scholars writing in a neoliberal welfare policy climate.⁸² For poor women, who in the 1990s like in the 1910s regularly juggled low-wage work and parenting with meager state support, austere social policy premised on social control was old news; again, perhaps neoliberalism was not so “new.”

But feminist scholars, many of whom were involved in efforts to retain the imperfect version of AFDC that remained in the 1990s, recognized welfare’s importance as well as its pitfalls. In a 1996 review essay, legal scholar Dorothy Roberts remarked that during this “dispiriting age of welfare retrenchment,” feminist scholars had “issue[d] a call to rekindle the ideal of a universal, inclusive, and dignified welfare system that thus far has existed only as a defeated dream.”⁸³ Scholars regularly pointed to missed alternatives for a better, more universal system. In *Pitied but Not Entitled*, Gordon examined what she called Black female reformers’ “welfare vision” as one such missed opportunity. Because they were more likely than their white counterparts to be wage earners and part of two-income families, Black middle-class reformers recognized that single mothers needed to work outside the home and advocated universal childcare. Their blueprint for better welfare policy, Gordon suggested, was ignored in New Deal policy circles.⁸⁴ Another missed opportunity was what Gordon, pushing back against the liberal feminists who

associated paid work with liberation, called a “more radical maternalist vision:” the recognition, valuing, and compensation of the work of mothers.⁸⁵ Indeed, some scholars implied that for all its limitations and prejudice, the very existence of “state sponsored social protection” was notable. Mink said income support “was conceived as remuneration for maternal work” and a step “toward entitlement,” though in “the interest of race and republic.” Pensions did compensate social reproduction, but only for some, and they were not intended as “social rights.”⁸⁶ Here were the stakes of welfare reform and the long roots of poverty’s feminization.

This generation of feminist scholars was writing in a “time of conservatism and economic depression,” as Gordon described the early 1990s, when the United States underwent massive economic restructuring under the auspices of protecting individual freedoms, with disastrous consequences for women combining low-wage work and parenting.⁸⁷ They underscored the role liberal women, constrained by existing norms, played in creating welfare programs that did not adequately address poor women’s needs. From the battleground of welfare reform, they found in history morsels of what was good about welfare and alternatives for a better system—destigmatized remuneration for all forms of labor (including the second shift), higher wages, and universal childcare. But by the time they wrote, policy makers had largely abandoned even the promise to support the work of social reproduction; instead, they required poor single mothers to take personal responsibility by engaging in paid work. The next generation would go further to recover the differences between welfare’s origins and welfare’s decline.

THE ROOTS OF WELFARE REFORM

The historic passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act in 1996 irrevocably altered cash support in the United States, ending welfare as we knew it. It also changed the way historians wrote about welfare. Where many had focused on similarities between the liberal origins of welfare and historians’ own neoliberal presents, the PRWORA revealed stark differences. Beyond underpaying, surveilling, and stigmatizing recipients, the PRWORA *eradicated* AFDC, a hallmark of twentieth-century liberal governance, and shepherded in an era of social policy that exacerbated inequalities during an economic upturn. In a 1996 review essay, historian Felicia Kornbluh summed up the moment: “Unfortunately, the only thing worse than the inadequate, oppressive, and obfuscatory welfare systems that have emerged in the modern United States and Europe seems to be their

absence.”⁸⁸ During this pivotal period in the history of welfare, activism and decline drew the bulk of scholarly attention.

The bipartisan passage of the PRWORA prompted two new lines of feminist historical inquiry—and new revelations about late twentieth-century political realignment. The first was a vigorous defense of a universal, more just welfare system through the examination of the welfare rights movement. Historians Premilla Nadasen, Eileen Boris, Felicia Kornbluh, Annelise Orleck, and Rhonda Y. Williams, among others, recounted the rich histories of the National Welfare Rights Organization and other groups.⁸⁹ The then-understudied movement attracted over 30,000 participants across the US in the 1960s and 1970s. Welfare rights historians exposed the horrors AFDC recipients were forced to endure: paltry benefits, lack of transparency, labor exploitation, and caseworkers’ “midnight raids,” or surprise checks to enforce the “man-in-the-house” rules that had cropped up in response to the shifting demographics of welfare recipients.

Most crucially, this scholarship reprised the alternate visions of cash assistance welfare rights activists put forward in the 1960s and 1970s.⁹⁰ The multiracial movement of welfare recipients and allies, led by Black women, fought for dignity, substantive cash support, and the choice of whether they worked outside the home or focused solely on their care work as parents. In the face of work requirements that forced some TANF recipients to perform the same work they had done previously as paid public employees, but now in exchange for benefits, historian Eileen Boris recovered activists’ condemnation of work requirements as “slavery” and their “defense of motherwork.” Activists had criticized mandatory paid work since the 1967 establishment of the Work Incentive Program (WIN), rejecting the liberal feminist goal of paid work outside the home and condemning reforms that “reinscribe[d] black women as workers, not mothers, relegated to household labor as maids, nannies, and daycare providers for other women’s children.”⁹¹ Boris chronicled how for recipient activists, “the goal was not employment, but an adequate income to support their duties as mothers” (as well as health care and childcare).⁹² The movement pursued fair hearings and broader legal rights.

When the PRWORA flattened any remaining hope of welfare as a right, feminist scholars inserted activists’ positive vision of welfare as remuneration for social reproduction into feminist discourse and welfare historiography. Though they failed in court, welfare rights groups waged a fierce campaign for a guaranteed adequate income, which, historian Premilla Nadasen’s *Welfare Warriors* (2004) showed, Black female activists

envisioned as a decent wage for the work of mothering and maintaining the home. They demanded a GAI that “forced the state to recognize housework and childcare as legitimate work, freed women from dependency on men, debunked the racial characterizations of black women as lazy by acknowledging their work as mothers, and gave women a viable option to degrading labor market conditions.”⁹³ Studying the history of cash assistance and the mostly Black women who mobilized to expand it and remove its scrutinizing, punitive characteristics, these scholars exposed a welfare system that equated deservingness of income, comfort, and dignity with labor. In the history of the welfare rights movement, they also found explicit rejection of these entrenched liberal norms and resistance in the face of a mounting neoliberal attack on welfare.⁹⁴ The contrast between activists’ demands and policy outcomes was stark.

After the PRWORA, another smaller group of feminist scholars traced the origins of the neoliberal consensus to the earlier, racially motivated concessions of liberal policy makers and activists. As others told the history of neoliberalism as the late twentieth-century rise of fragmentation and embrace of market logics, Jennifer Mittelstadt, Marisa Chappell, and others considered liberal policy making. The decisions liberal lawmakers and advocates made about work and family created openings for conservative policies and paved the way for neoliberalism and welfare reform.⁹⁵

In the PRWORA’s wake, Jennifer Mittelstadt’s *From Welfare to Workfare* (2005) examined the so-called liberal consensus of the mid twentieth century and found the roots of workfare.⁹⁶ A liberal coalition of social work professionals, researchers, government officials, foundations, and labor and civic groups “rediscovered poverty” in the postwar period as more nonwhite, divorced, and never-married women joined ADC rolls. These reformers began to associate poverty with single motherhood.⁹⁷ The Keynesian coalition abandoned comprehensive visions of welfare embraced by some New Deal liberals and increasingly “assumed that American society and its economy were healthy and functional and that the welfare poor simply needed to be helped or compelled to participate in both more effectively.”⁹⁸ When analyzing the poverty of female-headed households, they blamed individual “handicaps” associated with “broken” families, not structural problems and lack of income.⁹⁹ The reformers took up a politics of rehabilitation, teaching single mothers to better care for their children and, increasingly, encouraging them to work for wages, especially following a series of so-called crises that drew national attention to AFDC in the 1960s.¹⁰⁰ They supported the 1962 Public Welfare Amendments, which provided job training, work incentives,

and daycare for welfare recipients—even as the labor market and suppressed wages made it difficult for single women to financially support their households.¹⁰¹ To rinse ADC of its racialized and gendered stigma, they launched a public relations campaign claiming welfare fostered white family stability, going so far as to insert the word “families” into ADC in 1962, creating Aid to Families with Dependent Children.¹⁰² It was not only economists and industrialists who created the market-centric society out of which the PRWORA emerged. Mid-century social workers and researchers seeking to address poverty without undertaking largescale change helped solidify the racialized logic of “personal responsibility” that led to TANF work requirements.

Raced and gendered assumptions about the family were central to the PRWORA, which explicitly promoted marriage as a solution to poverty. In this context, Marisa Chappell’s *The War on Welfare* (2009) documented how liberal groups like the League of Women Voters, the Urban League, industrial unions, welfare rights groups, and liberal politicians clung to “cultural conservatism with respect to gender and family structure” in the poverty proposals they put forward in the 1970s.¹⁰³ Like Mittelstadt, Chappell located decisive moments in welfare’s decline in liberal politics (and brought the historiography of welfare full circle by historicizing the era in which Piven and Cloward wrote). As economic crisis ended postwar affluence, the breadwinner or family wage model became even less viable than it had been in prior decades. But the liberal coalition remained attached to the family wage, undercutting a more “generous social-democratic economic vision” and perpetuating the racist stigmatization of welfare.¹⁰⁴ To secure white working-class support, liberals avoided aligning themselves with AFDC, a program many associated with women of color (even though white women always made up the majority). Later in the 1970s, liberals went so far as to embrace the racist concept of the “underclass,” which ascribed poverty to cultural deficiency.¹⁰⁵ Once vying for guaranteed income, the coalition increasingly pursued full employment—an objective tailored to resonate with the newly unemployed white working-class persons hurt by deindustrialization.¹⁰⁶ Where other historians had attributed political realignment to the white working-class rejection of identity politics, Chappell described liberal reformers willing to accommodate the prejudiced status quo.

