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**No Relief:
The Politics of Welfare Retrenchment,
1873-1898 and 1973-2002**

by

Stephen Pimpare

**A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Political Science in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York**

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ABSTRACT

No Relief: The Politics of Welfare Retrenchment, 1873-1898 and 1973-2002

by

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No Relief compares the national repeal of AFDC in 1996 with the widespread campaigns against municipal poor relief that occurred throughout the United States some one hundred years earlier. In both eras businesses and the governments that depended upon them, threatened by growing labor power, civil unrest and the rising costs of poor relief, launched an attack against poor people and the limited benefits available to them. They did not do so directly but under cover of the Charity Organization Societies of the Gilded Age and conservative think tanks of the late twentieth century -- "neutral" reform organizations that obscured the class-based nature of their activism. In addition to examining these *institutions* through which anti-relief campaigns were waged, *No Relief* explores the *arguments* used to justify relief reforms (which in both periods drew upon Malthusian and Spencerian ideas about the dangers of a profligate pauper class and the "natural" role of the state); the *policies* ultimately enacted (which restricted access to relief and made what was still available conditioned upon work or new standards of moral behavior); and the *outcomes* of such policy changes (which led to rising costs and less effective service provision, in which greater sums of money were distributed to private contractors and not-for-profit service providers, and less money reached those most in need). What reformers achieved was to remove the minimal supports available to poor men and women, forcing them into the low-wage labor market, into marriage, or into prison. *No Relief* concludes with an analysis of what these cases reveal about the circumstances under which welfare benefits previously extended to citizens can be rescinded with relative impunity and offers some thoughts as to what the ultimate outcomes of relief reform in the late nineteenth century might portend for the beginning of the twenty-first century.

PREFACE

Here's to You, Gertrude Himmelfarb!

The following pages seek to respond to a few challenges. An early inspiration was Andrew Polsky, who pointed me toward events in nineteenth century poor relief he thought I might find puzzling. He was right. Why did so many cities abolish poor relief at the end of the century? Why did other cities not do so? I began my investigation in hopes of simultaneously addressing social welfare historian Michael Katz's complaint that "all discussions about the reasons for variation in [late nineteenth century poor] relief must remain speculative until historians do research on the topic. Virtually none exists at the moment" (Katz 1986, 341fn13). But to fully answer that challenge was, I soon realized, a fool's errand, not least because of the scarcity of reliable data. I am not the first to note the problem. F.B. Sanborn quipped at the 1877 National Conference of Charities and Corrections (NCCC) that "Mr. Canning once said in parliament, 'I can prove anything by figures, except the truth.' This is eminently the case with the figures which relate to pauperism." The 1891 President's address to the NCCC noted that "no state keeps complete statistical records." "It is impossible to obtain statistics of value from the majority of the States," complained another in 1892. Amos Warner wrote in 1894 that "There are absolutely no reliable statistics of outdoor relief in the United States as a whole." From the NCCC of 1898 we learn that "there is yet no uniformity [on reporting on relief] between the States, and the statistics secured are very imperfect." As late as 1922, Katherine Howland of Smith College wrote that "Not only is there no central body of our federal government which collects statistics on poor relief, but in a large number of states not even figures are available for all the counties." Suffice to say I cannot here offer the kind of rich comparison and analysis of poor relief patterns, city-by-city, that Katz (and I) would like to see. Instead, I gather what data are available to offer a few more pieces of the weird puzzle that is nineteenth century "welfare" (*outdoor relief*, or *out-relief* it was called then) and show how many of the same forces have more recently been at work once again.

I do better addressing Lawrence Mead's complaint (2000) that scholars have too little attended to the politics of recent policymaking, especially to the conservative welfare changes

of the 1980s and 1990s. I take the challenge, certain he will find little to like in my explanation, and up the ante a decade by beginning that part of my story in the 1970s. But more on Mead below.

I also pick up a gauntlet tossed down by Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward (1987, fn6), who lamented that “much of the history of popular political struggles over poor relief in the United States before the Great Depression remains to be written.” True enough. Most people I daresay don’t even know that there were heated battles over outdoor relief in the late 1800s or that many cities abruptly cut off assistance, imposed work requirements, tightened eligibility standards and enacted other “reforms” that eerily echo the “reforms” made in the late twentieth century. This is a faint response to their fair challenge (and one that owes much to them and their work) but it helps, I hope, solve another intriguing puzzle: given that Americans have always been ambivalent about welfare (whatever we have called it), why at the end of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries did we so give up on offering aid to poor people, and in so much the same way? Why *then* and why *now*?

But it turns out that these pages are as much as anything a reaction to those Gilded Age charity reformers and some contemporary would-be Victorian revivalists who argue that it is a decline in values (*virtues*, Gertrude Himmelfarb would insist we say) that is the real problem and that public efforts to reduce poverty by offering material aid, however well-intentioned, will only make matters worse, encouraging dependency, breeding illegitimacy and leading generally to the demise of all things decent and good. Then and now, such understandings permeate public debate and private discussion about welfare, about poverty, about poor people and about the proper role of government itself, importantly. These are myths. But however wrong they may be, they helped revolutionize welfare policy. Twice.

It is to these tall tales, then, to the Jukes and the Welfare Queen, to the Squeegee Man and the Sturdy Beggar, to Josephine Shaw Lowell, Charles Loring Brace and William Graham Sumner, and to Charles Murray, Lawrence Mead, Robert Rector and Gertrude Himmelfarb, to whom I most respond here and to whom I, albeit reluctantly, dedicate this work. Sorry Mom.

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NO RELIEF
THE POLITICS OF WELFARE RETRENCHMENT,
1873-1898 AND 1973-2002

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

This we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat

St. Paul the Apostle, 2 Thessalonians 3:10

On September 15, 1995 U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services Donna Shalala handed President William J. Clinton a report predicting that the “welfare reform” legislation then being considered by the Senate would drive over one million American children into poverty (Edelman 1997, 45). Less than one year later, on August 22, 1996, Clinton, whose 1992 election campaign famously vowed to “end welfare as we know it,” presided over a ceremony on the White House lawn at which he signed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRA), legislation in some respects harsher than the bill Shalala had warned him about. “The current welfare system is fundamentally broken, and this may be our last best chance to set it straight,” he proclaimed (Clinton 1996). The PRA repealed the New Deal’s Aid to Dependent Children program, imposed strict work requirements upon relief recipients, and made assistance harder to get and harder to keep. New York Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan said that “welfare reform in fact means welfare repeal. . . Everyone is to blame for this duplicity, everyone is an accomplice” (in Wilson 1996, 170-1). The Urban Institute (1996) predicted that the PRA would sharply increase poverty, especially among children. Katha Pollitt (1996) wrote in *The New Republic*, “we know how welfare reform will turn out. . . wages will go down, families will fracture, millions of children will be more miserable than ever.”

Yet by 2002, on the eve of the PRA’s legislatively mandated re-authorization, national relief rolls had been cut in half and there were fewer people on the welfare rolls than at any time since 1968. Official national poverty rates, even among children and even among African-American children, had declined to the lowest levels in two decades. And a majority of former welfare recipients had probably entered the workforce. Reporting on

this “Welfare Surprise” *Forbes.com* crowed that “evidence of welfare reform’s success continues to mount,” and that the PRA “justified its title” for it “significantly increased both personal responsibility and migrations from welfare to work” (Seligman 2000). “Little evidence of hardship has surfaced,” wrote Lawrence Mead (1998). In 2001 welfare reform was widely proclaimed a success.

These very claims had been made before, and under similar circumstances. Between 1874 and 1900 more than one-fourth of the fifty largest American cities had abolished public “outdoor relief” to their poor residents (there was no national poor relief, and no state-level aid to speak of). Seventy percent of the rest had cut their relief to very low levels or offered aid only in goods and services, but not in cash. Most had imposed some form of work requirement or “work test” as a condition for relief, and many boasted of their successful efforts to rid their streets of beggars. No harm had come to any, reformers claimed. “Dr. Walk, of Philadelphia, declares that no need has been felt in his city for restoring municipal outdoor relief, and that private benevolence was entirely adequate,” reported Munsterberg (1902, 524). “There is no well-authenticated instance where outdoor relief has been stopped and any considerable increase either of private charity has been required, or any marked increase of the inmates of institutions has occurred” wrote Warner and Coolidge (1908, 235, after Warner 1894, 171). Levi L. Barbour of Detroit (in Nill et al. 1891, 42-3) added that “It is the weak, the lazy, and the impostor who demand outdoor relief. . . . Quite a number of our large cities provide no outdoor relief, and their statistics fail to reveal more suffering than exists in other cities which provide a large and yearly-increasing fund for that purpose.” Poorhouse populations did not swell, street-begging was eradicated, and the moral tone of the cities was improved, anti-relief reformers said. No one suffered, they insisted, and no one complained. By the early 1890s relief reform was proclaimed a success, just as it would be a century later.

The Expansion and Contraction of Relief

I will show that reforms did not in fact succeed, even on reformers' own terms, but must first observe that it presents something of a conundrum for welfare scholarship that such contractions in relief could happen at all. Most such work simply does not consider them. T.H. Marshall (1950), for example, argued that the social welfare rights of the twentieth century have inexorably followed upon the extension of civil rights granted in the eighteenth century and the political rights gained in the nineteenth century. Subsequent welfare state analysis has also usually described the expansion and elaboration of welfare state programs: with few exceptions, theories of the welfare state describe *progress* and differ chiefly by what their authors cite as its most important causes. Some argue that it is industrialism itself, as economic growth provides the fiscal means for the state to offer assistance to a growing population of older, less productive workers and remove them from the labor force (Wilensky and Lebeaux 1958; Wilensky 1975). For other scholars, the key mechanisms driving expanding benefits are pressures from the working class and labor parties (Korpi 1983; Shalev 1983; Esping-Andersen 1990), heightened electoral competition, which encourages political parties to offer benefits to certain voters in exchange for their support (Burnham 1970; Key 1968; Schattschneider 1960), or the corporate sector's desire to enlist the state in helping it sustain and reproduce a healthy work force (Quadagno 1984). Others suggest that relief expands because bureaucrats and progressive-minded reformers press the state for changes (Heclo 1974; Patterson 1994; Trattner 1994), their opportunities and successes conditioned by the institutional exigencies they face at any given time (Skocpol 1992) or the political culture of the polity they inhabit (see Lipset 1996).

Which of these theories best describes welfare state expansion is not at issue here (see instead Skocpol 1992, 1-62; Piven and Cloward 1971 [1993], Ch. 12); what is important for my purposes is to note that none of them helps to explain the events under consideration in these pages. How do we account for the fact that twice in American

history this evolutionary process seems to have moved backwards, from 1873-1898, when thirty-nine of the fifty largest American cities cut back or eliminated their public cash relief programs, and in 1996, when “welfare reform” repealed the New Deal federal-state guarantee of poor relief to all eligible people?

While the preponderance of welfare state scholarship has attended to relief expansion, there are nonetheless some few who have considered the retraction or reconfiguration of social welfare benefits.

James O'Connor has argued that “social expenses are the price that the state must pay for political consensus and legitimation” (O'Connor 1981, 45; O'Connor 1973). But the state must also “underwrite the economic and social costs of [capital] accumulation, or those in political power risk losing their capacity to secure political and ideological consensus” (O'Connor 1981, 45). Two dilemmas emerge: first, the divergent interests of small business and others dependent upon low-wage labor engenders their political opposition to those social benefits extended by the state to foster allegiance to it and, second, the costs of such exercises in legitimacy-building drive the state toward fiscal crisis -- the demand for social benefits from the state will tend to outrun revenue the state collects, he argues, in turn generating the pressure to withdraw certain benefits. What O'Connor predicts is not a reduction in total social welfare expenses but a reconfiguration of relief, what I will here call a *retrenchment*: “the state budget can be seen as a complex mechanism that redistributes income backward and forward within the working class -- all to maintain industrial and social-political harmony, expand productivity, and accelerate accumulation and profits in the monopoly sector” (O'Connor 1973, 162). We will see evidence of this in the reforms of both the late nineteenth and late twentieth centuries -- total government relief expenses actually increased, but substantially less cash was made available to poor people as O'Connor (1973, 167) and later Piven and Cloward (1982) would predict. But while O'Connor helps explain why certain kinds of redistributive policies benefit certain classes, and why some exercises in legitimation also serve to divide the working class (see 1981,

46); while he suggests *why* social benefits are extended or withdrawn to certain groups, he does not specifically attend to *how* such redistribution is achieved politically or *who* the actors are (though see O'Connor 1973, 162-168). *No Relief* will.

Similarly, Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward (1971), while they ground their analysis more fully in political processes and attend more to the actions of movement forces and political actors than does O'Connor, also offer what has been characterized as a "functionalist" analysis of welfare state development and contraction. Under certain electoral conditions, they posit, the state expands relief in order to quiet disruptive protest; when protest subsides, relief is withdrawn in order to return recipients to the (low-wage) labor market. To use O'Connor's language, expansion favors legitimation, contraction favors accumulation. But, as with O'Connor, how contractions occur and who acts to achieve them is given less attention in their work than are the conditions for expansion (but see Piven and Cloward 1977); and they have been criticized for focusing too intensely upon the New Deal and Great Society eras in their analysis (see especially Trattner 1983, *passim*). Moreover, they locate late twentieth century relief retrenchment within a "new class war" (1982), in which business was a key player, yet, as we shall see, business activism was not always apparent during these relief battles, and the most visible actors were not the ones Piven and Cloward identified. They are right that business was a protagonist, but only by examining the ways in which business interests concealed their activism under cover of reform organizations do we reveal how they pursued and achieved their goals, perhaps even leading us closer to demonstrating that business *intended* the results they achieved, an admittedly difficult proposition. More generally, Piven and Cloward's thesis, like O'Connor's, has too seldom been subjected to concrete analyses grounded in historical events, political processes and institutional constraints. *No Relief* offers two investigations into how relief was transformed, describing who did what and when in two periods of cash relief contraction. It seeks to confirm whether the causes of poor relief retrenchment have been consistent with the functions that O'Connor's and Piven

and Cloward's models impute to such outcomes. By bringing new analysis of political processes to bear on such "functionalist" accounts, I offer descriptions of how such functions were achieved in two specific historical and political settings.

Conversely, by bringing the system-illuminating models of O'Connor and Piven and Cloward to bear on the political process-centered accounts found in much contemporary welfare reform analysis (see Weaver 2000, e.g.), I return class and political economy to accounts that can emphasize the role of self-interested state actors and institutional constraints while ignoring the influence of non-governmental actors and the power of political language that are vital if we are to gain a richer understanding of how political outcomes were achieved. For example, R. Kent Weaver's analysis of the politics of the PRA (2000) and Adonica Lui's (1995a; 1995b) analyses of nineteenth century New York relief abolition offer persuasive accounts of how intra-party competition, inter-party competition and election-year politics shaped reform. I align myself with much of their arguments. I do not dispute Weaver's claim that competition between the new 1994 Republican majority and Democrats trying to "outbid" each other for status as reform leaders, some Democrats' fear of taking a position to the left of Clinton on welfare, budget politics, and Clinton's pessimistic appraisal of the effects of (again) vetoing welfare legislation during his 1996 campaign all helped shape the final form of the PRA and propel it toward passage. And if Lui is correct, Tammany Hall's efforts to take away patronage power from its district leaders account for its motivations for centralizing, privatizing and then eliminating poor relief in Gilded Age New York. My concern is that Weaver and Lui come too late to their respective stories. Weaver is right that Clinton's campaign pledge to "end welfare as we know it" was important -- but how did it come to pass that policy debate and party politics had changed so much that a Democratic President sought election (and won) and sought reelection (and won) at least in part by promising to undo (and then undoing) significant elements of what his New Deal and Great Society predecessors had built? Why did so many Democrats abandon their party's defense of welfare and adopt

prescriptions that even Ronald Reagan had been unwilling to propose? Similarly, Lui does not offer insight into why relief was withdrawn while other, perhaps more lucrative forms of patronage, were not.

What I propose here is that there is a missing link, and that it is the successful campaigns against outdoor relief and against welfare that were launched in the 1870s and 1970s by Charity Organization Societies and think tanks, respectively. The success of those campaigns is ultimately revealed as policy in the Gilded Age's widespread repeal of outdoor relief for poor women and the mass incarceration and forced labor of male "tramps," and in the twentieth century in the passage of the PRA and the intensified criminalization of public displays of need by poor and homeless men. As Weaver and others rightly argue, we cannot explain such policy outcomes without knowing the specific politics that enabled reform to "succeed" when it had failed so often before, but I argue that we cannot explain those politics without realizing the ways in which the very context within which reform was debated and understood had been altered.

Opinion, Agenda-Setting and Reform

Political debate and public opinion about welfare and about poor people thus play an important role in this account, though it is a role quite different than they play in other explanations of reform. James Patterson (2000) and Weaver (2000), among many others, have argued that it was a widespread public antipathy to welfare that drove the late twentieth century reforms. "The public demanded policy change," wrote Weaver (1998, 375). Lawrence Mead (2000) claims that "The conservatism of recent welfare reform is largely explained by public opinion, which has long wished to combine support for the needy with demands that adult recipients work in return for aid." One college textbook explained the PRA by noting that "a sense of national crisis [occasionally] propels the public to demand more sweeping changes. . . . [and] During 1995 to 1996, the Republican-controlled Congress responded to public displeasure with the size, cost and

implementation” of AFDC (Wayne et al. 1999, 26). So too did many nineteenth century charity reformers and later historians attribute the success of relief withdrawal to the public demand for it (see Devine 1898, 187; Frankel 1903, 320; Watson 1922, 55; Feder 1936, 171; Himmelfarb 1992, 171).

But such explanations, while they contain elements of truth, offer too simple an analysis of the role of public opinion. First, they do not identify the means through which opinion is (or is not) transformed into policy. By such accounts, any popularly held view or policy desire of the majority would be (and presumably should be) enacted as policy. This is not clearly the case (but see Page and Shapiro 1983). Moreover, public opinion is typically expressed in very general terms, affording elites great latitude in how they might translate opinion into a policy that purportedly reflects it, while media, in turn, may choose to interpret poll results so that they comport with their reporting or with elite consensus (Lewis 2001, Ch. 3 and 88; Page and Shapiro 1983). To conclude that policy conforms with public opinion begs more questions than it answers.

More to the point, people have *always* been ambivalent about poor relief and governments have for centuries celebrated work while they blamed the poor and punished their poverty. In the thirteenth century, for example, Humbert of Romans cited the habitual “idleness, debauchery, drunkenness and dishonest dealings” of the poor as their chief failing (Geremek 1994, 29), much as Joel Schwartz (2001) recently argued that the remedy for modern urban poverty was to “remoralize” the poor to the “three cardinal virtues” of “diligence, sobriety and thrift.” As early as the fourteenth century the now-familiar categories of poor people had already appeared: the “Poor with Peter,” the voluntary *honest* poor of mendicant orders and the like, whose poverty was an act of submission to God and a mark of humility; and the “Poor with Lazarus,” those *dishonest* poor who suffered poverty not by choice but by circumstance and, perhaps, as punishment. They would become the deserving and the undeserving, the worthy and the unworthy, the working and the idle, the able-bodied and the impotent, the poor man and the pauper. The British

Parliament separated the deserving from the undeserving, instituted punishment for “able-bodied” beggars and by 1536 had enacted the Act for the Punishment of Sturdy Vagabonds and Beggars (the Henrican Poor Law) which imposed harsh punishments for the unworthy and required that assistance be provided, usually in exchange for work, only to the most deserving. Institutions to stigmatize and segregate the poor were established early, too: Florence by the 1400s had a homeless shelter (*syndochium*), a soup kitchen (*procotrophium*), an old age home (*gerontocomium*), and an orphanage (*brephotrophium*). In 1423 Brussels simply banished the needy, in 1525 Ypres mandated severe corporal punishments for begging, and by 1528 Venice sentenced those caught begging without a license to imprisonment or public whipping. By 1577, England had established Bridewell, the first workhouse, which would eventually lend its name and dark reputation to some two hundred others, while Rouen required all the dependent poor to identify themselves by wearing yellow crosses on their sleeves. Gallows were often erected next to the poorhouse to make the link between poverty and punishment unmistakable (Geremek 1994; Piven and Cloward 1971). Antipathy to public relief and institutionalized efforts to stigmatize and punish the poor have been documented throughout American history, too, and even FDR characterized relief as a “narcotic” (see Katz 1986; Piven and Cloward 1971; Trattner 1994).

To point to our “exceptional” political culture or American opinion aligned against welfare is thus to identify constancy, not change. Yet only twice have such sentiments so governed policymaking. We must therefore explain why at these particular junctures in time very old theories about the dangers and waste of poor relief rose to prominence and were enacted as regressive policy, just as others have shown how similar theories were overcome to expand relief during the Progressive, New Deal and Great Society eras. Part of what I will demonstrate is that mobilized anti-relief reformers tapped into resonant, almost archetypal ideas about poverty and about poor people and created with them a rationale, a political logic, a philosophical foundation for their preferred policies. With the

tangible resources of the Charity Organization Societies and think tanks and these ephemeral but potent rhetorical resources, poor relief opponents pushed a certain kind of reform onto the political agenda, and marshaled it through the policy process.

The further difficulty with accounts that attribute relief retrenchment to a public outcry against relief is that they presume that majority public opinion drives policy change. Patterson (2000) for example writes about welfare policy during and since the New Deal that we

oversimplify if we assume that since 1935 congressmen have mainly done the bidding of conservative groups, especially corporations and agribusiness, that overrode the popular will. On the contrary, Congress has generally approved what the majority of the American people have seemed willing to support. In battles over Social Security and welfare in 1935, as in many later struggles over social and medical policies, we will do better to see congressmen as reflecting larger, more general popular feelings.

Setting aside the difficulties in accurately measuring public opinion on matters of income support (see Lewis 2001, 112-3)¹, this fails to acknowledge the ways in which instead of public opinion driving public policymaking public politics and media coverage of them can drive public opinion (Edelman 1964; Stone 1997; Zaller 1992; Lewis 2001). In more formal terms, public opinion is not endogenous. And to demonstrate that at any given time public opinion and elite opinion coincide tells us nothing about their relationship to each other, or in which direction the causal arrow points. By examining the longer-term events of anti-relief mobilizations in the late nineteenth and

¹ Because of these very difficulties, I do not attempt to characterize changes in public opinion on matters of welfare, for data are available that would legitimately support many different, even contradictory, arguments. As Shapiro et al. (1987) wrote regarding workfare, "The public consensus is a broadly sweeping and vague preference in search of a viable policy."

twentieth centuries we will see that contrary to most explanations relief reform was not a democratic political response to public dissatisfaction with failed programs; instead, reformers portrayed their actions as a response to public backlash against the “indiscriminate relief” of the 1870s or the “failed War on Poverty” ninety years later. Public antipathy to welfare, or, to be more precise, the *perception* of public antipathy to welfare, was created. It was created in the latter period by think tanks, foundations and politicians of both parties with the help of a complicit (if sometimes unknowingly complicit) media, and in the former period by the Charity Organization Societies, the Chambers of Commerce and sympathetic politicians. Reformers then pointed to such opinion as one justification for enacting their proposed policy changes. Opinion was a tool used to help roll back poor relief, not a cause of reform.

Relief reform was thus in part the outcome of a successful advertising campaign to sell ideas to the public and, more importantly, to policymakers, about how the most effective means of assisting poor people is not to extend aid to them but quite the reverse -- to cut off public aid and compel work. Anti-relief reformers understood the power of persuasion. “The *sine qua non* of all effective social legislation,” wrote Watson (1922, 539), “is intelligent public opinion. The education of the public in the realm of social reform depends upon effective propaganda.” Smith (2000) shows that in the modern period it was not generally the direct power of American business (through campaign contributions or lobbying) that most helped achieve its collective goals, but its indirect power to manipulate opinion, which it did in large measure by funding sympathetic institutions of “experts” who exerted influence over policymakers directly, and indirectly through the media (Smith 2000) and the general public (Rampton and Stauber 2001; Jacobs and Shapiro 1998) in ways that partisans or apparently self-interested actors might not have done quite so successfully. Business thereby affected both policymaking and elections under cover of its funded organizations of policy experts and public intellectuals. As Fried

and Harris (2001) have shown, “Elites not only react to the public’s distrustful mood, but also seek to shape it, frame it, and employ it.”

I’ll anticipate one objection. Mead (2000) insists that “it is implausible to argue that the public’s hostility to traditional welfare is to any important extent the creation of elites” because, in part, “The public is likeliest to defer to elites in areas of policy that are technical or remote from everyday experience, such as economic regulation or arms control. Social problems are more everyday. People respond to them out of their own lives. These views may be right or wrong, but elites and the media do not control these opinions more than marginally.” But what in their own lives do people have to respond to, and how does this differ among classes? If we presume that significant numbers of people have no direct experience of their own with AFDC, how would they understand it? From the neighbor collecting a welfare check while so many other mothers have had to enter the workforce? From the woman at the grocery store buying chocolate cake with food stamps? People interpret such “facts” through more than their personal experience, and part of what I will argue is that they have been taught for three decades to interpret them in certain ways. The policy reform campaigns under examination here, these anti-relief *dramas*, had symbolic meanings too (see Piven and Cloward 1971 for this *dramaturgy of relief*; see also Edelman 1964). As for poor people themselves, “social problems” are only “everyday” in the sense that Mead seems to mean if one presumes that they flow from personal failure. If the social problems people experience instead stem from “abstractions” like declining manufacturing or tight labor markets, then people’s own experience no more qualifies them to understand the functions of poor relief than of international trade agreements, monetary policy or arms control -- thus, harsh judgments about welfare recipients can be heard from welfare recipients themselves. People’s frameworks for understanding the world are shaped by more than just their “everyday” experiences (Edelman 1964, see esp. Ch. 9; Stone 1997; Schneider and Ingram 1997; Yee 1996; Lewis 2001). If they were not, it is hard to explain why advertising industry revenues would have totaled nearly \$54 billion in 2000

(www.census.gov). More to the point, perhaps, is that people are generally of two minds when it comes to welfare: they may defer to elites rhetorically on abstract issues, but may not do so in practical consideration of more concrete alternatives (Feldman and Zaller 1992). Americans are ambivalent about welfare, and while polling may be good at measuring opinion, it is less effective at measuring beliefs (Weaver 2000, Ch. 7; Lewis 2001). I assert merely that such ambivalence can be and has been manipulated by elites. It is one measure of how far reformers have taken us, for instance, that an American Enterprise Institute work cautioned in 1976 that "Partisan rhetoric aside, few people seriously envisage dismantling the welfare state" (Neuhaus and Berger 1976). Twenty years later no less than the Speaker of the House of Representatives would seriously envisage just that. With the help of a Democratic president, AFDC was repealed. And today Democrats and Republicans alike contemplate the "privatization" of Social Security, the bulwark of the American welfare state.

Comparing the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries

Much changed in American politics, society and economy between 1900 and 2000, and I risk facile comparisons. The former was a period of nascent industrialism characterized by fundamentally different economic and political circumstances than the latter post-industrial era. The federal government had no relief role in the former era, while its role was central to the welfare debate of the latter period. Political parties were organized differently and functioned in distinct ways. And the late nineteenth century was a period of widespread, often violent protest from workers and poor people demanding work or relief from the state. In the last quarter of the twentieth century, by contrast, and especially during debate over the PRA, there was with few exceptions silence from poor people and their potential allies. Circumstances, in short, were different.

That said, the ends of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries also had much in common, as Phillips (1990, Table 2) and Amin (2000) point out: both eras were marked by

conservative control of the national government, the dominance of laissez-faire and anti-government politics, large-scale economic and corporate restructuring and consolidation, large tax cuts, a labor movement under attack, concentrated wealth, high individual and corporate debt, and a speculative bubble. I might push the comparison further still. The late nineteenth century saw huge waves of immigrants, many arriving to work grueling hours in dangerous jobs for low wages. For most families, no male breadwinner's salary was sufficient, so women (and children) worked too. There was economic inequality that belied the Tocquevillian myth of an egalitarian society. Complaints abounded of corrupt electoral processes, in which politics was a game of spoils played by the few for the few, as did complaints that the political parties were indistinguishable and that politics was bankrupt and inefficient. There were advances in technology that seemed to auger fundamental changes in society, a widespread belief in the supremacy of the free market in which opportunity was said to be had by all who would take it, and an insistence that government regulation and interference could only do harm, whatever its intent. The Supreme Court concerned itself with limiting national power over states and protecting private property from public responsibility. Cities revealed starkly the stratification of American society, from the mansions of the Vanderbilt set to the squalid, crowded slums of Five Points. This could as easily describe the latter period. Indeed, the late twentieth century seemed almost to want to erase the New Deal and the Great Society and return to a pre-1900 localism. It was not just AFDC that was repealed, after all -- major regressive changes were made in the 1990s to the 1933 Glass-Steagall Act, the Telecommunications Act of 1934, the estate tax (on behalf of which Vanderbilt once spoke so eloquently), and other progressive tax policies and corporate regulations. These similarities across eras are in some measure indications of the success of the campaigns that I will describe. The corporate counter-mobilizations of both ages succeeded in shifting power from poor and working people in arenas beyond just those to be considered here.

Perhaps the most striking and most commented upon similarity is the great economic inequality of both periods. In 1890, the wealthiest 12% owned 86% of all wealth; and the top 2% earned 50% of all income (Painter 1987, xx). In 1999, the top 10% of the population owned 71.8% of all wealth, while the wealthiest 1% owned 40.1%; and the top 1% earned 50.4% of all income. In 1976, by contrast, the wealthiest 1% owned 19.9% of all wealth. The only other year in which wealth was as concentrated as these two periods was in 1929. The number of families with no net worth increased from 15.5% in 1983 to 18.5% in 1995; others lost ground. Personal bankruptcies doubled from 1990 to 2000. The only group whose net worth increased over the period was the top 5% (Collins and Yeskel 2000, 29, 53-56; www.census.gov).

Many others have observed similarities in these excesses of the Gilded Age and late twentieth century. The Nexis database, for one crude but suggestive measure, records from just 1995 to 1997 hundreds of stories in major American newspapers that explicitly compared the 1990s to the Gilded Age, in articles about immense corporate mergers, growing corporate power, ineffectual anti-trust laws, robber barons and Bill Gates, old and new Mugwumps, regressive tax policies and tariff or trade policy wars. One article compared Newt Gingrich to McKinley strategist Mark Hannah and, alternately, William Graham Sumner; others reported on the lavish parties, extravagant new restaurants and mammoth new houses of the twentieth century that made Gilded Age Newport mansions “look like servants quarters.” By February 2002, the *Nation* was reporting that the emerging Enron bankruptcy scandal was “expos[ing] the decay of corporate accountability in the new Gilded Age.” The *New Yorker* published an anthology of recent articles from its pages titled simply *The New Gilded Age*. The similarities are not coincidental. As economist William Tabb (2001, 38) writes, “Globalization has put pressure on workers the same way the emergence of the national economy did a century earlier. These transformations as capitalism moves into new stages of its development are profoundly unsettling.” But not unprecedented: “The ‘tramp’ comes with the locomotive, and

almshouses and prisons are as surely the marks of 'material progress' as are costly dwellings, rich warehouses and magnificent churches" (George 1879, 7).

As we see in Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner's novel *The Gilded Age* (1873), from which we have adopted the era's sobriquet, it was not only the late century's ostentation and opulence that most marked the era, it was the *hunger* for wealth, for easy wealth especially, that make these speculative periods of extreme wealth and poverty seem distinct:

all men his age caught the fever of speculation, and expected to get on in the world by the omission of some of the regular processes which have been appointed from of old. And examples were not wanting to encourage him. He saw people all around him, poor yesterday, rich to-day, who had come into sudden opulence by some means which they could not have classified among the regular occupations of life (Twain and Warner 1873, 349).

"There's no doubt but money is to the fore now. It is the romance, the poetry, of our age" wrote Howells (1885, 60). Weyle observed in 1914 (in Hofstadter 1955, 148) that "Although lawyers, doctors, engineers, architects, and professional men generally, make larger salaries than ever before, the earning of one hundred thousand dollars a year by one lawyer impoverishes by comparison the thousands of lawyers who scrape along on a thousand a year. The widening of the competitive field has widened the variation and has sharpened the contrast between success and failure, with resulting inequality and discontent." The *Wall Street Journal* (1998) reported that a similar hunger for sudden excess seemingly affected everyone in the late twentieth century as well:

a wave of envy is gnawing at those near the top of the economic pyramid as they see others making even more. Most unsettled are corporate managers

and professionals like doctors and lawyers earning \$100,000 to \$200,000 a year. Five years ago that made them feel privileged. . . In 1995, a household with an income of \$288,000 ranked in the top 1% of the country. By next year, it will need to be making \$385,000 to retain that ranking. . . Envy among the affluent is a timeless theme, one that has made a ripe target for writers like Jane Austen and many others. But it is exacerbated now by the widespread media coverage of high-tech and Wall Street wizards, and by the proximity of the new wealth. People don't have to go far to see signs of it.

Nineteenth century politics, too, seems familiar again. Never mind the similarities between the contested Presidential elections of 1876 and 2000. Note instead this stanza from U.M. Fisk's "The Plutocrat's Jubilee" published in the *American Nonconformist* in 1894, which captures some of the character of both eras (Painter 1987, 125):

We own all the money -- we will own the land.
 The Courts and the Congress are at our command.
 Our fortunes have gone up like beautiful rockets'
 We've the Dems and Republicans both in our pockets;
 And to please the fool people, we make our salam,
 And let them choose either -- we don't give a damn!