These scholars theorized how liberals’ abandonment of more generous visions of welfare combined with their declining power to pave the way for welfare’s eradication—and, tacitly, neoliberalism. Mittelstadt suggested that as liberal reformers lost influence in the second half of the 1960s, conservatives adopted their ideas toward new ends. The WIN program and its amendments

required AFDC recipients to work and thus heralded a new era of welfare policy: the shift from the liberal objectives of rehabilitating recipients “according to their needs” and toward more conservative goals “to make clients act ‘responsibly.’”¹⁰⁷ Mittelstadt described this shift toward workfare as both “a continuation of and a break from the past.”¹⁰⁸ Similarly, Chappell suggested that liberals’ inability to imagine redistribution outside of the family wage led to conservative appropriation of pro-family rhetoric in the service of ending welfare.¹⁰⁹ By the time Reagan ran for president, most saw employment, not income support, as the only viable solution to poverty. Once elected, Reagan launched a vicious attack on AFDC through OBRA and later the Family Support Act. But liberal concessions had created the foundation for this “major federal assault on welfare.”¹¹⁰ By favoring work-centric, racist, and patriarchal politics as their influence diminished, liberals helped secure the neoliberal agenda that followed. Until recently, most scholarship tracking the history of neoliberalism has overlooked these liberal roots.

Even within the field of social policy history, the insights these historians offered were relatively unique in the 2000s. To shed light on welfare’s bad reputation—so bad, in fact, that AFDC had been eliminated with broad support—many set out to expose other aspects of the welfare state and especially, the types of nonstigmatized support that went disproportionately to white Americans, like federally backed mortgages, tax credits, and employment-based insurance.¹¹¹ Policy makers and the public directed their wrath at public assistance, but the government spent far more resources on nonpoor Americans. Political scientist Christopher Howard’s groundbreaking *The Hidden Welfare State* (1997) cited the EITC as a primary example. Tucked into the tax code, the EITC garnered the support of policy makers across the political spectrum. The facts that the EITC went only to the working poor and did not require “large social service bureaucracies” helped explain the program’s success and growth.¹¹² Many identified the embrace of the EITC as emblematic of a new political order. Katz reported glibly that “by the century’s end, the only politically viable antipoverty strategies either attached benefits to employment, like the Earned Income Tax Credit, or worked indirectly through markets,” what he called “fighting poverty 1990s style.”¹¹³ Some looked to the hidden or submerged or private welfare state to question the assumption that the welfare state had even retrenched in recent decades.¹¹⁴

Feminist historians of welfare did not mistake the growth of the EITC and other parts of the “hidden welfare state” for a more robust safety net. Though the EITC “did bolster the income of poor wage-earning

breadwinners,” according to Chappell, it “did nothing for families without an employed adult.”¹¹⁵ Like welfare reform, sociologist Ann Shola Orloff argued, the EITC reinforced “the centrality of employment for women as well as men.”¹¹⁶ But these perspectives were exceptional and mostly relegated to the narrow subfield of feminist welfare history. In the years after the PRWORA eliminated the welfare entitlement, replacing AFDC with the time-limited and otherwise restricted TANF, much welfare state scholarship set cash assistance aside. So, too did many beginning to take interest in the history of neoliberalism, who looked to histories of monetary policy, business, and industrial unions instead of social policy. As the poverty program receded further into the apses of the past, historical memory of welfare’s very existence faded.

CLAIMING WELFARE AS A LOST RIGHT

Several recent histories countered such forgetting by reclaiming the history of welfare as a right; in the process, they historicized neoliberal governance more explicitly. As I have argued, scholars living and writing amidst the ascendance of neoliberalism found powerful continuities between mid and late twentieth-century social policy and, more recently, traced how liberals created openings for conservatives to attack welfare and let neoliberalism take hold. Writing as the effects of neoliberal policy became the targets of movement critique, this new cohort found more of what was new about neoliberal social policy. Much of this work shifted the scope of analysis from federal reform and policy making to state and sometimes local policy administration, reflecting increased interest in federalism.¹¹⁷ Some scholarship revisited the mid-twentieth-century history of welfare when many recipients viewed welfare as a right, if perpetually inadequate. Others historicized the late twentieth-century backlash against the right to welfare, helping explain why in the twenty-first century, it felt so far away.¹¹⁸

Some in this generation rethought liberal policy making and especially, earlier scholarship’s emphasis on coercion and continuity. Lisa Levenstein’s *A Movement without Marches* (2009) traced the history of poor Black women in postwar Philadelphia who individually made claims that implied the right to welfare (as well as health care and the courts), long before the welfare rights movement explicitly demanded such rights.¹¹⁹ In *States of Dependency* (2016), legal historian Karen M. Tani went further to suggest that the Social Security Act of 1935 itself embedded welfare as a right. Tani argued that the New Deal’s public assistance grants created a system “more inclusive (albeit still

discriminatory), more centralized and bureaucratic, and more capable of seeing and vindicating individual rights” than the local system that preceded it.¹²⁰ By installing a federal administrative capacity that infiltrated localities around the country, the government empowered states and transformed poor relief from a discretion into a right.¹²¹ Whereas other scholars articulated the gendered and raced distinction between needs for the undeserving and rights for the deserving, Tani showed that, by the 1940s, reference to rights was everywhere in the communication of federal agents. Welfare had not been continuously or only scorned; at some point in history, many claimed it.¹²²

In fact, according to Tani, the existence of this right prompted the vigorous push to squash it. Cold War era local and state governments waged a backlash against federal public assistance, charging that it violated local control. Wariness of “active, centralized governance” and especially the racialized AFDC eventually eclipsed more expansive visions of rights that emphasized dignity and collectivity.¹²³ Increasingly, when states passed laws like “suitable home” legislation that cut benefits of women deemed immoral, the federal government lacked the capacity to enforce its own rules at the local level.¹²⁴

In writing about how state-level revolts paved the way for the further erosion of benefits, Tani charted the roots of welfare’s demise. But Tani also recovered a lost interpretation of a welfare state that provided an administrative capacity and legal paradigm for individuals to claim social rights. Welfare rights protests did not emerge until the 1960s, but claimants in the preceding decades viewed benefits as guaranteed by citizenship; when they thought those rights were being violated, they used state courts to demand fair hearings.¹²⁵ Though constrained by the prejudice of liberal policy makers, welfare was far more empowering than scholars previously claimed. Neoliberalism, Tani did not say directly but implied, emerged to condition the poor anew.

Historian Julilly Kohler-Hausmann’s *Getting Tough* (2017) similarly suggested that there had been “tentative steps toward a broader economic citizenship” during the mid-twentieth century and traced efforts to undo those gains in the 1970s.¹²⁶ As the Black Lives Matter movement protested mass incarceration and the state’s refusal to value Black life, Kohler-Hausmann highlighted the dehumanizing effects of late twentieth-century welfare policy. She argued that policy makers responded to the bold claims of the welfare rights movement—namely, the demand for a guaranteed income—by “getting tough, or a policy regime of civic degradation.”¹²⁷ Liberal welfare policy had long exposed recipients to rehabilitation, but even such degrading policies treated welfare recipients “as rational economic actors who would

respond to economic incentives.”¹²⁸ In contrast these new “tough” policies, first implemented under California Governor Ronald Reagan, abandoned work incentives and embraced “coercive work mandates.”¹²⁹ The state began to paint welfare recipients as criminals who “had forfeited their rights and claims on the state” and subsequently deprived them of the more expansive citizenship they had demanded.¹³⁰ Reagan reduced eligibility, punished fraud, and enforced child support collections. Illinois officials used the trope of the “welfare queen” to “cast the entire welfare program as *robbery*”; welfare recipients were not only undeserving but criminals who drained public coffers of hardworking Americans’ money.¹³¹ Nonrecipients imbibed anti-welfare rhetoric and blamed recipients, “widely imagined to be black and Latina women,” as personally responsible for the hardships they faced.¹³² Policy makers cast recipients as cheaters while ignoring structural conditions—inflation, stagnating wages—that, in effect, forced recipients to cheat.¹³³ This state-level punitive turn was not about reducing government through consensus, as some have theorized neoliberalism; instead, it used penal tools to quash nonwhite women’s expectations for federal cash support and social citizenship.¹³⁴

Neoliberalism, this work insinuated, emerged to silence poor women’s increasingly robust claims to rights and citizenship.¹³⁵ But it never did. Where many writing about late twentieth-century politics posit consensus, welfare historians charted continuous resistance. (In some cases, their attention to activism may have come from their own participation; there is a long tradition of scholar activism in the field.) Felicia Kornbluh and Gwendolyn Mink’s *Ensuring Poverty* (2018) traced the contested history of welfare reform, showing how the one-time entitlement came to be eliminated.¹³⁶ They opened the book not with Katz’s indictment of welfare but with a condemnation of the PRWORA: “the 1996 welfare reform law shortens women’s lives.”¹³⁷ Expertly versed in welfare’s coercive history, Kornbluh and Mink foregrounded its life-prolonging potential as well as antipoverty activists’ visions for how to improve the program.

Ensuring Poverty argued that the bipartisan PRWORA was at once “merely the latest in a long series of reforms” and a “major departure”—the culmination of welfare’s familiar history but also emblematic of a new era.¹³⁸ Kornbluh and Mink used a feminist lens to enumerate the gendered, raced, nativist, and ablest provisions of the PRWORA: The law supposed that “marriage is the foundation of a successful society.”¹³⁹ It penalized childbirth for parents receiving TANF. It restricted benefits for immigrants. And its “most famous promise,” it made work compulsory without providing

childcare.¹⁴⁰ Drawing on the robust body of feminist scholarship, Kornbluh and Mink situated the PRWORA within the longer history of prejudiced welfare policy. But they did not downplay the PRWORA, which eliminated the federal entitlement to aid, empowering states to cut and restrict assistance and undermining their ability to finance it.

Ensuring Poverty recovered the bipartisan policy decisions that led to the PRWORA. As Arkansas governor and on the campaign trail, New Democrat Bill Clinton “rehearsed many of the arguments that would ultimately shape the bill he signed while in the White House.”¹⁴¹ Clinton and the Democratic Leadership Council deployed raced and gendered rhetoric to garner the support of white middle-class voters. As president, Clinton proposed reforms focused on restoring the family and reducing rolls. Reforms proposed after the 1994 Republican landslide into Congress “changed the tenor, but not the overall shape, of the welfare reform debate,” Kornbluh and Mink proffered.¹⁴²

Kornbluh and Mink also chronicled social justice feminist opposition to welfare reform during the 1990s and 2000s—efforts in which the authors were deeply involved. Democratic lawmakers including Representative Patsy Takemoto Mink (Gwendolyn Mink’s mother) proposed progressive reforms, such as the Job Start for America and later the Family Stability and Work Act, which proposed to compensate parents’ work as caregivers and to create jobs for those who wanted them. Welfare rights groups organized. After Republicans proposed their own bill in 1995, seven hundred feminist scholars, activists, and artists formed the Women’s Committee of 100 to lobby Congress, many using their scholarship.¹⁴³ Resistance continued in the early 2000s, with low-income activists testifying in Washington about the hardships TANF caused. The Women’s Committee of 100 recommended a federal, nondiscretionary “caregivers’ allowance.” Activists offered an alternative vision of welfare: a right to the economic support required to parent one’s children. But they lost. Kornbluh and Mink argued that in the years since, public debates about poverty “suffered because they were starved of progressive feminist ideas.”¹⁴⁴ Neoliberal social policy stamped out welfare—with ripple effects on historical scholarship on neoliberalism.

WELFARE FOR OUR MOMENT

In recent years, we usually hear the word “welfare” in reference not to TANF but other safety-net programs. As journalist Bryce Covert argued in 2018, Trump and the conservative Congress intentionally broadened what was

popularly understood to be “welfare” to gut other programs. They described plans to implement Medicaid and SNAP work requirements and penalties against immigrants who relied on benefits as “reform of the welfare system,” part of a renewed commitment to “personal responsibility.”¹⁴⁵ The reticence of moderate and even progressive politicians to embrace and defend (or even talk about) welfare suggests that they too deem it an outdated and unrealistic political possibility, part of history.¹⁴⁶

The coronavirus pandemic and its crushing economic effects energized public discourse around cash assistance in a way not seen in decades. In 2020, the CARES Act disbursed cash payments to individuals (except “any nonresident alien individual”) whose annual income fell below a certain threshold.¹⁴⁷ More recently (and more monumentally) the Biden administration’s American Rescue Plan (ARPA) meted out additional stimulus payments, expanded the EITC, and instituted an unprecedented expansion of the Child Tax Credit (CTC) to families earning up to \$150,000. The bill also significantly boosted SNAP and WIC and provided cash vouchers to people needing to escape domestic violence.¹⁴⁸ Research showed that the ARPA reduced poverty considerably.¹⁴⁹

The expanded CTC was particularly notable and as some journalists have pointed out, temporarily reversed the course welfare policy has taken in recent history.¹⁵⁰ By not requiring parents to earn wages, it better resembled AFDC or even a guaranteed income than a tax credit. And, though it was technically means tested, the program’s high income cap helped it avoid the stigma of programs that only serve the very poor. Neoliberal social policy increasingly restricted cash support and for several decades it also wiped welfare from the minds of many. For a moment, the coronavirus and shifting political winds brought it back—to great effect. Six months after it was implemented, the expanded CTC was keeping 3.7 million children out of poverty. Many called to extend the expansion or to make it permanent.¹⁵¹ But Congress let the benefit expire in January 2022 and the gains immediately reversed.¹⁵²

Welfare histories help us remember welfare and understand the political climate that eradicated it. Rarely at the center of US political historiography, this mostly leftist, feminist scholarly corpus shows how this relatively minor part of the welfare state was at the core of high-stakes debates over what constituted work and who deserved government support. During the 1970s, Piven and Cloward commented on how a means-tested, federalist welfare system functioned to control the poor. This was part of an argument for universal benefits and dignity. In the fifty years since, scholars have built on *Regulating the Poor’s* insights, recognizing the pitfalls of this controlling

welfare system that in ways supported caretakers and on which many of the most vulnerable people desperately relied. When more nonwhite, unmarried women insisted that the state help bear their burden of care, policy makers changed course. Regulating labor and policing deservingness had always been part of welfare policy, but now policy makers deployed penal tools and more severe interpretations of personal responsibility—and eventually removed federal safety nets altogether. Welfare recipients and their advocates continuously fought for government support, but they often lost.

Welfare scholars, often informed by their participation in antipoverty struggles led by women of color, help us understand the gendered and raced dimensions of the political realignments that brought us to this moment, when welfare is hardly discussed. Welfare scholarship helps us see neoliberalism's liberal roots and its motivation to squash antiracist, feminist demands for universal support detached from productive labor as well as dignity and more meaningful citizenship. In muffling discussion of welfare, neoliberalism was successful. But welfare scholars, in their work and by their example, also show us that neoliberalism remained contested, even as it permeated much of our political imagination. Their insights about the importance of state support as a social right can be heard in calls for the expanded CTC, universal programs like Medicare for All, even demands to defund the police and invest in social institutions. By taking greater interest in the insights of welfare historiography at this pivotal time, historians can and should refuse to accept ours as a "postwelfare" moment.

Independent Scholar

NOTES

1. The Social Security Act created Aid to Dependent Children, the predecessor to AFDC. In 1950 Congress passed the "caretaker provision," which expanded benefits to care providers as well as dependent children. Premilla Nadasen, Jennifer Mittelstadt, and Marisa Chappell, *Welfare in the United States: A History with Documents: 1935-1996* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 33.

2. In a piece about debates over tax expenditures, Monica Prasad cites Christopher Howard's argument that "the American welfare state is actually 40 percent larger than commonly believed." Howard, "Making Taxes the Life of the Party," in *The New Fiscal Sociology*, ed. Isaac Martin, Ajay Mehrotra, and Monica Prasad (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), cited in Prasad, "Tax 'Expenditures' and Welfare States: A Critique," *Journal of Policy History* 23, no. 2 (2011): 251–66.

On the expansion of public health care programs, see Jill Quadagno, "The Transformation of Medicaid from Poor Law Legacy to Middle-Class Entitlement?" *Medicaid and*

Medicare at 50: America's Entitlement Programs in the Age of Affordable Care, ed. Alan B. Cohen, David C. Colby, Keith Wailoo, Julien E. Zelizer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Keith A. Wailoo, "The Era of Big Government: Why It Never Ended," in *Medicare and Medicaid at 50*, 233–52.

3. Michael B. Katz, *The Price of American Citizenship: Redefining the American Welfare State* (New York: Macmillan, 2002), 294–98, quote on 298.

4. In 2019, the Child Tax Credit, Medicaid, and the EITC were the top federal expenditures on children. Heather Hahn, Cary Lou, and Julia B. Isaacs, *How Much Does the Federal Government Spend on Programs Benefitting Children?* (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2019), <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/102752/how-much-does-the-federal-government-spend-on-programs-benefitting-children.pdf>.

5. Federal Fiscal Year 2019 Statistical Enrollment Data System Reporting, November 10, 2020, <https://www.medicaid.gov/chip/downloads/fy-2019-childrens-enrollment-report.pdf>.

6. "Analysis Examines the Affordable Care Act's Impact on Nearly All Americans," KFF, September 23, 2020, <https://www.kff.org/health-reform/press-release/analysis-examines-the-affordable-care-acts-impact-on-nearly-all-americans/>. As of April 2022, twelve states have not expanded Medicaid, "Status of State Medicaid Expansion Decisions: Interactive Map," KFF, April 26, 2022, <https://www.kff.org/medicaid/issue-brief/status-of-state-medicaid-expansion-decisions-interactive-map/>.