The economic consolidation of capital and the rise of its political power that so mark the late nineteenth century are salient because the corporation was able to extract and acquire new economic powers and legal privileges without the obligations that had previously attended it when it was a joint public-private entity (Berk 1994; Roy 1997; Sklar 1988; see Weinstein 1968 for post-1900 implications). That new power over government

and over labor was neither inevitable nor an inevitably “efficient” outcome as business historian Alfred Chandler (1990) would have it -- it was the outcome of a power contest in which the private ultimately prevailed over the public; the battles over relief that I will describe are but one element of that contest. As Sklar (1988) suggests, we might be better served by thinking of corporations not as an interest, but as a social movement, who launched their battle

in market and property relations, in the law and jurisprudence, in party politics, in government policy and legislation, in foreign-policy making, and in scholarly modes of thought. Their efforts assumed the organizational forms of trade and civic associations, single-issue groups and committees, reform clubs, electoral party politics, lobbying, publications ranging from newsletters and newspapers to periodicals and books, and conferences and conventions Corporate capitalism, that is, had to be constructed (Sklar 1988, 15; see also Rosenzweig 1983, Ch. 1).

Wiebe (1962, 21) suggests that late Gilded Age business organizations “formed front organizations through which they conducted their lobbying.” Reznick (1950, 501) reports that in 1878 “In the *Atlantic Monthly* an anonymous analyst of ‘Certain Dangerous tendencies in American Life’ advanced a program of positive ‘propagandism,’ which would profit men of property to spend a million dollars in the next three years for the preparation and circulation of broadsides among country papers, repeating the simple truths on such topics as debt, paper money, economy, and thrift.” As Sklar describes the corporate construction of capitalism, Beckert (2001, Chs. 8 and 9) reveals the social, cultural, institutional and organizational construction of capitalism. In the 1870s, he argues, elites began to form a more unified, “self-conscious” class identity which enabled

them to better mobilize against taxation, against universal male suffrage, and the focus here, against relief.

Throughout the late nineteenth century Gilded Age actors sought to limit relief to make rebellious workers even more dependent upon a precariously positioned emergent industrial order. Capitalists did so largely under the auspices of the Charity Organization Society, falling back on age-old patterns of blaming poor people for poverty. Where they succeeded, and where local political conditions permitted it, relief was withdrawn. More recently, as one aspect of what we might call a corporate *re*-construction of American capitalism, the foundations of Scaife, Bradley and Olin and corporate and individual grants made to a dense network of research and advocacy organizations helped the largest conservative think tanks to dominate public debate about welfare reform. But the involvement of these organizations, their leadership and their patrons long pre-dates the PRA: only by examining the roots of a class-wide mobilization of business that began around 1973 can we discern the long trajectory of policy activism that culminated in 1996.

We might identify similarities across any two historical periods, and the point is not to belabor the comparisons nor make too much of them. The important point is that relief was assaulted under similar conditions of economic transformation and political insularity; it was a response by comparable interests struggling under comparable circumstances; they responded in similar ways through similar organizations advocating similar policies. And as we shall see, the changes enacted were strikingly similar, as were the outcomes. History does not repeat itself. But sometimes Men competing for power do, employing old repertoires either in conscious imitation of previous strategies or as improvised responses to new challenges.

Overview of the Argument

No Relief describes and compares two instances of American poor relief contraction. These “reforms” were enacted in the wake of sustained campaigns against relief, one that

occurred locally throughout the United States from about 1873 to 1898 and the other nationally from about 1973 to the present.² Through a network of special-purpose organizations, reformers launched assaults upon poor relief, contending that it was prohibitively expensive, fostered dependency and did harm to its recipients. These anti-relief reformers developed and proposed policies to limit aid to only the most “deserving” recipients and to compel others to work or survive by some other means. The activism of these reform leaders and the institutions they inhabited was heavily subsidized by business elites who stood to benefit from such campaigns. Reformers achieved significant results. Though it would occasionally fail, in the late nineteenth century anti-relief agitation helped lead to the widespread reduction or elimination in most large American cities (and in many smaller ones as well) of what reformers called “lavish” public and private outdoor relief, an impressive outcome given reformers’ relatively limited budgets and the opposition they faced, especially in their early years. In the late twentieth century reformers achieved even more striking successes rolling back the “explosion” in welfare and the “failed War on Poverty,” in part because they had greater resources and access to a national media, and because the New Deal had centralized poor relief, thereby narrowing their target. *No Relief* will examine the institutions, the ideas, the policies and the outcomes that unite these successful mobilizations a century apart.

The following chapter, “Anti-Relief Reformers,” focuses on the institutions through which reformers acted, the hundreds of Gilded Age Charity Organization Societies, certain late twentieth century think tanks, and some business lobbies like the Chamber of Commerce (which was active in both anti-relief eras). It recounts the circumstances that led many businessmen in both eras to organize in order to better affect public policy, and describes the organizations they established or nurtured to confront, among other perceived

² This is not to say that these are the only instances in which American poor relief was reduced from a prior level. That these eras marked sustained and successful campaigns against relief is the important distinction, for there were, as will be briefly discussed below, short-lived local reductions in outdoor relief in some cities in the early 1800s, and the emergency relief measures of the early New Deal were also quickly ended; neither however was a coordinated campaign against relief or a major relief policy reconfiguration.

threats, charity and welfare programs. It describes the leadership, sources of funding, and stated goals of these organizations of “experts.” It further describes a concurrent twentieth century religious mobilization that emerged in response to cultural threats, which also identified welfare as a target, but for different reasons. It shows how these institutions served as sophisticated mechanisms for coordinating anti-relief activism, formulating policy and marketing policy prescriptions, and that they did so while obscuring the interests of their benefactors.

Chapter Three, “The Rhetoric of Reform,” offers an analysis of the ideas and rhetoric reformers employed to support their policies and to press their claims, tracing their logic to common sources in the writings of Thomas Malthus and Herbert Spencer. These ideas emerged and re-emerged because they were useful -- they furthered reformers’ projects by couching their self-interested goals in resonant rhetoric about rights and responsibilities, about the work ethic, about limited government, about the virtues of self-reliance and independence and about the harms caused by relief itself. Such rhetoric helped construct logically coherent and benevolent rationales for denying aid to poor men and women; reformers sought to change policy by persuading policymakers directly and, through their constituents, indirectly, that reformers’ proposed policy prescriptions were practicable and just. This rhetoric was influential in large measure because the COSs and think tanks so well amplified it and insinuated it into public discussion and policy debate. In this manner reformers’ rhetoric -- that is, their use of persuasive but deceptive language - - propelled, shaped and constrained reform.

“Reform,” Chapter Four, moves on to describe the policies that were enacted and the role that reform organizations played in two campaigns to celebrate and enforce work among economically vulnerable populations. We shall see that in the nineteenth century many reformers succeeded while some others failed to convince cities to withdraw the relief upon which poor women and some men depended; still other cities reduced their out-relief without apparent pressure from the COS -- in these local policymaking arenas, there was

wide variation in municipalities' response to the growing poverty and unrest in their cities, and this chapter will try to explain some of that variation. The national reform that is marked by the PRA in 1996 is more easily described, so I pay more attention here to the manner in which think tanks came to dominate policy debate and policy-making. I will also attend to the concurrent changes that were made in the kinds of aid available chiefly to poor men, documenting two eras, a century apart, in which public displays of need were newly criminalized and men were pushed into the labor market or into prison, where enforced work was common in the nineteenth century and increasingly used in the twentieth.

Chapter Five evaluates outcomes, the "Results of Reform," showing that, contrary to many reformers' claims, relief reform caused harm among the poor and working classes while increasing government expenses. Costs rose, need rose, suffering grew. Claims made by reformers that no harm had come to former relief recipients were unfounded: in the nineteenth century, reformers failed to associate the rising populations of asylums, orphanages and prisons with the effects of relief withdrawal, and in the twentieth century reformers ignored or minimized evidence that large numbers of poor and working people were hungry, homeless, or living in deeper poverty than they had been before reform. Reformers did, however, achieve their principal goal -- to drive men and women from relief rolls, leaving them to the vicissitudes of the low-wage labor market or the discretionary relief of over-burdened private charity providers. There were important differences across these eras of anti-relief agitation, too, most notably that many reformers in the late nineteenth century would come to repudiate their former understandings of relief and even seek to expand it in the wake of the 1893 depression, while at this writing it seems unlikely that the reauthorization of the PRA in late 2002 will make more than marginal policy adjustments.

Chapter Six concludes with a summary of my findings and some thoughts on what the ultimate outcomes of nineteenth century reform might reveal about the contemporary retrenchment of poor relief.

CHAPTER TWO

Anti-Relief Reformers

This chapter explores the organizations through which many anti-relief campaigns of the late nineteenth and late twentieth centuries were pursued, examining first the Charity Organization Societies of the Gilded Age and then the anti-relief think tanks and business lobbies of the latter era. I will show that both sets of institutions were born of similar circumstances, were created and funded by similar classes of businessmen and professionals, and advocated similar policies that would make poor men and women even more dependent upon the low-wage labor market for survival. While these organizations identified themselves as *neutral, independent, scientific, reform, or non-partisan* groups of *experts and professionals*, they were used by a narrow class of individuals to pursue their own class interests; they provided resources for the front lines of a war that had among its goals the transformation of what constituted acceptable public poor relief policy. The COSs and the think tanks were not the only players in these dramas, but they were key actors. As Michael Joyce, former President of the conservative Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation said, "It's true that many people do not know where certain ideas come from, but the important thing is that they agree with them" (mediatransparency.com 2001). This chapter shows where many anti-relief ideas and policies came from; subsequent chapters will discuss the rhetoric that gave coherence to those policies (Chapter 3) and then examine the policies themselves (Chapter 4) and their impact (Chapter 5).

The Rise of Charity Organization

I begin by offering a brief history of early American poor relief practices and a description of the state of municipal relief in the mid- to late-1800s.

Nineteenth Century Poor Relief

By the end of the 1500s, the transfer of responsibility for the care of the poor from the Church to the State was well established throughout the European continent and with it

faded the medieval notions that giving alms was a means toward salvation and that poverty was the will of God. The English Poor Law Act of 1601 (the Elizabethan Poor Law) formally took over relief from the Church of England, instituted a tax specifically for aid to the poor, organized the distribution of aid in local parishes, imprisoned beggars, and created three categories of poor persons -- children (who were forced into indentured servitude or apprenticeships); the "able-bodied," who were offered aid conditioned upon work; and the "impotent," who received the most generous treatment and were eligible for some limited cash assistance. Despite reluctance to offer any but the barest relief, by 1818 the English Poor Rate, the tax for relief, was six hundred percent higher than it had been in 1760. In response to this perceived crisis (and the supposed ill-effects of the Speenhamland system of aid-in-wages) came the English Poor Law Reform Bill of 1834 (the New Poor Law). It ended all outdoor assistance for the "able-bodied;" consolidated the administration of relief from 13,264 local parishes into 568 units; and offered most aid only in the workhouse. The alternative was prison. Disraeli said that "it announces to the world that in England poverty is a crime." New York Charity Organization Society founder Josephine Shaw Lowell later proclaimed it "probably the most instructive historical document in existence which relates to pauperism" (Geremek 1994, *passim*; see also Trattner 1994; Piven and Cloward 1971; Lowell 1884, 15. For discussions on Speenhamland, see Polanyi 1944 and Block 2000).

These policies served as the model for the first American poor relief practices. As early as 1619 the Virginia Assembly required compulsory labor from the "slothful." Shortly thereafter there were grim workhouses throughout the colonies. From the 1640s to 1690s Virginia, Connecticut and Massachusetts passed laws that auctioned off those in need or placed them in forced labor in private homes with whomever would accept the lowest fee for their care (Trattner 1994). By 1750, colonial relief provision was exclusively local, emphasized family assistance and continued to provide aid by auctioning off the poor or by contracting out their labor but also by offering small amounts of cash or

goods to people in their homes (this is called *outdoor relief* or *out-relief* until the twentieth century, and compares to modern cash welfare programs) or in poorhouses (one form of *indoor relief*, what we might think of as homeless shelters and other institutions, some of which required work and some of which did not).

In the same year as England's 1834 New Poor Law, New York passed the County Poorhouse Act, which was based upon the recommendations of Secretary of State J.V.N. Yates' report on "The Relief and Settlement of the Poor." That study, like the "Josiah Quincy Report of 1821 on the Pauper Laws of Massachusetts," explicitly adopted New Poor Law principles: it divided the poor into the impotent and the able; it directed the county, not the town or municipality, to manage relief programs; and decreed that no able-bodied person between the ages of 18 and 50 was eligible for any assistance except in the workhouse or the prison (which institutions Yates recommended be combined). As Quincy wrote: "of all modes of providing for the poor, the most wasteful, the most expensive, and most injurious to their morals and destructive to their industrious habits is that of supply in their own homes" (Trattner 1994; Quincy in Breckinridge 1927; Yates in Breckinridge 1927). Only with a revision to the Act in 1837 was any out-relief offered to anyone (legally, that is, since counties continued to provide relief surreptitiously), when it was capped at ten dollars (Hannon 1984a; Branscombe 1943). With New York leading the way, many cities and towns in the early nineteenth century began depending more upon local or county poorhouses, although throughout the 1800s American towns "often spent more money ridding themselves of paupers than they would have spent supporting them" (Katz 1986, 21).

Some poor people, often those in smaller towns that had no almshouse, were "boarded out." The city contracted with a family, often a farmer, who would care for the boarder for a fixed fee. Other locales "bound out" their paupers, releasing them to an employer for no fee; in return that employer could retain the pauper's labor -- children especially, served as such indentured servants. In others they were still auctioned off.

Many locales paid physicians to care for poor people either in their homes or in the infirmaries; some cities that claimed to offer outdoor relief in fact only provided funding for physicians, and in some locales these were prime patronage positions. Some (usually larger) cities operated their own hospitals; some states did in other regions; still other cities, states and counties contracted with private hospitals for the care of their poor. Those poor children not cared for in their own homes with out-relief or in institutions were “placed out” in private homes permanently or temporarily (akin to contemporary foster homes), adopted out, or, as with the Children’s Aid Society and other similar institutions, shipped off and deposited in those homes in need of labor, much like the boarding out process for adults.¹ Some of the “harmless insane” were also boarded out. Burials were a common, and sometimes large, expense for public providers of poor relief (Yates in Breckinridge 1927; Henderson 1897).

But the majority of poor relief in the late nineteenth century took the form of indoor relief (in an almshouse, poorhouse, workhouse, orphanage or asylum) or outdoor relief (as cash, food, coal or medical care). Outdoor relief was rarely provided by the state, and nowhere funded by a state-level tax. Most states or counties authorized or required the provision of relief, which was sometimes directly administered by them and sometimes through local governments and officials, some of whom were appointed and some elected; in other jurisdictions only cities or towns were involved in the provision of out-relief, with no involvement by the county or state. New York alone had five distinct methods of organizing relief throughout the state, although each town did seem to have an Overseer of the Poor (Branscombe 1943). In some places the county or state assumed responsibility for people without settlement (i.e., those who had not lived in one county or city long enough to be considered by settlement law residents and therefore eligible for local assistance). Relief provision was, to generalize, more likely to be local in New England

¹ While he referred to all such wards as orphans, it seems. Brace (1876) made clear that many of the children he spoke of and boarded in his lodging houses had living parent(s) and that these children’s value was as workers. See also O’Connor 2001; Polsky 1991, 32-33.

and more likely to be administered by the county in the South and West. Most residents of poorhouses had work histories and tended to be unskilled laborers; two-fifths stayed for three weeks at most, and three-fifths for less than six weeks (Katz 1986).

Private philanthropy provided most relief, as the church did before, until late in the 1800s. But it often did so with public funds.

The Threat Emerges

Due to rapid industrialization, the concentration that came with large migrations to the swelling cities, and unpredictable economic cycles, poverty and the demand for assistance increased significantly throughout the 1800s. Himmelfarb (1992, 277) has observed that “it is a great law of social development that the movement of slavery to freedom is also a movement from security to insecurity of maintenance.” Insecurity was pandemic. The dilemma was that while insecurity rose, so too did the need for a malleable, insecure labor force to support burgeoning industry. The industrial revolutions of the nineteenth century were not merely revolutions in production, and the changes they brought to economy, society, family and culture were profound. The “new industrial division of labor” also compelled the specialized use of physical space, divided work from home and created, for many workers, a newly bifurcated identity in which work and home were separate places (see Katznelson 1981 for its modern analogue). The fast pace of production, especially after 1875, reduced the control workers had over their day and even changed their conceptions of time itself (Handlin 1963). Unemployment as we know it came into being: the absence of agriculture and the scarcity of land left the growing numbers of new workers with nothing of value save their own labor power, making their survival dependent upon their acquiescence to the new demands of industrial production, and forcing them to find means of reconciling old agrarian ideas with their new social reality (see Bender 1975). Keyssar (1986, 149) in a study of Massachusetts finds that while real wages rose over the whole period from 1870 to 1920, so did expectations; most

still spent the vast majority of their income for rent, food, clothing and fuel. He writes that “if scattered and impressionistic evidence can be trusted, this period probably witnessed a slight overall increase in the incidence of serious deprivation among the unemployed” because of the ways in which urbanization left fewer and fewer people with the means of self-support. Many resisted by reporting irregularly to work, moving from job to job, staging shutdowns and slowdowns, drinking on the job, and ostracizing or punishing co-workers who worked too fast (Rodgers 1974, 166). Resistance took on more violent and threatening forms, too. The rhythms of daily life, social relationships and even ideas about the world took on new forms as the result of industrialization and urbanization.

Such upheaval demanded a changed role for the state itself. By building infrastructure (canals and roads) and providing public goods (clean water and sewers), by protecting the labor supply (through relief, education or liberal immigration policies), and by suppressing newly-created class conflict (with professional police forces, courts or militia), the state began to experiment with ways to resolve a new dilemma: how to reconcile the demands of workers, who began to look more to government as a countervailing power against capital, with the needs of those producers who were making cities centers of power and wealth. In early nineteenth century New York and Philadelphia, when workers responded to social upheaval with mass unrest, the cities reacted by centralizing city government, establishing police forces, and attempting to diffuse growing class conflicts that threatened capital by exploiting ethnic-based conflict (Wilenz 1984; Warner 1968). We will see evidence of this in the mass incarceration of unemployed immigrant men late in the century. When state actions were insufficient to suppress discontent, as they often were, private organizations -- civic associations -- formed. Thus, the temperance movement had the effect (whatever its intent) of propagating a personal and behavioral explanation for workers' insecurity while “employers started a counter-offensive to crush the journeyman's revolt,” forming trade associations that made

weapons of the courts, the military and the press (Johnson 1978; Wilenz 1984, 286). Public government and private capital united to protect the emerging new order.

But government also responded by expanding poor relief. Public relief expenditures (especially outdoor relief expenditures) increased dramatically. While, for example, 40% of all relief in New York was provided in poorhouses in 1835 (with the rest in outdoor relief), that had dropped to 19% in 1859; and while real *per recipient* expenditures dropped 60% from the 1820s to the late 1850s (as did average time on relief), *total* expenditures more than doubled. Nationwide, from 1850-1860 rolls rose 76%. While relief was offered in New York to 1.13% of the state's population in 1823, it was offered to 6.8% by 1859.² Moreover, while indoor relief declined and outdoor relief rose as a percentage of the total offered, the share of relief going to the elderly and children declined while the share going to adult "unemployed" men and to the foreign-born rose (Hannon 1984a; Hannon 1984b; Kiesling and Margo 1997). Then, from 1860 to 1870 the total amount New York spent on outdoor relief nearly doubled, from \$524,943 to \$976,560 (indoor relief expenditures grew even more, from \$351,820 in 1860 to \$1,731,677 in 1870) (Katz 1986, Table 2.1). Public out-relief expenditures in Philadelphia increased five-fold from 1830 to 1870, nearly doubling from 1850 to 1870 (total expenditures climbed 1,000 per cent) (Clement 1992, Tables 1 and 2).

Many cities further expanded their poor relief in response to the depression of 1873-1878, straining their budgets while still leaving great needs unmet. Churches, private aid societies and wealthier individuals complained that they could not meet the demands for assistance they received from the poor masses who could get no aid from the city. Complaints abounded, too, about the "indiscriminate charity" -- public and private both -- that the depression called forth. Out of that crisis and response was born the Charity Organization Society as counter-response (see Kellogg 1893). Watson (1922, 399)

² This is almost identical to the percentage on relief the next time fears of a relief explosion would lead to an attack against it: In 1974, 6.9% of the US population received non-insurance-based public assistance.

summarized the birth of the movement as “a protest against the methods of administration of public outdoor relief then obtaining which was viewed as a tool of unscrupulous politicians, wasteful of the taxpayers’ money and pauperizing in its effects. Historically, the administration of public outdoor relief had from the beginning of the movement been foreign to the spirit and methods of charity organization.”

The Birth of the COS

The COS was created under these conditions as an expressly anti-relief mobilization of professionals and businessmen to resist losses stemming from and threats posed by, as they perceived it, the gains of the lower classes and to combat the “misconception,” as one partisan put it, that “capital oppresses labor and seeks to deprive it of its natural rights” (Bigelow 1878). This points to an irony at the very heart of the COS’s role in relief policy in the late nineteenth century. Public opinion was largely against the COS in its early years. It was characterized variously as “The Society for the Suppression of Benevolence” (Johnson 1923, 56), and the “The Society for the Paying of Salaries to Philanthropists Who Need Money” by the editor of the *New York Morning Telegraph* (in Ringenback 1973, 100); its motto (*Not Alms, But a Friend*) was mocked as “Neither Alms Nor a Friend,” and the poet John Boyle O’Reilly wrote famously that “Organized charity scrimped and iced/in the name of a cautious, statistical Christ” (Bremner 1956a, 53). The Buffalo COS complained soon after its founding of “the discouragements” it had, including “the ignorance of our citizens as to its objects and its aims; [and] to the hostility of the official keepers of the public purse, fearing an interference with their prerogatives” (NCCC 1883, 75). Yet some while after the charity reform movement launched its years-long argument against relief in the 1870s, fighting to change public opinion about the proper roles of public relief and private charity and about the nature of need itself, public opinion, about the COS and about the urban poor, did begin to change. That it did so while COS leaders themselves increasingly questioned the wisdom of their behavioral and moral

approach to understanding and “curing” poverty is the irony. “Charity organization is no longer on the defensive,” wrote *Charities Review* in 1892, “it no longer needs to explain. Its principles are well-nigh universally adopted among thinking men and women” (CR 1892, 233). The argument had been won, and through the country cities could report great savings from the applications of “better methods” of relief (Henderson et al. 1894, 114-5). But a scant year later, the Depression of 1893 would help accelerate an already evolving shift in COS understanding of poverty and its causes.³

Charity organization was not the innovation many of its advocates and partisans claimed. In 1617, St. Vincent de Paul established the Ladies of Charity, women of the upper classes who would visit and comfort the poor. De Paul said, “to send money is good, but we have not really begun to serve the poor till we visit them” (in Watson 1922, 15). Cotton Mather in his 1710 *Bonifacius* (see pp. 58-9, 78-9) admonished that one must visit and comfort the poor, “and if it be needful, bestow your alms upon them,” “provided it be done with discretion” and “Keep, Sir, a list of ‘em.” New York’s Society for the Prevention of Pauperism, established in 1817, sought to “uplift the poor” through moral education and cited “the numerous charitable institutions of the city” as among the principle *causes* of poverty (along with “intemperance, idleness, ignorance [and] want of economy”) (Watson 1922, 67). The Associations for Improving the Condition of the Poor that formed in the 1840s -- “a long name for a weary task,” wrote Jacob Riis (1890, 35) -- were launched with strikingly similar goals to those of the COS: they lodged responsibility for poverty in the behavior of poor people, complained that outdoor relief made recipients “compliant troopers in political campaigns,” and argued that private relief was more efficient than public (NYAICP, esp. Nos. 1-3). The first AICP emerged in New York City after the brutal winter and economic crisis of 1837-38 to limit the “false and dangerous methods of relief” used by the Society for the Prevention of Pauperism and other early

³ Thus this was not some abrupt change brought on by the Depression, not quite so sudden a shift as Waugh (1997; 2001) and many others would have it.

relief agencies. It divided the city into 22 districts and 278 sections, and assigned Visitors to each (mostly wealthy men, in this case) “to help them [the poor] discover those hidden springs of virtue within themselves from which alone their prosperity might flow” (Bruere in Watson 1922, 78). While even then there were some attempts to address the “environmental” aspects of poverty with attention to housing, pure milk campaigns, and the establishment of public bathhouses, New York AICP founder Robert Hartley had little doubt as to the problem and the remedy: “To remove the evil, we must remove the causes, and these being chiefly moral. . . they admit only moral remedies” (in Watson 1922, 84). The “less eligibility” principles enshrined in the English Poor Law Act of 1834, which demanded that relief always be less desirable than work, were explicitly adopted by the AICP. Their Visitor’s Manual urged that they must “give assistance, both in quantity and quality, inferior, except in case of sickness and old age, to what might be procured by labor” (NYAICP Nos. 1 and 21). By 1876, there were twenty-nine AICPs built upon the New York Model. But like the settlement house workers to follow, the more AICP Visitors encountered poor people, the harder it was for them to place the whole blame for poverty on moral failings, and “remonstrance was often necessary to prevent these visitors from relaxing efforts at moral reform and calling in the discredited system of relying entirely upon almsgiving” (Watson 1922, 81).

The development of COSs, often modeled upon the London Society established in 1869, was an attempt to overcome the AICPs’ perceived failures: a lack of organization and cooperation among agencies, which left too much room for fraud by the poor; insufficient focus on moral education, despite AICP claims; too few Visitors; corruption in both the government and in private agencies; and what was often characterized as “lavish” outdoor aid -- the AICP had “sunk into a sea of almsgiving”, reported Watson (1922, 89). Charity Organization would for some forty years try to put into practice what the AICP could only hold as ideals. Whatever their other accomplishments, and they varied from

city-to-city, from year-to-year, the COS would succeed in setting the terms of the debate about relief.

The very first American COS was established in the Germantown neighborhood of Philadelphia in 1873 to manage the appeals being made to wealthier citizens for food and money (Watson 1922, 175). The first *city-wide* COS was established in 1877 by the Rev. Stephen Humphreys Gurteen, late of the London COS, in Buffalo, New York, in large measure to remedy the “lavish abuse of charity” that had resulted from the depression of 1873 (Watson 1922, 179).⁴ It was not just Gurteen but a number of “public spirited men” who pushed for the establishment of a COS (see CR 1898 V.8). Watson (1922, 183) says it is thus “not surprising that the new society early entered upon a crusade for the reduction of public outdoor relief,” a testament perhaps to how accepted even then was the belief that relief was counter to the interests of professional and business men. Over its entrance was posted a sign that read “Charity Organization Society, Central Office,” and along the posts that supported it were the words “No Relief Given Here” (Gurteen 1894, 359). Gurteen divided the city into multiple administrative Districts to coordinate the charity work within each, carefully avoiding doing so by Wards, “which should always be avoided in consequence of their political complexion” (Gurteen 1882, 144). He did not appoint any clergy to the governing Council, being “equally opposed to the gift of the coal-ticket and the gift of a tract,” and instead selected “all business and professional men, and the very ablest that the city afforded” (Gurteen 1882, 126).

One hundred ninety six American cities had established a Charity Organization Society by 1900, many explicitly imitating Buffalo. By 1915, by my count, some three hundred twenty-seven had (NCCC *passim*; Sage 1914; COS 1896; Watson 1922; Warner

⁴ In other cities, agencies that would later adopt COS methods had roots much earlier, like the Lawrence City Mission of 1859. Many “COSs” were not actually called Charity Organization Societies, and were more often Associated Charities. Still others were Societies for Organizing Charities, United Charities, Federated Charities, and so on. There were, moreover, innumerable other mutual aid societies -- ethnic, religious, trade -- that would to varying degrees adopt COS methods. The convention, begun by movement contemporaries and continued in scholarship of the period, has been to refer to all such organizations as COSs. I will continue to do so here.

1894; Warner and Coolidge 1908; Gurteen 1882; Feder 1936). Although most observers have described charity organization as, chiefly, an urban and northeastern movement, by the end of the century there were COSs established throughout the country. While there was no COS in Atlanta by the turn of the century, for example, and the New Orleans organization was inactive, there were “strong” COSs in the southern cities of Louisville, Memphis, Nashville, Chattanooga, Richmond, Wilmington (NC), and Charleston (SC) (Ayers 1895). Smaller cities (Burlington, Iowa; Taunton and Brookline, Massachusetts; and Little Rock, Arkansas) and western ones (Salt Lake City, Dallas, Portland, Oakland and Los Angeles) could also boast active charity societies. Even some small towns like Tivoli, New York (1896 population of 1,300), Haddonfield, New Jersey (1896 population of 3,000) and Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania (1896 population of 876) had established a COS.

In the 1890s the National Conference on Charities and Correction (see NCCC 1897, 142) and Gurteen (1894, 365-6) would begin to issue calls for the creation of a national organization of COSs; while that was never achieved in the sense they intended, an American Society for Organizing Charity did come to serve as a network for information-sharing in the early 1900s. In 1914, the Russell Sage Foundation recorded the presence of COSs in Canada, Austria-Hungary, Belgium, Denmark, Egypt, France, Germany, Great Britain (which for Sage included Africa, Australasia, England and Wales, India, Ireland, Scotland), Greece, Holland, Italy, Russia, Sweden and Norway, Switzerland, and Turkey.

Structure and Funding

Just as COSs differed in name, so too did they differ in structure and organization, function, relationship with other charities and with their city, county or state governments, even in goals and philosophy. Their internal structures and means of organization generally differed according to the size of the city they inhabited, with smaller cities requiring less “minute subdivision” and specialization than that required in large urban centers (Watson 1922, 104). Some, as Watson (1922, 347) noted, were COSs in name

only. Many closed, abandoned COS principles or fell into disuse shortly after having been established, including Poughkeepsie, Lowell, Princeton, Chicago, D.C., Moline, Minneapolis, Patterson, Sandusky, Binghamton, Quincy (IL), Columbus (OH), Altoona (PA), Northampton, Omaha, St. Joseph (MO), Dedham (MA), Toledo, Annapolis and others. Some would later be re-born (Chicago, notably, would struggle to create a COS-based organization for many years), while others would not and cities would resume more traditional relief practices (NCCC 1889, 1890, 1891, 1895; CR 1892, 1893, 1894; Kellogg 1893; Sage 1914; Watson 1922, esp. 225fn3).

COSs were not, in fiscal terms, large enterprises. By 1900, the annual budget for the COS in New York was \$56,000 (\$15,751 of which was devoted to salaries and other administrative expenses), \$22,500 in Boston (\$17,000 for administration), \$10,719 in Baltimore (all of which was administrative) and \$8,096 in Buffalo (\$2,595 for administration) (Munsterberg 1902, 681). Most others operated on significantly smaller revenues. A few were endowed: Buffalo had investments in 1892 totaling \$308,873 and Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania had nearly \$92,000 (Warner 1894, Table XXXII). Most handled relatively few cases except in the early years of the depression of 1893, when almost all were overwhelmed: in its first fourteen years, for example, the Buffalo COS dealt with only 8,235 cases; from the 1880s to 1893, the Boston COS rarely had more than 1,000 cases per year; even New York recorded only a total of 18,100 cases from 1889-1898, for an average of under 2,000 cases per year in a decade of deep depression; and Baltimore counted 6,395 cases from 1888-1895 (Warner 1894, Table IV; Warner and Coolidge 1908, 47ff). Even when faced with great demand, the COSs often managed to adhere to their belief that relief was injurious and successfully denied aid to all but the most "deserving." Most were also short-staffed and never able to secure enough volunteer Visitors -- the most notable exception is Boston, which in 1886 had one Visitor for every five cases (and one for every thirty-four paupers in the city). Brooklyn, too, had one Visitor for each eight cases, though only one for every 188 paupers in the city. In some

substantially smaller cities, Visitor-to-cases ratios were lower (1:2 in Columbus, 1:3 in Poughkeepsie, 1:4 in East Saginaw), but most cities for which data are available had around one Visitor for every twenty cases and one for every few hundred paupers (nearly one in four hundred for New Haven, Chicago and New York). By contrast, the average Visitor handled 50 cases in Buffalo, 66 in New Haven, 55 in Louisville, and 72 in Davenport (NCCC 1887, 134 Table 1). In the same year, Boston had 27 paid Agents and administrative staff, Philadelphia had 25 and New York had 23; no other cities seem to have had even half as many (NCCC 1887).

They raised their funding as charities do today -- through mail appeals, advertisements, personal solicitations, membership dues, benefits, tag sales, and dedicated requests for donations to benefit particular poor families (Watson 1922; Greeley 1995). Contributors, like William Dean Howells' fictional Silas Lapham (Howells 1885), were less likely to have donated out of conviction than out of convention or practicality: among certain businessmen, less so of the "old" money of the aristocratic classes, it was simply among the things one did. Howells had reason to know, having served on a COS District Committee in New York (Waugh 1997). One Wall Street director stated in *The Gilded Age* (Twain and Warner 1873, 203) that "one of the happiest advertisements in the world is your benevolent donation." As Warner and Coolidge (1908, 380-1) observe, "to contribute to the charities of the localities is one of the means by which social advancement is secured." Munsterberg (1902, 506-7) called it the "charity sport" of social climbing. Wrote Ross (1914), "The popularity-hunter has always appreciated the wisdom of subscribing handsomely to benevolent enterprises. . . The resort to philanthropy as a means of propitiation becomes more general as the public becomes more and more critical of the ways of business."