7. Katz, *The Price of Citizenship*, 337–38.

8. Felicia Kornbluh and Gwendolyn Mink, *Ensuring Poverty: Welfare Reform in Feminist Perspective* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), ix, xi; H. Luke Schaefer and Kathryn Edin, *Policy Brief: Extreme Poverty in the United States, 1996 to 2011*, National Policy Center Policy Brief, no. 28 (February 2012), <https://www.thenation.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/policybrief28.pdf>; Kathryn Edin and H. Luke Schaefer, *\$2.00 a Day: Living on Almost Nothing in America* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2015); Bryce Covert, "Why Hillary Has Never Apologized for Welfare Reform," *The Atlantic*, June 14, 2015, <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/06/welfare-reform-and-the-forging-of-hillary-clintons-political-realism/486449/>; Clyde Haberman, "20 Years Later, Welfare Overhaul Resonates for Families and Candidates," *New York Times*, May 1, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/02/us/20-years-later-welfare-overhaul-resonates-for-families-and-candidates.html>.

9. Krissy Clark, "Oh My God—We're on Welfare?!" *Slate*, June 2, 2016, http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/moneybox/2016/06/_welfare_money_often_isn_t_spent_on_welfare.html, cited in footnote 5, Kornbluh and Mink, *Ensuring Poverty*, 153.

10. Peter Holley and Elahe Izadi, "Kansas Bans Welfare Recipients from Seeing Movies, Going Swimming on Government's Dime," *Washington Post*, April 6, 2015, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/govbeat/wp/2015/04/06/kansas-wants-to-ban-welfare-recipients-from-seeing-movies-going-swimming-on-governments-dime/>; Dana Milbank, "The Rush to Humiliate the Poor," *Washington Post*, April 7, 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-rush-to-humiliate-the-poor/2015/04/07/8795b192-dd67-11e4-a500-1c5bb1d8ff6a_story.html?utm_term=.00f0cfbf65d; Robert Pear, "Political Rifts over Bill Clinton's Welfare Law Resurface as Aid Shrinks," *New York Times*, May 20, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/21/us/politics/welfare-arizona-bill-hillary-clinton.html>.

11. The *Goldberg v. Kelley* (1970) decision, which “ruled that welfare benefits were protected by due process and could not be terminated without a hearing,” was particularly decisive. See Premilla Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors: The Welfare Rights Movement in the United States* (New York, Routledge, 2005), 60, 61.

12. Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, *Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare* (New York: Vintage, 1971).

13. Michael B. Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poor House: A Social History of Welfare in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1986).

14. Linda Gordon, ed., *Women, the State, and Welfare* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990); Gwendolyn Mink, “The Lady and the Tramp: Gender, Race, and the Origins of the American Welfare State,” in Gordon, *Women, the State, and Welfare*, 92–122; Barbara J. Nelson, “The Origins of the Two-Channel Welfare State: Workmen’s Compensation and Mothers’ Aid,” in Gordon, *Women, the State, and Welfare*, 123–51; Linda Gordon, *Pitied but Not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare 1890-1935* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994).

15. Michael B. Katz, “Was Government the Solution or the Problem? The Role of the State in the History of American Social Policy,” *Theory & Society* 39, no. 3/4 (May 2010): 490.

16. Felicia Kornbluh, “‘To Fulfill Their ‘Rightly Needs’: Consumerism and the National Welfare Rights Movement,” *Radical History Review* 69 (Fall 1997): 76–112; Felicia Kornbluh, “The Goals of the Welfare Rights Movement: Why We Need Them Thirty Years Later,” *Feminist Studies* 24, no. 1 (Spring 1998): 65–78; Premilla Nadasen, “Expanding the Boundaries of the Women’s Movement: Black Feminism and the Struggle for Welfare Rights,” *Feminist Studies* (Summer 2002): 270–301; Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors*.

17. Jennifer Mittelstadt, *From Welfare to Workfare: The Unintended Consequences of Liberal Reform, 1945-1965* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Marisa Chappell, *The War on Welfare: Family, Poverty, and Politics in Modern America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

18. Karen M. Tani, *States of Dependency: Welfare, Rights, and American Governance: 1935-1972* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Julilly Kohler-Hausmann, *Getting Tough: Welfare and Imprisonment in 1970s America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017); Kornbluh and Mink, *Ensuring Poverty*.

19. For a masterful synthesis of historians’ reckoning with neoliberalism, see Kim Phillips-Fein, “The History of Neoliberalism,” in *Shaped by the State: Toward a New Political History of the Twentieth Century*, ed. Brent Cebul, Lily Geismer, and Mason B. Williams (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), 347–62.

20. Examples include Nelson Lichtenstein, *State of the Union: A Century of American Labor: A Century of American Labor* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002); David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Jefferson Cowie, *Stayin’ Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (New York: The New Press, 2010); Judith Stein, *Pivotal Decade: How the United States Traded Factories for Finance in the 1970s* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011); Daniel T. Rodgers, *Age of Fracture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011); Robert O. Self, *All in the Family: The Realignment of American Democracy since the 1960s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012); Jefferson Cowie, *The Great Exception: The New Deal and the Limits of American Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017); Gary Gerstle,

“America’s Neoliberal Order,” in *Beyond the New Deal Order: U.S. Politics from the Great Depression to the Great Recession*, ed. Gary Gerstle, Nelson Lichtenstein, and Alice O’Connor (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), 216–33.

21. Examples include Daniel Steadman Jones, *Masters of the Universe: Hayek, Friedman, and the Birth of Neoliberal Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013); Angus Burgin, *The Great Persuasion: Reinventing Free Markets since the Depression* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015); Lily Geismer, *Don’t Blame Us: Suburban Liberals and the Transformation of the Democratic Party* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015); Nancy MacLean, *Democracy in Chains: The Deep History of the Radical Right’s Stealth Plan for America* (New York: Viking Press, 2017); Quinn Slobodian, *Globalists: The End of Empire and the Birth of Neoliberalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018); Amy C. Offner, *Sorting Out the Mixed Economy: The Rise and Fall of Welfare and Developmental States in the Americas* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019); David Stein, “Containing Keynesianism in an Age of Civil Rights: Jim Crow Monetary Policy and the Struggle for Guaranteed Jobs, 1956–1979,” in *Beyond the New Deal Order*, 109–22; Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *Race for Profit: How Banks and the Real Estate Industry Undermined Black Homeownership* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019).

22. Examples include Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2007); Loïc Wacquant, *Punishing the Poor: The Neoliberal Government of Social Insecurity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009); Heather Ann Thompson, “Why Mass Incarceration Matters: Rethinking Crisis, Decline, and Transformation in Postwar American History,” *Journal of American History* 107, no. 3 (December 2010): 703–34; Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2012); Donna Murch, “Crack in Los Angeles: Crisis, Militarization, and Black Response to the Late Twentieth-Century War on Drugs,” *Journal of American History* 102, no. 1 (2015): 162–73; Elizabeth Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime: The Making of Mass Incarceration in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016).

23. Examples include Bethany Moreton, *To Serve God and Wal-Mart: The Making of Christian Free Enterprise* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009); Eileen Boris and Jennifer Klein, *Caring for America: Home Health Workers in the Shadow of the Welfare State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Gabriel Winant, *The Next Shift: The Fall of Industry and the Rise of Health Care in Rust Belt America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2021).

24. Melinda Cooper, *Family Values: Between Neoliberalism and the New Social Conservatism* (New York: Zone Books, 2017), 21. Lily Geismer explicitly claims the liberal origins of neoliberalism. Geismer, “Agents of Change: Microenterprise, Welfare Reform, the Clintons, and Liberal Forms of Neoliberalism,” *Journal of American History* 107, no. 1 (June 2020): 107–31.

25. N. D. B. Connolly, “A White Story,” *Dissent*, January 22, 2018; N. D. B. Connolly, “The Strange Career of American Liberalism,” in *Shaped by the State*, 62–95. See also Destin Jenkins, *The Bonds of Inequality: Debt and the Making of the American City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021), 5.

26. A new book rejects the lens of “social critic” commonly embraced by social policy historians. Edward D. Berkowitz, *Making Social Welfare Policy in America: Three Case Studies Since 1950* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020), 10.

27. I hope to show that welfare scholarship offers a response to the incisive question Phillips-Fein raised: “Are there ways to think about liberalism and neoliberalism in relation to each other that avoid collapsing them into each other altogether?” Phillips-Fein, “The History of Neoliberalism,” 357.

28. This innovative historical overview argues that neoliberalism’s “assault on the working class was waged just as much, if not more so, on the terrain of social reproduction.” Salar Mohandesi and Emma Teitelman, “Without Reserves,” in *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentring Oppression*, ed. Tithi Bhattacharya (London: Pluto Press, 2017), 37–67, quote on 63.

29. Though this essay examines pivotal texts that chart long histories of welfare, including its origins in local poor laws and the poorhouse, it does not engage with the exciting work on poverty and welfare in early America. Examples include Ruth Wallis Herndon, *Unwelcome Americans: Living on the Margin in Early New England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001); Elna C. Green, *This Business of Relief: Confronting Poverty in a Southern City, 1740-1940* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2003); Timothy Lockley, *Welfare and Charity in the Antebellum South* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007); Seth Rockman, *Scraping By: Wage Labor, Slavery, and Survival in Early Baltimore* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009); Seth Rockman, editor, *Welfare Reform in the Early Republic: A Brief History with Documents* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2014).

Neither does this article fully grapple with important scholarship published since I authored the article, including Lily Geismer, *Left Behind: The Democrats’ Failed Attempt to Solve Inequality* (New York: Public Affairs, 2022).

30. Felicia Kornbluh and Gwendolyn Mink call for a “new framework in welfare policy” that begins with an “intersectional feminist agenda for equality.” In Kornbluh and Mink, *Ensuring Poverty*, 144, 145.

31. Covert, “Why Hillary Has Never Apologized for Welfare Reform.”

32. On 2020 debates, see Carl Huse, “Jobless Aid Fuels Partisan Divide over Next Pandemic Rescue Package,” *New York Times*, May 7, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/07/us/coronavirus-stimulus-package.html?searchResultPosition=4>; Jeff Stein and Erica Werner, “Trump Demands Payroll Tax Cut While GOP Eyes Benefit Cuts for Unemployed,” *Washington Post*, July 20, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2020/07/19/repUBLICan-stimulus-unemployment-coronavirus/>; Alex Pareene, “The \$2,000 Checks and Our Failing Vaccine Rollout Have Something in Common,” *The New Republic*, January 8, 2021, <https://newrepublic.com/article/160810/2000-stimulus-checks-vaccine-rollout-democrats>. On welfare and domestic violence, see Roberta Spalter-Roth, Beverly Burr, Heidi Hartmann, and Lois Shaw, *Welfare That Works: The Working Lives of AFDC Recipients—A Report to the Ford Foundation* (Washington, DC: Institute for Women’s Policy Research, 1995), cited in Chappell, *The War on Welfare*, 245.

33. Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors*, 161.

34. On the politics of GAI in this period, see Nadasen, chapter six in *Welfare Warriors*, 157–92; Brian Steensland, *The Failed Welfare Revolution: America's Struggle over Guaranteed Income Policy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008).

35. Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, *Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare*, updated edition (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 3. The revised edition added two chapters, which I do not incorporate into my analysis of the text published in 1971.

36. Piven and Cloward, *Regulating the Poor*, 30.

37. Piven and Cloward, *Regulating the Poor*, 123.

38. Examples from Piven and Cloward, *Regulating the Poor*, 128, 151, 158, 161, 166.

39. Piven and Cloward, *Regulating the Poor*, xvii.

40. Piven and Cloward, *Regulating the Poor*, 336. See also Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward, *Poor People's Movements: Why They Succeed, How They Fail* (New York: Pantheon: 1977).

41. On continued welfare rights organizing beyond the 1975 shuttering of NWRO doors, see, for example, Annelise Orleck, *Storming Caesars Palace: How Black Mothers Fought Their Own War on Poverty* (Boston: Beacon Books, 2005); Lana Dee Povitz, *Stirrings: How Activist New Yorkers Ignited a Movement for Food Justice* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019), 198–239.

42. Howard, chapters three and seven in *The Hidden Welfare State*, 64–74, 139–60.

43. In 1982, Piven and Cloward wrote, “we now think the cyclical relief pattern [theorized in *Regulating the Poor*] may represent a characterization truer of the past than of the future.” Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, *The New Class War: Reagan's Attack on the Welfare State and Its Consequences* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), 29, 33–34.

44. David J. Rothman, *Conscience and Convenience: The Asylum and Its Alternatives in Progressive America* (Boston: Little Brown, 1980); Michael B. Katz, *Poverty and Policy in American History* (New York: Academic Press, 1983).

45. William I. Trattner, *From Poor Law to Welfare State: A History of Social Welfare in America* (New York: The Free Press, 1974); James T. Patterson, *America's Struggle against Poverty, 1900–1980* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981).

46. Edward Berkowitz and Kim McQuaid, *Creating the American Welfare State: The Political Economy of Twentieth-Century Reform* (New York: Praeger, 1980).

47. Charles Murray, *Losing Ground: American Social Policy, 1950–1980* (New York: Basic Books, 1984). In response to Murray (as well as liberals), William Julius Wilson looked to unemployment, lending credence to the idea of the underclass. Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

48. Michael B. Katz, “Segmented Visions: Recent Historical Writing on American Welfare,” *Journal of Urban History* 24, no. 2 (January 1998): 244–55.

In a recent essay historian Maurizio Vaudagna concurred, arguing that from the postwar period until the early 1980s, social scientists dominated the field of “welfare state development.” In Vaudagna, “Historians Interpret the Welfare State, 1975–1995,” in *Democracy and the Welfare State: The Two Wests in the Age of Austerity*, ed. Alice Kessler-Harris and Maurizio Vaudagna (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 28.

49. Michael B. Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poor House: A Social History of Welfare in America*, 10th anniversary rev. ed. (New York: Basic Books, 1996), ix. The revised edition added a chapter, which I do not incorporate into my analysis of the text published in 1986. Examples of contemporary work include Michael B. Katz, *The Undeserving Poor: From the War on Poverty to the War on Welfare* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1989).

50. Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse*, xii.

51. Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse*, ix.

In a footnote tucked deep in *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse*, Katz described how in the 1970s, “few social scientists realized that the expansion of social welfare was about to be checked by the war on welfare. At the worst, they thought the trajectory of welfare expansion would flatten during the next decade; at best, they forecast the federal government follow its expansion of social benefits with a modest attack on income inequality.” See footnote one in Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse*, 365. Katz cites Robert A. Haveman, “Introduction: Poverty and Social Policy in the 1960s and 1970s: An Overview and Some Speculations,” in Haveman, ed., *A Decade of Federal Antipoverty Programs* (New York: Academic Press, 1977), 18–19.

52. Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse*, 259, 214.

53. Charity organizers “responded as harshly as employers and governors” similarly confronted with working-class unrest; relief was as coercive as the capitalist system it propped up. Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse*, 60–61.

54. Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse*, xii.

55. Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse*, quote on 214. Katz suggests that “the reluctance to exercise public responsibility had so crippled the development of government capacity that it fell to the leaders of private industry to pioneer key aspects of the American welfare state.” Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse*, 192.

56. Katz gestures at the Federal Emergency Relief Administration’s Civil Works Administration as a desirable missed alternative. Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse*, 233.

57. Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse*, 268.

58. Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse*, 287.

59. Katz recognized his missed gendered analysis in the introduction to the tenth anniversary edition but posited, “none of the main interpretations in the book seem to be wrong, and the periodization still seems right.” In Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poor House*, xiv. He later wrote on the narrowing of “welfare” to mean AFDC, Michael B. Katz and Lorrin R. Thomas, “The Invention of ‘Welfare’ in America,” *Journal of Policy History* 10, no. 4 (1998): 399–418.

60. Gordon proposed using historical research to understand women’s role in creating welfare and to complicate the “antistatist, anti-expert, participatory-democracy values characteristic of the late 1960s/early 1970s women’s liberation movement” that had colored earlier analyses of welfare. Gordon, “The New Feminist Scholarship on the Welfare State,” in Gordon, *Women, the State, and Welfare*, 21.

As Gordon recognized, this work built on earlier examples of feminist scholarship, including many republished in the volume. Acknowledgements, in Gordon, *Women, the State, and Welfare*, ix–x. See also Mark H. Leff, “Consensus for Reform: The Mothers’-Pension Movement in the Progressive Era,” *Social Service Review* 47, no. 3 (September 1973): 397–417; Susan Ware, *Beyond Suffrage: Women in the New Deal* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard

University Press, 1981); Mimi Abramovitz, *Regulating the Lives of Women: Social Welfare Policy from Colonial Times to the Present* (Boston: South End Press, 1988); Carole Pateman, "The Patriarchal Welfare State," in *Democracy and the Welfare State*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), 231–60.

61. She explicitly stated, "feminist consideration of the welfare state stands in a complex dialogue with the older scholarship," which she characterized as "gender-blind" and deterministic. Gordon, "The New Feminist Scholarship on the Welfare State," vii, 4, 29. See also "What Does Welfare Regulate? A Review Essay on the Writings of Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward," *Social Research* 55, no. 4 (Winter 1988): 609–30.

62. Gwendolyn Mink, "The Lady and the Tramp (II): Feminist Welfare Politics, Poor Single Mothers, and the Challenge of Welfare Justice," *Feminist Studies* 24, no. 1 (Spring 1998): 55.

63. Kornbluh and Mink, *Ensuring Poverty*, 73.

64. On the eve of the PRWORA, one percent of the federal budget went to AFDC. In 1995, the federal government spent \$294.6 billion on Social Security, \$157.3 billion on Medicare, \$88.4 billion on Medicaid, and \$17.3 billion on AFDC. Katz, *The Price of Citizenship*, 318; Nadasen, Mittelstadt, and Chappell, *Welfare in the United States*, 66; Howard, *The Hidden Welfare State*, 26.

65. Nelson, "The Origins of the Two-Channel Welfare State." Nelson's essay was one of nine already published and compiled by Gordon in her twelve-essay volume. See Barbara J. Nelson, "The Gender, Race, and Class Origins of Early Welfare Policy and the Welfare State: A Comparison of Workmen's Compensation and Mothers' Aid," in *Women, Politics and Change*, ed. Louse A. Tilly and Patricia Gurin (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1990), 413–35.