Mission and Action

But what did they do? What were they for? The *Charities Review*, the late-century journal of the New York Charity Organization Society, described the effort this way: charity organization “looks to permanent cure of distress, not to its mere temporary alleviation, and. . . seeks to effect that cure in the only way in which it can be effected, by understanding the disease before attempting to treat it: Charity, like medicine, is hardly an exact science, but the time has gone by when we should try to cure human misery with quackery” (deForest 1891, 2). Charity organization was determined to apply “scientific” methods to charity: to make assistance to poor people rational, systematic and coordinated. “Why so much emphasis on organization?” asked the first issue of *Charities Review*. “Because conditions have changed. . . the mass of human misery was becoming too great to be dealt with by single persons working alone” (deForest 1891, 3). Old solutions could not be applied to new problems, and a new form of poverty that seemed inseparable from industrial development required a more sophisticated institutional mechanism to combat it and a new, scientific, philosophy. Thus, New York COS Secretary Edward Devine would construct an intricate, evolving typology built upon “seventy-five illustrative cases” to guide Visitors in determining who should receive what kind of relief, under what circumstances, and for what duration; it testifies to the sincerity of their belief that charity could, in fact, become a profession with clear laws, articulated principles and specific solutions to specific problems (Devine 1904, Part II; Devine, “Draft,” CSS Box 92; Devine manuscript, CSS Box 108).

The key principle of the COSs was that theirs was “charity in its original meaning of ‘love,’ not charity in its debased meaning of ‘alms’” (deForest 1891, 2). They believed that cash aid to poor people was dangerous and even cruel, for it fostered dependency, took away incentives to work, and offered false hope for a better future: cash might minimize momentary suffering, but it could never get at the *causes* of poverty. The causes for many COS directors and Visitors were largely moral -- intemperance chief among them. While

these institutions called themselves societies for organizing charity, those most lauded by the NCCC functioned as organizations for systematically denying charity and enforcing work. Throughout the late century, COSs routinely claimed that most applicants needed work, not relief (and were therefore denied it). An 1886 survey of twelve cities (see NCCC 1886, 171ff) showed that only 9% of all applicants were deemed worthy of continuous relief; 25% were worthy of temporary relief; 40% were judged to be in need of work, not relief; and a full 26% were unworthy of any consideration. In this last category often fell those judged intemperate, deemed unsuitable for most work. The NCCC of 1887 (p. 130; see also Warner 1894b, 30) reported an examination of nearly 30,000 COS cases in twenty-five cities: 40% of all applicants needed work not relief. Hyslop (1894) reported that 46% of all New York COS applicants in 1892 were unworthy, while the average was 22% in Indianapolis from 1882-1894.⁵ Only as the century neared its close would the causes of poverty be more widely understood by the COSs to be social, political and economic as well (see e.g. NYCOS 1882-1900).

Charity Organization Societies urged that relief be administered by private agencies in order to reduce the power of patronage in relief-giving and to embed the administration of relief in institutions that could better discriminate than government could between the “worthy” and “unworthy” poor.⁶ COSs argued that private charity could offer better support (providing moral uplift in lieu of cash) and do it more cheaply and efficiently than public agencies. Said Jeffrey R. Brackett at the NCCC of 1895 (p. 83): “There is too

⁵ Yet one 1896 study of COS records (in Devine 1904) found that 44% of all applicants for whom “lack of employment” was cited as cause of their need had been replaced by another (presumably lower-paid or more compliant) worker; in only 17% of such cases could the COS attribute the worker’s termination to “character weakness.”

much tendency today to look upon the public purse as the resource of all needs; while, on the other hand, in churches and small bands of workers and individuals are to be found the highest exponents of charity, those who will not give merely of their means, but of their time and energy." Private relief affects the recipient differently than public: "There is not so much cringing, and there is more gratitude" (Barnett 1899), and "the gift without the giver is not only bare, it is an active agent of injury" (Devine 1904, 82). Besides, they argued, public relief inhibits the private spirit of giving. Henderson (1894b, 233), however, not alone among reformers, saw virtue in each form of relief provision. "It is generally agreed that personal and private charity surpasses official charity in spontaneity, versatility, adaptability, idealism, religious fervor. It is thought that official charity surpasses private charity in completeness, adequacy, equality of burdens, and in the control of criminal tendencies often mixed up with pauperism."

The COSs engaged in an effort to ensure both that poor relief remained firmly ensconced as charity and would not become a right, and that cash would be offered only as a last resort to those who could not find assistance elsewhere. As Frederic Almy (1899, 69) wrote in *Charities Review*, "the latent powers of the poor have been aptly compared to those of boys who swim when thrown into the water, although they were sure they could not." "Not alms, but a friend," as noted above, was the infamous and much-mocked COS motto first used by Robert Treat Paine of Boston, inspired by the London COS's Octavia Hill (Johnson 1923, 53; Watson 1922, 7). "Almsgiving and dole giving are hurtful," wrote Lowell, another who was influenced by Hill, "therefore they are not charitable" (Lowell 1884, 89; Waugh 1997). Indeed, COSs and their AICP predecessors measured

⁶ Accusations that this was to acquire power and resources for COSs and their leadership grew increasingly frequent by the turn of the century. During the debate over the reinstatement of free coal distribution in 1898, New York's Devine was compelled to explicitly deny any profit motive in his opposition to coal relief (*NY Comm Adv* 2/10/1898 in CSS Box 108). The *Charities Review* offered this suggestive report (1894, 408) of a relief skirmish in Ohio: "The Associated Charities of Canton have found themselves cramped for funds for over a year, and during that time have been endeavoring to get possession of the Hartford poor fund, the interest of which amounts to over \$2,500 a year. The sum has been distributed by councilmen, there being a law governing it. The council refused to turn over the money to the Associated Charities, and the ladies went to Columbus and got a bill passed, compelling them to do so."

their effectiveness by demonstrating that with each passing year they offered assistance to fewer people than they had the year before (see NYAICP and NYCOS, *passim*).

Leadership

Men, predominantly, set policy and held administrative and governing positions, while women served as "Friendly Visitors," native born, well-to-do volunteers who would offer moral guidance, comfort, education about such matters as household maintenance and child rearing, and, when the client was deemed worthy, material relief. While, over time, women would assume more positions of responsibility and the composition of COS leadership would become more ethnically diverse, for all its presumed concern about bringing the classes closer together, working people and poor people were never incorporated into the COS leadership (see Greeley 1995). Working class women would, however, be hired as clerks (Agents, they were called) which would have significant impact upon COS effectiveness (see below).

The Boards and District Committees of COSs were, as a rule, like the governing bodies of their predecessors, the Society for the Prevention of Pauperism and the Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor, composed of white, Republican, Protestant men from the business and professional classes. The original Board of the New York Charity Organization Society consisted of two lawyers, two physicians, two businessmen, one banker, and Josephine Shaw Lowell. President Robert deForest was a lawyer for banks, railroads and insurance companies. Goodman (1983, 693-4) reports further that

Of the 233 chief office-holders and heads of district committees who worked for the New York Charity Organization Society from 1882 to 1905,

150 are identifiable. . .they come almost exclusively from the middle-class⁷ business and professional strata and included twenty-six doctors, forty-four lawyers, twenty-six businessmen, seven manufacturers, sixteen merchants, thirteen bankers, nine ministers, seven teachers, one politician and one artist.

His analysis of the New York AICP offers similar findings (p. 286):

Of the 539 men who served as managers of the agency from 1844 to 1882, 400 can be identified. The majority of the chief office-holders (321 men) consisted of merchants, manufacturers, shopkeepers and craftsmen. The remaining 79 managers consisted of 32 doctors, 16 laborers,⁸ 14 lawyers, 8 teachers, 7 politicians, 1 editor and 1 minister.

Most, if not all, were Protestant. Most of whom they served were foreign-born and Roman Catholic. The AICP's founders "were all six merchants and businessmen of some standing -- one owned one of the largest US shipping firms, another the largest financial institution in the city" (Goodman 1983, 278-9). Even the SPP represented many of the same interests: Of the eighty-nine men who served as managers from 1817 to 1823, all were

conservative individuals representing the commercial and professional class of Manhattan. . . the occupations of sixty-nine of them have been identified

⁷ Goodman's use of "middle-class" here is potentially misleading. What's important is to note that the vast majority of those he identifies are business and professional men.

⁸ Perhaps the presence of non-professional working men among leadership of the AICP helps account for its "demise" into a relief-giving institution, much derided by the COS until they began systematically working together in the 1890s. In 1939 the COS and AICP combined and became the Community Service Society of New York.

and included thirty-four businessmen, four clergymen, five politicians, nine attorneys, two teachers, eight mechanics, six doctors and one editor (Goodman 1983, 127ff).

Kusmer (1973, Table I and 674) examined 89% of Chicago's Associated Charity Directors from 1886 to 1908 and discovered much the same pattern. Fourteen were merchants (all affiliated with big business, not small concerns); there were ten bankers, seven lawyers, four manufacturers, three managers, three educators, three settlement workers, two ministers, two physicians and two real estate brokers. Most were between forty and sixty years old and active in the Civic Federation. The New York State Charities Aid Association also had similar membership, consisting of "New York City's elite -- merchants, industrialists, ministers, lawyers, professors, and physicians," including Frederick Law Olmstead, E.L. Godkin, Theodore Roosevelt Sr., Charles Loring Brace, Josephine Shaw Lowell, and Louisa Schulyer (Stanley 1992, 1275). Many New York members of the COS, State Charities Aid Association and State Board of Charities, Lowell most notably, overlapped, forming "a kind of 'charity trust' not unlike the 'oil trust' or the 'steel trust' of Gilded Age businesses" (Waugh 1997, 114). The New York COS's "patrons" included Andrew Carnegie, J.P. Morgan, Mrs. Cornelius Vanderbilt and other prominent industrialists or their wives (Piven and Cloward 1987, 14-15). The dense interlocks evident among conservative policy-planning organizations (and liberal ones, too) we shall see in the twentieth century were evident in the nineteenth.

Not just the leadership of the COSs was of the upper classes, though. In studies of the Philadelphia society, Rauch (1975; 1976) finds that of those men who gave the COS time or money, most were professional and upper class native-born whites; the average contributor was a native-born businessman in his late 40s or early 50s; he was married, and he resided in a single family residence in an elite neighborhood with live-in servants. Ten percent served on the board of a bank or insurance company and five percent were on the

board of a mining or transportation company. They were likely to support the Committee of 100, a reform organization of and for businessmen. Among female Visitors, 77.4% had live-in servants; 6.3% were employed (not all outside the home); their fathers or husbands were merchants, bankers, lawyers, judges, physicians, clergy, and educators; 57% were single or widowed, and their average age was forty-three. Visitors "provided a cheap source of labor for male philanthropists unwilling to support professional social workers," says Rauch (1975, 253).

Bremner (1956b, 171) argued that "Charity agents were well aware of the popular feeling that their efforts were designed mainly to protect the pocketbooks of the rich." Kusmer (1973, 673ff) added that businessmen served on boards to refurbish their image by showing their wealth to be part of a system that benefited all, to demonstrate that wealth had social and not just personal value, to show that they were not blind to plight of poor. "Furthermore, charity organization was particularly appealing to them because it did not endanger their economic position. Charity workers, no less than businessmen, were eager to avoid any kind of class analysis; they spoke instead of reconciling class differences and reuniting American society." As one Chicago banker said, the COS served "as a clearing house through which people of philanthropic disposition may make their contributions to charity without any misgivings that they may be misdirected." Even Cleveland COS trustee Frederic C. Howe⁹ would come to think that organized charity was "a business enterprise, designed to keep poverty out of sight and make life more comfortable for the rich" (in Bremner 1956a, 54). For Ross (1914) this was the Achilles' heel of private charity -- its dependence upon the largesse of the business and professional classes prevented it from acting as it saw fit. "Most of the adverse conditions [of the day] are mixed up with your lucrative business, and you cannot go about to abolish them without having a business

⁹ It was he who received an infamous letter from a clergyman with the accusation that "Your society, with its board of trustees made up of steel magnates, coal operators, and employers is not really interested in charity. If it were, it would stop the twelve-hour day; it would increase wages and put an end to the cruel killing and maiming of men. It is interested in getting its own wreckage out of sight. It isn't pleasant to see it begging on the streets."

interest on your back.” Ross reports that two workers who had refused to act as strike-breakers sought assistance from a local COS leader who then reproached the company for its labor practices. “The reply he got was, ‘You people can’t complain of having to handle such cases. Don’t we contribute \$150 a year to your work?’” Ross continued: “A student of mine, after three years of charity organization work, said to me, ‘Professor, I’ve quit. There nothing *in* it. The game’s too thin. We coax money from the people who are the beneficiaries of the abuses that produce the wrecks we deal with. They let us deal with the wrecks, but we can’t touch or even show up the conditions that produce them, because that would affect their income.’”

The COSs’ dependence upon certain of the upper classes for leadership, staffing and finance is made abundantly clear by the laments of COS leaders of being unable to continue their operations during the summer months because so many upon whom they depended left the cities for their country houses. Some COSs, which generally faced fewer requests for help then than during the winters, even closed during the summer (see CR 1894, 362; Greeley 1995, 127-32). By May 1882 Lowell (Stewart 1911, 129) would complain that there were not enough men of “*leisure* with the tradition of public service like so many of the ‘nobility and gentry’ of England. Our young men, those that we can catch, are very

good, but usually too busy." This offers some further indication that those involved were not of the old noblesse oblige, but a new guard, perhaps a new class of bourgeoisie.¹⁰

Agents of Business

It should come as no surprise given the backgrounds of these reformers that in many cities the charity organization movement worked closely with the local Chamber of Commerce or the Merchants' Association to control which charities were "responsible" enough to receive donations from the public and which should not survive. That is, they sought to regulate private relief as well as public relief through Charities Endorsement Committees, which evaluated private charities and published reports on those it condoned and those to which no one should contribute.¹¹ Watson (1922, 421-2) reported that by 1910 Charities Endorsement was managed, to varying degrees, by "commercial organizations" in Buffalo, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Denver, Grand Rapids, Indianapolis, Lincoln, Los Angeles, Milwaukee, Omaha, Peoria, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, San Francisco, Seattle, Wheeling, Worcester and Youngstown. Felton (1905) says of her Endorsement Committee in San Francisco, which was instituted by the local Merchants' Association "to investigate all charitable enterprises applying to it for endorsement and to

¹⁰ There was not one upper class, of course, but many upper classes. William Dean Howells' novel *The Rise of Silas Lapham* offers one glimpse of the conflict between old and new money. Their attitudes toward each other differed as their interests differed; so too did their attitudes toward the poor -- instead of the noblesse oblige of the old aristocracy, the rising manufacturing classes often demonstrated a contempt for the idle poor that had much in common with their contempt for the idle rich (see Lowell on this, for example). Whether we subscribe to Hammack's (1982) typology of five turn-of-the-century elites (the Protestants of wealth, cultivation or ancestry, the German Christians and the German Jews), McCabe's (1882) four-tiered upper class (professionals, Knickerbockers, the cultured and the newly rich) or Beckert's (2001) more unified bourgeoisie, all remind us that attitudes toward the poor could differ among the non-poor in ways that affected the material well-being of the lower classes. The "old" charity that the COSs condemned, while rooted in the church and its indiscriminate giving, was still practiced by the old aristocracy -- perhaps one of the reasons that many, if not most, had little to do with the COSs and the "new" charity (Leiby 1984). Hammack (1982, 77) noted that only one of forty-three COS directors was invited to Mrs. Astor's Ball for The Four Hundred in 1892. Those wealthy people who did seek out the assistance of organized charity, for example, to respond to individual pleas from poor people -- "begging letters" -- did not always follow the COS's advice, and offered charity even when advised against it (See Greeley 1995).

issue its official card to such as are doing honest and efficient work," that "The members of the Merchants Association are to support the committee by refusing to give to all unendorsed charities." She further reports that "The Endorsement Committee has been bitterly criticized by every organization refused endorsement. That such criticism has passed almost unnoticed is due to the fact that the merchants generally consider the Endorsement Committee as a merchants committee -- a committee made up of their own members, whose impartiality is beyond question." Three of its members were appointed by the Merchants' Association, two by the Associated Charities and two by other charities. *Charities and the Commons* wrote (1909 V.21) that "so effective has been its work that not only members of the Chamber but the whole community relies upon it. Without its card, an organization cannot raise funds sufficient for maintenance." That is, through the endorsement committees, the Chamber of Commerce could drive out of business charities of whose methods they disapproved, in their own "impartial" manner.

While a central tenet of COS philosophy was, they insisted, the reunion of rich and poor, the COSs consistently saw as their duty the protection of the better classes from the dangerous and dependent classes, and to protect business from charity that offered workers any leverage. Given the COSs' leadership, this too is unsurprising. Here is perhaps the most explicit statement: presenting a paper that was probably written by Charles Loring Brace (see NCCC 1874) at the first convocation of the National Conference on Charities and Correction, R.T. Davis claimed that "Some of the gifts [of charity during the past winter] were no doubt prompted by the selfish prudence of capital wishing to guard against the discontent of the poor." The effects of such charity however were no secret to Brace and those who would soon organize and come to oppose it:

¹¹ Their late twentieth century counterparts were the National Charities Information Bureau and the Better Business Bureau's Philanthropic Advisory Service.

Mechanics still demanded from \$3 to \$5 per diem. It was notorious that important trades, such as the building trade, were at a stand-still on account of high wages, and that the employing class could not afford to pay such high rates. Yet no wages came down. Labor was in a struggle with capital against the lowering of prices. Charity assisted labor in the combat. The soup-kitchens and relief associations of various names became thronged with mechanics. . . The whole settlement of the labor question was postponed by the over-generous charity of the city. . .

These benevolent institutions also interfered with many kinds of legitimate businesses. . . small eating-houses. . . were almost thrown into bankruptcy by the competition of certain soup-kitchens. . . . In one district, also, a keeper of a laundry, who had ten or twelve girls in his employment, at good wages, found himself stripped of his help in the midst of the winter, these women preferring to live for nothing in the free lodgings.

It had been expected that this industrial crisis would bring down the wages of female servants, since these had remained at a high rate, though all other prices had fallen. The Superintendent of the Free Labor Bureau, however, stated that during all this distress the poor girls who came to his office could not be induced to take situations for less than from \$14 to \$20 per month, and said that they preferred to live at the charitable institutions until they could get such wages as they chose (Davis 1874).

At the Tenth Annual Meeting of the NCCC in 1883 (p. 16), President Frederick H. Wines of Illinois told the assembled: "Our task is to diminish the amount of the burden which mankind has to carry and so save expense. It is our duty to scrutinize the demands made upon capital in the name of charity, to detect and expose sham charities, to point out the futility of methods which have often been tried and found ineffectual, to invent better methods to take their place." Or as Mary Richmond told the Conference in 1899, "Businessmen have no time to think about the serious problems of charity. We have come into existence that we may do so" (in Gettleman 1963, 320). Denver, for example, established its COS because "the businessmen of Denver demanded 'that the charitable institutions asking aid in their work should solicit funds through a central agency, and should organize for efficiency and for the prevention of duplication in their work'" (Denver COS in Watson 1922, 240). In 1887, John K. Cowen, an attorney for B & O Railroad said that the COS "hunts out the fraudulent applicant for relief; furnishes information to those who are benevolently disposed and thus enables them to say to the able-bodied man: 'Do not come unto me, you must work for your living'" (Gettleman 1963, 317fn21). The COSs fulfilled many functions for such businessmen -- here it was a way to avoid saying no directly, for one could always blame the local COS. Gurteen argued that one of the essential functions of the District Agent ought to be to act as liaison between business and the COS, to keep the COS apprised of local labor needs (Gurteen 1882, 213). Evans (1889, 28) agreed: "The visitor's work must then be to try to remove the flaw, to bring the labor to the market where it is in demand, and never to treat an able-bodied workman to a dole of bread till he and his children degenerate into paupers." The Chicago Municipal Lodging House was explicit in one advertisement, which read: "Skilled and unskilled labor to be obtained without charge to employer or employee. . . Employment is found for the industrious and able bodied. The citizens and housewives of Chicago are requested therefore to refuse alms" (NCCC 1904, 165). By 1909 Devine, with a grant from The

Russell Sage Foundation, had designed and established a National Employment Exchange in emulation of local exchanges in New York and other cities. It charged a fee to those seeking work, though not to the employer; its Board of Trustees was “drawn from the mercantile and industrial classes” and started “with a capital fund of \$100,000 donated by New York’s wealthiest citizens” (Ringelback 1973, 146-7). Watson (1922, 111) notes approvingly that an organization of businesses “in one city” even took over the operation of the COS; this, he observes, is beneficial because “A local chamber of commerce or board of trade is a *neutral* body” [italics mine]. Gurteen (1882, 129) proudly noted that “At the beginning of the year 1879, some of the leading business men of Buffalo, of their own accord, held a private meeting, when it was unanimously agreed that, in view of the benefit which the Society had been to the city at large, to the poor, to the benevolent and to the tax-payers, they would raise among themselves the \$7,000 required for the [COS operating costs for the] ensuing year.” In a sense, Buffalo businessmen paid the COS to reduce relief, just as they would elsewhere.

The charity ideology of the COS was not new: charity organization’s innovation was in the rational, scientific, administrative approach it designed to implement its ideology, a strategy built in part upon its appraisal of the perceived failure of its AICP predecessors, and the effectiveness with which COSs disseminated their ideas and fought to see that they influenced public debate and the shaping of public policy. Perhaps the most important difference between the Charity Organization movements and other campaigns against relief is that we can talk of charity organization as a movement -- in the last quarter of the nineteenth century anti-relief sentiments gained a force and influence not seen previously and not seen again until the late twentieth century.

The Rise of the Think Tank

As David Ellwood (1988, 6) wrote some years before he joined Clinton’s welfare reform team at the Department of Health and Human Services, “Welfare brings some of our

most precious values -- involving autonomy, responsibility, work, family, community and compassion -- into conflict.” Chapter Three below will describe the ways in which nineteenth century understandings of poverty and relief were revived late in the twentieth century, tapping into these sometimes contradictory values to good strategic effect. This renewed prominence of old ideas was no accident of fate, not the product of some cycle of history, nor was it even evidence of some culturally-embedded antipathy to poor relief; rather, it was the culmination of a sophisticated public relations campaign about labor policy, market regulation, taxation, and the very size and role of government that began more than twenty years before the passage of the PRA, and for which welfare was only one among a host of targets, albeit one of the most symbolically potent and vulnerable ones. Business fought for reduced regulation, changes in tax policy, and, our focus here, reductions in poor relief programs that like the outdoor relief of the late nineteenth century had again come to be seen as taking sides in the battles between capital and labor, interfering on behalf of workers and impeding the “natural” operations of the “free” market (for the classic statement on how the market is neither natural nor free, see Polanyi 1944).

I have shown above that the COS was created specifically to oppose public relief and private charity; this is not so for the new and newly invigorated think tanks of the late twentieth century. They included opposition to relief among many targets. This difference is partly the result of different circumstances. In the late nineteenth century, especially before the consolidation of corporate capital that reached its peak in the mid 1890s through to the new century, local labor markets had greater impact upon business profit, and there was little in the way of regulation to roll back. By contrast, late twentieth century business were pinioned, they would argue, by an array of city, state and federal regulations that governed much of their business; relief itself was economically less important (although as important symbolically) than it was for their Gilded Age predecessors. Therefore, the story of the think tanks’ rise to influence differs from the account of the emergence of the COS

above, and relief -- welfare, in this case -- does not appear until later into the narrative. The anti-relief activism of the think tanks will be more fully revealed in both Chapters 3 and 4.

As with the account of the nineteenth century reform organizations above, I will begin the discussion of twentieth century reform organizations with a brief description of the state of poor relief prior to their activism.

Twentieth Century Welfare

By the end of the nineteenth century, many COSs had established their own relief funds and urged greater government regulation and intervention in the wake of rising unemployment and poverty, as we shall see. Whatever success we may ultimately attribute to the COSs, it was short-lived, for private charity failed to fill the gap left when public relief was rescinded. The oft-told story of the Progressive Era and the New Deal is partly one of the states and then the federal government assuming responsibility for what had been until then staunchly defended as local and private responsibility. It was not until the Progressive Era, for example, that states engaged in widespread intervention in and regulation of the market and began to assume some of the burden for protecting employees. And it was not until the Social Security Act of 1935 (SSA) that the federal government would assume partial responsibility for the care of the dependent poor by institutionalizing relief.¹² The SSA provided aid to the most worthy or deserving of those in need: Title I established grants to the states for aid to the old; Title II created federal pensions, paid for

¹² Trattner (1988) argues that there was significant federal involvement in social welfare in the nineteenth century, but his evidence rests mainly with federal land grants to states (some of whom used such land for establishing charitable and medical institutions), ad hoc disaster relief, and grants-in-aid for veteran's care in institutions. As with Skocpol's (1992) writing about Civil War pensions, Trattner offers a useful reminder that federal government involvement in matters we might broadly define as "social welfare" did not emerge *ab ovum* during the New Deal, but neither substantiates any claim that the American welfare state was more precocious than generally believed. There were, after all, benefits paid even to Revolutionary War veterans, and institutions established for their care. But Civil War pensions were not part of a federal role in general social welfare or an assertion of federal responsibility, but a narrowly circumscribed effort to pay a debt incurred during wartime and to solidify the power of the Republican party (see Bense 2000), a very different kind of proposition, I submit. See Henderson (1897, 476) for a contemporaneous appraisal of federal and states' roles in nineteenth century relief provision.

by employees and employers. "I believe," said President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, "that the funds necessary to provide this insurance should be raised by contributions rather than by an increase in general taxation." He also said "we put those payroll contributions there so as to give contributors a legal, moral and political right to collect their pensions" (in Ellwood 1988, 27). This has become the program we now call Social Security, available to rich and poor alike, enjoying broad-based support that made it, until very recently, politically resistant to attack. Title III created a federal payroll tax with which states could provide unemployment compensation (restricted to certain employees and excluding agricultural and domestic labor, helping to regulate the labor market and placate Southern Congressional delegates). Title IV made grants to the states for Aid to Dependent Children, later to become Aid to Families with Dependent Children. By 1936, there were 300,000 children receiving ADC benefits.

These were not large, broad programs meant to bring relief to great numbers of people -- they were restrained attempts to target assistance to categories of people who were deemed legitimately unable to support themselves. Nonetheless, federal protections were extended further with the expansion of the Food Stamp and Medicare programs in the 1960s and Supplemental Security Insurance in the early 1970s, as eligibility for provisions of the SSA broadened over time as well. From those New Deal interventions and expansions through to the 1970s, poverty declined, reaching its lowest level in 1973; a year later AFDC rolls reached their peak twentieth century purchasing power (Mishel et al. 1997).

AFDC was never a popular nor particularly effective program. States set their benefit levels too low to support a family; AFDC never reached more than 5% of the population (Abramovitz 1994, 21), and even with food stamps included no state's AFDC benefits ever were enough to lift a family above the poverty line (Edelman 1997, 44; Katz 1989, 68). Nonetheless benefits (including Medicaid) were often higher than the return available from the employment available to recipients (when work-related expenses such as

childcare, transportation, work wardrobe, etc. are calculated). This created a disincentive to accept low-wage, no-benefit work.¹³ AFDC set no national standard, so that benefits varied widely from state to state. AFDC, for much of its life, offered benefits only to children and (later) to their mothers. Men and couples were ineligible until 1963's AFDC-UP. So-called man-in-the-house rules also in effect until the 1960s forced women to live alone with their children (or at least pretend to). This discouraged marriage and two-parent households. Whatever judgments we make about the virtues of two-parent versus one-parent households, a household with a single wage earner is likely to be poorer than a household with two wage-earners, and single-parent families are poorer than families with two parents present (Thomas and Sawhill 2001). All that said, we should not understate the importance of AFDC for those families who did receive it, not least because it often served as a gateway into food stamps, Medicaid, and other programs.

Perhaps because of its categorical, means-tested, state-federal structure, AFDC never enjoyed widespread support (unlike national, more universal, insurance-style programs like Social Security or Medicare) and was often believed to be exorbitantly expensive: in a 1994 survey, 20% thought "welfare" spending higher than military spending (Albelda 1996, 88; see also Ch. 4fn16). Many argued that by tying benefit levels to the number of children in the household AFDC encouraged women to have children to increase their benefit levels. Similarly, many argued that because AFDC was an open-ended entitlement, it encouraged dependency, laziness and a "cycle of poverty" from one generation to the next.¹⁴ In a 1995 Public Agenda survey, 65% of respondents said that

¹³ Perhaps the most important distinction between my judgments about relief and those of Victorians and Victorian revivalists is this: they would describe this as a "perverse incentive," as a structural failing of relief, as a dilemma, as a root of dependency. I argue instead, as others before me have done (see Hernes 1987; Piven and Cloward 1989; Esping-Andersen 1990; Sainsbury 1996), that welfare, however imperfectly, thus served to offer poor women the ability to decline low-wage, low-benefit work. Welfare did not make them dependent but allowed them to trade one kind of dependence for another, sacrificing dependence on the labor market or a husband or family or private charity for dependence on the state. AFDC thereby gave them some measure of power, of freedom even.

¹⁴ I will devote little attention here to refuting these common myths, which have little empirical support. For a concise rebuttal to most such understandings, see Albelda 1996.

“welfare encourages the wrong lifestyle and values.” In a 1997 *Newsweek* survey 51% of respondents said that welfare cuts represent government “ending a system that keeps people poor.”

At its initial passage Aid to Dependent Children was a little-noticed program, a partial federalization that used states’ modest mothers’ pension programs as a policy model (Skocpol 1992; Gordon 1994). The federal government paid 50-80% of all benefits, but the responsibility for determining need, setting benefit levels, and administering programs was relegated to the states. By 1959, over 3 million people were receiving ADC benefits; 28% of them had no hot water or flush toilets and 17% had no running water at all (Patterson 1994, 86). The official American poverty rate was 22%, a decline from 30% in 1950 and 40% in 1940. Between 1960 and 1969, thanks to reduced stigma, relaxed eligibility guidelines and protest by potential recipients, AFDC rolls rose more than 100%, 71% per cent of that increase taking place between 1964 and 1969 alone (Piven and Cloward 1971, 183). As early as 1968, the official poverty rate was down to 13%; it is reasonable to conclude that AFDC, Medicaid, Food Stamps and the War on Poverty programs of the Office of Equal Opportunity were at least part of the reason. Nixon expanded the Food Stamp Program (federalizing benefits and setting minimum benefit levels), and from 1969 to 1972, federal grants to the states for social services rose from \$354 million to \$1.7 billion. Through 1972, the value of AFDC benefits (and the number of Americans receiving benefits) had steadily increased; that year also saw the implementation of Supplemental Security Income, a guaranteed income (not unlike the numerous failed proposals for a negative income tax) for the blind, disabled and the elderly. The real value of hourly wages had been growing, too. Infant mortality had declined by one third. The poverty rate for the old had been cut nearly in half. By the early 1970s, the American poverty rate was lower than it had ever been before -- 11% -- and lower than it has ever been since. This was more than just the effects of economic growth; between 1965 and 1972, the pre-transfer poverty rate (the number of people poor before

counting government programs) declined 9% while post-transfer poverty declined by more than 15%. By 1972, government transfer programs (Social Security, particularly) themselves lifted fully 50% of the poor above the poverty line (Katz 1989, 113).

That success, however, would prove insufficient to protect programs, and Democratic President Jimmy Carter soon presided over the first massive cuts in social programs in a failed attempt to combat inflation. The second assault on poor relief to be confronted in these pages begins here, in the early 1970s in the wake of gains made by poor and working people and, importantly, an expansion of poor relief that has something in common with the growth that helped usher in nineteenth century relief “reform.” Indeed, by the 1980s many politicians and policy intellectuals urged a return to the local, minimal, private charity of the nineteenth century, with many of the same arguments and even the same words used throughout the Gilded Age. This is no mere accident, I will argue. There is a pattern in this history.

The Threat Emerges

Just as the COS movement emerged as a response to the “indiscriminate charity” of the mid-1800s and the growing unrest of the depression of 1873 and was only one aspect of the first “corporate reconstruction of American capitalism” (Sklar 1988), the creation or resurgent activism of conservative foundations, lobbying organizations and think tanks in the early 1970s also marked a counter-mobilization. Two counter-mobilizations, actually. One was a corporate reaction to economic, political and rhetorical gains made by working people (at the perceived expense of corporate profitability) since the New Deal, the “explosion” of relief rolls in the late 1960s, and the increasing intrusion of the state into corporate affairs in the wake of environmental and consumer movements. The second was a reaction of the Christian and cultural right to the “social breakdown” of the 1960s. Here, the anti-relief campaigns focused upon moral and marital behavior, instead of the work-focused nature of the corporate campaign.

Many businesses in the 1970s confronted urgent new challenges to their profitability and power, as had their late nineteenth century counterparts. The OPEC oil embargo led to large rises in the prices of energy and other commodities. Government regulation of business had increased; as Parenti (1999, see Ch. 2) reports, "Between 1964 and 1979 the federal government enacted sixty-two health and safety laws which protected workers and consumers, while thirty-two other laws were passed protecting the environment and regulating energy use." Lowi (1987, 106) drives home the point: "Depending on who is doing the counting, an argument can be made that Congress enacted more regulatory programs in the five years between 1969 and 1974 than during any other comparable period in our history, including the first five years of the New Deal." These included large, costly programs, such as the Occupational Safety and Health Act, the Clean Water Act and amendments to the Clean Air Act. The welfare rights movement helped precipitate an "explosion" in poor relief rolls, comparable, as noted above, to that of the 1870s. Relatively strong labor unions and wage growth contributed to profit declines that began in the mid-1960s. Although corporate taxes had declined from 23.2% to 16.9% of all federal revenues from 1960-1970 (and would continue that decline), capital gains taxes rose under Nixon. Increased global competition and the first American trade deficit since 1893, and an economic crisis longer (from November 1973 to March 1975) and deeper than any since the Great Depression were increasingly seen by many businesses as serious long-term threats (Edsall 1984; Judis 2000; Ferguson and Rodgers 1986; Useem 1984; Vogel 1989). American businesses' (albeit limited) post-war willingness to "integrate the labor movement" (in part because specific economic conditions made it possible for profitability and wages to rise simultaneously) had come with a price: "the bargaining power of workers in the monopoly sector led to increasing economic demands, fully legitimated within the historical agreements reached to co-opt the unions. These demands were subsequently extended to the area of welfare and indirect wages and became

particularly acute in the periods of expansion, contributing to the cyclical deterioration of the ratio of profit to wages" (Castells 1980, 95).

It was more than just regulation and profits that caused concern -- fundamental shifts in public opinion and in state power seemed evident. A 1971 *Newsweek* article reported on "The American Corporation Under Fire;" in the previous year public support for business had declined to thirty-three per cent from seventy percent just two years earlier (Vogel 1989, 54; see also Smith 2000). Such opinion could help achieve further inroads by workers and consumers, many feared. Said one executive, "if we don't take action now, we will see our own demise" (in Su et al. 1992).

Businesses and their leaders mobilized much as Sklar (1988) and Wiebe (1962) show that corporations and their leaders had a century before: they built trade associations and sector-wide organizations like the Business Roundtable (a lobbying group of 200 CEOs), created public relations divisions within their firms, increased their marketing budgets, and established new offices close to political power in Washington, D.C. They hired K Street lobbying firms to press their claims upon the federal government. Many fought more forcefully against labor: in 1965 42% of companies complied immediately when unions filed to be recognized with NLRB, reports Judis (2000); by 1973, 16% did. They formed new Political Action Committees (PACs) to help increase their campaign contributions and influence (and substantially increased overall campaign contributions), they took new risks by shifting campaign funding to Republican Congressional challengers (43 were elected with that help in 1980, though they were unable to sustain that level of success), and they coordinated contributions with other PACs to further maximize their influence (see Su et al. 1992 for a good discussion of this last point). They endowed university chairs and fellowships for free-market-advocate professors and students. They funded journals of policy and opinion and magazines. New members joined the reinvigorated Chamber of Commerce, the National Federation of Independent Businesses (NFIB) and the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM). And they established

policy institutes, foundations and other organizations designed to produce expert research to support their claims and to gain an audience with policymakers, the media and the public (see Judis 2000; Vogel 1989). Among them are those think tanks or “policy-planning organizations” (Peschek 1987) and some lobbying organizations like the U.S. Chamber of Commerce that, like their COS predecessors, sought to cut back poor relief either through their public advocacy efforts or their lobbying of public officials.

David Plotke (1992) criticizes this kind of explanation of business mobilization as too economically determinative (in its crudest form, it argues that declining profits caused business as a class to launch an assault on regulation, taxes and unions). The timing of declining profits and mobilization doesn’t support the thesis, he argues (but see Castells 1980, Figure 9), and the best predictor of activism, Plotke finds, was the *size* of business, not its profitability (Martin 1998 also emphasizes the different influences in a decentralized polity of large and small business). Moreover, that business would focus on combating regulation was not the most logical choice given the economic data available at the time. Instead, he claims, “Widespread concern with regulation was a political interpretation of economic problems.” That is, the arguments business used as strategy should not be confused with its diagnosis, and perhaps businesses concluded that “opposing social and economic regulation would have greater appeal than conventional anti-union complaints or efforts to reduce corporate taxes.” Su et al.’s data (1992) also suggest that regulatory concern, not profit declines, best correlates with business mobilization.

For my purposes, it does not matter whether Su and Plotke or Useem, Vogel, Edsall, and Ferguson and Rodgers are closer to the truth -- all agree that across sectors, businesses large and small, capital intensive and labor-intensive, perceived a need to intervene in public policy in the early 1970s and sought to alter the power of labor and the state. There is not to my knowledge any informed observer who disputes that sometime

around the early 1970s, American corporate leaders became newly active to influence public policy.¹⁵

Another Threat Emerges

That business fought its declining power is perhaps not surprising; that it was able to so effectively roll back the hard-fought gains that poor and working people had made is the striking outcome that will require explanation. As Noble (1997, 14) rightly cautions, "business elites everywhere [in the world] have lobbied against legislation to protect wage earners from the discipline of the market. The real question is why business opposition has been so effective here [in the US]." His macro-level answers -- that a decentralized government affords businesses easier entree into government decision-making; that single-member, winner-take-all elections push campaigns toward centrist policies; that deep racial cleavages inhibited the formation of left coalitions; that strong court interventions limited labor power, and that media are dominated by the right -- are, it seems to me, correct. But Noble points us to structural conditions; our concern here is with specific actions during a discrete period. And he misses one important factor: this corporate mobilization, which would eventually find influence in both the Democratic and Republican parties (see Ferguson and Rodgers 1986), magnified its strength in some policy areas because of the ways in which its goals coincided with a culture- and religion-based mobilization that offered much to and received much from the Republican party.

This latter mobilization of the religious right was also a counter-response to events of the 1960s. Just as Moe (1984) has argued that corporations seek to create a boundary that protects their core business from the instability of the market, so too do groups of

¹⁵ As Tabb (2001, 83) writes, it is ultimately "arbitrary" what date or event we choose as marker for "the point is that in these years something we associate with globalization became evident and something we call the postwar era dominated by the national Keynesian welfare state came to an end." Castells (1980) places the first important stirrings of businesses mobilization more than a decade earlier than most, but reports that it ran into labor and political resistance it was unable to overcome until the 1970s. I have marked 1973 as the onset but could have chosen another date, or no particular date. In Tabb's sense, it is arbitrary.

people seek to shield their core beliefs, their culture, their family structures, that which is stable and familiar in their lives, from the social and economic forces of an increasingly chaotic social and economic environment. When established structures become insufficient to protect that core, the form of the protective structure, the core, or both must change. John Winthrop and his generation saw their new colony as a “city upon a hill;” in some senses the Christian Right saw America as a nation atop a mount, a shining example to the world of progress, moral order and freedom. William Bennett, for example, offered wistful, longing paeans to this lost “golden age,” while Reagan used the image in his first inaugural address. Beginning in the 1960s, however, that belief became harder to hold as the old moral order began to dissolve. In 1960, for the first time a Catholic was elected president. Cultural standards of appropriate sexual behavior began a radical change, and with it a change the structure of the family. Women in large numbers sought political and economic independence from men. In 1963, the Supreme Court ruled that forced religious observance in public schools was unconstitutional. Mass unrest and rioting associated with the Civil Rights movement shook the old racial order; order was disrupted again with anti-war protests at the end of the decade. Eastern and New Age religions emerged, and were especially popular among the young, who already displayed new understandings of sex and drug use. Protestant denominations saw declining membership, shortages of seminarians, and deep funding crises (Ahlstrom 1972, 1086). The oil crisis, financial crises in cities, deindustrialization, stagnant economic growth, rising inflation and defeat in Vietnam made notions of the nation atop a mount difficult even for the most faithful to believe. And “the group most vulnerable to these changes was the fundamentalist Protestants -- not because they were fundamentalist, but because they were by region, history, and education the group most rooted in the past, the one with the least capacity for adjusting to change” (Lipset and Raab 1981). It is possible that the Supreme Court’s decision in 1973 to legalize abortion was the last straw.

The evangelical movement had emerged earlier as a response to this transition into a "post-Puritan" age (Ahlstrom 1972, 1079), and they were able to support this movement with institutions they built early in the century, after backlash from the Scopes trial drove evangelicals, scorned and derided, from the public sphere. In this "wilderness," they began to build colleges, Sunday schools, seminaries, private schools, radio networks and later television networks, publishing houses, direct mail agencies and new churches. In addition to energetic institution-building, this budding movement was also developing a core of well-educated and well-trained seminarians, educators and intellectuals. Evangelicals mid-century returned to what Max Weber called "this-worldly asceticism." Since 1960, there have been more "special purpose" religious organizations formed than in all of the nineteenth century.¹⁶ The now-familiar litany of the Christian Right's organizational strength is the result. The Moral Majority brashly announced the entrance of this new Christian Right into electoral politics, securing between two and four million votes for Reagan. By the early 1980s, Pat Robertson was operating the fifth largest cable television company in the nation, Jim Bakker was overseeing a ministry with over \$100 million in annual revenues, and Jerry Falwell was broadcast in 172 markets. (Wuthnow 1988). By 1997, there were 1,648 Christian radio stations and 257 Christian television stations. Robertson's *700 Club* had a viewership of some two million people. In 1995, one tenth of the entire American music industry was Christian music; sixty-five per cent of all Christians listened to Christian music on radio -- and nearly three-quarters of that audience was between 27 and 45 years old, an attractive demographic for marketers. In addition to nonfiction books, a wide array of periodicals, and Christian novels, the Christian right even established its own wire service -- the Evangelical Press News Service -- as well as colleges, law schools, and, finally, think tanks, many of which were created thanks to the opportunity the Christian Coalition and other politically active religious

¹⁶ Not all of these were politically conservative, I should emphasize. As McAdam (1982) shows, for example, the expansion of the black church (along with colleges and the NAACP) in the twentieth century created a unique institutional power to advance the Civil Rights movement.

organizations seized upon by finding common cause with members of the “intellectual” Right, corporations seeking lower taxes and reduced regulation, and with issue groups such as the NRA and anti-abortion organizations (Diamond 1998; see also Diamond 1995). This cultural counter-mobilization is not, in reality, an entirely distinct movement from the corporate counter-mobilization described above; they have formed an effective political coalition and the late twentieth century victories of the Republican party were indebted to both, though plagued by the difficulties of placating both constituencies.

The Birth of the Think Tank

I will argue in Chapter Three below that there were two general kinds of relief reforms advocated in the late twentieth century, those Spencerian reforms aimed at removing perverse work incentives and those Malthusian ones that targeted perverse marriage and childbearing incentives. These are not meant to be precise categories, and most institutions incorporated elements of both the work- and woman-centered approaches to welfare reform. The American Enterprise Foundation, the Brookings Institution, the Cato Institute, and business lobbying organizations like the Chamber of Commerce tended to focus upon work -- workfare, rewarding work, making work pay. The Heritage Foundation, the Family Research Council, Empower America, and the Christian Coalition, on the other hand, focused their attentions largely upon poor women -- rewarding marriage while punishing out-of-wedlock births and reducing the incidence of abortion. The think tank has been the indispensable institution in both the work-focused and woman-focused sides of the anti-relief battle.¹⁷

Paget (1998) traces the beginnings to the day in 1969 when Paul Weyerich was accidentally invited to a liberal political strategy meeting, where he saw revealed the

¹⁷ It has been central to other successful movement campaigns as well, from those to repeal workplace and environmental regulations, weaken unions, reduce taxes for wealthy individuals and corporations, change tort laws to make it harder to sue corporations for injuries they cause, weaken banking regulations and anti-trust laws, and more (See Stefancic and Delgado 1996; Peschek 1987; Burch 1997).

possibilities to exert influence, change opinions, and re-make policy. “Weyerich now thanks the left, the Lord, and Joe Coors -- in that order -- for providing the inspiration and the wherewithal to begin building what today is known as the ‘new conservative labyrinth.’” Coors provided him with a substantial portion of the initial funds for the Heritage Foundation. Soon after Weyerich’s revelation, in 1971 Lewis Powell (whom Nixon would months later nominate to the Supreme Court) wrote in a widely circulated Memorandum that

The American economic system is under broad attack. . . [The assault] is gaining momentum and converts. . . The overriding first need is for businessmen to recognize that the ultimate issue may be *survival* -- survival of what we call the free enterprise system, and all this means for the strength and prosperity of America and the freedom of our people (in Judis 2000, 116).

Powell (Judis identifies him and Irving Kristol as the leading makers of this early history) urged a coordinated, aggressive regime of lobbying, public relations and media activism, and the long-term funding of university professors and conservative textbooks. This Memorandum “convinced businessmen that they had to become involved in national politics and in Washington policy making,” writes Judis. Kristol, too, in a stream of articles that moved from the conservative readership of *Commentary*, *Reason* and *The Public Interest* to the broader audience of the *Wall Street Journal*, the *New York Times*, and the *Washington Post*, urged corporations to respond in new ways, to fund their own think tanks as a counter-force to the Ford Foundation and others, to stop funding foundations and other charities with anti-corporate agendas, to change opinion.

By the end of the twentieth century these institutions had become central players in politics and policy, their growth nearly as dramatic as the expansion from one lone city-

wide American COS in 1877 to over 200 by 1900. In 1966, there were fewer than seventy think tanks in the US, yet by 1996 there were over three hundred active in politics (Rich and Weaver 2000). Many think tanks or lobbying organizations that took an active interest in welfare policy were created late in the twentieth century. The Heritage Foundation was founded in 1973, the Cato Institute in 1977, the Manhattan Institute in 1978 (by future CIA Director William Casey) and Empower America in 1993. Others opened their doors much earlier. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce was established in 1912 from local Chambers and, as seen above, were locally active agents in the fight against nineteenth century out-relief. The Hoover Institute was founded in 1919, the Brookings Institution was founded in 1927, the American Enterprise Institute in 1943 (by 1954 it was led by the Chamber of Commerce's William Baroody), and the Hudson Institute in 1961. Though many of these latter institutions began as "neutral" organizations of expert government advisors, they would increasingly become partisan and ideologically-centered organizations when infused with new sources of funding in the late post-War era (Allen 1992; Domhoff 1998; Rich and Weaver 2000; Weinstein 1968; Burris 1992; Peschek 1987; Judis 2000). Each of these would come to play a role in relief retrenchment.

That these organizations achieved significant influence over a broad range of policies and government decision-making processes is clear. More than thirty AEI-affiliated people occupied senior-level positions in the Reagan Administration (Peschek 1987, 27) and twelve Heritage fellows had secured administration jobs by 1984 (Allen 1992). Hoover, established "to demonstrate the evils of the doctrines of Karl Marx" was nearly bankrupt in the 1960s but after an influx of corporate donations in the 1970s rose to such heights that it provided even more appointments to the Reagan administration than either Heritage or AEI, a total of forty (Burris 1992; Allen 1992). Brookings (which in its early history opposed the New Deal) may have served as a "Democratic government-in-exile during the Nixon-Ford years," but shifted its focus to monetary policy, capital formation, deregulation, and the USSR, continuing its shift right to combat competition for

financial support from AEI (Peschek 1987; Allen 1992). Heritage “claimed that more than 60 percent of its proposals had been adopted by the [Reagan] administration” (Peschek 1987, 32) and Allen (1992) credits the structure and the rationale for the tax cuts of Reagan’s 1981 budget to economists from Hoover.

Structure

The conservative think tanks and anti-relief business organizations of the late twentieth century were a diverse lot, and others have documented their individual histories and attended to their distinct characters (see Smith 1990; Ricci 1993 for the standard histories; see mediatransparency.org and FAIR’s *Think Tank Monitor* for ongoing documentation). These organizations were no more monolithic than were COSs -- each had a somewhat different understanding of the causes of poverty and the functions of welfare, although none seems yet to have undergone the kind of evolution in thinking about poverty and its remedy that many Charity Organization Societies did over the course of their lives. Generalizations about think tanks and more traditional lobbyists like the U.S. Chamber of Commerce are harder to make than generalizations about organized charity -- there are none quite so narrowly focused upon matters of poor relief as was the early COS. The COSs, moreover, were service organizations as well as producers of policy ideas; they existed in large measure to coordinate (or limit) the distribution of aid to poor people in cities before the advent of public bureaucracies willing and able to manage such relief. Such (municipal) service-delivery concerns are not, typically, the purview of the (national and state) twentieth and twenty-first century reform organization.

Anti-relief institutions differed in their objectives, their sources of financial support, their influence in the media or among policymakers, and their effectiveness. Some, like the American Enterprise Institute, were densely “interlocked,” with many members of their Board of Trustees serving on the Boards of other policy-planning organizations or on the Boards of corporations that provided institutional funding; others, like the Heritage

Foundation, were much less densely interlocked and received relatively little of their funding from corporate sources, depending instead upon individual donations and revenue from the sale of their policy products (see Domhoff 1998; Allen 1992). Some institutions were not research-producing think tanks at all but long-standing lobbying groups like the U.S. Chamber of Commerce that would become active in anti-relief efforts. I will have some occasion to attend to these differences among twentieth century anti-relief organizations, but will not focus upon them: my concern is with the similarities among those institutions that were active in the fight to reform welfare, with their common sources of financial support, and with their combined influence on welfare debate and policy.

Mission and Action

We might well ask, as with the Charity Organization Societies, what did late twentieth century think tanks do? What were they for? As I have said, they differed in some ways from the COSs, and targeted their influence much more broadly than their nineteenth century counterparts. The think tanks served many functions: they helped reconcile diverse class interests and coordinate activism, they formulated policies to further those interests and provided the arguments to market them, they disseminated those arguments and policies, and they helped obscure the class interests of the institutions' benefactors and clients. The next few pages will discuss each of these in turn to highlight the ways in which think tanks' institutional strengths would become vital resources in anti-relief campaigns.

First, think tanks coordinated interests and activism (and the financial and human resources needed for each). Charity Organization was born, at least in part, as an attempt to manage and restrict the public and private charity of an increasingly complex urban landscape -- only such explicit control could alleviate the broader concerns and threats to emerging corporate power. Similarly, in the post-war world of the late twentieth century in which finance, capital and labor markets were becoming increasingly more integrated and

interdependent, "the issues facing the corporate rich [were] too complex and the economy [was] too big for new policies to arise naturally from common interests" (Domhoff 1998, 125). Thus, different policy-planning organizations were used by different religious and corporate interests to help to identify when their interests were in common and to pursue their own agendas when their group interests (as labor intensive versus capital intensive firms, for example) differed from other sectors of the capitalist caste. Weyerich and other founders have made it clear that they intended such results; other business interests likely began to fund certain institutions only when they discovered that they could serve as useful mechanisms for channeling their policy desires toward policy solutions.

Post (1997) and Allen (1992) talk of this burgeoning family of conservative think tanks as either a capitalist or conservative "policy planning network." Peschek (1987, 9) observes that such institutions help "convert problems of political economy into manageable objects of public policy," they "help translate class interests into state action." Put even more simply, they help achieve consensus, not only within but even across organizations, so that by the late 1970s "ultraconservative" and more moderate policy-planning organizations were finding common ground (Burris 1992). Useem (1984, 3), focusing upon a more narrow "inner circle" of corporate leaders like those of the Business Roundtable, suggests that "this politically active core gives coherence and direction to the politics of business. . . those few whose positions make them sensitive to the welfare of a wide range of firms have come to exercise a voice on behalf of the entire business community." Think tanks are less central for Vogel (1989), merely a "catalyst," accelerating the celerity with which neoconservative ideas were disseminated. Domhoff (1998) adds that they offer corporate interests a forum for exchanging and developing ideas and plans, a training ground for advocates, and a recruiting ground for new operatives.

None of these descriptions excludes any other, and there is truth to each of them. The anti-relief think tanks that concern us served to do each of these things, in various ways.¹⁸

Think tanks provided arguments and ideas, and then they helped translate them into public policy proposals, occasionally even drafting legislation. Alpert and Markusen (1980) argue that such organizations (Brookings especially, they report) perform “brokerage functions between private capital and the state” producing “policy, ideology and plans.” More prosaically, their resident scholars wrote books, journal and magazine articles, briefing papers for politicians and their staffs, op-ed pieces, white papers and policy analyses, press releases, lectures, pamphlets. Some, like AEI or Empower America, produced radio and television programs (Burris 1992). They maintained mail and e-mail distribution lists, fax alerts, briefing services, and banks of policy experts who were made readily available for television and newspaper reporters in need of quick, concise information. Other organizations, like Virginia’s Leadership Institute, taught budding conservative journalists and politicians “the art of selling conservatism as compassion” through sophisticated techniques of “political technology” and operated a Job Bank to place its graduates in position on Capitol Hill (Harden 2001), while the Heritage Foundation provided Washington, D.C. journalists “free training in computer-assisted research and reporting” through its Center for Media and Public Policy to “bridge [the] chasm between conservatives and the media” (Quintero 2002).

Think tanks effectively disseminated their policy proposals, depending largely upon the media instead of direct influence with lawmakers (see Allen 1992; Smith 2000) in order to influence the general public and through them policymakers. Like the COS’s “scientific” philanthropy, the trappings of the think tank (white papers, conferences, books, etc.)

¹⁸ This should not be interpreted to suggest that corporate elites necessarily have common interests, or that they can conspire to pursue a single agenda; indeed, the point here is quite the opposite, that corporate-class interests are sufficiently diverse across policy issues that some institution or network of institutions was necessary to reconcile those interests and enable individual actors and institutions to act together, to pool their resources, to further their class interest in the political realm (for this debate see Poulantzas 1969; Milliband 1969; Carnoy 1984, 104ff).

legitimated their staffs and members as experts, helping to more effectively influence the media and through them public opinion. The most effective institutions timed the release of their publications to coincide with particular political transitions or events. Thus, AEI provided the incoming Reagan administration with a comprehensive briefing book, *Mandate for Leadership*, that was “favorably received” and well used (Burris 1992); in 2000 it prepared another in its series on Presidential Transitions for the Bush II team. Heritage helped draft The Contract with America, which included the Personal Responsibility Act among its provisions, and Ferguson has written that foundation head Richard Mellon Scaife “had as much to do with the Gingrich Revolution as Gingrich Himself” (in PFAW 1996). During the first 100 days of the 104th Congress, Heritage testified before Congress more than 100 times and held over 100 briefings for members, helping them compile data and marshal arguments to support their proposals (Callahan 1999a). Gingrich called Heritage “without question the most far-reaching conservative organization in the country in the war of ideas” (in Swomley 1996). Cato has been and remains among the leaders of the Social Security privatization debate. The Manhattan Institute was a key source of policy ideas for New York Mayor Giuliani, and helped design elements of its workfare program (Callahan 1998). The Bradley Foundation was a large funder of Hudson’s Wisconsin welfare reform advocacy, and had a formal role in implementing its W-2 program (Cursor 1997). It helped secure a spot for Charles Murray on the W-2 “task force” (Wilayto 2000). That they provided Republican politicians with staff, as noted above, further magnified their influence. As the Wittenbergs report (in Burch 1997), “When the Heritage Foundation’s Stuart Butler said. . .that the White House would soon present a paper on the privatization of welfare, he knew what he was talking about. The person in charge of writing the report at the White House was his co-author of a book on the subject, and the person assisting the White House expert was a woman who worked for Butler until she joined the administration.”

Stefancic and Delgado (1996, 137ff) have attributed the comparative success of right-wing think tanks over their liberal counterparts to their focus on a relatively small number of issues; their careful selection of issues for “thematic coherence”; their greater financial resources; their more expert use of media; their shrewd use of resonant language and sharp sound-bites; their better funding and cultivation of affiliated “experts”; their ability to tell better stories; their refusal to compromise on ideas or policy; and a long-standing practice of intentionally disseminating materials in such a manner as to make their reach and import appear greater than warranted (that is, think tanks would simultaneously distribute a report to congresspeople and multiple media sources, encourage journalists to produce stories based upon the report, while placing their own experts’ editorials in newspapers, all of which the think tank would then forward to the elected official, who might conclude that the report identified an important policy idea gaining popular or elite support).

The budgets of conservative think tanks grew much more quickly than those of moderate organizations from 1965 to 1983 (see Allen 1992). This is important too: Rich and Weaver (2000) demonstrate that much of the significantly greater presence of conservative over liberal think tanks in national newspapers (*NYT*, *WSJ*, *Washington Post*, *Washington Times*, *USA Today*, *Christian Science Monitor*) can be explained by their budgets and presence in D.C. And the policy planning organizations who were given most attention here are those most often cited in national newspapers. As Rich and Weaver (2000) summarize:

Notably, the newspapers tend to rely on the same think tanks as sources. The Brookings Institution is the most commonly cited in all except the identifiably conservative *Washington Times*, where it is the fifth most commonly cited. The Heritage Foundation and the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) are ranked in the top three in all but the *Washington Times*,

where AEI is fourth. Think-tank citations in all of the national newspapers show a striking concentration in just a few organizations, with the frequency of mention of the top three think tanks cited ranging from 32.3 percent (New York Times) to more than 41% percent (USA Today) of total think tank citations.

Progressive media watchdog group FAIR produced studies as part of its *Think Tank Monitor* that confirmed Rich and Weaver's findings: in 1999 conservative think tanks received 46% of all citations in major newspapers and television programs, "centrist" organizations received 45% (Brookings falls into this category in their study)¹⁹ and progressive think tanks (for example, the Economic Policy Institute and the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities) received 9% of all citations (see Hussein 2000; Dolny 2000). Smith (2000) also documents this "conservative advantage." Dolny (2001) found that right-wing think tanks were cited by major newspapers, television and radio programs twice as often as "left-leaning" organizations. And as Paget (1998) noted of an earlier study, "Corporate funders were rarely identified, even when they made up more than a quarter of the [conservative] institute's budget. By contrast, when the Economic Policy Institute (EPI) was quoted, both its ideological predisposition (liberal) and its funding source (roughly one-quarter of its budget is from labor) usually were identified." These contemporary conservative policy planning organizations developed, while perhaps not a monopoly, certainly an overwhelming influence on the ways in which public policy issues were reported and interpreted. In three decades of anti-welfare activism they redefined poverty and welfare in the eyes of many policymakers and much of the public. And as

¹⁹ I include Brookings among conservative organizations, although Smith and others categorized it as without consistent ideological identity; across all issues, that may be true, but is not true for welfare policy. And, as a former Brookings man who moved to AEI said of both: "It's probably true that both are moving to the middle, but the middle is moving to the right" (Peschek 1987, 31).

Schattschneider (1960, 66) reminds us, “*the definition of the alternatives is the supreme instrument of power*” [italics in original].

Finally, think tanks obscured the class-based nature of their activity. As Piven (1999a) observed, think tanks and foundations “allowed business itself to remain nearly invisible” while offering an effective forum for disseminating their preferred policy prescriptions. Smith (2000, 193) showed that a unified business position could have negative effects upon its ability to influence policy, so “Business elites therefore might more effectively shape public opinion by funneling money into like-minded think tanks than by advocating positions themselves.” The kind of influence conservative think tanks had over late century welfare policy will not necessarily appear as testimony before Congress (though in the case of the PRA it does) or campaign contributions -- this is a war of *position* not a war of *maneuver*, not a direct attack upon the institutions of power but a battle for a kind of hegemonic dominance, the dominance of ideas and interpretations (see Carnoy 1984, “Gramsci and the State”). It is therefore a mistake to minimize the impact of conservative interest groups as does Weaver (2000, Ch. 8). Moreover, as Domhoff argues, a key power of some policy-planning and lobbying organizations (especially the Business Roundtable) is “veto power” or its “preemptive” power (see Lindblom 1977 and Block 1977) to keep items off the policy agenda -- the lack of proactive activity, of lobbying, would therefore be no indication of lack of influence. Schattschneider (1960, see Ch. 2) a generation ago noted the reluctance of corporate power to lobby in any public forum for fear of “enlarging” or expanding the “scope of [political] conflict.” An aura of institutional independence can be essential, which may be why many think tanks have increasingly sought to derive income from book sales and honoraria for speeches. As Allen (1992) put it, “conservative policy-planning organizations function very much like

traditional interest groups, but have the advantage of not being perceived by policymakers as interest groups.”²⁰

Leadership and Funding

Leaders of the twentieth century policy-planning organizations had much in common with the leaders of the nineteenth century charity organizations. Over 93% of those who in 1990 sat on two or more Boards of twelve key policy-planning organizations (including AEI, Brookings, Heritage, Hoover, NAM, the Business Roundtable, and the Chamber of Commerce) were top corporate executives (half from manufacturing and mining concerns, 18% from banking and finance, and 20% from utilities, retail and other). Half were from the northeast (fully 20% from New York City alone), one-quarter were from the midwest and the balance was split between the west and south. Just over half belonged to an “elite social club”; 44.9% had an “elite” undergraduate education; while ten per cent were listed on the social register (Burris 1992). In 1994 and 1995, only two of AEI’s thirty Trustees were *not* corporate executives; almost 60% of those 28 led Fortune

²⁰ This is a theme in certain think tank scholarship, that policy-planning organizations have supplanted political parties and created a new form of interest group; see Abelson 1995 for a concise summary and a discussion of foreign-policy-focused think tanks unattended to here.

1000 firms; only 28% of Heritage's Trustees did.²¹ While 64.6% of AEI's funding was from Fortune 500 firms, 48.9% of Heritage's was (Post 1997). The overwhelming majority of those who occupied leadership positions among the twelve organizations Burris (1992) analyzed represented big business; he argued that even the Chamber of Commerce came to be dominated by big business.²² Smith (2000) found that in instances when the Business Roundtable and Chamber of Commerce took public positions on issues, they agreed 96% of the time in the 1970s; in the 1980s they agreed 95% of the time; and they were in 100% agreement on all issues in the 1990s.

Most of the funding for conservative anti-relief institutions came from the same few sources, many of which were created after the 1970s: the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation (which was not fully endowed until 1985), John M. Olin Foundation, Smith Richardson Foundation, the Scaife family foundations (Sarah Scaife Foundation, Carthage Foundation, and Allegheny Foundation), J.M. Foundation, the Koch family foundations (Charles G., David H., and Claude R. Lambe, which mostly promote free-market and

²¹ AEI and Brookings were among the policy-planning organizations most densely "interlocked" with corporations and the corporate elite (Domhoff 1998; Callahan 1999a; Burris 1992; see also Allen 1992). The Heritage Foundation and NAM were among the least interlocked (Domhoff 1998; Burris 1992). Yet, by widespread accord, Heritage was among the most active (and effective) organizations in the debate over the PRA and its reauthorization. This would seem to present a problem for my general argument, that business (in both eras) used policy reform organizations to help disseminate their policy prescriptions and effect their policy goals. It would seem that they did not so use Heritage (or not to the extent that they used other organizations). This is correct, and is so for a reason: Heritage did not largely make work-centered anti-relief arguments but advocated woman- and family-focused changes. Corporate interests specifically objecting to the labor market effects (or work ethic insult) of welfare invested in organizations like AEI. While the Heritage Foundation received its early funding from many of the same foundations that supported the AEI, from early on it sought significant portions of its funds from individual donations, possibly because it was so politically active. By 1986, it was raising some 37% of its budget from individuals (Allen 1992). It represented a different set of anti-relief interests -- hence its stronger ties to the religious right than to the neoliberal right -- which afforded it the freedom (or created for it the necessity) to focus more intensely upon the sexual and marital aspects of welfare reform. Similarly, the ultraconservative nature of the NAM -- once affiliated with the John Birch Society among others, it lost influence as it grew more conservative, reported Burris (1992) -- made it a less useful vehicle for interests that were seeking to build consensus among and across corporate interests and to use such institutions to persuade the public that their analysis is "objective" and "scientific," which is essential if they are to be credible and persuasive (Lewis 2001). This helps account for why it ceded a role in welfare reform to the Chamber (see Chapter 4 below).

²² Domhoff (1998, 57, 193) has similarly argued that the NFIB suffered the same fate and came to be dominated by big business, not the smaller concerns it was purported to represent.

libertarian agendas through Cato and similar institutions), and the Adolph Coors Foundation. Because of their consistent long-term funding of many of the same organizations, Bradley, Olin, Smith Richardson and Sara Scaife came to be known as “the four sisters.” Their influence and commitment have been all the more striking given that they are not among the country’s wealthiest private foundations (Covington 1997).

Allen (1997) revealed a dense network of twelve most-active foundations and ten most-active policy-planning organizations. His data also reveal that the Heritage Foundation received almost 91.5% of its total funding from 1977-1986 from among these twelve sources; the figures were 51.6% for AEI, 90.8% for the Manhattan Institute and 85.2% for the Hoover Institution. For the same period, 9% of all American foundations provided 35% of all foundation grants to these institutions. Moreover, more than half of all individual contributions in 1980 to Heritage and AEI were from executives of large corporations (Post 1997).