Nelson saw her article as adding gender analysis to the "state capacities approach" rooted comparative welfare state formation. Nelson cites Theda Skocpol, "Bringing the State Back In: Strategies of Analysis and Current Research," in *Bringing the State Back In*, ed. Peter B. Evans, Deitrich Rueschmeyer, and Theda Skocpol (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Ann Shola Orloff and Theda Skocpol, "Why Not Equal Protection? Explaining the Politics of Public Social Spending in Britain, 1900–1911, and in the United States, 1880s–1920," *American Sociological Review* 49, no. 6 (1984): 726–50; Theda Skocpol and John Ikenberry, "The Political Formation of the American Welfare State in Historical and Comparative Perspective," in *Comparison Social Research: The Welfare State, 1883–1983*, vol. 6, ed. Richard F. Tomasson (Greenwich: JAI Press, 1983). In *footnote 2*, Nelson, "The Origins of the Two-Channel Welfare State," 146.

Vaudgna observes that this generation of feminist scholars was unique in its effort to bridge the divide between social scientific and historical writing on the welfare state. Vaudgna, "Historians Interpret the Welfare State, 1975–1995," 43.

66. Nelson, "The Origins of the Two-Channel Welfare State," 124, 133.

67. Nelson, "The Origins of the Two-Channel Welfare State," 140.

68. Nelson, "The Origins of the Two-Channel Welfare State," 141.

69. Nelson, "The Origins of the Two-Channel Welfare State," 144.

70. Orloff, "Gender in Early U.S. Social Policy," *Journal of Policy History* 3, no. 3 (1991): 252. A poll showed that although confidence in the ability for the government to pay out Social Security benefits dipped in the 1970s and 1980s, support for the program remained

strong, in Sally R. Sherman, “Public Attitudes toward Social Security,” *Social Security Bulletin* 52, no. 12 (December 1989), 2–16, <https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/ssb/v52n12/v52n12p2.pdf>.

71. Examples of work pioneering the study of race, the New Deal, and the welfare state include Jill Quadagno, *The Transformation of Old Age Security: Class and Politics in the American Welfare State* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); Jill Quadagno, *The Color of Welfare: How Racism Undermined the War on Poverty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); Charles V. Hamilton and Donna Cooper Hamilton, *The Dual Agenda* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

72. Mink argued that the Progressive Era “origins of the American welfare state lay in gender-based solutions to what was widely perceived to be a racial problem.” Mink, “The Lady and the Tramp,” 111. See also Gwendolyn Mink, *The Wages of Motherhood: Inequality in the Welfare State, 1917-1942* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995).

73. Mink, “The Lady and the Tramp,” 110, 111.

74. Gordon, *Pitied but Not Entitled*, 45.

75. Quadagno, *The Color of Welfare*, 119. See also Gordon, *Pitied but Not Entitled*, 111–44.

76. Gordon, *Pitied but Not Entitled*, 60, 145. Gordon attributes this in part to the “silence” of the women’s movement” during 1930s unrest. Unemployed councils and labor organizing emphasized male needs, Gordon, *Pitied but Not Entitled*, quote on 212, 218.

77. Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).

Skocpol’s analysis was part of a larger conversation about comparative welfare state development and why the United States was late to develop a welfare state. See Vaudagna, “Historians Interpret the Welfare State, 1975-1995,” 35–37, 44.

Some scholars criticized Skocpol’s claims to have “discovered” women’s involvement in building the American welfare state and her uncritical account of women’s labor norms. As historian Marisa Chappell recently argued, Skocpol was instrumental in inspiring a new generation of scholars to investigate the history of state-building, to “bring the state back in.” The histories that resulted, Chappell suggests, deepened understandings of the raced and gendered limitations of liberal governance. Chappell, “*Protecting Soldiers and Mothers* Twenty-Five Years Later: Theda Skocpol’s Legacy and American Welfare State Historiography, 1992-2017,” *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 17, no. 3 (2018): 546–73.

78. In a 1998 essay, Gwendolyn Mink indicted feminists who failed to oppose welfare reform as “uniquely responsible for how Congress reformed welfare.” Mink, “The Lady and the Tramp (II),” 57. Examples of the extensive scholarship on maternalism and welfare during this period include Robyn Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion American Reform, 1890-1935* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991); Molly Ladd-Taylor, *Mother-Work: Women, Child Welfare, and the State, 1890-1930* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994); Mink, *The Wages of Motherhood*; Joanne L. Goodwin, *Gender and the Politics of Welfare Reform: Mothers’ Pensions in Chicago, 1911-1929* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997). On comparative welfare states and maternalism, see Seth Koven and Sonya Michel, eds., *Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States* (New York: Routledge, 1993). Examples of work on maternalism and labor include Vivien Hart, *Bound by Our Constitution: Women, Workers, and the Minimum Wage* (Oxford:

Oxford University Press, 1991); Kathryn Kish Sklar, *Florence Kelley and the Nation's Work: The Rise of Women's Political Culture, 1830-1990* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995).

79. Gordon, *Pitied but Not Entitled*, 45.

80. Gordon, *Pitied but Not Entitled*, 7. On the family wage, see also Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon, "A Genealogy of Dependency: Tracing a Keyword of the US Welfare State," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 19, no. 2 (1994): 309–36.

81. Joanne L. Goodwin, *Gender and the Politics of Welfare Reform: Mothers' Pensions in Chicago, 1911-1929* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 7.

82. On the contradictions between the nature of social policy and the reality that many single women needed to work for wages, see also Eileen Boris, *Home to Work: Motherhood and the Politics of Industrial Homework in the United States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

83. Roberts reviewed *Pitied but Not Entitled* and Jill Quadagno's *The Color of Welfare*. Dorothy E. Roberts, "Review: Welfare and the Problem of Black Citizenship," *The Yale Law Journal* 105, no. 6 (April 1996): 1565.

84. Gordon, *Pitied but Not Entitled*, 141. Gordon further argues that "the deletion of public works [permanent public jobs program] and medical insurance from Social Security contributed greatly to the stigma on 'welfare' by depriving the poorest of essential supports that might have provided them with dignity of work and health care." Gordon, *Pitied but Not Entitled*, 256.

85. Gordon, *Pitied but Not Entitled*, 282. On motherhood as work, see Gordon, *Pitied but Not Entitled*, 56–57.

86. Mink, "The Lady and the Tramp," 110.

Orloff suggested that noncontributory mothers' pensions were seen as an entitlement, but when they were administered "ended up with many shortcomings"—they were inadequate, invasive, and discriminatory. Orloff, "Gender in Early U.S. Social Policy," 256.

87. Gordon, *Pitied but Not Entitled*, 4.

88. Felicia A. Kornbluh, "The New Literature on Gender and the Welfare State: The U.S. Case," *Feminist Studies* 22, no. 1 (Spring 1996): 172.

89. Examples include Kornbluh, "To Fulfill Their 'Rightly Needs'; Eileen Boris, "When Work Is Slavery," *Social Justice* 25 (Spring 1998), 28–46; Deborah Gray White, *Too Heavy a Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves* (New York: Norton, 1999), 212–56; Anne Valk, "Mother Power: The Movement for Welfare Rights in Washington, D.C., 1966-1972," *Journal of Women's History* 11, no. 4 (2000): 34–58; Nadasen, "Expanding the Boundaries of the Women's Movement"; Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors*; Rhonda Y. Williams, *The Politics of Public Housing: Black Women's Struggles against Urban Inequality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Orleck, *Storming Caesars Palace*; Felicia Kornbluh, *The Battle for Welfare Rights: Politics and Poverty in Modern America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007). This work builds on earlier scholarship, including Guida West, *The National Welfare Rights Organization: The Social Protest of Poor Women* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1981).

90. Some did this directly. For example, Kornbluh, "The Goals of the Welfare Rights Movement."

91. Boris, "When Work Is Slavery," 40.

92. Boris, "When Work Is Slavery," 37.

93. Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors*, 167. Many male activists were less critical of work and did not conceptualize the guaranteed income this way. Nadasen, *Welfare Warrior*, 165.

94. Historian Gabriel Winant cited Nadasen when arguing in his recent work that welfare rights activists "defied the assumptions of the liberal order entirely" by "developing a feminist analysis and seeking to detach survival from production." Winant, *The Next Shift*, 126–27; Nadasen, "Expanding the Boundaries of the Women's Movement."

95. Mittelstadt, *From Welfare to Workfare*; Chappell, *War on Welfare*.

Several other works found the roots of welfare's decline in mid-century liberal policy. On the 1970s shift from the liberal focus on welfare, instead of poverty, as the social problem, see Alice O'Connor, "The False Dawn of Poor-Law Reform: Nixon, Carter, and the Quest for a Guaranteed Income," *Journal of Policy History* 10, special issue no. 1 (January 1998): 99–129. On the role of scientific research in shaping welfare reform, see Alice O'Connor, *Poverty Knowledge: Social Science, Social Policy, and the Poor in Twentieth-Century U.S. History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002); William Graebner, "The End of Liberalism: Narrating Welfare's Decline, from the Moynihan Report (1965) to the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act (1996)," *Journal of Policy History* 14, no. 2 (2002). On backlash, see Ellen Reese, *Backlash against Welfare Mothers* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2005). On persistent emphasis on charity, see Andrew J. F. Morris, *The Limits of Voluntarism: Charity and Welfare from the New Deal through the Great Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). On the antitax politics driving liberal social policy during the mid-twentieth century and how it paved the way for antistatism, see Molly C. Michelmore, *Tax and Spend: The Welfare State, Tax Politics, and the Limits of American Liberalism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014). For an excellent overview of welfare history, see Nadasen, Mittelstadt, and Chappell, *Welfare in the United States*.