Conservative philanthropists didn’t shift their funding priorities in ways that funders on the left or center traditionally had done. This is important. A steady stream of ample, reliable funding allows the institution to devote its resources to influencing policy, not to fundraising. Thus, a Center for Policy Alternatives Report shows that AEI, the American Legislative Exchange Council (established by Weyerich in 1973 to influence State Legislators; its membership by 1996 comprised one-third of all state legislators (PFAW 1996)) and Cato had combined resources 400% greater than the Center for Policy Alternatives, the Institute for Policy Studies, the Economic Policy Institute and the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, the rough institutional equivalents on the left. That is a failure of foundations to contribute large amounts of operating support to left-leaning research and advocacy organizations, not a measure of their scarce resources. Moreover, conservative foundations focused on the entire “knowledge production process” (Paget 1998), from research and its dissemination to media watchdogs like *Morality in Media* and *Accuracy in Media* and law firms and legal foundations like Pat Robertson’s American

Center for Law and Justice, the Washington Legal Foundation, the Pacific Legal Foundation and the Center for Individual Rights (Swomley 1996). They helped build and fund a network of 70 conservative college newspapers, too. In the mid-1990s left-leaning foundations contributed less than one-tenth the amount to four leading journals -- the *Nation*, *The Progressive*, *Mother Jones*, and *In These Times* -- that right-wing foundations contributed to *The New Criterion*, *National Interest*, *Public Interest*, and the *American Spectator* (PFAW 1996). In 2000, the income of Brent Bozell's conservative Media Research Center was eighteen times that of FAIR (Scherer 2002). Importantly, right-leaning foundations were more willing to fund "goodwill" (that is, public relations) than were left-leaning ones (Lowry 1999) and did not usually fund direct service programs; the result, as People for the American Way (1996) commented, was that "progressive groups, local and national, sought to fill gaps in an ever more frayed social safety net while conservative groups invested their resources in further shredding that net."²³

The same foundations also funded state-level policy-planning organizations. In 1973 Weyerich founded ALEC, supported largely by corporate contributions (Callahan 1998). ALEC's own literature noted that their "credo is that business can, should, and must be an ally of legislators" and that it "provides for the private sector to work in a one-on-one relationship with state legislators to develop public policies that are pro-growth, pro-business and pro-freedom." It shared office space with Heritage Foundation, whose own Project on Federalism and the States extended the foundation's activity to state-level policies. ALEC, in turn, created The Madison Group, a national coordinating organization of state-level foundations and think tanks (NCRP 1991). Founded in 1992 with Olin, Bradley and Koch money, the State Policy Network had by 2001 forty member organizations, including the Pacific Research Institute (California), the Mackinac Center for Public Policy (Michigan) and the Heartland Institute (Chicago), with combined 1999

²³ Hall (2000) argued that even the foundation associations, the Council on Foundations and the Independent Sector, had undergone a "dramatic" turn to the right and focused increasingly upon "professional and corporate issues."

budgets of \$6 million, much from hundreds of corporate donors seeking to influence state policy in the manner in which they have influenced national policy (Callahan 2001). The Heartland Institute -- created by local businessmen as a means of influencing local policy and advocating free-market policies -- went so far as to name its newsletter *Intellectual Ammunition*. Heartland had affiliates by 1991 in Cleveland, St. Louis, Kansas City and Milwaukee (NCRP 1991; PFAW 1996). As one Pennsylvania state policy organization director said to the Heritage Foundation in 1989, "Ideas are ammunition, the bullets of a political movement, but let us not forget that to fire those bullets effectively we need a full arsenal of weapons at the state level, just as we need them at the federal level." Family-focused groups have also founded state-level policy organizations. Bauer and Focus on the Family's James Dobson helped establish them in thirty-eight states by 1995 (Stone 1995).

Anti-welfare activism was only part of the work of these twentieth century policy-planning organizations, unlike the relative single-mindedness of the COSs. But this dense network of well-funded institutions offered corporate and financial interests powerful means of access to policymakers and the means to dominate public and elite debate about a range of issues, poverty and welfare among them, and the tools with which to help turn them into policies that would benefit them. That is why this mobilization is important to understanding the welfare retrenchment of the late twentieth century. Weyerich said (in Covington 1997, 21) that "Ideas have consequences only when they are connected to action." The next chapter will explore the ideas at the heart of anti-relief campaigns, while Chapter 4 will then describe the policies created when those ideas were combined with action.

CHAPTER THREE

The Rhetoric of Reform

If we can restore the language of morality, reviving such words as illegitimacy and promiscuity, we may also be able to revive such concepts as discipline and self-discipline. Perhaps we may even be able to revive such archaic ideas as virtue and vice. And if we can remoralize social discourse, we may be able to remoralize social policy.

-- Gertrude Himmelfarb, Harvard Journal of Law and Public Policy, 1996

This chapter compares the arguments that COS and think tank reformers made about relief and argues that their rhetoric, which tapped powerfully into long-standing American cultural beliefs, played an important role in policy. It shaped debate and policy itself. It made politically palatable and publicly acceptable harsh new treatment of poor Americans because it demonstrated that such reforms were, in truth, only the harsh medicine necessary to finally cure the poor. Any shrewd advocate for any reform will strive to develop a persuasive rhetoric to help further his or her cause, one presumes, but because the institutional resources anti-relief reformers had at their disposal were so great, as seen above, both their rhetoric and their political activism came to achieve unusual influence. This is rhetoric in the old-fashioned sense, what the Concise Oxford Dictionary defines as "language designed to persuade or impress."

As we shall see, there is an unmistakable consistency to the logic of reform and the rhetoric used to pursue it politically in both of these Victorian Ages, despite the century of advancing social science that separated them. There is a reason for the consistency. The late nineteenth and late twentieth centuries were periods of great inequality and great instability. To sustain (and exacerbate) such division in a democratic society required some cohesive rationale. Through the COSs and the think tanks, reformers offered such a rationale, one which argued, among other things, that true compassion required that one allow the poor to suffer their fate, a fate usually deemed to be of their own making. There

was less need of such public explanations for class division in the brief interlude of the 1930s to the 1970s because American society was less evidently split between the fit and the unfit -- the so-called Keynesian consensus describes a brief time in which democracy, however imperfectly, expanded and the booming economy managed to distribute its bounty so that wages and living conditions of working people and the poor improved rather steadily (Amin 2000; Tabb 2001; Castells 1980). Not so in the periods under consideration here. Gains were, at best, unevenly distributed, and the immiseration of the many could reasonably be seen to be the price paid for the opulence of the few. Regimes that seek to sustain such division must find ways either to repress dissent or to control it by re-interpreting social "facts" in ways that justify or require what seem to be unfair outcomes. This is part of what Hofstadter (1944, 204) is getting at when he tries to explain the Gilded Age rise of social Darwinism by suggesting that

changes in the structure of social ideas wait on general changes in economic and political life. In determining whether such ideas are accepted, truth and logic are less important criteria than suitability to the intellectual needs and preconceptions of social interests. This is one of the great difficulties that must be faced by rational strategists of social change.

That Andrew Carnegie identified himself as "Spencer's disciple" and that William Graham Sumner was wildly popular among businessmen are measures of the usefulness of such ideas in the Gilded Age (Fine 1956): "Successful business entrepreneurs apparently accepted almost by instinct the Darwinian terminology which seemed to portray the conditions of their existence" (Hofstadter 1944, 44). As a Standard Oil lawyer said, there is poverty only "because nature or the devil has made some men weak and imbecile and others lazy and worthless, and neither man nor God can do much for one who will do nothing for himself" (Fine 1956, 98). Malthusian arguments about the ways in which

imposing strict moral codes and other sanctions upon the poor enriched them and all of society served similar functions in both eras under consideration here. But unlike Carnegie, reformers of the nineteenth century Charity Organization Societies or of twentieth century think tanks were not strict disciples of Spencer or Sumner, nor of Malthus: they selectively used these and other ideas to help formulate a “rationalization of the *status quo*” (Hofstadter 1944; Fine 1956) and an assault on the protections afforded poor and working people. This chapter traces anti-relief arguments and rhetoric from Malthus to Murray to show how anti-relief reformers created a rationale for how the only way to truly help the poor was to abandon them -- a rationale that well-served their benefactors.

Suffering is Compassion

Bronislaw Geremek (1994, 222) wrote in his account of poverty in the middle ages that “History abounds in examples of schemes to thrust happiness upon men by force.” Arguing that offering assistance to poor people only deepens their poverty and insisting that economic self-sufficiency, even if it results in suffering, is the route to moral health and a rise from poverty, charity reformers in the late nineteenth and late twentieth centuries sought to thrust happiness upon poor people by taking away what meager cash, food or fuel was available to them. “We should be willing to suffer ourselves and see our poor friends suffer to save them from this fearful permanent evil” of out-relief, urged Josephine Shaw Lowell (in Waugh 2001). Besides, wrote Lowell, “we exaggerate the importance of physical suffering” for “hunger and cold are not so pressing or so sharp as they are represented to be” and we “must accept the statement that there has been nothing eaten for twenty-four hours rather as a fanciful way of describing the general poverty than as the exact truth” (Stewart 1911, 144-5). Jacob Riis (1890, 191) suggested that “There is enough of real suffering in the homes of the poor to make one wish that there were some effective way of enforcing Paul’s plan of starving the drones into the paths of self-support: no work, nothing to eat.” Marvin Olasky (Ebeling 1995, 64) reminds us that *compassion*

is from the Latin *with suffering*. Even Mother Teresa agreed: “I think it is very beautiful for the poor to accept their lot, to share it with the passion of Christ. I think the world is being much helped by the suffering of poor people” (in Wagner 2000, 115). Suffering, it would seem, is Compassion.

This is not intuitive, and the Charity Organization Societies of the late nineteenth century had to fight hard to convince the public, especially the old-money elites and the churches, of the evils of any almsgiving apart from their system of rigorous investigation and moral education. So too did the think tanks of the late twentieth century struggle to overcome the ideas that seemed prevalent especially in the 1960s that poverty was a blight on democratic society, that it could be alleviated and that state intervention was an essential component in doing so. Such contradictory ideas, popularized by Henry George and Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward* (1888) in the late 1800s and later disseminated in milder versions by John Kenneth Galbraith in *The Affluent Society* (1958) and by Michael Harrington in his influential chronicle of poverty, *The Other America* (1962),¹ are little attended to here. That is not to suggest that there was no opposition to anti-relief rhetoric, for there were dissenting voices across both eras. But those pro-relief ideas and voices did not dominate in relief debates, in large part because of the achievements of the mobilization described in the previous chapter, although the conclusion of this chapter will explore the contradictory and complicating strains in COS thought that would eventually lead them toward abandoning their opposition to outdoor relief (see also Chapter 6).

Emulating the Past in the Present

“Researchers might return to a discourse about poverty more like that of a century ago,” suggested Lawrence Mead (1994, 339), when “The debate chiefly was about the mentality or morality of the poor and how they might be reformed by special institutions,

¹ It may have been Dwight MacDonald’s (1963) *New Yorker* review of Harrington and of Galbraith that created the perception that *The Other America* was a radical work. In fact, culture-of-poverty interpretations pervade it, offering faint echoes of Robert Hunter (1904) or Jacob Riis (1890) (see e.g. p 10-11).

such as the work house or the mental hospital.” He advocated a “new paternalism” (Mead 1993; 1997; 1998) that would compel upright behavior. Gertrude Himmelfarb (1994) agreed: “contemplating our own society, we may be prepared to take a more appreciative view of Victorian moralism -- of the ‘Puritan ethic’ of work, thrift, temperance, cleanliness; of the idea of ‘respectability’. . .of the reverence for ‘home and hearth’; of the stigma attached to the ‘able-bodied pauper’” and of the spirit of voluntarism. “There is no welfare crisis. There is, however, a moral crisis,” she wrote elsewhere (Himmelfarb 1996). The Hudson Institute’s Joel Schwartz (2001; see also 2000) wrote that “The virtues of diligence, sobriety, thrift, and familial responsibility were unhesitatingly commended to the poor in the mid-nineteenth century. . . [and] are actually more applicable today as remedies for poverty than they were when the moral reformers first espoused them.” Marvin Olasky (Ebeling 1995, 63) insisted that “During the nineteenth century, a successful war on poverty was waged by tens of thousands of local, private charitable agencies. . .[they were the] platoons of the greatest charity army in American history.” Elsewhere (Olasky 1992) promised that “Many lives can be saved if we recapture the vision that changed lives up to a century ago.”

That “vision” is readily identified: In 1834, the Rev. Charles Burroughs proclaimed that “poverty is the consequence of willful error, of shameful indolence, of viscous habits. . . It is a misery of human creation, the pernicious work of man, the lamentable consequence of bad principles and morals” (in Katz 1989, 13). Or, as researcher and COS member Robert Hunter said (1904, 63): “The sins of men should bring their own punishment, and the poverty which punishes the vicious and the sinful is good and necessary.” Neither is a far cry from Cotton Mather’s admonition that “For those who indulge themselves in idleness, the express command of God unto us is that we should let them starve” (in Trattner 1994, 21). We have returned to much of this century-old discourse: compare William Slocum’s 1892 address to the National Conference on Charities and Corrections with a 2000 Heritage Foundation report by Robert Rector:

Indiscriminate almsgiving is a crime against society. It is opposed to the divine order. It saps the very foundation of the self-respecting home. It destroys the best element of true society. It destroys citizenship and those active powers of the human soul that put it in sympathy with the divine ideal. . . almsgiving, while it may, in a way, express charity, has not the essence of charity. We are also agreed in recognizing that pauperism is a disease, that it should be destroyed, and that whatsoever helps to develop this disease is wrong.

One-way handouts usually hurt those they are intended to help. True charity begins by requiring responsible behavior from the beneficiary as a condition of receiving aid. True charity seeks to generate in the recipient the virtues, commitment, and self-discipline necessary for success in society, rather than passively subsidizing ever-escalating levels of social pathology. . . what is needed is transformation in the realm of ideas, a change in the current philosophical foundations that govern both government and private aid to the poor.

The late twentieth century “remoralization” of welfare, after a post-World War II Keynesian interlude in which state intervention was less contested, is much like its late nineteenth century analogue, when Malthus, Spencer and others helped justify withdrawing support for poor people and leaving them to the voluntary, private sector; there has been a twentieth century return to laissez-faire that legitimizes claims that the economic and political spheres of social life must be kept separate, and that the state should do little or nothing to improve the natural laws of the market through which, if left alone, rationally self-interested action will aggregate and inure to the public good. Failure is earned, poverty

is natural, reproduction among the poor should not be encouraged, and poor relief impedes the market's wise allocation of penalties and rewards. It legitimizes a passive, weak government and unchecked accumulation and exploitation. It makes human suffering an inevitable, even natural occurrence, and buttresses arguments that efforts to ameliorate it can only make it worse, creating paupers and dependents. "Until poor people are willing to assume responsibility for the consequences of their actions, there is nothing anyone, or any program, can do to help them" (Lee in Ebeling 1995, 89). The success of the *Personal Responsibility Act* of 1996 was thus often judged in the press and by policymakers by how many people were driven from the relief rolls, not by whether their poverty had been reduced or their standard of living improved, just as the Charity Organization Societies and their predecessor agencies proclaimed their effectiveness by demonstrating that with each passing year they offered assistance to fewer people than the year before. Dependence and pauperism were the evils to be remedied, not poverty; "the focus must be on changing and saving people" (Gingrich 1996), to find ways to overcome the "fundamental incompetence" of poor women (Mead 1996). Only the poor themselves can ameliorate their own poverty and the state can only do them more harm. In some ways, Charles Murray replaced Thomas Malthus as the prophet of the age.

Malthus, Spencer, Sumner and Relief

The rhetoric that late nineteenth and late twentieth century reformers wielded was not their invention -- they employed tropes that, as we have seen, had centuries-long pedigrees. But the central logic of both eras' reformers can nonetheless be traced to less distant philosophy -- sharply argued and widely circulated theories that were read, praised and used by anti-relief reformers. Thomas Malthus, Herbert Spencer and William Graham Sumner provided anti-relief agitators with the rhetorical tools they needed to justify their preferred policies, tools that were picked up by others seeking similar relief changes in the

late 1900s because they remained effective weapons consistent with American political culture.

Malthus' *Essay on the Principle of Population* makes this assertion: while population increases geometrically (1,2,4,8,16, etc.), the food supply able to be produced by that population will increase only arithmetically (1,2,3,4,5,6,7, etc.). In the first *Essay* of 1783, only "vice and misery" could check population growth to bring it more in line with food production; by the second edition of the *Essay* in 1803 he had added the possibility that "moral restraint" might also help resolve the dilemma -- that is, people could choose not to marry and not to reproduce until they could support their brood. To encourage such restraint, his preferred solution to these "laws of nature" was the gradual abolition of the Poor Laws (that is, of poor relief); and that no child born either within marriage nor any "illegitimate" child "should ever be entitled to parish assistance." While men must be encouraged never to marry unless able to support a family, and such couples must be encouraged, even morally obligated, not to bear children unless able to support them, he proposed no restraint of law to compel such behavior (and opposed all forms of contraception). Instead, "To the punishment therefore of nature should he be left, the punishment of want. . . All parish support should be denied him; and he should be left to the uncertain support of private charity. He should be taught that the laws of nature, which are the laws of God, had doomed him and his family to suffer for disobeying their repeated admonitions; that he had no claim of *right* on society for the smallest portion of food beyond that which his labour would fairly purchase." Should children die as a result, it is of little social consequence, for "The infant is, comparatively speaking, of little value to the society, as others will immediately supply its place." Any such short-term harms, he argues, are of little consequence, for they will further the long-term good of society. Poor relief creates "tyranny, dependence, indolence, and unhappiness." Suffering, it would seem, is compassion.

Malthus thus offers one rationale for abolishing poor relief: the uncontrolled reproduction of the lower classes can only be checked by their own moral restraint or by them suffering the consequences of their actions; therefore, while we may offer moral education in hopes of instructing the poor in certain virtuous behaviors, we must also remove carriers of their "misery" -- the Poor Laws -- that enable them to bear children they cannot support, which harms all of society. As an aid toward teaching moral restraint so that one might depend less upon "vice and misery" to control the population of the poor, Malthus sanctioned a system of public education, despite the danger that "common people would be put in a capacity to read such works as those of Paine, and that the consequences would probably be fatal to government," as a means of "increasing the prudential habits and personal respectability of the lower classes of society."

Herbert Spencer (1843) offers a different rationale for the abolition of relief. Government, for Spencer, has few legitimate functions: "to protect person and property -- to prevent the aggressions of the powerful upon the weak -- in a word, to administer justice. This is the natural, the original, office of a government. It was not intended to do less; it ought not to be allowed to do more." Thus, all other activity -- waging war, religious support, health care, trade restrictions or promotion, colonization, education and, especially, charity -- however benevolent their aims, will invariably cause harm, for

the laws of society are of such a character, that natural evils will rectify themselves; that there is in society, as in every other part of creation, that beautiful self-adjusting principle, which will keep all its elements in equilibrium; and, moreover, that as the interference of man in external nature often destroys the just balance, so the attempt to regulate all the actions of a community by legislation, will entail little else but misery and confusion.

To intercede, to act on behalf of poor people, is in fact to harm them. "Adversity, is, in many cases, the only efficient school for the transgressor." True justice requires inaction. Poor relief is especially pernicious, for how "Can any individual, whose wickedness and improvidence has brought him to want, claim relief of his fellow-men as an act of justice?" This is "oppression," says Spencer, not justice. Moreover, he observes, the poor rates unduly burden other working men, making them the worse off. Spencer also asserts that "charity will always be more extensive, and more beneficial, when it is voluntary" and that private relief is more effective than public relief because "Forced contributions rarely appeal to the kindly feelings." "It may reasonably be concluded, therefore, that were there no poor law, the rich would be more charitable, and the poor more provident. The one would give more, and the other would ask less." These have been influential arguments, despite Spencer's failure to offer evidence for the self-regulating, equilibrium-seeking nature of society or economy he posits and, just as critical, his failure to acknowledge that government inaction preserves and thus privileges the existing distribution of power -- inaction is not justice, it is discrimination.² Yet Spencer writes, "a poor law, though apparently a boon to the working classes, is in reality a burden to them."

Malthus and Spencer provided two lines of argument, two kinds of rationales for abolishing relief -- for Malthus, it was a way to prevent overpopulation and the resulting immiseration of all society; for Spencer, it freed the natural operations of the market from the interference of government intervention, resulting in the greater long-term good -- the means of a family's survival must come from the labor of that family, not from the taxes of others and the largesse of government. Malthus worried about the family, about women, and about sex. Spencer worried about men, about work, and about government.

William Graham Sumner, claim Hofstadter (1944, 51) and Fine (1956, 79), is the most influential proponent of nineteenth century Spencerian Social Darwinism; this is only

² The argument, made in the context of *Lochner*-era U.S. Supreme Court decisions, is Sunstein's (1987).

half the truth, for in Sumner the Malthusian strain is quite as pervasive as the Spencerian, and the two combined to form a potent rationale for refusing public relief to the poor and for “warning” them off (that is, sending them to other towns and cities in search of work or relief), and a reasonably consistent defense of inequality as justice and suffering as necessary for the future health of society. Lowell and her like-minded colleagues stood firmly behind such principles, although they often sought to temper their language and to evade some of the grimmer implications (this they accomplish, in part, by allowing for the interference of private charity); that is, while the COSs were never expressly Spencerian, neither were they associated with adherents of the Social Gospel, who were the chief anti-Darwinists of the Gilded Age, or with radical reformers like Henry George, whose *Progress and Poverty* (1879, Book II) included an extended argument against Malthus.

Sumner’s comfort with Malthusian principles is clear. “All experience proves that monogamy, pure and strict, is the sex relation which conduces most to the vigor and intelligence of the race” (Sumner 1880). As remedy for “The constant tendency of population to outstrip the means of subsistence,” he offers two potential solutions that go beyond Malthus’ options of letting vice and misery work their course or of moral education. One might emigrate to where the burden of population is less and where employment is in more plentiful supply (see also Sumner 1881), or the methods of food production might advance to outstrip the Malthusian law. The latter, he concludes, is unlikely. The former, while to be encouraged, has its limits. Therefore, what remains is only the competition of the natural order under conditions of liberty -- that is, the “security given to each man that, if he employs his energies to sustain the struggle on behalf of himself and those he cares for, he shall dispose of the product exclusively as he chooses.” That is, liberty is property. In this he is in full accord with James Madison (see *Federalist 10*), for whom the most vital function of government is to protect the differing natural faculties of each man so that he might use those faculties to acquire property. For Sumner, like John Locke, Men get in return from nature what they contribute to her:

she grants her rewards to the fittest. . . If we do not like it. . . we can take from the better and give to the worse. We can deflect the penalties of those who have done ill and throw them on those who have done better. We can take the rewards from those who have done better and give them to those who have done worse. We shall thus lessen inequalities. We shall favor the survival of the unfittest, and we shall accomplish this by destroying liberty. Let it be understood that we cannot go outside of this alternative: liberty, inequality, survival of the fittest; not-liberty, equality, survival of the unfittest. The former carries society forward and favors all its best members; the latter carries society downwards and favors all its worst members (Sumner 1880, 164-5).

What Madison called faculties Sumner calls capital (including material goods as well as intellectual abilities and inherited money and talents); capital is the *sine qua non* of a just society, and to redistribute capital would destroy the natural order, would remove from Man those incentives to attain it (Sumner 1880; 1883). His explanation is a union of Malthus and Spencer that provides a “scientific” basis for the gross inequality and concentrations of capital in the Gilded Age (it does so again today). “Every law or institution which protects persons at the expense of capital,” he writes,

makes it easier for persons to live and to increase the number of consumers of capital while lowering all the motives to prudence and frugality by which capital is created. Hence every such law or institution tends to produce a large population, sunk in misery. All poor laws and all eleemosynary institutions and expenditures have this tendency. On the contrary, all laws and institutions which give security to capital against the interests of other

persons than its owners, restrict numbers while preserving the means of subsistence. Hence every such law or institution tends to produce a small society on a high stage of comfort and well-being (Sumner 1880).

Competing economic forces will, if unencumbered, restore “equilibrium.” To those who are not well-suited to these conditions, sufficient “distress” will encourage them either to emigrate (restoring a Malthusian equilibrium between population and food supply) or will see “their ambition and energy awakened,” (attaining a fitter position in the Spencerian world). “For the rest the solution is famine and death, with a social regeneration through decay and the elimination of that part of the society which is not capable of being restored to health and life” (Sumner 1880). Charity for Sumner is worse than foolish. “If you give a loaf to a pauper you cannot give the same to a laborer. . . [and] Every particle of capital which is wasted on the vicious, the idle, and the shiftless is so much taken from the capital available to reward the independent and productive laborer.” Therefore, he cautions, “The next time you are tempted to subscribe a dollar to a charity. . . I do ask you to stop and remember the Forgotten Man [the working man] and understand that if you put your dollar in the savings bank it will go to swell the capital of the country” which can then be used for productive purposes (Sumner 1883).

Nineteenth Century Reformers and the Laws of Nature

These are ideas that are pervasive in the writings and speeches of nineteenth century organized charity. Lowell wrote in 1884 (p. 68) that “while the acknowledgment is made that every person born into a civilized community has a right to live, yet the community has the right to say that incompetent and dangerous persons shall not, so far as can be helped, be born to acquire this right to live upon others. . . the only way is for the community to refuse to support any except those whom it can control -- that is, except those who will submit themselves to discipline and education.” Lowell (1887, 138) later wrote that “we

must start with the fundamental principle that all relief of bodily wants by outsiders is in itself bad"; she approvingly quotes Drummond, who said in "Natural Law in the Spiritual World" that "any principle which secures food to the individual without the expenditure of work is injurious." She notes that to avoid this "paupers and paupers' children may be re-educated and redeveloped into self-respecting men and women," as Malthus recommended. This is the center of Charles Loring Brace's *The Dangerous Classes* (1880) and the core of his comprehensive re-education and re-acculturation program for children, institutionalized in the Children's Aid Society and made famous by its "orphan trains." Trattner (1994, 118) reports that Brace read Darwin's *Origin of Species* thirteen times. Another reformer (Evans 1889, 27) captures much of the argument at once:

Too often it will be found that the root of the evil lies in the characters of the poor themselves, -- in habits of laziness, shiftlessness, intemperance, or vice, which have reduced them to an irregular and meagre subsistence. To such people, almsgiving, far from being the universal remedy, is a simple aggravation of the trouble. For demand and supply are the law of life as well as of trade. In Nature's economy, strength tends to appear where it is called for; and strength will degenerate into weakness when another supplies the needs one could and should supply for one's self. When, therefore, the lazy man finds that he gets on just as well without working, he will be less and less inclined to work. So of intemperance; for the drunkard who finds that, when he fails to provide for his family, his prosperous neighbors do, is to place a direct premium on drunkenness. Why should such people care to work to buy their children food and clothes, when they can get them for nothing for the asking? Moreover, alms to the improvident do not even relieve their material needs, for by no device can we permanently stand between a man and his own character.

Others can never take as good care of him as he could take care of himself; and indiscriminate charity is by its very nature insufficient and uncertain, -- it first encourages a man to be idle, and then keeps him on the verge of starvation.

Another commented simply, "Harsh as the law of survival of the fittest may appear, it is the law. . . .When we see a wretched beggar it is easy to give him a penny to still our own conscience and to go away with a false and degrading sense of virtue. We have, however, done no good. Our duty is to look him up, to look after him, even to expose him if necessary" (Hall 1892, 120-1). Or, as Sumner (1880) himself put it, "A law may be passed which shall force somebody to support the hopelessly degenerate members of a society, but such a law can only perpetuate the evil and entail it on future generations with new accumulations of distress." Elsewhere (1883) he makes the implication clear: "It may shock you to hear me say it, but when you get over the shock, it will do you good to think of it: a drunkard in the gutter is just where he ought to be. Nature is working away at him to get him [and any potential progeny] out of the way." As Lowell's East Side Relief Committee put it, "When industry and trade are natural, the only safe course for the working people is to accommodate themselves to their circumstances, or to change them by their own action. The efforts of philanthropists to compensate, by artificial means, for irregularity of work or low wages can only result in mischief" (Stewart 1911, 419).

Indeed, the impact of Spencer (and Sumner) was profound, and such statements are commonplace from reformers.³ Not only did they offer moral cover for the suffering of the poor while the COSs denied aid to all but a chosen few, but they freed reformers from the

³ I cannot resist one last example, this from Hyslop (1894, 8), who wrote that "adjustability to environment is the first duty of every man as the condition of survival, and if he will not practice it voluntarily, or in obedience to changes of economic influences, the only recourse open to us in dealing with him is to increase the severity of the pressure upon him until he does yield to this demand upon him. The labor test exerts this pressure, and will show whether the man has those qualities which entitle him to survival, and to the sympathy of society, or whether his moral inertia puts him beyond the pale of redemption by ordinary means."

old church-based indiscriminate charity by freeing them also from an intellectual commitment to the idea of divine descent and, therefore, divine obligations (Hatheway 1995). In an already chaotic world, the arrival of evolutionary theory shook the very foundations of theological thought, yet it also served a vital political function by bridging the gap between laissez-faire market ideology and cultural and religious impulses for social welfare; it was a "scientific" means to reconcile and justify the instability that seemed to be spreading through all aspects of life. One's obligation, and society's, to "the poor" was limited, since Nature herself now sanctioned their misery. Spencer said "if to be ignorant were as safe as to be wise, no one would become wise." Good and bad are thus inseparable, one unable to come to be without the other -- and Man cannot change that. "The truth is that the social order is fixed by laws of nature precisely analogous to those of the physical order," and that order requires that the unfit not survive to breed more -- even in a perfect, unimpeded state, then, nature requires suffering (Sumner 1880). As Darwin himself wrote in *Descent of Man*, "we build asylums for the imbecile, the maimed, and the sick; we institute poor-laws. . . .thus, the weakest members of civilized societies propagate their kind. No one who has attended to the breeding of domestic animals will doubt that this must be highly injurious to the race of man" (in Caudill 2001, 253).

Nineteenth century reformers told cautionary tales wrapped in such notions, stories that would be familiar to Ronald Reagan, who made famous the Welfare Queen, lolling about, living her life on the dole and breeding a nest of predatory, dependent paupers; said Reagan, "she has eighty names, thirty addresses, twelve social security cards and is collecting benefits on four nonexistent deceased husbands. . . . Her tax-free cash income alone is over \$150,000" (in Albelda 1996, 92).⁴ At the NCCC of 1877 (p. 81-95), R.L. Dugdale presented a paper on "The Jukes," a multi-generational tribe of degraded, drunken, illegitimate and licentious paupers who he said had in 75 years together cost the

⁴ Ziliak (1996a; 1997) presented evidence in the late 1990s that "the average duration of a spell on outdoor relief has not increased substantially since the 1820s, and by some measures it has decreased," remaining at around two years or under for three-quarters of all recipients.

public well over one million dollars. Inspired by the Jukes, at the NCCC of 1888 (p. 154-9) Indiana's Oscar McCulloch presented his own study, "Tribe of Ishmael: A Study in Social Degradation." These paupers and their descendants, he found, "underrun society like devil-grass." Both Dugdale and McCulloch lingered on the effects of sex and alcohol with a prurient fascination that seems all too familiar among the neo-puritans of the late twentieth century. Brace (1880) too told lurid rich tales of the multi-generational paupers he encountered. Lowell (1879, 193) reported of poorhouse inmates that "These women and their children, and hundreds more like them, costing the hard-working inhabitants of the state annually thousands of dollars for their maintenance, corrupting those who are thrown into companionship with them, and sowing disease and death among the people, are the direct outcome of our system. . . . To begin at the beginning, what right had we to permit them to be born of parents who are depraved in body and mind? What right have we today to allow men and women who are diseased and vicious to reproduce their kind?"⁵

That the arguments have no clear empirical support has been politically irrelevant, at least in part because the Victorians old and new have succeeded in couching their arguments in bold, troubling narratives intelligently keyed into cultural assumptions about rights; self-reliance and upward mobility; sex, marriage and race; the culture of poverty; the pernicious nature of a too-powerful government; and the perverse incentives or unintended consequences of relief itself. Below I offer a further comparison of the language used across both the late nineteenth and late twentieth centuries along these central themes, and show what uses such rhetoric served and continues to serve.

⁵ By 1877, Lowell had launched what would be a ten-year fight to establish "reformatories" for women -- to separate them from the male population, to relieve local officials from the care of "Vagrant and degraded women" and to "provide work for them, as appropriate, instead of allowing them to degrade themselves and infect others in almshouses." The reformatories she proposed would incarcerate for up to five years women under 30 arrested for misdemeanors (petty larceny, public drunkenness, prostitution) or who had borne more than one illegitimate child where they could "be taught to be women." Even if she could not reform them, she said, she could at least protect society from them, and keep them from reproducing (Stewart 1911, 89ff).

Rights and Relief

Reformers wanted to ensure that poor relief remained charity, not a right, and that cash would be offered only as a last resort. Lowell argued that outdoor relief “has none of the redeeming features of private charity, because there is nothing personal or softening in it” and that “Private charity can and will provide for every case that should be kept from resorting to public sources of relief” (Lowell 1884, 59). Rector (2000, 332) wrote that “Private charity is morally superior to government welfare because it depends on voluntary contributions rather than coerced extractions from the taxpayers. . . . But in both the private and public sector, there is an almost universally accepted philosophy of welfare that is permissive and corrupt. It emphasizes ‘one-way’ material handouts, treats beneficiaries as victims of injustice, and rewards dysfunction.” Horace G. Wadlin in the Twenty-Fourth Annual Report of the Massachusetts Bureau of Statistics of Labor wrote that “Relying upon the municipality to do things which may be accomplished through persistent individual effort tends to become chronic, weakens character, and might easily be carried so far as to cause serious social evils” (in Feder 1936, 131). Or as Lawrence Reed, President of the Mackinac Center for Public Policy put it more recently, “The superiority of [private charity] is now approaching the status of undisputed, conventional wisdom: the private sector exacts a toll from the inefficient for their poor performance, compels the service provider or asset owner to concern himself with the wishes of customers, and spurs a dynamic never-ending pursuit of excellence -- all without any of the political baggage that haunts the public sector as elements of its very nature” (in Berkowitz 2001). Robert D. McGonnigle warned of public relief and the pauper (in Ellwood 1900, 96): “He begins to think he has a right to it, that there is no disgrace attached to receiving it, and that any examination on the part of the poor-law officials is impudence.” Throughout both eras reformers emphasized the virtues of private relief over public charity in part because private relief was discretionary, and allowed its distributors to act upon moral judgments about who would and who would not receive their benevolence.

But there is more to this concern about establishing the right to relief. Rights have power beyond their legal status -- "Rights pronounced by courts become possessions of the dispossessed. . . legal language, like a song, can be hummed by someone who did not write it and changed by those for whom it was not intended" (Minow in McCann 1992, 733). A legally established or culturally accepted right has power, even if its legal obligations remain unenforced. To confer rights is to concede power. And in 1970 the Supreme Court in *Goldberg v. Kelly* had come dangerously close to identifying a property right in welfare, as Yale law professor Charles Reich (1964) had urged. Justice Brennan, in a footnote to the majority opinion, wrote that "It may be realistic today to regard welfare entitlements as more like 'property' than a 'gratuity'. Much of the existing wealth in this country takes the form of rights that do not fall within traditional common-law concepts of property. . . We have come to recognize that forces not within the control of the poor contribute to their poverty." "Public assistance, then, is not mere charity, but a means to 'promote the general welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity.'" But, he continues, "We, no less than the dissenters, recognize the importance of not imposing upon the States or the Federal Government in this developing field of law any procedural requirements beyond those demanded by rudimentary due process." The implications, had such a right been conferred, are profound.

To deny the right to relief grants government the authority to refuse it and by implication to compel work. The tension between social or even economic rights and the obligation of self-sufficiency and independence from government is heightened by welfare -- poor relief is, after all, the means by which government permits one to trade independence for dependence, work for leisure, competition for something softer.⁶ Wilson (1985a, 297) captures my point with this observation: "During the 1960s, a large number of persons who once thought of being on welfare as a temporary and rather embarrassing

⁶ It is an interesting oddity that the Heritage Foundation in its efforts to privatize Social Security argued that its benefits should be deemed the legal property of workers (see Anand 1998).

expedient came to regard it as a right that they would not be deterred from exercising,” which, he correctly observes, contributed to a large rise in relief rolls (see Piven and Cloward 1971). Wilson continues: “In short, the character of a significant number of persons changed.” Why is this a measure of *character*? Because for Wilson and for those Victorian reformers and revivalists under discussion here the receipt of relief is itself a mark of moral failure; to accept it without shame is corrosive, to accept it as a right is even more pernicious, for it seems to negate both the value of hard work and the promise of upward mobility central to conservative (neo-)liberal doctrines. To welcome relief without shame accepts the legitimacy of government intervention in the private sphere of the free market.⁷

It is thus with good reason that Malthus singled out Paine as a threat to society; he constitutes a threat to Spencer’s world, too. Spencer claimed that “We cannot say to a man, ‘So much of the substance you have acquired by your labour is your own, and so much belongs to your fellow-creatures.’ We cannot divide the right. Either it is a right, or it is not. There is no medium. We must say yes or no.” Paine refutes such absolutist notions of property, by understanding, as Spencer and twentieth century economist Milton Friedman (see 1962) do not, that political society must contain notions of a common good and of interdependence. “Separate an individual from society,” Paine wrote in *Agrarian Justice* (1795), “and he cannot acquire personal property. . . . All accumulation, therefore, of personal property, beyond what a man’s own hands produce, is derived to him by living in society; and he owes on every principle of justice. . . a part of that accumulation back again to society from whence the whole came.”⁸ Just as such ideas gained power during the Jacksonian Era through the Workingman’s Movements (see Bussiere 1997), so did they gain prominence in the Gilded Age, perhaps never more widespread than in Edward Bellamy’s popular novel *Looking Backward* (1888). Julian West, upon finding himself in

⁷ For discussion of relief recipients’ general failure to employ the language of rights see Gilliom 2001, Ch. 3; Sarat 1990).

the year 2000, asks Dr. Leete, his guide, much about what has transpired during his long sleep (the first question of import from West's mouth is "what solution, if any, have you found for the labor question? It was the Sphinx's riddle of the nineteenth century, and when I dropped out the Sphinx was threatening to devour society"). When asked about what charity was provided in 2000 for people incapable of self support, the Doctor replies, "Who is capable of self support? . . . There is no such thing in a civilized society as self-support." He describes the "complex mutual dependence" of a society in which, just as when a brother is sick, you care for him, so too for all others. West replied, "the cases are not parallel. There is a sense, no doubt, in which all men are brothers; but this general sort of brotherhood is not to be compared, except for rhetorical purposes, to the brotherhood of blood, either as to its sentiment or its obligations."

"There speaks the nineteenth century!" said the Doctor.

Here lies the core of Bellamy's vision and the great threat to Spencerian and Malthusian constructs: familial obligations of support that Josephine Shaw Lowell and Mary Richmond and the COSs generally lauded, that Scottish divine and charity reformer Thomas Chalmers praised as "natural" charity, could be extended to all those in a community, obliterating distinctions between deserving and undeserving and threatening the legal foundations for great concentrations of wealth. In Bellamy's 2000, there are removable sidewalk coverings, sheltering all, to protect pedestrians during rainstorms. Instead, in the nineteenth century, Leete notes, the private umbrella ruled the day, each person carrying his own, "giving his neighbors the drippings." He said he thought paintings of such scenes must be meant as satires. Late in the novel, a sermon on the nineteenth century inspired by West's appearance proclaims that "It was the sincere belief of even the best men at that epoch that the only stable elements in human nature, on which a social system could be safely founded, were its worst propensities. They had been taught

⁸ Paine also proposed, in *The Rights of Man* (1792), a comprehensive welfare state: he advocated doubling poor relief and establishing children's pensions, public education, old age insurance, public works programs and veteran's pensions while imposing high luxury and inheritance taxes.

and believed that greed and self-seeking were all that held mankind together, and that all human associations would fall to pieces if anything were done to blunt the edge of these motives or curb their operation. In other words, they believed. . . that the anti-social qualities of men, and not their social qualities, were what furnished the cohesive force of society.” This is the competition that Spencer demands, and the rationale for a politics and economics that sees only harm in relief provision.

Self-Reliance and Upward Mobility

Economist John Kenneth Galbraith (1958, 290) wrote regarding the Protestant work ethic that

what we regard as the Puritan inheritance was soundly grounded on economic circumstance. In a country that was being carved from the wilderness, thrift and labor were the obligations of everyone, for they conserved and enlarged the supply of goods which sustained life itself. And the central or classical tradition of economics was more than an analysis of economic behavior and a set of rules for economic polity. It also had a moral code. The world owed no man a living. Unless he worked he did not eat. The obligation thus imposed required him to labor on his own behalf and therewith on behalf of others. Failure to work, even when it could be afforded, was offensive to what came to be called the Victorian, but could as well have been named the economic, morality.

Emblematic of this Victorian economic morality were the novels of Horatio Alger, which loomed large in the relief narratives of the late nineteenth century (see Alger 1868, 1890), and they too fulfilled a discrete function, demonstrating that any industrious young man could rise to join the better classes. Hoffman (1907, 135) wrote that “Most of our

poverty is of a temporary character, even among the foreign element. . . with abundant opportunity for work at good wages, for practically every able-bodied person. . . there is very little actual need of any considerable amount of poor relief.” Said Francis Wayland, of Yale (NCCC 1877, 118): “It must be remembered, that in this country, it is, fortunately, very rare that employment furnishing some remuneration cannot be obtained by all who are really anxious to secure work.”

Alger’s novels do not live up to their myth, however, for it is not hard work alone that enables the poor street urchin to rise to commanding heights, though that is important. Rather, it is the improbable coincidence and blind luck, an almost mystical and magical luck, that are always central elements (see also Trachtenberg 1982). Despite the much-touted example of Andrew Carnegie and his rise from poverty to power-broker, as Miller (1949) demonstrated, Carnegie was atypical, and corporate and political leaders were, with rare exception, native-born, Protestant, of British heritage, and the sons of businessmen or professionals. American class mobility in the nineteenth century has been often exaggerated, and continues to be. Mobility declined after the 1960s, and in 2000 was no higher in the US than elsewhere, and our “escape rate” from poverty is among the lowest of advanced nations (Dreier et al. 2001).⁹

But the rags-to-richest mythology is also the power of the Tocquevillian myth of equality of condition, of a classless society; it is the power of the myth that America had no feudal past, or that we have never had a class-based labor movement (see Orren 1991; Forbath 1989), and remains a chord in the civil society refrain, from Tocqueville himself to contemporaries like Amatai Etzioni or Robert Putnam. If we believe that there is truly an equality of opportunity, after all, then any inequality of outcomes becomes a problem of individual failure. If we can believe in true equality, then any government interference is

⁹ And never mind that before Alger came to New York to work and live at the Five Points Mission with the lads of Brace’s Children’s Aid Society he resigned his ministry for having committed, as he later confessed to Henry James, the “abominable and revolting crime of unnatural familiarity with *boys*” (O’Connor 2001; italics in original).

inappropriate favoritism; it can only be a neutral arbiter by refusing to intervene. Justice is Inaction. Work alone is salvation, or as Gilder (1981, 79) put it, "The only dependable route from poverty is always work, family and faith."

While he concedes that work may be difficult to obtain and offer few rewards, Mead (1996) believes nonetheless that "employment is a school of virtue" and has argued (1994, 323) that "poverty may be due not so much to a lack of opportunity, as to a lack of enforcement of social norms such as the work ethic." He notes elsewhere (1990, 49) that "Reluctantly, policymakers have begun to accept that work must be enforced as are other civilities such as obedience to the law or tax payment. . . the solution to the work problem lies in *obligation*, not in freedom. . . The great question is how to get more of the employable poor to participate in the economy, in any kind of job, not how to improve those jobs." Olasky (Ebeling 1995, 69) has made the same argument, that true freedom is hard work, that in the nineteenth century "Freedom was the opportunity for a family to escape dire poverty by having the father work long hours and a mother sew garments at home." As Murray (1994a, 186) has observed, "to sustain [upward] mobility, the United States has depended on the willingness of the poor to make investments -- of time, energy, psychic commitment, and money. Because these investments are being made by people with very little to spare in the first place, investing means that an already difficult existence must be made even more difficult." New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani argued that the Job Centers he proposed to replace welfare offices would transform the city and former welfare recipients, because instead of offering cash or Medicaid or food stamps, "the first thing we try to do is to find you a job, because we really care about you, we really love you and we really understand the human personality a lot better than the people who brought us dependency" (NYT 7/25/00). Suffering is Compassion, Obligation is Freedom, Liberty is Responsibility, Work is Love. Or as the words over the medieval Hamburg workhouse proclaimed: "by work I am nourished, by work I am punished" (Geremek 1994).

Sex, Marriage and Race

Other anti-relief arguments focused more upon marriage and sex. Charles Murray, Robert Rector and George Gilder, while certainly concerned about the work effort of poor women and men, built much of their rhetoric about public poor relief upon concerns that better echo Malthus than Spencer. "The paramount goal of welfare reform," observed Rector (2000) of the Heritage Foundation, "was to reduce illegitimacy and restore marriage." In fact, one of the Contract with America's proclaimed welfare goals was to "discourage illegitimacy and teen pregnancy by prohibiting welfare to minor mothers," and the very first words of the PRA's Title 1 declared that "Marriage is the foundation of a successful society." These are not new goals of American poor relief policy (as I have said, is not these ideas that were new in reform periods, but the success of them that was). Some Philadelphia public officials in 1827 "charged that public cash went largely to mothers of illegitimate children." In 1835 the city eliminated pensions to women because they "fostered dependence and vice and discouraged women from taking up wage labor jobs outside their homes" (in Clement 1992, 42-3). AFDC and its replacement TANF have imposed strict restrictions on women's behavior in an attempt to force them to act "responsibly" and raise their children as policy dictated they ought to. An AFDC affidavit from 1950, for example, required the recipient to affirm that "I also agree to raise my children to the best of my ability and will not knowingly contribute or be a contributing factor to their being shamed by my conduct. I understand that should I violate this agreement, the children will be taken from me" (Patterson 1994, 88). "Man-in-the-House" rules (which forbade women on relief from living with men who might offer a means of

support) were enforced by "midnight raids," in which caseworkers would appear unannounced to seek out men.¹⁰

Lowell wrote, when urging the passage of a state law that would have committed women with two illegitimate children to a women's reformatory, that "the very character of the women must be changed. . . The unhappy beings we are speaking of need, first of all, to be taught to be women; they must be induced to love that which is good and pure, and to wish to resemble it; they must learn all household duties; they must learn to enjoy work; they must have a future to look forward to, and they must be cured, both body and soul, before they can be safely trusted to face the world again" (NCCC 1879 in Goodman 1983, 661). Myths of women's dependence and reproductive profligacy persisted: Gilder (1981, xix) said, "contrary to all claims of the left, female-headed families are mostly a disaster, incapable of disciplining boys or of escaping poverty. . . their problem was not chiefly poverty but a breakdown of the moral codes of civilized society."

Murray wrote (1994, 27-29) that "Illegitimacy is the central social problem of our time, and . . . its spread threatens the underpinnings of a free society. . . the main reason for scrapping welfare is to reduce the number of babies born to single women." He has argued that the supposed incentives of welfare benefits themselves have encouraged out-of-wedlock pregnancies (in an attempt to get more money) and have largely been responsible for the creation of poor female-headed families. As William Bennett told the House Ways and Means Committee in 1995, "Welfare may not cause illegitimacy, but it does make it

¹⁰ This, as Piven and Cloward (1971) observed, may have been as much to limit men's access to women's AFDC money as to monitor their sexual behavior, but nonetheless there has been an "historic pattern in social policy of rewarding and punishing women based on their compliance with gender roles, misinformation on AFDC's impact on work, families, and the economy, and, finally, society's persistent pattern of blaming women when things go wrong" (Abramovitz 1994, 18). Research by Edin and Lein (1997) and Newman (1999) demonstrates that while work often offers less security and fewer rewards than welfare, many women worked nonetheless "because it made them feel better about themselves" (see also Wilson 1997; Piven 1998b). Yet Kane (1987, 414) argues that enforced work takes away choices from women who already have few, and may make them reluctant to work even if they would have chosen to do so in the absence of coercion, and one post-PRA study shows that women who left relief for work before the PRA earned more than those who left after it took effect (Cancian et al. cited in Blank and Schmidt 2000).

economically viable. It sustains it and subsidizes it. And what you subsidize, you get more of. Welfare is illegitimacy's economic life-support system" (in Weaver 2000, 151). Traditional Values Coalition lobbyist Andrea Sheldon said during the welfare debate that if any proposed bill didn't squarely address illegitimacy, "then you don't have anything" (Zoroya 1995). Sawhill (2001a) offers an expressly Malthusian perspective: "There are two solutions to this problem. One is to encourage these young women to marry the fathers of their children (assuming the fathers are willing). The other is to get them to delay childbearing until they are older and married." Murray wrote (1994, 31) that "welfare for single mothers has been destructive beyond measure, and should be stopped forthwith." The hysteria over reproduction and marriage has traveled a line from Malthus and Sumner and Brace to Murray and Gilder and the Heritage Foundation in the present.

There's more typically at work in these arguments, too, and matters of race are often connected with them. "There is an additional characteristic of women who are at most risk of giving birth to children out of wedlock: they generally have low intelligence" said Murray (1994, 30). "AFDC evolved into the *bête noir* of the social welfare system. By the fifties it had become embarrassingly, outrageously clear that most of these women were not widows. Many of them had not even been married. Worst of all, they didn't stop having babies after the first lapse. They kept having more. This had not been part of the plan. The most flagrantly unrepentant seemed to be mostly black, too" (Murray 1984, 18). Others have well described the ways in which the AFDC rolls became in the late 1960s identified with black women and how that contributed to its political vulnerability (see Quadagno 1994; Brown 1999; see also Schram 2000). The perceived racial composition of the rolls also affected the ways in which scholars on the left would respond or fail to respond to the assault on poor relief later launched by the right. As Wilson reported, it began with Daniel Patrick Moynihan's 1965 report "The Negro Family: A Case for National Action." Moynihan reported that 25% of all black marriages ended in divorce, that 25% of all black births were "illegitimate," that 25% of all black families were female-

headed, and that these factors had led to a rise in AFDC rolls, which no longer rose and fell in concert with black male unemployment rates as they had in the past (Moynihan reprinted in Rainwater and Yancey 1967, 43-58).¹¹ The roots of these problems for Moynihan could be traced to the lingering effects of slavery and Jim Crow laws, which effectively excluded men from the workforce; the disruption of family and community social patterns that came with black migration from the south to northern cities; and unemployment. These forces served to weaken the role of men in families, which was dangerous, he said, because it placed female-headed families "at a disadvantage in a patriarchal society." (This point Gilder would come to emphasize above all others.) But it was unemployment Moynihan cited as the greatest threat. As he said in a 1964 conference, "the biggest question is, will the Negro community itself get pulled apart by the problems of unemployment? It would seem to us to be absolutely devastating, and they are not Negro problems, they are American problems generally, but their differential effect on the Negro is potentially disastrous" (in Rainwater and Yancey 1967, 22).

The report was widely perceived, as was Lewis' culture-of-poverty thesis (see below), as placing the blame for poverty among blacks on blacks themselves, and an infelicitous phrase helped cement that perception: "There is much evidence," Moynihan wrote, "that a considerable number of Negro families have managed to establish themselves as stable, effective units living according to patterns of American society in general. . .[and] there is no one Negro community. There is no one Negro problem. There is no one solution. Nonetheless, at the center of *the tangle of pathology* is the weakness of the family structure" [italics mine]. When the *New York Times* first discussed Moynihan's report, it did not include its analysis of the economic roots of the problem. When the *Wall Street Journal* weighed in it asked "isn't the next task to enlighten even the most downtrodden Negro to the middle class outlook?" By an August 1965 Evans and Novak

¹¹ These were not novelties of the twentieth century. As Goldin (in Clement 1992, 36) reported, in Philadelphia from 1790 to 1860 fully 15% of all households were headed by unmarried women -- the figures were 31% for poor blacks and 21% for poor Irish.

article, black and liberal “readers in Washington and New York could find their worst fears confirmed. . . The government was seriously entertaining a wild report that placed the causes of ghetto problems in the Negro family and not in unemployment or any other institutional sources of deprivation” (Rainwater and Yancey 1967, 142). As Wilson argued (1985, 544), the furor over the Moynihan Report made many left-leaning researchers skittish, resulting in a dearth of sophisticated analyses attempting to correlate race and poverty; into this void stepped a host of conservative analyses that offered explanations where the left had none. Another effect of the Moynihan Report was to reinforce white stereotypes of blacks’ inherent inferiority, their inability even to raise their families in a civilized manner. Thus another excuse surfaced not to offer comprehensive support -- unless they alter their own pathological lifestyle, what good will assistance do anyway? Murray later carried the Moynihan Report one step further in a 1993 article in the *Wall Street Journal* in which he warned of “The Coming *White* Underclass” (see Easton 1994; *italics mine*). It was a renewed Malthusian terror of overpopulation by the unfit.

Gilder (1981, 82) has written that

the problem is neither race nor matriarchy in any meaningful sense. It is familial anarchy among the concentrated poor of the inner city, in which flamboyant and impulsive youths rather than responsible men provide the themes of aspiration. The result is that male sexual rhythms tend to prevail, and boys are brought up without authoritative fathers in the home to instill in them the values of responsible paternity. . . . In poor communities, it might be said, all time is present time, and capital -- in its human form of work effort combined with education and savings -- does not adequately accumulate to provide income and wealth.

Gilder, in fact, focuses much more upon the behavior of men (black men, typically) than do other anti-relief agitators. "The key problem of the welfare culture is not unemployed women with illegitimate children," he writes. "It is the women's skewed and traumatic relationships with men and boys. In a reversal of the usual pattern in civilized societies, the women have the income and the ties to government authority and support. The men are economically and socially subordinate." Worse, "All programs addressed to relieve the condition or upgrade the employability of welfare mothers will only ensconce more fully these welfare 'queens' on their leisured thrones and render the men still more optional, desperate, feral and single." They need to be "tamed by marriage." Not that women are blameless. In fact, most efforts to force their employment are doomed, he says, because "these women are slovenly, incompetent, and sexually promiscuous." What's more, "the very idea that women with small children should work outside the home is perverse" (Gilder 1995; compare Devine 1904, 44 and Feder 1936, 136). Gilder is important precisely because he puts into explicit language what other reformers do not; they are more politic, but within their more genteel language seem to lurk ideas at little remove from Gilder. And Gilder is at little remove, ultimately, from the logic of Malthus.

The Culture of Poverty

Still others, like Himmelfarb, Olasky and Schwartz, include both marriage and work arguments as part of a plea for a return to Gilded Age or Victorian virtues. All point to a culture of poverty or an underclass (though for each it poses special dangers and is caused by special factors), and the connection with Spencer is inescapable. To identify a separate culture of poverty is to begin to define a class of the unfit, and for Spencer, the "survival of the fittest" was also the "law of conduct and consequence" (see Fine 1956, Ch. 2). Today we call it *personal responsibility*. The failure of poor people to assume responsibility for their own poverty and to take action to remedy it is one theme in

nineteenth and twentieth century poor relief politics: the state cannot help them, they must help themselves. And it is their very culture that must change.

Oscar Lewis (1968) famously crafted a catalogue of some seventy traits that mark a poverty culture, including an absence of participation in institutions (and a distrust and criticism of them); low income, poor and overcrowded housing and a lack of privacy; lack of property, savings, food reserves and cash; hatred and fear of the police; low marriage rates; a “present-time” and fatalistic orientation; territoriality; the “absence of childhood as a specifically prolonged and protected stage in the life cycle”; early sexual activity; high abandonment of wives and female-centered families; an overriding authoritarianism and belief in male superiority; feelings of marginality, helplessness, dependence and inferiority; as well as among its members a “weak ego structure,” sexual identity confusion, a lack of impulse control, and a “tolerance for pathology.” Thus, some arguments go, the inability or unwillingness of the ghetto poor to change these culturally transmitted pathologies is the chief cause of their high rates of violence, out-of-wedlock birth, welfare dependency and poverty. In Malthusian terms, we must educate them to “moral restraint.” Schwartz (2000) would say that we must educate them to the “three cardinal virtues” of “diligence, sobriety and thrift.” Failing that, we must abide by the natural law and abandon them to suffer the consequences of their own actions; this may seem like “tough love” indeed, but it is in their interest. This culture of poverty notion was widely promulgated in the late twentieth century but distorted in the process, popularized by such works as Ken Auletta’s *The Underclass* (1982), and it became as common as “the cycle of poverty” as a rhetorical shorthand for describing an immobile and usually black (and usually dangerous) intergenerational ghetto class sustained by welfare payments.

The idea of a separate culture among poor people was not new with Lewis nor was it original to Banfield’s 1970 *Unheavenly City* or even his 1958 study, *Moral Basis of a Backward Society*; even the phrase pre-dates them both. Hunter (1904, 41) reports that George K. Holmes described “an enormous culture bed of poverty.” The Head of the US

Census in 1897 said that "pauperism is largely voluntary. . . those who are paupers are so far more from character than from condition. They have the pauper trait; they have the pauper brand" (in Patterson 1994, 21). Riis observed (1890, 2) that "while the forces for good on one side vastly outweigh the bad -- it were not well otherwise -- in the tenements all the influences make for evil. . . they are the hot beds of the epidemics. . . nurseries of pauperism and crime. . . [they] turned out in the last eight years a round half million beggars to prey upon our charities. . . above all, they touch the family life with deadly moral contagion" and "the truth is that pauperism grows in the tenements as naturally as weeds in a garden lot. A moral distemper, like crime, it finds there its most fertile soil. All the surroundings of tenement-house life favor its growth, and once it has taken root it is harder to dislodge than the most virulent of physical diseases. The thief is infinitely easier to deal with than the pauper, because the very fact of his being a thief presupposes some bottom to the man." Hunter observed the same lack of alienation that Lewis would observe: "paupers are not, as a rule, unhappy. They are not ashamed, they are not keen to become independent, they are not bitter or discontented. They have passed over the line which separates poverty from pauperism" (Hunter 1904, 3). For Hunter, pauperism "like parasitism" was "a disease of character," a natural illness that marked the poor as a special class of the sick, the addicted or the parasitic.

Disease metaphors are common in descriptions of the underclass and the unfit. Kusmer (1973, 661) calls it "the rhetoric of contagion."¹² Said Almy (1900, 138), "Pauperism is far too contagious a disease to be tolerated with safety. When once contracted, it becomes rapidly virulent, and the epidemic spreads from room to room in a tenement and from house to house in a street." William Slocum told the 1892 Conference that "pauperism is a disease, that it must be destroyed" (NCCC 1892, 211). Moreover, "the presence in the community of certain persons living on public relief, has the tendency

¹² See Schram and Soss (2000) for its twentieth century cousin, a discourse of "disorder, sickness and infantilism."

to tempt others to sink to their degraded level,” for it is “infectious,” observed Lowell (1894, 66). Brace (1880) wrote that “When this disease of pauperism is fairly mingled in the blood of children, their condition is almost hopeless.”

Recipients are animals, too, for “As vultures flock to the carrion, drunken and shiftless paupers crowd the cities having the largest poor-fund. They are all entitled, they think, to a share, and they want it” (Nill et al. 1891, 42-3). Alfred Crozier of Grand Rapids said that “Instead of finding employment for the poor woman who begs for temporary help, you give her alms. It is easier, and perhaps cheaper. But you have poisoned her soul. Her children are now taught lies by their mother, and sent out under fictitious names to forage on the public. You have converted that once happy though poor home into a nest of paupers, breeding like vipers, and multiplying their accursed species” (NCCC 1897, 156). Levi Barbour of Detroit told the NCCC (Nill et al. 1891, 43) that “A swarm of bees, it is said, when removed to a tropical clime, learn that winter never comes, and soon cease to lay up a store of honey. So the pauper, learning that there is a fund for his support, basks in the sunshine of constant expectation, neither toiling nor spinning.” During welfare reform debate in the House of Representatives on March 24, 1995 (H3766, H3772; see also H3884) Rep. Mica of Florida, arguing that “we have upset the natural order. . . We have created a system of dependency,” suggested that the logic of signs posted in his state that commanded “Do Not Feed the Alligators” might be applied to welfare and its recipients. Later that day Rep. Cubin of Wyoming recounted the perverse incentives of her state’s “wolf welfare program.”

Or, said Almy, “Alms are like drugs, and are as dangerous; they create an appetite which is more harmful than the pain which they relieve” (in Bremner 1956b, 170). Gilder (1981, 30) observed many decades later that “excessive welfare hurts its recipients, demoralizing them and reducing them to an addictive dependency that can ruin their lives.” Economist William Niskanen in the *Cato Journal* (1996) calls relief a “narcotic,” just as FDR had decades earlier. For Bishop (1902, 608) relief is a “poison.” King’s (1893,

456) *Handbook of New York* proudly reported that “Thousands of active philanthropists are daily saving New York from the poison of its depraved and degraded humanity and the venom of pauperized peasant immigration.” Gurteen, after comparing the Roman corn laws to the creation of Frankenstein’s monster -- an unnatural creature that turned against its creator -- insisted that American relief was creating the monster anew (Gurteen 1882, 44ff). Barnett (1899) noted similarly that “Out-relief is a sort of monster which destroys its own parent, the local rates from which it is drawn.” “Official out-door relief must be stopped. That is a cancer that is eating out the heart of our social morality, and when it is removed we must have an efficient system of private relief to take its place,” writes Gladden (1891). Even more recently, Vaillant (in Mead 1997, Ch. 9), offers “a psychiatric viewpoint” by which he describes poverty as both an addiction and a disease and proposes various treatments to cure it. These understanding of poverty have precedence even in law; the U.S. Supreme Court in *City of New York v. Miln* in 1837 allowed New York to exclude poor people from the city citing “the moral pestilence of paupers.” Not until 1941 in *Edwards v. California* would they overturn that decision, arguing “we do not think that it will now be seriously contended that because a person is without employment and without funds he constitutes a ‘moral pestilence’” (in Bendich 1966, 92). But contended it remains.

Lewis said that “there is nothing in the concept [of a culture of poverty] that puts the onus of poverty on the character of the poor” (Lewis 1968, 194). His culture of poverty is an active reaction, an adaptation, a means by which poor people lower their expectations and shield themselves from the disappointment and frustration that would come from foolish hopes for a better life. But whether there is a culture of poverty and what its *functions* might be for the concentrated urban poor who are said to comprise it is ultimately not germane here -- the idea of a permanent underclass is *useful* for opponents of relief just as Spencer and Malthus are useful. What remains is a culture of poverty that owes more to Banfield than Lewis, for while both see the culture of poverty manifesting itself in similar

fashion, Banfield's remedy is the more familiar: not to raise the expectations of the underclass, to keep unemployment low by repealing the minimum wage, to shorten formal schooling so as to move the poor more quickly into jobs, to provide birth control to poor women, to put more police on the streets and to ensure that punishment is swift and severe, to prohibit live television coverage of riots and, for the health of the community-at-large, to abridge the freedoms of those deemed likely to commit crimes (Banfield 1974). To compel a more virtuous, Victorian, behavior. These prescriptions are evident especially in the late nineteenth century assaults on beggars and Tramps and in late twentieth century campaigns against panhandling and homeless men, as described below in Chapter Four.

Leviathan vs. Laissez-Faire

There's another divide beyond the one I have identified between those who emphasize sex and culture and those who stress work -- it separates those reformers who would use the power of government to compel moral behavior and those who would withdraw it from poor support and leave remoralization to private agencies or to the caprice of nature. Gilder (1983; 1995) is willing to use the powers of the state to compel changes in marriage and reproductive behavior that restore black men to their rightful role as dominant over women; Mead (1986; 1993; 1997; 1998) and Kaus (1992) would do so to require work. Mead argued that welfare does not *regulate the poor*, but it should -- with a state that "seeks order rather than justice" by creating new obligations for its citizens (Mead 1998; 2000b). Olasky (1992; 1996), on the other hand, advocates a complete withdrawal of government welfare provision and proposes the Welfare Replacement Act which would significantly cut income taxes and offer incentives to contribute to local churches and charities (see 1996; 1997). Himmelfarb (1996) hesitates to support workfare programs for fear that any government guarantee of support would promote dependency. Lowell also expressed this concern but would use the power of police and prisons to better punish the poor, and supported state institutions that would better segregate, house and employ them

(see Stewart 1911); she might be said to have advocated an Old Paternalism that anticipated (or is at the root of) elements of Mead's New Paternalism. But Lowell was much more determined to remove public agencies from relief provision than Mead. Murray emphasizes private provision too (1984; 1994; 1998), though his reasons are more connected with perverse incentives theses (and he concedes the possible need to establish indoor relief in the form of group homes for unwed mothers and orphanages for the children of unfit ones). Newt Gingrich (1995), as well, emphasizes the superiority of the private voluntary sector, whether celebrating Boys' Town and the Spencer Tracy movie romanticizing it or harking back, as so many so often do, to Tocqueville's few short pages on American associations in *Democracy in America*.¹³ While Gingrich would decentralize and privatize state power (especially economic power), he argues for a centralized moral culture, a single acceptable idea of appropriate values. Milton Friedman (1962) is most consistent with Spencer, urging that government withdraw itself from all activities save the protection of persons and property, even more so with Sumner (see 1883) perhaps, who opposed taxation and tariffs, all state regulation, trade unionism, public education (which even Adam Smith and Alfred Marshall have granted as a legitimate role for the state) and most all lawmaking. As Sumner wrote elsewhere (1886): "Nearly all the machinery of Congress is an elaborate mechanism for preventing anything from being done. . . The only fault with the mechanism is that it is not perfect enough."

Perverse Incentives and Unintended Consequences

A measure of how debased receipt of government relief itself had become in the eyes of its critics is that even such gains as had been attributed to the 1960s' "War on Poverty" and subsequent government interventions were dismissed. As Mead wrote in *Beyond Entitlement* (1986, 40), "Poverty did not really disappear; it was overwhelmed by

¹³ Himmelfarb (1997) refutes Tocqueville's much-championed assertion that American civil society was unique in its reach, insisting that "the English used that 'principle of association' at least as 'constantly' and 'adroitly' as did the Americans."

cash. . Policymakers have not really solved poverty, only exchanged it for the problem of large-scale dependency.” Giving cash relief to poor people may reduce their material poverty but masks their moral poverty, he argues; it has therefore been ineffective, even if it did reduce poverty.¹⁴ Gingrich (1995) took this further, describing the downfall of civilization itself as “precisely where three generations of Washington-dominated, centralized government, welfare-state policies have carried us.” Indeed, the failure of the Great Society -- “a disaster more harmful to more Americans than the Vietnam War,” said Gingrich (1996) -- forms a key thread in late twentieth century anti-relief narratives. Rector (see 2000 especially) argued that there is little *material* poverty in the United States;¹⁵ the problem is, instead, *behavioral* poverty, the core of which is welfare itself: “public spending in the past, intended to alleviate material poverty, led to dramatic increases in behavioral poverty. The welfare system established in the War on Poverty heavily subsidized illegitimacy, divorce, and non-work. . . The War on Poverty may have raised the material standard of living for a few Americans, but it has done so at the cost of creating whole communities in which traditional two-parent families have vanished, work is rare or

¹⁴ Or as Lee (Ebeling 1995, 99) adds, “after adjusting for taxes and transfers, the income distribution has not significantly changed one way or the other.” Poor relief programs such as AFDC were never intended nor expected to have effects upon the conditions which created poverty and unemployment; that’s part of why AFDC was criticized even among liberals and radicals throughout its history -- remember that “*Everyone hates welfare*” (Ellwood 1988, 4; italics mine). AFDC was designed to make poor women and their children less poor. Taxes and transfers are the means through which distribution is effected; to control for them is to guarantee that they can have no effect upon income distribution. As Kaus (1992) so astutely put it: “giving people money only gives people money,” or, as a writer in 1886 said, “Out-door relief inevitably becomes, in a greater or less degree, a mechanical, hard, and unfeeling grant of codfish, of oatmeal, of potatoes, of coal, -- in the worst cases, of money” (LAH 1886 VIN3, 127-9).