96. Mittelstadt, *From Welfare to Workfare*, 7.

97. Mittelstadt, *From Welfare to Workfare*, 1.

98. Mittelstadt, *From Welfare to Workfare*, 11. Mittelstadt's focus on this period of relative affluence such as the 1950s and 1960s, perhaps indirectly, supported Piven and Cloward's theory that periods of prosperity bring about greater welfare discipline. Mittelstadt, *From Welfare to Workfare*, 7, 8–9.

99. Mittelstadt, *From Welfare to Workfare*, 52, 53.

100. Crises included the State of Louisiana cutting 30,000 people from welfare rolls after the governor called recipients "a bunch of prostitutes" and a New York city manager declaring war on welfare in 1961. In Mittelstadt, *From Welfare to Workfare*, 86–106. On racist state-level "family caps" that withheld benefits for children born to unmarried women and how contemporary bipartisan welfare reforms pursued similar goals but "cleansed" their rhetoric "of its express racial terms," see Dorothy E. Roberts, *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1997), 207, 229.

101. Mittelstadt, *From Welfare to Workfare*, 121–26, 151. War on Poverty job programs focused on men's employment, seeking to reinsert men as heads of family. Mittelstadt, *From Welfare to Workfare*, 147–48.

102. This emphasis on family attracted support of the YWCA and the AFL-CIO, which supported "the traditional two-parent, male-breadwinner family" in its struggle for a family

wage. The Urban League supported these reforms as part of its “effort to strengthen and improve family life among African Americans.” Mittelstadt, *From Welfare to Workfare*, 83.

103. Chappell, *The War on Welfare*, 6.

104. Chappell, *The War on Welfare*, 5.

105. Chappell described how the liberal coalition intended to win over the white working class by supporting the Family Assistance Plan, despite welfare rights activists’ opposition to FAP’s “racially motivated distinctions.” The liberal antipoverty organization Movement for Economic Justice avoided drawing the connections between poverty and race that had characterized economic justice struggles in the 1960s. In Chappell, *The War on Welfare*, 93, 114–15, 122. On embrace of underclass, see Chappell, *The War on Welfare*, 141.

106. Chappell, *The War on Welfare*, 108, 125. In the late 1970s, some feminist and welfare rights groups presented “a new, degendered family wage.” They embraced the focus on employment as a solution to poverty but more carefully determined “exactly what poor women would need to achieve self-sufficiency through labor.” They demanded job trainings, transitional income, childcare, and other supports. Chappell, *The War on Welfare*, 158, 182.

On tensions between activist demands for income and jobs, see Gordon K. Mantler, chap. 4 in *Power to the Poor: Black-Brown Coalition and the Fight for Economic Justice, 1960–1974* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 90–120.

107. Mittelstadt, *From Welfare to Workfare*, 170.

108. Mittelstadt, *From Welfare to Workfare*, 169, 170–71, quote on 169.

109. On the politics of “breadwinner liberalism” leading to those of “breadwinner conservatism,” see Self, *All in the Family*. Political scientist Melinda Cooper criticizes Piven and Cloward for bolstering the breadwinner wage model in Cooper, *Family Values*, 41–42. On Daniel Patrick Moynihan’s embrace of the Family Assistance Plan to garner white support, paving the way for welfare retrenchment, see Joseph E. Hower, “‘The Sparrows and the Horses’: Daniel Patrick Moynihan, the Family Assistance Plan, and the Liberal Critique of Government Workers, 1955–1977,” *Journal of Policy History* 28, no. 2 (2016): 256–89.

110. Chappell, *War on Welfare*, 200, quote on 109.

111. Examples of the expansive welfare state include Katz, *The Price of Citizenship*; Michael B. Katz, “The American Welfare State and Social Contract in Hard Times,” *Journal of Policy History* 22, no. 4 (2010): 508–29.

Examples of work highlighting the hidden welfare state and how the majority of government support has gone to straight, white, male Americans include Blanche D. Coll, *Safety Net: Welfare and Social Security, 1929–1979* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995); Quadagno, *The Color of Welfare*; Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996); Robert C. Lieberman, *Shifting the Color Line: Race and the American Welfare State* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998); Michael K. Brown, *Race, Money, and the American Welfare State* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999); Christopher Howard, *The Hidden Welfare State: Tax Expenditures and Social Policy in the United States* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999); Alice Kessler-Harris, *In Pursuit of Equity: Women, Men, and the Quest for Economic Citizenship in 20th Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Ira Katznelson, *When Affirmative Action Was White: An Untold Story of Racial Inequality in America* (New York: WW Norton and Company, 2005);

Mary Poole, *The Segregated Origins of Social Security: African Americans and the Welfare State* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Margot Canaday, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009); Cybelle Fox, *Three Worlds of Relief: Race, Immigration, and the American Welfare State from the Progressive Era to the New Deal* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012); Boris and Klein, *Caring for America*; Michael B. Katz, *The Undeserving Poor: America's Enduring Confrontation with Poverty*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

Examples of work on the private welfare state include Marie Gottschalk, *The Shadow Welfare State: Labor, Business, and the Politics of Health Care in the United States* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000); Jacob S. Hacker, *The Divided Welfare State: The Battle over Public and Private Social Benefits in the United States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Jennifer Klein, *For All These Rights: Business, Labor, and the Shaping of America's Public-Private Welfare State* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003); Colin Gordon, *Dead on Arrival: The Politics of Health Care in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003); Jill Quadagno, *One Nation, Uninsured: Why the U.S. Has No Health Insurance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

112. Howard, *The Hidden Welfare State*, 140.

113. Katz, *The Price of Citizenship*, 293–94, 197.

114. In 2011, sociologist Monica Prasad warned that equating tax preferences with an expanded welfare state—that “*not taking equals giving*”—ignores how tax preferences privatize collective risk, erode state capacity, and suggest an antigovernment sentiment emblematic of the rise of neoliberalism. Prasad further suggested that the logical conclusion of these kinds of arguments—that the US welfare state is potentially more expansive and generous than European ones—is politically dangerous. But Prasad excluded the EITC from her critique on the basis that it refunds workers whose wages fall below a certain income threshold and therefore redistributes wealth. Prasad, “Tax ‘Expenditures’ and Welfare States,” 254.

115. Chappell, *The War on Welfare*, 107.

116. She went on to argue that these policy changes ended the “maternalist’ strand of US social provision, while expanding an employment-based strand in the context of disenfranchisement and the expansion of the significance of the labor market for Americans’ life chances and material conditions.” Ann Shola Orloff, “Explaining US Welfare Reform: Power, Gender, Race and the US Policy Legacy,” *Critical Social Policy* 22, no. 1 (2002): 113, quote on 97.

117. Tani quoted James C. Scott’s pronouncement that one should “never assume that local practice conforms with state theory,” in Tani, *States of Dependency*, 79–80. Ann Shola Orloff made a similar distinction in a 1991 article, Orloff, “Gender in Early Social Policy,” 252. Tani’s work also built on that of Suzanne Mettler, who argued that federalism led to gender bias in mid-century welfare policy, when maternalist Progressive Era reformers embraced state and local control. Mettler, *Dividing Citizens: Gender and Federalism in New Deal Public Policy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998); Mettler, “The Stratification of Social Citizenship: Gender and Federalism in the Formation of Old Age Insurance and Aid to Dependent Children,” *Journal of Policy History* 11, no. 1 (1999): 31–58; Tani, *States of*

Dependency, 288n29. On state and local governments as administrators of welfare and penal policy, see Kohler-Hausmann, *Getting Tough*, 24–25; William Crafton, “The Incremental Revolution: Ronald Reagan and Welfare Reform in the 1970s,” *Journal of Policy History* 26, no. 1 (January 2014): 27–47. Stephen Pimpare called for more histories of lived experience of welfare in 2007. Pimpare, “Toward a New Welfare History,” *Journal of Policy History* 19, no. 2 (2007): 234–52.

118. There is also resurgence in research on welfare rights, especially at the local level. Examples include Keona Ervin, *Gateway to Equality: Black Women and the Struggle for Economic Justice in St. Louis* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2017); Jessica Wilkerson, *To Live Here, You Have to Fight: How Women Led Appalachian Movements for Social Justice* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2019); Rosie Bermudez, “Chicana Militant Dignity Work and Politics: Building Coalition and Political Solidarity in the Los Angeles Welfare Rights Movement,” *Southern California Quarterly* 102, no. 4 (2020): 420–55.

119. Lisa Levenstein, *A Movement without Marches: African American Women and the Politics of Poverty in Postwar Philadelphia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

120. Tani, *States of Dependency*, 11.

121. Tani described the SSA’s efforts to “centralize, professionalize and unify a diffuse system of locally administered poor relief,” in Tani, *States of Dependency*, 29.

122. On “full rights feminists” and a more positive vision of social policy, including welfare, see also Dorothy Sue Cobble, *For the Many: American Feminists and the Global Fight for Democratic Equality* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2021).

123. Tani, *States of Dependency*, 83. While mostly male lawyers saw the state’s promise as “fair treatment and rational decision making,” mostly female social workers envisioned the state’s responsibility as an obligation “to meet human need, respect human dignity, and acknowledge human interdependence.” Tani compares the male rights vision as part of the promise of positive law and the female rights vision as being more in line with statutory law and T. H. Marshall’s “social rights.” In Tani, *States of Dependency*, 82–83, 91, quotes on 82 and 83.

124. Tani, *States of Dependency*, 209.

On the regional transformation of public assistance at the hands of Southern Democrats, see Eva Bertram, *The Workfare State: Public Assistance Politics from the New Deal to the New Democrats* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015).

125. Even if they were not always granted benefits, their claims “subtly strengthened the notion of poor citizens as rights holders.” Tani, *States of Dependency*, 135.

126. Kohler-Hausmann, *Getting Tough*, 122. Sandwiched between sections on New York drug laws and California sentencing policy, Kohler-Hausmann devotes a section of the book to a discussion of welfare in Illinois and California. Other works parsing the tensions between the redistributive and punitive state include Julilly Kohler-Hausmann, “Guns and Butter: The Welfare State, the Carceral State, and the Politics of Exclusion in the Postwar United States,” *Journal of American History* 102, no. 1 (June 2015): 87–99; Kimberly J. Morgan and Ann Shola Orloff, ed., *The Many Hands of the State: Theorizing Political Authority and Social Control* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

127. Kohler-Hausmann, *Getting Tough*, 2, 4.

128. Kohler-Hausmann, *Getting Tough*, 140.

129. Kohler-Hausmann, *Getting Tough*, 140.
130. Kohler-Hausmann, *Getting Tough*, 6.
131. Kohler-Hausmann, *Getting Tough*, 164.
132. Kohler-Hausmann, *Getting Tough*, 159. In response to press coverage that played up the image of the “welfare queen” in Illinois, nonrecipients sent tips to authorities, strengthening the surveillance apparatus and lending it legitimacy, in Kohler-Hausmann, *Getting Tough*, 192–93.
133. Even though inadequate grants made welfare cheating necessary, often as unreported income earned from working outside the home, politicians relentlessly slandered recipients as lazy and greedy, in Kohler-Hausmann, *Getting Tough*, 169.
134. Kohler-Hausman, *Getting Tough*, 179.
135. Other scholars have traced the hardening of the boundaries of citizenship to this era of welfare policy. Historian Sarah R. Coleman drew connections between the Nixon administration decision, backed by the Supreme Court in *Mathews v. Diaz* (1976), to bar states from providing federal welfare benefits to undocumented immigrants and the PRWORA’s exclusion of authorized immigrants. Sarah R. Coleman, *The Walls Within: The Politics of Immigration in Modern America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2021), 107, 108. See also Cybelle Fox, “Unauthorized Welfare: The Origins of Immigrant Status Restrictions in American Social Policy,” *Journal of American History* 102, no. 4 (March 2016): 1041–74. On the contours of Native American and Puerto Rican citizenship, see Emma Amador, “Women Ask Relief for Puerto Ricans’: Territorial Citizenship, the Social Security Act, and Puerto Rican Communities, 1933–1939,” *Labor* 13, no 3–4 (2016): 105–29; Mary Cameron Klann, “Citizens with Reservations: Race, Wardship, and Native American Citizenship in the Mid-Twentieth-Century American Welfare State” (PhD diss., University of California-San Diego, 2017).
136. This account of welfare reform is part of an emerging corpus of historical work on this topic. Examples include Cooper, *Family Values*; Laura Briggs, *How All Politics Became Reproductive Politics: From Welfare Reform to Foreclosure to Trump* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017); Geismer, *Left Behind*. For a postmortem on welfare reform from the perspective of an activist scholar, see Gwendolyn Mink, *Welfare’s End* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998).
137. Kornbluh and Mink, *Ensuring Poverty*, ix.
138. Kornbluh and Mink, *Ensuring Poverty*, 23.
139. Kornbluh and Mink, *Ensuring Poverty*, 1, quote from PRWORA.
140. Kornbluh and Mink, *Ensuring Poverty*, 17.
141. Kornbluh and Mink, *Ensuring Poverty*, 43.
142. Kornbluh and Mink, *Ensuring Poverty*, 54, 65–67, 69, quote on 69.
143. Before this in 1993, Representative Mink hosted a conference to bring a feminist perspective to welfare reform debates, inviting antipoverty activists, lawyers, and scholars including Richard Cloward and Linda Gordon. Participants’ remarks were published in a 1993 special issue of *Social Justice*, edited by Gwendolyn Mink. In Kornbluh and Mink, *Ensuring Poverty*, 62–63. On the life and politics of Representative Mink, see Judy Tzu-Chun Wu and Gwendolyn Mink, *Fierce and Fearless: Patsy Takemoto Mink, First Woman of Color in Congress* (New York: New York University Press, 2022).
144. Kornbluh and Mink, *Ensuring Poverty*, xiv.

145. Bryce Covert, “The Not-So-Subtle Racism of Trump-Era ‘Welfare Reform,’” *New York Times*, May 23, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/23/opinion/trump-welfare-reform-racism.html>; Michael D. Shear, Miriam Jordan, and Caitlin Dickerson, “Trump’s Policy Could Alter the Face of the American Immigrant,” *New York Times*, August 14, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/14/us/immigration-public-charge-welfare.html>.

Kornbluh and Mink argued that “In the second decade of the twenty-first century many white voters spoke the language of welfare reform fluently even though the system it described had ceased to exist.” Kornbluh and Mink, *Ensuring Poverty*, 131.

146. On how progressives in the 2010s did not talk about welfare, Kornbluh and Mink, “Preface,” in *Ensuring Poverty*, ix–xviii.

147. Eight million people in the United States, disproportionately Black and Latinx, still slipped into poverty between May and October 2020. Jason DeParle, “8 Million Have Slipped into Poverty since May as Federal Aid Has Dried Up,” *New York Times*, October 15, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/15/us/politics/federal-aid-poverty-levels.html>.

148. Melena Ryzik and Katie Benner, “Biden’s Aid Package Funnels Millions to Victims of Domestic Abuse,” *New York Times*, March 18, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/18/us/politics/biden-domestic-violence.html>; Dottie Rosenbaum, Zoë Neuberger, Brynne Keith-Jennings, and Catlin Nchako, *Food Assistance in American Rescue Plan Act Will Reduce Hardship, Provide Economic Stimulus* (Washington, DC: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, updated May 7, 2021), <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/food-assistance-in-american-rescue-plan-act-will-reduce-hardship-provide>.

149. Laura Wheaton, Linda Giannarelli, and Ilham Dehry, *2021 Poverty Projections: Assessing the Impact of Benefits and Stimulus Measures* (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, July 2021), <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/2021-poverty-projections-assessing-impact-benefits-and-stimulus-measures>; Jason DeParle, “Pandemic Spurs a Record Drop in Poverty,” *New York Times*, July 28, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/28/us/politics/covid-poverty-aid-programs.html>; Ben Casselman and Jeanna Smialek, “U.S. Poverty Fell Last Year as Government Aid Made Up for Lost Jobs,” *New York Times*, September 14, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/09/14/business/economy/census-income-poverty-health-insurance.html>.

150. Bryce Covert, “The End of ‘the End of Welfare as We Know It,’” *New Republic*, August 20, 2021, <https://newrepublic.com/article/163321/pandemic-relief-poverty-reduction-welfare-reform-democrats>.

151. Fact Sheet: The American Families Plan, The White House, April 28, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/04/28/fact-sheet-the-american-families-plan/>; Emily Cochrane, “Senate Democrats Begin \$3.5 Trillion Push for ‘Big, Bold’ Social Change,” *New York Times*, updated September 21, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/08/09/us/politics/senate-budget.html>. Calls to make the CTC permanent have come from activist and advocacy groups, think tanks, politicians, economists, and beyond. Examples include Gregory Acs and Kevin Werner, *How a Permanent Expansion of the Child Tax Credit Could Affect Poverty* (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, July 2021), https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/104626/how-a-permanent-expansion-of-the-child-tax-credit-could-affect-poverty_1.pdf; Sumbul Siddiqui, “Congress Should

Make Child Tax Credit Permanent,” *Boston Globe*, August 2, 2021, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2021/08/02/opinion/congress-should-make-child-tax-credit-permanent/>; Paul Krugman, “Why Not Make the Kids Alright?” *New York Times*, September 21, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/09/21/opinion/child-tax-credit-poverty.html>.

152. Center on Social Policy and Poverty at Columbia, “3.7 Million More Children in Poverty in January 2022 without Monthly Child Tax Credit,” February 17, 2022, <https://www.povertycenter.columbia.edu/news-internal/monthly-poverty-january-2022>.