¹⁵ This was a favorite tactic of Rector’s (see Rector 1998, 2000, 2001), to argue that, in his words, “Although material hardship does occur in America, it is rare. The bulk of the ‘poor’ live in material conditions considerably more comfortable or even well-off than just a few generations ago” (Rector 1998). He reports that significant percentages of poor Americans own homes, cars, color televisions (it is always that they are *color* televisions that seems most galling to him), VCRs, dishwashers and microwaves. He notes that “Most ‘poor’ Americans today are better housed and better fed and own more personal property than average Americans throughout much of this century.” That many poor people today may live in less squalor than a resident at the turn of the century in one of the tenements Jacob Riis’ photographs made famous is a meaningless trick of analysis for actual poor people living in actual conditions of material poverty and of relative poverty. But as a political tactic it may be shrewd -- as Deborah Stone has so well put it, in politics “Interpretations are more powerful than facts” (Stone 1997, 28). Should Rector succeed, he could interpret away a large portion of American poverty.

nonexistent, and multiple generations have grown up dependent on the government” (Rector 2000). Gilder (1981, 12) was less measured: “What actually happened since 1964 was a vast expansion of the welfare rolls that halted in its tracks an ongoing improvement in the lives of the poor, particularly blacks, and left behind -- and here I choose my words as carefully as I can -- a wreckage of broken lives and families worse than the aftermath of slavery.” “It is now broadly accepted,” wrote Murray (1984) “that the social programs of the 1960s broadly failed; that the government is clumsy and ineffectual when it intervenes in local life; and that the principles of personal responsibility, penalties for bad behavior, and rewards for good behavior have to be reintroduced into social policy.”

The “failure” of the Great Society is rooted in a rhetorical slight-of-hand that Rector and the Heritage Foundation used in 1995 with their “America’s Failed \$5.4 Trillion War on Poverty” (and a trick Murray adopted in *Losing Ground*). The report was used to fuel public and political indignation and legislative and executive campaign against relief. It was a simple enough game; he included in his figures expenditures like the Earned Income Tax Credit (which only goes to working people), Medicaid (half of which goes to blind, elderly and disabled people) and other programs that are not restricted to poor people (student loans, for example) or those Americans typically identify with welfare. The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities estimated that 70% of what Rector and others described as “welfare” programs went to households that did not receive AFDC (see Albelda et al. 1996; Ackerman 1999).

Rector would later play the same game again and bring his total to \$7.9 Trillion (Rector and Fagan 2001). Rightly noting that total welfare spending had increased and not declined after the passage of the PRA (see Ch. 5 below), Rector urged that “Steps must be taken to help policymakers and the public understand the vast size of the welfare system and to limit its future growth” (Rector 2000). Rector did just that. In testimony about the reauthorization of the PRA before the US House of Representatives (Rector 2001) he argued that the federal government operated some 70 welfare programs (see Rector 2001,

Appendix II for the list), and that for fiscal year 2000 total state and federal spending on welfare totaled some \$434 billion. "Welfare spending," he told the Committee, "is so large it is difficult to comprehend. On average, the annual cost of the welfare system amounts to around \$5,600 in taxes from each household that paid federal income tax in 2000." Still, even while Rector (2001) included expenditures we should exclude from an estimate of total "welfare" costs, his tally amounted to 4.4% of the total budget. While hardly an insignificant sum, he fails to make the case that this amount *per se* should inspire concern.

Moreover, a "War on Poverty" was arguably never fought. Lyndon Johnson requested from Congress \$500 million in new money for a "war" one Council of Economic Advisor economist estimated would cost \$11 billion per year (Noble 1997, 94). No matter. Facts are rarely useful in such debates. As Stefancic and Delgado (1996) observe, "Such stories grab attention more effectively than do the endless lists of statistics recited by liberals." Piven (1998a) agrees: "this sort of argument is not won or lost with facts, and certainly not with facts alone."

Contradictory and Complicating Strains

As we shall see, the anti-relief reforms of the late nineteenth century ultimately failed, despite Olasky's dogged insistence to the contrary.¹⁶ The depression of 1893 made apparent that private voluntary organizations were unable to assist all those in need. The

¹⁶ Of those who explicitly advocate a return to a Victorian charity -- Schwartz (2000; 2001), Himmelfarb (see 1992; 1995a; 1996; 1997 especially), Olasky (1992; 1994a), and to a lesser extent Mead (1998) and Murray (1998) -- Schwartz and Mead acknowledge that private voluntary agencies were unable to provide for those in need once their cities were confronted with the joblessness and need among the "deserving" during the depression of 1893-1898. Olasky asserts that nineteenth century reformers succeeded and should serve as a model, but fails to offer evidence to support the claim. Himmelfarb escapes this dilemma by concerning herself with the *spirit* of the age, with Victorian virtues, leaving matters of policy, programs and outcomes largely outside her discussion -- it is what nineteenth century American reformers might call "moral tone" with which she concerns herself. Gingrich (1995), instead of looking to the Victorian age specifically as a model, proposes that we simply return to "the values and principles of American Civilization," or to pre-New Deal understandings of the role of the state, combining that decentralized welfare provision with new technologies of the Information Age. Murray and Rector seem to have in mind some mythologized 1950s, when communities of self-reliant individuals and voluntary associations did what government would do later.

depression also made apparent to many who had clung to moral explanations for poverty that circumstances beyond working people's control were significant causes for poverty. Relief rolls began to rise again, and even one-time anti-relief reformers helped establish relief funds and urged government to play a larger role. As they moved slowly away from entirely moral understandings of poverty, they began to better appreciate the ways in which business and business cycles affected their cities, too -- from this evolution in thought came what we think of as the Progressive Era and eventually elements of the New Deal and the Keynesian consensus (see also Bremner 1956a; Polsky 1991).

Comparing Edward Devine, who replaced Lowell as President of the New York COS, and Buffalo's S.H. Gurteen shows the ways in which understandings of poverty and relief, and of the need for government involvement, would change over these last decades of the nineteenth century. The "science" of Gurteen's charity emphasized a rational mind distrusting claims of need. "There must be no sentiment in the matter" (Gurteen 1882, 123), he wrote; "Let the head hold in check the heart -- refuse all street charity, all relief to that demoralized multitude who spend their lives in going, with artfully devised tales of woe, from house to house and from society to society; school yourself in the rational methods, and let the time come to an end when the accomplished cheat is filled with good things, while the deserving poor are sent empty away." Gurteen (1882, 189) claimed that up to one half of all out-relief went to charlatans and frauds. Gurteen's organized charity used administration as a means toward better restricting access to traditional relief. The innovation, in part, was in saying *No* in more sophisticated ways, with more able rationales. Need was, for such reformers, assumed to be a product merely of moral failure, of bad character, of a weak will that required what today we might call "tough love" to cure it. In the homes of the poor, said Gurteen (1882, 38), one would find "an immorality as deep as its poverty." Intemperance, ignorance, "want of thrift" rend the home to turn the honest poor into paupers -- those made by relief "incapable of effort and timid of change" (Barnett 1899). The solution was not money or clothing but, rather, "to

bring back the rich into such close relations with the poor as cannot fail to have a civilizing and healing influence" offering sympathy, moral education and what Bailly called in 1830 the "alms of good advice" (in Gurteen 1982, 12). As Brace (1880) put it: "The personal connection of a poor creature and a fine lady, is not so bad as that of a pauper to the state." The organizational structure through which this yearning would be realized was, of course, the COS itself, the Visitors that personal link.

By comparison, Devine's (1904, 25-6) was often a more complicated science of social problem-solving:

To be born and nurtured among squalid and indecent living conditions, to have the physical strength undermined by disease, by undernutrition and abuse, to be given a perverted education in a school of vice, to be deprived of suitable parental care, to be compelled to struggle hopelessly for support of one's family against adverse industrial and social surroundings over which the individual can exert no effective control, to become enslaved by drink or other animal appetites, are dangers as great, some of them indeed far greater, than to be given unearned money. The danger of being pauperized by relief is a real one, but it should not become so exaggerated as to blind us to other dangers. . . . By wisely formulating relief measures, society would transfer to the community as a whole, certain of the burdens naturally imposed upon individuals by industrial progress. The community would no longer permit its weakest members to suffer vicariously that others might gain. . . A sound relief policy would seek out from among the families that become dependent as a result of such [industrial] changes those who suffer most severely, and put them nearly as possible in a position as eligible as that from which they were displaced.

In the early 1930s, the New York COS looked back upon its first fifteen years, from 1881-1896: "Fifty years ago civic minded people who started the C.O.S. and other welfare agencies had much more of a puritanical outlook, feeling for the most part that if clients did not respond to the C.O.S. efforts to rehabilitate them, it was simply because they did not want to and therefore relief was cut off for their 'lack of cooperation.' Some years later, however, it began to be clearer that the situation was not as simple as all that." (Claire Tousley, "Report," CSS Box 128). Charles Henderson wrote in 1894 (1894b, 226) that "the first duty of charity is to secure higher wages, shorter hours, better physical and moral conditions of labor," and that "charity as a substitute for justice is cruelty." In 1892, *Charities Review* cited regressive taxation as a principle cause of pauperism, noting that "Various societies seek its [pauperism's] causes in intemperance, ignorance, immorality or crime, and refuse to consider that these things are themselves mainly the result of social conditions." As the author also wrote, "The wonder is that men are, not so wicked, but so virtuous."

It is nonetheless important not to conclude too much from such "progressive" thinking. While Devine recognized the role of industrial change in the creation of poverty, he proposed to use charity to change people to accommodate industrial society, not to change industry to better serve the displaced. And as we have seen, he too could demonstrate, like Hunter, what Rodgers (1974, 225) aptly described as the COS's "radically ambivalent mixture of sentimentalism and callousness." Lowell's changing activism revealed her ambivalence, moving from an almost exclusive focus upon moral education and negative reinforcement to increasing agitation for workplace and housing reforms; but she did not seriously contemplate more radical reforms that would strike at the

heart of the industrialization she in her own life had seen grow.¹⁷ And just as after the end of the nineteenth century we can find reformers echoing Gurteen, so too earlier in the century were there those who anticipated arguments that would rise to prominence in the late Gilded Age and Progressive Era. Note this observation from one Indianapolis reformer in 1883: “Comparatively little can be done by working on individuals, when the destructive forces work upon the mass. The houses with their over-crowding, the often inadequate wages, the desertion of family, the ignorance of best ways of living, the intemperance, at once the cause and consequence of poverty -- these drag down and keep down” (NCCC 1883, 86). This co-mingling of ideas, incorporating themes we associate with the early Gilded Age and the Progressive Era, in which industrial and moral causes are recounted together, is the point. Perhaps only Mead among our contemporary Victorian revivalists displays this complexity.

Charity Organization Societies and their wealthy leaders and Visitors were not blind to the industrial, environmental, social and governmental forces and structures that contributed to endemic poverty. They wrote often of the enormous changes, in cities especially, that burgeoning industrialization was affecting to the social order, and believed that they could educate poor people to the means of advancement in this new world. That they were uncertain of how best to address this new and growing crisis should not be surprising. That they were often callused to the real suffering in their midst makes some sense too: “affluence, unless stimulated by a keen imagination, forms but the vaguest notion of the practical strain of poverty,” observed Edith Wharton in *The House of Mirth*;

¹⁷ Just as Lowell's thought evolved in complicated, perhaps contradictory ways, so did Mary Richmond's. Claire Tousley, the New York COS's Assistant Director in the early 1930s, makes much of the fact that “Miss Richmond, the ‘dean of family social work,’ suggested our saying instead of ‘case closed: family will not cooperate’ -- the following: -- ‘case closed: social worker does not know how to cooperate’” (CSS Box 128). Yet Richmond in 1907 would recommend, as remedies for poverty, advice offered for decades -- the poor should leave town, borrow money, change occupations, live on their savings, and depend upon friends and family, and should accept relief only as a very last resort (Feder 1936, 192). While in some ways the decline of strict adherence to strict COS philosophy ended with the very last COS established on a firm “no relief” policy -- Atlanta, 1905, says Watson (1922) -- COS influence permeated the creation of the social work profession, an influence it has never entirely escaped.

or, as Jane Addams (1910, 190) put it a few years later, “we credit most easily that which we see.”

Charity for the COSs was, at least in part, an effort to recreate a sense of community, to re-join classes being torn asunder, to bring together rich and poor for the sake of both, and a way to avoid European-like class divisions which seemed to be emerging, to protect them all from what was lost by the move to the city. We see this reflected in the emphasis many reformers placed on garden projects, fresh air funds, farm labor, and programs to remove children from the corrupting influence of the city (see also Polsky 1991, Ch. 1; Bender 1975). By identifying the problems of poverty and pauperism with the loss of what Chalmers called “natural” charity, by insisting that family, neighbors and community ties of yore were at the root of successful aid, the COSs almost perceived this truth -- it was the advancement of industrialization and its attendant urbanization that caused the conditions that created such poverty in late nineteenth century cities; it was, in a real way, the destruction of those old forms of neighborhood that caused poverty. What they missed was that one could not reestablish that social form by changing the behavior of poor people -- one would have to change the very economic and social and even geographic forces that caused and were caused by such change. This, though not thought about in quite this way, was perceived by many Settlement House leaders, and eventually even by the COS reformers themselves, who would help usher in the Progressive Era agenda of environmental and industrial reforms. It is worth emphasizing, however, that the mainstream of neither the settlement nor the COS movement subscribed to arguments, mainly from socialists, that the very industrial order itself must be overturned -- they sought merely to alleviate the worst of the conditions they finally acknowledged it created, that is, they ceased trying to recreate the countryside and focused on changing conditions in the city and helping people adjust to a new world (not return to an old one). It is this transition that so marks this era, and its struggles.

This one-hundred-year old transformation in social understandings of the roots of misery and a tenuous political truce about the proper role of government is what the late twentieth century business mobilization sought to undo. What the anti-relief reformers had in common, whether their focus was on work or marriage, whether they advocated reducing or enlarging the role of the state, was the belief that, at heart, poverty is the result of immoral or unwise behavior and that, therefore, remoralizing the poor must be the principal focus of any reform program. It is not the state, not business, not markets, education, discrimination or any other politically controllable aspect of society that requires alteration (and therefore a reorganization of power relations) but the poor themselves. The following chapter reveals the policies created in accord with such understandings.

CHAPTER FOUR

Reform

This chapter examines the new poor relief policies enacted locally throughout the nation in the late nineteenth century and nationally in the late twentieth century and describes the political struggles over them, focusing upon the role of the Charity Organization Society, the think tank and some business lobbying organizations. The policy changes sought and enacted in both periods have much in common. In the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries the cash assistance available to poor people was severely constricted, and what remained was conditioned upon work. And even this aid was limited to a newly narrowed group of eligible recipients who had to demonstrate their worthiness and deservingness. Rules were enforced more strictly and relief was denied more readily for failure to comply, helping to reduce the numbers on relief through bureaucratic devices that had little if anything to do with effectively gauging need. Single men were further pushed out of the public relief system or moved into the prison system while greater work requirements were placed upon even women with very young children for whom work was compelled through tough sanctions or encouraged with wage subsidies to their employers. Whatever aid that remained was less likely to be in cash than in goods or vouchers for goods. Concurrently, there was an intensified criminalization of public displays of need, whether it was the mass incarceration of nineteenth century “tramps” or the twentieth century prohibitions against begging in the New York City subways, starkly dramatizing renewed associations between poverty and crime. Modern campaigns against homeless men sent the same message about the price of idleness that the campaign against welfare did, just as the anti-tramping and anti-relief campaigns did a century before. The result in both periods was that poor men and women were forced to work or, as St. Paul would have it, to starve.

The Assault on Outdoor Relief

Historians generally tell the story of late nineteenth century poor relief and poverty, on those occasions when it is told, as a campaign against outdoor relief led by the COSs either as a benevolent if misguided attempt to apply “scientific” principles to charity (Bremner 1956a; Trattner 1994) or to control the poorest classes (Katz 1986; Piven and Cloward 1987). There is truth in both approaches, for the COSs often did intend that their activism would benefit the poor, and that activism often had the effect of rendering them dependent upon low-wage labor or the capricious demands of private charity moralists. But the charity organization movement is not best understood as the leader of this campaign; there was no single leader, no single campaign, no one movement. Like the twentieth century assault upon AFDC, the war on out-relief was one part of a larger battle between capital and labor over the role the state would or should take on behalf of one or the other. The anti-relief movement sometimes failed, even when it had strong COS support. Where it succeeded, it was never a COS alone that was responsible. In some cities the COS *opposed* the abolition of relief, while in others the COS emerged only after public relief had been abolished in order to combat the growth in *private* charity that followed. Over the three decades under investigation here in some cities the COS’ role changed from one administration or one depression to the next. The COS came to be an important institution in this movement, but it was not always used and it was not always effective, just as the use and influence of think tanks would vary in the following century. As Katz (1986, 47-54) has shown for Brooklyn and Kaplan (1978) and Lui (1993, 1995a, 1995b) have shown for New York, relief was sometimes abolished not because the COS demanded it or because the public opposed it, but because partisans found it a useful tool in political skirmishes over resources and symbols. The story is complex, and different for each city.

Nonetheless, COSs were important actors in these dramas, usually fighting against public and private relief and enforcing policies, often with the Chamber of Commerce as

partner, that forced men and women into work. Cities with active COS campaigns were more likely to successfully abolish relief. Moreover, the local and national campaign against relief was important irrespective of its direct successes, for it publicized debate about the harm of relief, made abolition a respectable policy alternative, and influenced state and local policymakers so that throughout the nation the possibility of relief became even more uncertain and precarious for the poor. This chapter documents the role of the COSs in local relief change showing how they influenced local relief policy; it will simultaneously undertake to advance our limited understanding of why it was that some American cities cut back their cash relief in the late 1800s while others did not, examining the ways in which partisan politics, working-class mobilization, the perceived effectiveness of public relief administration and the competition of other private charity providers affected local relief policy.

A Summary of Relief Retrenchment

That there was a large change throughout the nation in out-relief policy is clear. Nearly eighty percent of the fifty largest American cities abolished, cut back or reconfigured the poor relief programs in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. By 1897 there was no public outdoor relief at all in Brooklyn, Baltimore, New York, Philadelphia, San Francisco, Kansas City (MO), New Orleans, Louisville, Charleston (SC), Portland (OR), Denver, Erie (PA), Memphis, St. Louis, Salt Lake City, Peoria, Atlanta and Savannah. Total annual public out-relief was below (in many cases well below) \$10,000 in Springfield (MA), New Haven, Cincinnati, Indianapolis, Cambridge, Trenton, D.C., Wilmington, Saginaw, Brookline, Albany, Worcester, Lincoln, Providence, Seattle, Richmond, Somerville (MA), Dayton, Evansville (IL), Allegheny (PA), Jersey City, Reading (PA) and Hoboken. Still other cities (and many of those listed above) offered only "in-kind" aid of food, clothing or coal, but by 1897 dispensed very little (under \$1,000) or no cash out-relief, including Buffalo, Syracuse, Detroit, Cleveland, Milwaukee,

Newark, Minneapolis, Lynn (MA), Bridgeport, Columbus, Fall River, Hoboken, St. Paul, St. Joseph and Worcester (Folks 1898; Devine 1898; Almy 1899; Almy 1900). By the early 1890s, there was no public outdoor relief in the entire states of Florida, Missouri, or in the Utah Territories (NCCC 1892, 243; 1893, 99; Henderson et al. 1894, 116). Thus, of the fifty largest American cities in 1900, twelve (24%) had abolished public outdoor relief, sixteen (32%) had reduced their rolls and out-relief expenditures, and eleven others (22%) offered no cash aid (but in some cases large amounts of in-kind or indoor aid): thirty-nine of the fifty largest cities, or 78%, had reconfigured their cash assistance to poor residents during the last quarter of the nineteenth century despite two severe depressions (1873-1878 and 1893-1898) and one milder one (1882-1886).¹ Of the next twenty-five largest cities, fourteen did the same.

Outdoor Relief Retrenchment and the COSs

Among students of nineteenth century poor relief there is consensus as to why this happened: "Outdoor relief decreased because of a national campaign launched against it" by Charity Organization Societies (Katz 1986, 41; see also Bremner 1956a and 1956b; Mohl 1983; Patterson 1994; Piven and Cloward 1971, 1983 and 1987; and Trattner 1994). For some analysts, there is almost a movement mind at work. Kauffman and Kiesling (1997), to take one example, note that Brooklyn abolished outdoor relief "in the sweep of the scientific charity movement." Watson (1922, 196) insists that "the movement came as a natural evolution or its spread would not have been either so rapid or spontaneous," and that COSs "sprung up" first in large cities then in small. This is not explanation but a convenient shorthand, as if to say that there was such widespread antipathy to relief and such forceful advocacy from the COSs that they together almost *willed* the abolition of relief. But COSs were created, were founded, were organized. People acted and did so

¹ Whether there was a depression in the 1880s is in some dispute, as is its duration. I follow Rezneck (1956).

intentionally. COSs did not spring up -- they were planted and nurtured. And relief did not abolish itself in the sweep of a movement, but it was abolished or cut back by the actions of governments and of people with motives, many of whom used the COSs as means toward their own ends.

It is nonetheless understandable that so many would emphasize a story that credits the COSs for a widespread withdrawal of public outdoor relief, for it is the one that charity reformers told at the time (in part no doubt to demonstrate to their contributors and supporters that they were succeeding) and it is the one that predominates in the only comprehensive institutional histories of COSs, Warner's *American Charities* (1894; 1908) and Watson's *The Charity Organization Movement* (1922). "Whether the reason for abolishing outdoor relief in Philadelphia was that of economy or some other, certain it is that the change was made at the direct request of the society, and as the result of sentiment against outdoor relief created by direct agitation" Watson (1922, 191) wrote. Warner and Coolidge (1908, 242) agreed: "It is not without significance that the movement to do away with public outdoor relief has kept pace with the development of charity organization." Abolishing relief "attracted wide attention in watchful official circles, evinced the value of the investigations which preceded it, and disclosed the worse than useless prodigality of outdoor relief. Its influence spread far and wide beyond the limits where it could be statistically followed, and was the beginning of a wiser administration of the charitable funds raised by taxpayers in many communities" said Philadelphia's Charles Kellogg (1893, 60). New York's Homer Folks, looking back during the NCCC of 1903 (p. 379), said that "In out-door relief, the extreme activity of the associated charity movement in all the leading states of the country has resulted in a very active development of a public sentiment regarding the principles of investigation and co-operation, to the end that helpful relief, instead of harmful relief, is more often given than in the past."

We must, however, reconcile those claims, and they abound, with testimony from other reformers that the COSs were not responsible in the most prominent cases. Kellogg

(1893, 60) also reported that “While this elimination of outdoor relief was not pressed by formal action of our societies, Charity Organizationists claimed the credit of it as a result of their agitation and personal effort, and it was exactly in the line of the principles they advocated.” New York COS President Devine’s national study of charity organization (1904, 303) also stated -- in direct contradiction to Watson -- that in Philadelphia “whatever the motive, it is clear that the change was *not* made at the direct request of the society, or as a result of the sentiment against outdoor relief created by direct agitation” [emphasis added]. He further asserted that his Society played no role in the abolition of relief in New York. Watson (1922, 399fn1), offering a fine example of how confusing all this can be, admitted that “Since these early days there have been *occasional* anti-outdoor relief campaigns conducted by various charity organization societies. . . . [but] There were always directors of the Associated Charities on both sides of the question” [emphasis added].

The Search for Patterns in Nineteenth Century Relief Change

There is clearly a correlation between COS presence and relief policy, but it is an imperfect one. Of the fifty largest cities in 1900, thirty-nine (78%) had a COS. Of these, eleven (28%) abolished relief, thirteen (33%) had reduced it and nine (23%) offered in-kind aid only. Thus, 85% of those cities with a COS offered little or no cash assistance, while the rest -- Boston, Rochester, Los Angeles, Scranton, Grand Rapids and Nashville -- kept their relief programs intact despite the presence of an active COS. Boston (along with Indianapolis, often) was widely praised by reformers as operating the model COS -- it was well-staffed, had plenty of Visitors, it effectively coordinated the activities of other charities, and seemed to be well-respected and admired within Boston and elsewhere -- yet Boston did not abolish relief. Conversely, eleven (22%) of the largest cities had either never established a COS or its COS had “lapsed.” Yet 55% of these cities also cut back on their public cash relief despite the absence of an active COS. New Orleans, D.C.,

Minneapolis, Columbus (OH), St. Joseph, Atlanta and Reading had lapsed, inactive or non-existent COSs and nonetheless abolished or reduced their outdoor relief. In some cities (Baltimore, New York, Castleton [Staten Island], Philadelphia, Atlanta, Indianapolis), relief abolition *preceded* the formation of the COS and in the cases of New York and Philadelphia the successful campaign against relief is what led to the formation of the COS. Devine is right to insist that his society had nothing to do with relief abolition in New York. It didn't exist at the time. The local presence of a COS alone is insufficient to account for which cities did and which did not cut back or reconfigure their relief.

Others have sought patterns elsewhere. Almy (1899) and Katz (1986) note the correspondence between relief levels and geography: cities with harsh winters were less likely to eliminate aid, presumably because of the more dire human consequences and the need to keep workers from abandoning cities during winter months to avoid the possibility of labor shortages when work resumed in fair weather. It is true that Chicago and Buffalo did not abolish relief during this period; but New York, Brooklyn, Syracuse, Milwaukee and Philadelphia did, while Cincinnati and Albany severely contracted their relief programs. The fact that Atlanta, Richmond, New Orleans, Charleston, Louisville and Memphis abolished or severely contracted relief along with New York, Philadelphia and Providence makes north-south hypotheses suspect, too. As Devine (1904) notes, New York and Philadelphia abolished relief, but Buffalo and Pittsburg did not; San Francisco did, but not Los Angeles. This was not generally a regional or state phenomenon, but a municipal, and in some cases county, one.

Warner and Coolidge (1908, 227) write regarding outdoor aid in the late nineteenth century that "The evils connected with this form of relief have long been a matter of controversy, and in this country the agitation against it has gained headway in almost direct proportion to the density of population. The flagrant abuses of the system in the large Eastern cities led to a concerted movement for doing away with it from 1878 onward." Piven and Cloward (1987, 15 citing Mohl 1983) argue that the COS "campaign was less

effective in many smaller towns” and Watson (1922, 281) says that “the smaller town and semi-rural districts were in the main untouched by the movement.” And the vast majority of all COSs that had failed or lapsed by the turn of the century were in cities with populations below 40,000. Hunter (1897, 692) claimed that “In no purely rural district has outdoor relief ever yet been abolished.” Having a large population does seem to have made a city more likely to have abolished relief, but even of those nineteen cities with the largest populations -- 200,000 and above -- only seven (37%) did so.

Some argued that the poor relief system functioned in the countryside and in villages and smaller cities because relief was less immersed in politics and “everybody knows everybody”. . . “Probably it is for this reason that the [Ohio] law has not been repealed and the system abolished” (Gunckel 1897, 757). Could the lack of COS presence in small towns explain their lower rates of relief withdrawal? Perhaps. But causation is hard to untangle here, for it is the very factors which enabled the creation of COSs -- ample financing, a pool of volunteers, sufficient charity already operating to require coordination, evidence of significant waste or indiscriminate giving, an organized and active business and professional community -- that contributed to antipathy to relief (that is, large numbers of recipients placing burdens upon city budgets, active business and professional class, etc.). And, more simply, smaller towns and cities, especially those in the West and the South, had little in the way of entrenched or established poor relief to cut back -- smaller cities cut less in part because there was less to cut (“Out-door relief appears to be now an integral part of our poor law system everywhere, excepting in some of the Southern States, where it is unknown,” wrote Low in 1881, 145). But there were, nonetheless, aggressive campaigns to abolish relief in smaller cities; George Wilson of the D.C. Associated Charities conducted a survey of twenty-two of them in 1900 and concluded that many wanted to abolish relief but feared that their system of private relief was insufficient to meet

the need (NCCC 1900, 259-61).² By 1904, seventy-nine cities with populations between 5,000 and 60,000 had established a COS; yet few had reduced their public relief expenditures. One member of the National Conference of Charities and Corrections in 1879 thought that outdoor relief was, generally, less pernicious in the West because family ties still predominated and unemployment there was "temporary" (NCCC 1879, 98). Low (1881) thought it less dangerous in rural areas because the appropriate shame was still attached to relief, unlike in large cities.

The Expense of Relief

The Rev. Wendte of Cincinnati attributed its short-lived (see CR 1894, 409) relief withdrawal in 1881 to a simple budget crunch: "not by public opinion, but by the stresses of circumstances, we have abolished all out-door relief, save the giving of coal, for ten weeks in the winter." (in Low 1881). Bremner (1956b) points to the rising costs of relief and the need for increased taxation to fund it. This is true; as discussed above, from about 1850 to 1870 relief expenses rose significantly (Katz 1986; Hannon 1984a, 1984b; Kiesling and Margo 1997). "If, by abolishing outdoor relief, we can stop the squandering of the public money, and save the taxpayers a half million dollars annually, it should be done at once!" cried one Ohio reformer (Gunckel 1897, 756). But the sheer expense of relief doesn't seem to offer an explanation: many of those cities that had the largest per-capita relief expenditures were among those that retained or, in some cases, even expanded public outdoor aid late in the century. Those include some of the largest cities (Detroit, Chicago, Boston) as well as the smaller (Scranton, Grand Rapids, Fall River) (Almy

² The General Secretary of the Portland, Oregon COS said in 1901 that "The attempt was made in the first place, twelve years ago, to make this strictly a charity-organization society, but a few years in that direction demonstrated the necessity of combining relief work with the other. We have, I think, succeeded in doing this without giving place to the evil effects that are usually supposed to arise from such a combination. Outdoor relief has been greatly diminished, begging practically abolished, and a good degree of cooperation secured among churches, societies and benevolent individuals. The county commissioners contemplate discontinuing outdoor relief and have followed our example in requiring work from able-bodied persons asking relief. The situation is not all that could be desired, but improves from year to year" (Hubbard 1901).

1899). Similarly, Monkkonen's (1993) claim that the "inherent visibility" of out-door relief on local budgets and tax assessments helps account for the "turn away" from it may be true, but nonetheless tells us little.

Relief as Patronage

Relief, like all budget items, was a resource; it was fought over. Katz (1986, 45) observes simply that "local political struggles also shaped the nature of relief." Others who have examined this phenomenon emphasize the ways in which outdoor relief was used as a patronage tool. Skocpol (1992, 96) observed that "Charity Organization reformers. . . were especially appalled by the ways in which public relief. . . could become enmeshed with grassroots party politics." Orloff (1988, 50) adds that "electoral considerations could enter easily in the determination of eligibility for aid." Reformers agreed: "Most of the evils and abuses existing here and there in the administration of charitable and penal institutions are owing in a greater or lesser degree, if not wholly, to the prevalence of what is commonly called the political spoils system," noted the NCCC (1898, 247). In other locales, relief was given in some measure, said one superintendent, "to accommodate merchants -- men who help to elect Overseers of the Poor and perhaps superintendents" (Katz 1986, 57). Brooklyn's Seth Low (1879, 202ff) noted that

The system had become furthermore a sore on the body politic. The friends of politicians received help whether needy or not, and so the system was perpetuated. Families with voters were the first served. The 'out-door relief' appropriations became a vast political corruption fund. Large numbers of the population were taught to rely on the county help, and sought it for no other reason than that the county gave it. One woman received help under nine different names. Many sold what they received. Men came from the country every autumn to live at the expense of the city

during the winter, because the city was offering a premium to the idle to come and live in idleness. The poor did not get the chief benefit of increased appropriations.

This is the crux of many of the arguments made by Charity Organization Societies - - that only private agencies could fairly administer relief and ensure that it went to those truly in need of it, those genuinely deserving. An effort was made in the Connecticut state legislature, for instance, that would have mandated that all relief be distributed in-kind, through purchase orders from "responsible firms;" it was defeated, reported *Charities Review*, out of "a natural unwillingness to give up the considerable patronage which is enjoyed through the present often indiscriminate system of distributing outdoor relief" (CR 1899, V9N4, 136). Relief was associated with patronage and corruption for good reason. That there was power to be gained from distributing relief was made famous by Tammany boss George Washington Plunkitt, who said, so quotably, "What tells in holdin [sic] your grip on your district is to go right down among the poor families and help them in different ways they need help. I've got a regular system for this. . . If a family is burned out I don't ask whether they are Republicans or Democrats, and I don't refer them to the charity organization society, which would investigate their case in a month or two and decide they were worthy of help about the same time they are dead from starvation. I just get quarters for them, buy clothes for them. . . and fix them up" (Riordan, 1994, 64).³ Even as early as 1857 we can see the political patronage battle over relief funds. The Chicago *Democratic Press* reported that some aldermen fought a plan to allow the Chicago Relief and Aid Society to distribute newly allocated relief funds because that "would very materially restrict the electioneering finances of certain members of the council" (in Feder 1936, 22). As one writer said of Boston Mayor Quincy's similar struggle with ward leaders, "the real

³ Such antipathy between relief officials and charity reformers is commonplace in the contemporaneous accounts of this era.

issue. . . was not the amount spent but who was to control the city budget” (Kennedy 1992, 104-5).

New York, the COS and Public and Private Relief

Lui (1993, 1995a, 1995b) argues similarly that it wasn't the COS that caused the abolition of relief in New York, but the more mundane forces embodied in political processes, machine politics, party maintenance and state structures. In her accounts outdoor relief was abolished in 1877 by Tammany Mayor Wickham and Comptroller Boss Kelly “to withhold patronage resources from the party ranks to achieve internal organizational discipline” (1995b, 348). Conversely, free coal delivery was not abolished, despite the urgings of the AICP and the COS, because Tammany's ties with coal merchants were strong and useful and because the structure through which the city's budget was crafted did not offer access to the COS, district leaders, or other outside interests. When coal distribution was finally abolished in 1898, it was “an indirect consequence of the intraparty conflicts of the state Republican party and Greater New York politics” surrounding the Consolidation charter (Lui 1995b, 354-5). Thus, “Tammany's decision to cut cash and keep coal relief was an early effort at institutional consolidation, an attempt by the machine leadership to centralize party resources, impose organizational discipline on the district or ward leaders, and, at the same time, build and maintain alliances with the local business community” (Lui 1995a, 388). Kaplan (1978) argues that instead of an inter-party conflict in which Tammany leaders sought to abolish relief to concentrate power, relief was cut in the mid-1870s as part of a downstate civic reformer and upstate-Republican compact to reduce taxes and to weaken Tammany by taking away patronage powers.

But they both ignore more direct evidence to refute the presumption that the COS was a cause of relief change in New York.

New York was hard hit by the panic of 1873. It was the home to many collapsed firms upon whom it depended for tax revenues, and its fiscal health was weakened by the profligate spending of the corrupt Tweed Ring (temporarily deposed in 1871). The Department of Public Charities was singled out for its drain on public finances and its budget was cut substantially. This was the proximate cause for the first abolition of relief in New York, when it was "temporarily" suspended from July 13, 1874 to January of 1875 (Schneider and Deutch 1969; Goodman 1983; Feder 1936). New York COS Secretary Devine (1904, 293) reported the transition from this "temporary" abolition to its codification this way:

The abolition of public outdoor relief in New York City, except in medicines to the sick, an annual cash disbursement to the blind, and the distribution of free coal in the winter, occurred on December 20, 1875, by adoption by the commissioners of charities and correction of a resolution that the experiment be made of giving the necessities of life to the outdoor poor instead of money or orders on grocery stores. A week later it was resolved to visit all applicants for relief within forty-eight hours after application, and it was officially announced that the department disclaimed all intention of aiding the unworthy poor. Again, on January 10, 1876, it was proposed to visit all applicants for coal. From this time forward the department gave coal only, the previous appropriations for general relief having been reduced by the board of estimate and apportionment.

So by December of 1875 -- 1877 according to Lui (1993; 1995a) -- several years before the founding of the COS in 1882, New York had abolished all relief but aid to the blind and coal. The COS could not have been the cause. But what followed in the wake of relief repeal is instructive. Private charities struggled, and failed, to fill in the gaps left by

this withdrawal. By 1877, the Comptroller's report noted the "alarming increase of taxation within a few years for the support of asylums, reformatories, and charitable institutions in this city," nearly \$1 million in 1877 (Pellew 1878, 64). As Kauffman and Kiesling (1997) put it, soon after relief was "abolished" the city began "an unprecedented period of assistance in the United States -- private charity subsidization from municipal revenues. . .it is clear that New York continued to give outdoor relief in amounts equal to those before their supposed policy change" (see Ch. 5 for more on these issues). By 1880, 66 Manhattan agencies gave \$546,832 to 525,155 people (Goodman 1983, 636). The New York COS emerged only after relief had been abolished in order to regulate the explosion in *private* charity that followed.

By 1887, the COS had helped pass state-wide laws restricting relief, although many of them were ignored by local overseers who were reluctant to relinquish control (Branscombe 1943). By 1894 there were still some 360 societies -- not including churches and individuals -- that offered some form of relief. Total amounts approached \$10 million (a \$5 million decrease over the previous year) including \$2.25 million from the city's Charities and Corrections budget; \$4.5 million from private agencies; \$500,000 from 590 churches and \$2 million from 5,000 "benevolent families." (Hyslop 1894, 13-4). As Kaplan (1978) observes, the lack of public relief afforded Tammany an opportunity during the Depression to step in with money, coal, jobs and money for burials. Reformers' efforts to ration relief had failed, as would their efforts to eliminate coal until 1898. Homer Folks (1901, 268ff), the New York City Commissioner of Charities and member of the State Charities Aid Association, in reporting that the Greater New York Charter of 1897/1898 prohibited all outdoor relief⁴ said that this provision

⁴ Except aid to the adult blind; it therefore effected no change in Brooklyn; ended Coal in Manhattan and the Bronx; and ended all out-relief in Richmond and Queens.

had been inserted at the suggestion of a representative of one of the private charitable societies [Devine 1898 confirms this account], and was adopted without much discussion. It attracted little attention, and on January 1, 1898, the new board proceeded to continue the distribution of coal as heretofore. Its attention was called to the provision of the new charter, and the distribution had to be discontinued. Private societies promptly offered to take over all the applications from families asking for coal, and to provide coal for all found to be in need. To this the city authorities consented, though bills were immediately introduced in the legislature to reestablish the distribution of coal in all the boroughs of Greater New York. The history of these bills is one of extreme interest. Representatives of a number of leading charitable societies asked for a hearing, and appeared before the assembly committee. It was probably the first discussion of outdoor relief before a legislative committee in New York for many decades. The representatives of the charitable societies were shown scant courtesy by the assembly committee. They were evidently looked upon as hard-hearted, visionary enthusiasts, probably of doubtful moral character. The bills were promptly reported favorably by the assembly committee, passed the assembly with practical unanimity, and the struggle was renewed before the senate. Meanwhile spring was coming on, and the charitable societies had been proving themselves fully able to meet the need during the winter. The Republicans in the senate may have thought that the power to distribute free coal might be made a valuable perquisite in the hands of a Tammany administration in New York city. The attitude of the charitable societies in opposing the bill, and in offering to furnish coal themselves when needed, afforded at least a plausible reason for refusing to pass the bill.

The Senate defeated this bill to reinstate free coal. New York COS Assistant Secretary Kellogg, in familiar language, cited opposition to the elimination of cash and coal relief as stemming from "a natural unwillingness to give up the considerable patronage which is enjoyed through the present almost indiscriminate system of distributing outdoor relief" (CR 1898 Vol. 3), while some politicians, in turn, blamed the greed and elitism of the COS: "not one word in opposition was ever said until these extra blue-blooded, finely scented, Puritan-Mayflower-Salem-witchcraft stock made their appearance, and in my opinion, because they could not dispose of the coal themselves, made their assault upon this bill" (in "Free Coal Bill. Mr. Harburger Denounces Charitable Associations. Says High-Salaried Officials Stand in Way of Relief for Poor Persons," *Commercial Advertiser*, January 31, 1898, CSS Box 108). In 1899 a new bill to reinstate free coal distribution in the city was reintroduced, COS representatives again testified against it and "This time they were heard more courteously, their arguments seemed to have more force, the experience of the past winter had counted for something" (Folks 1901, 268-9) and the bill died in committee in the Assembly. 1900 brings the same story. It was reintroduced yet again (all by the same member in these years) in 1901. COS members send their testimony via letter this time. They prevailed again, and the bill was again defeated. "The political consideration may have had some little weight, but the steadily increasing opposition to the bill in the legislature was in large measure the result of a thorough discussion of the subject. This may properly afford much encouragement to those who are endeavoring to secure legislative reform of outdoor relief elsewhere" reported Folks (1901).

The COS was active in the defeat of these efforts to reinstate free coal, despite Lui's claim to the contrary, though Folks suggests that the COS served as cover for Republican state senators who wanted to eliminate coal so as to take away its patronage power from New York city Tammany Democrats, an account consistent with Kaplan's (1978) history. Some years later, during the anthracite coal strike of the early 1900s, the COS as well as the AICP, United Hebrew Charities, the State Charities Aid Association and the Society of

St. Vincent de Paul all voiced their opposition to expanded coal delivery, though in their letter to the state senate they now emphasized the corruption of politicians over the degradation of the poor: "The city's generosity would be perverted to the profit of operators and speculators who are now taking advantage of our necessity," they wrote (Letter to Sen. Horace White, Chair, Senate Committee on Committees, 1/17/1903, CSS Box 108). They prevailed.

The point to emphasize is this: the COS was actively involved in anti-relief campaigns, and can probably be credited as being key players in the anti-coal campaigns of the late century. But the COS was not responsible for the abolition of public relief in New York -- instead, its achievement was to rationalize and restrict the private relief that arose after public out-relief was abolished. This nineteenth century assault against private charity marks one of the key differences with twentieth century campaigns, which focused almost exclusively upon public relief.

Philadelphia, the COS and Another Fight Against Private Charity

The tale in Philadelphia is similar in some ways, though there the COS would develop a greater role. By 1850 private relief expenditures had already outpaced public (see Clement 1992, Table 2), with the greatest growth occurring from 1850-1870. The depression of 1873 hit, and the city faced huge debt. The Common Council "slashed" the Board of Guardians' budget (Rauch 1976, 57). The Philadelphia Society for Organizing Charitable Relief and Repressing Mendicancy (which later became the Philadelphia Society for Organizing Charity, or SOC) was formed in 1878 in part to respond to those cuts in public aid that began in 1874 (another case of relief being cut before a COS was created) and the profusion of private relief and private agencies that followed: by 1878 there were 270 agencies and 547 religious organizations which together raised \$1,546,050 (Watson 1922, 547ff). The SOC was born of a meeting called by 26 citizens "to discuss, and, if possible, determine on a method by which idleness and beggary, now so encouraged, may

be suppressed, and worthy, self-respecting poverty be discovered and relieved at the smallest cost to the benevolent" (First Annual Report 1879 in Watson 1922, 547ff). Many sought "to protect their charities from the countless impositions practiced upon them" (Rauch 1976, 578); others would later become members of the Committee of 100. It was "a relief-giving as well as a relief-obtaining society," which caused jealousies from established relief providers and from "the political dispensers of the official relief from the city treasury, who resented interference with so profitable an instrument of political patronage; and professional politicians began to devise means to strangle the reform at its birth" (Watson 1922, 187ff; Devine 1904, 300-03). The city fired its dispensers of poor relief and then suspended relief itself, and turned over all relief to the SOC in hopes of embarrassing them and pointing to the suffering they expected to result from the SOC's failure. But, says Watson, no great increase in relief demand occurred, and the public almshouse population even decreased. By the end of their third year the SOC had "raised into conditions of self-respect and self-support" some 1,110 families of 4,000 people (Watson 1922, 193). The Council, despite protest from the Guardians of the Poor, then used the professed effectiveness of the SOC as reason to cut public relief more, and by 1879 all public out-relief was gone save for Guardians' salaries and medical aid (Rauch 1976, 57-8). Here again we see relief abolished first before a COS was established, which came into being not to repeal public relief but to help limit and control private relief. Relief thereafter was a political affair in which the COS functioned either as an opponent or as a tool to be used for other ends. Once more, we cannot credit the COS with relief repeal.

Protest and Relief

We might confront another puzzle. The poor were not passive in the wake of the depression of 1873-1878, or during subsequent depressions in the 1880s and 1890s, for that matter. Throughout the country there were large-scale demonstrations and protests "accompanied by extravagant demands" (Rezneck 1950, 499). A "short-lived but quite

vocal 'movement' demanding public aid for the unemployed spread" in the 1870s and "struck terror into the hearts of the many" as the *Workingman's Advocate* described it (in Gutman 1965, 254). "Symptoms of danger, premonitions of violence, are appearing all over the civilized world. Creeds are dying, beliefs are changing. . . Political institutions are failing. . . There is a growing unrest and bitterness among the masses. . . a blind groping for escape from conditions becoming intolerable" warned Henry George (1883 in Ahlstrom 1972, 732). Battles raged in the streets. During the epidemic railroad strikes of 1877, Philadelphians destroyed 104 locomotives and more than 2,000 railroad cars; over 5,000 local militia and federal troops were brought in to quell the mobs (Gilje 1996, 118). Between 1883 and 1885 alone there were 196 boycotts, three-quarters of which succeeded (Forbath 1989, 1167). Between 1881 and 1900 in Chicago 593,000 workers struck 17,176 businesses in 1,737 strikes; over one million struck in New York City over the same period (Katz 1986, 186). "The Eighties," wrote Ida Tarbell "dripped with blood" (in Painter 1987, 72). There were more solidarity strikes in the 1890s than at any other time in American history. During that decade, for every 100,000 strikers, two were killed and 140 injured (Forbath 1989 1151, 1185fn343). From 1881 to 1905 there were somewhere in the neighborhood of 37,000 strikes of seven million workers (Trachtenberg 1982, 80). Each of the 1870s, 1880s and 1890s saw widespread depressions, marked by unemployment as high as forty percent of the working population in some cities in their worst periods; those *underemployed* could add another forty percent of the population to this roster (Feder 1936, 83 and passim). Compounding the suffering, with most financial crises industry lowered already modest wages, precipitating more strikes and violent protest throughout the nation. A Chicago newspaper spoke of "a real threat of anarchy" (in Cahn 1972, 144). On May 1, 1886, 350,000 demonstrated in Northeastern cities, 80,000 in Chicago alone (Cahn 1972, 142). The Haymarket bombing followed three days later, and that fear of anarchy seemed made real. One historian writes that "the Haymarket Affair drove the terror deep into the nation's mentality and turned it into hysteria" (Rayback in

Cahn, 165). A cartoon of the period pictured marchers carrying a banner that proclaimed "Unemployed. . . We are starving. . . Work or War" (in Cahn 1972, 158). Fear among the better-off classes was tangible, if not a bit overwrought. Wrote Crosby in 1883's *The Dangerous Classes*, "We have seen in our country what a power for evil these debased classes are, in the riots of 1877. . .History will ever point. . . to the Reign of Terror in bleeding France. . ." (in Hatheway 1995). They were fearful for their very heads, perhaps with good reason.

In light of this history Raymond Mohl (1983, 38-9) has argued that "if the Piven and Cloward model is correct, we should be able to find clear evidence of substantial expansion of public relief to temper the disorder among the unemployed and the poor, and then an effort to reinforce work norms when economic conditions improved and social turmoil subsided."⁵ Yet, as we have seen, quite the contrary seems to have taken place -- public relief was contracted or eliminated in more than half of all large cities, cities where much of the worst turmoil occurred.

Piven and Cloward have themselves responded to Mohl and others who have argued that their conclusions about the 1930s and 1960s do not hold for other periods of American history (Piven and Cloward 1983; Trattner 1983, *passim*). Their principal critique is to Mohl's basic misreading of *Regulating the Poor*. As they note, "we never said, 'if mass disorder then mass relief.' What we did say is, 'if mass relief, then mass disorder preceded.'" Under what conditions, then, does disorder expand relief, or as they ask, "when bread, and when bullets?" Relief policy in this period shows that some cities responded with bread, and others with bullets. Piven and Cloward elsewhere (1977, Ch. 1) argue that there are three possible responses by government to insurgents: if the disruption is contained and unlikely to have larger impact, it will simply ignore it. If, on

⁵ As they wrote in *Regulating the Poor* (1971, 3): "Relief arrangements are ancillary to economic arrangements. Their chief function is to regulate labor, and they do that in two general ways. First, when mass unemployment leads to outbreaks of turmoil, relief programs are ordinarily initiated or expanded to absorb and control enough of the unemployed to restore order; then, as turbulence subsides, the relief system contracts, expelling those who are needed to populate the labor market."

the other hand, central institutions are threatened, the state is more likely to punish and repress protest. Only when, in times of great change, when those in power enjoy uncertain electoral support and the use of force poses risks will it seek to placate, co-opt or undermine protesters by granting concessions. Only then is protest likely to elicit relief.

In most cities of the Gilded Age the mobilized poor had great difficulty extracting concessions from local governments. They were much more likely to have their claims ignored or suppressed, though police forces and militia were more likely to have been used for strikes than protests. Kellogg (1894, 27) reported that the “trivial socialistic bread riots and hunger parades of last autumn failed as demonstrations and promptly ceased,” and Gutman (1965) reports that protests in New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, Detroit, Cincinnati, Newark, Pittsburgh, Indianapolis and Boston were largely ignored by city governments and ridiculed by the press as a hopeless futile cry of ignorant immigrants. Take this from the November 10, 1873 *New York Graphic*: “There is no point in railing at the rich nor in scowling at the capitalists nor in condemning corporations simply because one’s stomach is empty and he happens to be dinnerless. . . Whining and whimpering are as useless as they are disgusting” (in Gutman 1965, 256). When relief was “temporarily” suspended in New York in 1874 many businesses simultaneously lengthened the working day and lowered the wages of their workers, this only six months after police were called in to quell large demonstrations in Tomkins Square Park (Schneider and Deutch 1969; Goodman 1983; Feder 1936). When Paterson, New Jersey tried to institute a public work relief program, Gutman adds, it was protest by taxpayers that caused it to end.

As I have said, the COSs were explicit efforts to control disorder and restrict or rationalize relief; they had advantages, being less confrontational than bullets and less expensive than bread. Gurteen (1882, 45-6) expressly identified organized charity as a response to the disorder he saw embodied in the New York Draft Riots and the “chasms” of riot in 1877. He said it was “a fact that the *root* of the trouble lay in our present system of leaving pauperism to take care of itself.” He added “Are we to stand idly by while the

State or the Municipality levies a tax upon our subsistence for officialdom to distribute -- a tax demanded by Mendicity as the price of our safety in life and property?" Lowell repeatedly spoke of public charity as extortion by the masses for the safety of the better classes, and that COSs could offer a cheaper and more effective form of social insurance. As she said in an address to Sunday school children in Harlem (Stewart 1911, 151), "The money raised by taxation for the support of those in want is simply a public fund, paid from self-interest in the same spirit and for the same purpose as the far larger amounts spent for the police. It is for the public protection, and there is no element of charity in it." As the Rev. C. G. Trusdell put it to the NCCC of 1893 (p. 104), "Charity has a twofold character. It is the practical expression of sympathy with the afflicted, and the price that society pays for its own safety." The activism of the COSs and local governments seeking to control relief was behavior consistent with Piven and Cloward's understanding of the functions of relief.

Perhaps more to the point, what Mohl fails to appreciate is that while it may be appropriate to talk of a single movement and a single relief policy in the 1930s or 1960s, such an approach is ahistorical in the Gilded Age. There was no national policy, therefore to expect a national response is not logical. While protest was widespread throughout the last quarter of the century, it happened for different reasons in different places at different times with different objects of its outcry, there were different goals and demands, and, importantly, different local conditions. He points to a three-decade period of widespread disorder and insurgency and a three-decade period of relief cutbacks without attempting to correlate them, yet expects this disorder to have affected relief policy. But why should an 1877 riot in Philadelphia have precluded Milwaukee from abolishing relief in 1898? It shouldn't, because such events are unlikely to have much affected each other. Yet Mohl's challenge presumes that they could. What this ultimately calls for is a city-by-city analysis of the levels of insurgency preceding its major relief decisions throughout the late century

in order to determine whether such protests can be correlated with relief reductions or expansions; that is beyond the scope or ambition of this project.

No Protest

There are nonetheless a few points to be made. Katz (1986, 54) notes that “outdoor relief had no passionate, articulate champions, and the wealthy professionals who led the attack against it encountered little ideological opposition.” It is an important part of explaining relief withdrawal if there was no coordinated, strong opposition to the withdrawal of relief and indeed, as Katz observes, the record shows little opposition in many cities. That may have much to do with whether what was being withdrawn was considered worth fighting for: by the end of the century, public relief in many cities had grown more paltry, harder to get, undependable, and demeaning. Buffalo, Syracuse, Detroit and Milwaukee, which offered no cash out-relief, are among the cities with the highest total per capita out-relief expenses by 1900: thus even many cities with very “generous” relief offered very little money to poor people (Almy 1899; Almy 1900). For example, in 1897 in D.C. \$13,000 “for relief of the poor” was allocated by Congress and distributed by the Commissioners in accord with recommendations of the Superintendent of Charities. \$1,300 was distributed by the police for provisions, fuel or clothing. \$7,200 was paid to physicians, \$3,400 bought medicines, \$300 bought coffins, \$500 went to the women’s dispensary and \$300 to the aged women’s home (Devine 1904, 298-9). Alameda County, California reportedly used its poor funds to buy lobster, salmon and tobacco for the Overseers (Warner and Coolidge 1908, 241). Katz (1986) notes that aid in Brooklyn before it was abolished consisted of “pitiful” quantities of food or coal provided on alternate weeks. Keyssar (1986) reveals the same for Massachusetts.

Relief, for many, was looked down upon as a poor substitute for what they wanted: a job. Among the placards carried by some of the 10,000 marchers in an 1886 Henry George rally was this: “No Charity: We Want Fair and Square Justice” (Hammack 1982,

113). During the depression of the 1870s, labor did not include poor support among its demands (Lui 1995a); said one mason in Newark, "Workers don't want charity but work" and marchers in Chicago carried signs that proclaimed "War Against Idleness" and "We Want Labor and Not Beggary" (Gutman 1965, 265). Mandler (1990, 24) argues that during this transformative period, as people constructed "new work-centered-identit[ies]" they, in an effort to distinguish themselves from the undeserving Other, "became more hostile to old-fashioned charity."⁶ "Working classes hold charitable enterprises in detestation and scorn," confirms Kellogg (1894, 24), "The feeling does not arise simply from self-respect, -- but from an economic and class conviction that charitable relief stands in the way of a juster distribution of profits, and is an aristocratic concession to poverty, in order to content it with an unequal and debasing social system. Labor demands justice, and not charity." Even the Populist Platform of 1892 proclaimed solidarity with St. Paul, declaring "If any will not work, neither will he eat" while still lamenting that "From the same prolific womb of government injustice we breed the two great classes -- tramps and millionaires."

Gilded Age insurgents did not typically issue calls for relief: many poor and working people believed, like their would-be benefactors, that self-sufficiency and work were their salvation, not charity, whether it came from private organizations or from the state. Rodgers (1974, 246) found few relief protests in the late century, and reports that those that did occur were "theatrical rather than coercive" and "aimed at audiences rather than targets." That so many trade unionists and workers, especially in the depression of 1873, condemned charity and demanded work instead is a measure, perhaps, among other things to be sure, of how well-ingrained the anti-charity ethic is in American working-class culture. "I am a workingman, therefore an honest one, and would refuse a dollar I did not earn, for I am neither a beggar to accept charity nor a thief to take what belongs to another,

⁶ But Mandler (1990) also cautions us not to assume that simply because bourgeois citizens attached a stigma to charity is sufficient reason to presume that working-class or other persons in need did so.

however he came by it" (A Striker 1877). Similarly, note Closson's (1894, 177) account of the late century Depression: "A small body of the unemployed themselves held a mass meeting in Union Square November 28, and passed resolutions requesting 'employment rather than charity,' and asking that the city and State 'promote works of public benefit and improvement.'" The Rev. S.S. Craig of Canada told the NCCC in 1897 (p. 272) that "the poverty of today is not the result of a lack of industry on the part of those who are suffering. Labor is not refusing to go to work. It is clamoring, beseeching, praying God and man for an opportunity to work." Yet, as Mandler (1990) argues, when faced with sufficient distress, working-class people throughout large cities throughout the world overcame their shame in seeking relief, shunning only that form -- the poorhouse -- that required them to sacrifice their freedom, their family and their meager assets.

But Passive Resistance

Most COS reformers implemented a charity that, whatever its intent, was in effect an attempt to monitor and change the behavior of their poor petitioners. One of the principal functions of Visitors was to recommend whether a family should receive assistance, and in what form, which was abundantly clear to the Visited: among their challenges, then, was to at least *appear* to be comporting to the desired behavior of their Visitor, since fewer than one in three applicants was eventually deemed worthy of relief (Devine 1898). They did not take to the streets in protest, and few dared risk outright confrontation, but they did regularly lie to and actively deceive Visitors in order to appear qualified for relief, acting according to what Hobsbawm has called "working the system to minimum disadvantage" with the passive resistance we might more readily associate with slave stratagems. COS Visitors were aware of these subterfuges, and their reports are full of descriptions of supposedly unworthy clients attempting to appear worthy; this is part of why Evans (1889) advised that a Visitor should always leave decisions about relief to the District Committee and the distribution of relief to the COS Agents, so that the Visitor would be more likely to

be told the truth by her client. Indeed, the deceptions that some have documented in charity-client relations attest to a game being played in which charity seekers pretend to comport to the values they know will get them assistance. There was thus a fundamental contradiction in the efforts of Friendly Visitors, as Katz (1986) and Boyer (1978) have observed: while the stated COS goal was to inculcate independence in their poor clients through moral education, the power the Visitor held in some instances over the client's very life fostered their dependence, requiring poor applicants to act as supplicants. As one Visitor reported, "Threatened Mrs. G. that relief would be discontinued if she does not do exactly as she was told. Explained that when she accepted charity, she gave up the right to make any decisions" (in Wagner 2000, 63).

While some reformers understood this -- charity "divides mankind into lofty patrons and cringing, begging clients," noted Henderson (1894b, 226) -- the chasm between Visitor and Visited could be great. This, from a letter from an AICP Visitor in 1873: "The room *dirty and disorder*, with some like companion sitting around a table with a pitcher or can of ale or beer, and perhaps already half drunk. I make known my business and of course under the circumstances tell them I can't give any assistance. Then Sir, you may be sure abuse of the first order is heaped on the poor Visitor who finds himself in such a plight" (in Becker 1961, 391). Notice the use of "poor," and that it's the Visitor who is "in a plight."⁷ Chicago Settlement House leader Jane Addams caught the Visitor's dilemma nicely: "it often occurs in the mind of the sensitive visitor. . . that she has no right to say these things; that she herself has never been self-supporting; that, whatever her virtues may be, they are not the industrial virtues; that her untrained hands are no more fitted to cope with actual conditions than are those of her broken-down family" (Addams 1899, 164) and that the Visitor was inevitably frustrated because instead of teaching about things she knew, "like Latin prose," she had to teach what she had not learned from either books or

⁷ Perhaps little changed in the following century: Piven and Cloward (1971, 176) report New York State findings that more people received AFDC when there were fewer professionally-trained, social worker caseworkers.

experience (Addams 1910, 167). In an analysis of case files of the Indianapolis COS, Ziliak (1997) found that visiting the poor and educating them to reformers' ideas of virtuous behavior had no statistically significant impact on their success in finding employment (*pace* Gertrude Himmelfarb).⁸

Active Assault

We might finally consider that while anti-relief agitation was evident long before the creation of COSs, it did not achieve any considerable or widespread success until the late nineteenth century. Philadelphia was the scene of attacks against relief in 1769, 1774, 1793 (when "outpensions" were abolished), and finally, 1828, when outdoor relief was eliminated not to resume until the 1840s. In New York, sustained attacks against relief were launched as early as the 1820s (Katz 1986, 41). Throughout the 1820s and 1830s, similar efforts in other cities were made by AICP reformers. Few were successful. Not until the last quarter of the nineteenth century did anti-relief mobilizations achieve widespread results perhaps because only then did relief reveal itself (in different ways in different times in different cities) to be such a serious threat to the emerging new order that business and professional men organized to resist it; their economic goals coincided with the sometimes different goals of charity reformers seeking to recapture rural community and neighborhood in an increasingly alien and urban world, forming a coalition of compatible desires that would be seen again in the late twentieth century when the family-focused reformers of the cultural right and the work-focused reformers of the corporate-funded think tanks both fought to restrict the availability of relief to poor men and women.

As both Devine (1904) and Katz (1986) have previously suggested, local conditions were responsible for whether a Gilded Age city abolished, reduced, expanded, reconfigured or privatized its relief programs. The search for simple explanations or for

⁸ This will not surprise those who have operated work-readiness or life skills courses for people on welfare to help make them more "employable." There is no contemporary evidence that such efforts at education achieve more than, at best, short term, temporary employment successes (Weisman and Kasmir 1994).

patterns yields little. But in some of those cities where relief was not repealed, it seems to have been in part because of protest, as in Chicago and Buffalo, or because relief programs were well-staffed and well-funded and, as a result, deemed better by the public and even the COSs than any private alternative, as was the case in Cleveland (and in Ohio generally) and in Boston.

Resisting Reform: Protest in Chicago and Buffalo

“With the possible exception of the COS in New York no society exerted more influence at the turn of the century on the theory and practice of charity and social work administration” than Chicago (Kusmer 1973). Yet Chicago was among those cities that did not reduce or eliminate outdoor relief during this period. There are two features of Chicago during this era that might account for this apparent anomaly. First is that while Chicago could boast early and consistently influential charities, there was no organization explicitly adherent to COS principles in place throughout the entire period. The local COS was organized in 1886 by Buffalo’s Gurteen (Hunter 1902, 77) but the general relief society, Chicago Relief and Aid Society, would not cooperate and “the new society, overshadowed by the older society, was a few years later ‘benevolently assimilated’ by it and so [the COS] ceased to exist” (Watson 1922, 224; Hunter 1902). Relief principles won out over COS principles. Alexander Johnson (1923, 59-78), who took charge of the Chicago COS in 1886, opposed the Relief and Aid Society, which he said squandered the money raised after the Great Fire and was run at the whim of its Board. The Cook County “outdoor relief system had been notoriously abused; it had been made into little more than a system for vote buying; it was a common saying among the henchmen [of the Board of Commissioners] that a ton of coal before election ought to be good for at least one vote.” Johnson urged that the Relief and Aid Executive Committee abolish relief and give responsibility for it over to the COS, but it “lacked the courage necessary to assume so heavy a responsibility” and refused; he then attempted a hostile takeover of Relief and Aid,

and got seven members of the COS's Board appointed to theirs, but ultimately failed (Johnson 1923). The COS fought for control and lost. In Watson's (1922) appraisal, it was not until after 1900 that Chicago really saw the rise of COS methods in its administration and charity. This must surely have made any Chicagoans reluctant to turn over relief to such antagonistic institutions, whatever their antipathy to relief itself. Second, Chicago was arguably the scene of more violent and more widespread labor unrest than any other city during this period (Boyer 1978, 125-7). If Piven and Cloward are correct and relief is only extended (or, in this case, not withdrawn) in response to and to quiet mass insurgency, perhaps the sheer disruptive force of poor and unemployed people presented a greater threat or perceived threat than it did in other cities, even though their appeals were not specifically for poor relief. But when they were, they succeeded. As in many others cities, the Depression of 1873 led to new demands for work and/or relief, including from some 20,000 protesters in a single event; claiming that city funding was insufficient, the Mayor asked the Guardians of the Great Fire fund to borrow from it (\$700,000 still remained in 1873). They refused. More protests followed, and when 1,000 people simultaneously applied for relief, then 2,000 on another day, the city renewed its pleas and began imposing new restrictions to try to stem the tide, like requiring vaccinations before accepting relief applications. Though they would turn still away 60% as undeserving, the city spent in that year \$149,196 for relief for 5,984 families; by 1875, they had implemented more restrictive rules to prevent such expenditures again (Feder 1936, 51-6), but expenses continued to rise.

Buffalo, which had the first city-wide COS, could not boast of the most successful anti-relief campaign, though Gurteen certainly tried. Early in the life of the Buffalo COS Gurteen noted that "Wherever Organization has been started, it has, without a single exception, either abolished out-door city relief altogether or has reduced the amount hitherto annually expended, within comparatively reasonable limits," and then claimed that Buffalo's savings were about \$50,000 annually (Gurteen 1882, 124). Yet the elected

Overseer of the Poor seems to have thwarted Gurteen and his agency successfully over the long-term, inspiring bitter complaints from reformers about the agitation of an ignorant and unruly public whose rioting for bread and relief in the winter of 1893 caused relief rolls to rise, combined with unwise officials and the failure of private organizations to demonstrate an ability to take over from public overseers (Gurteen 1882; Almy 1900; Rezneck 1953; Munsterberg 1902). "In Buffalo," reported Almy (NCCC 1900, 142), "the city alms are given by a single overseer of the poor, elected by popular vote, who is at present honest, but not over-intelligent; and this overseer of the poor is responsible to no one." Except, of course, to those who elected him, who seem to have demanded relief. Total relief expenditures fluctuated wildly, from \$112,054 in 1876 to \$32,360 in 1882 to \$52,700 in 1885 to \$118,803 in 1898, but total relief expenditures per family remained relatively constant at around \$35. In Buffalo, as elsewhere, a determined COS tried to abolish relief and ultimately failed despite very strong support from the city's business and professional men (see Watson 1922, 179ff; Gurteen 1882, 129). As late as 1900, reports of the NCCC still noted Buffalo's continuing attempts to reduce or abolish its high levels of relief, which were higher even than that of "lavish" Boston.

Resisting Reform: Proficiency in Cleveland and Boston

In 1897 Cleveland's Associated Charities lamented its failure to compel the city to abolish relief and turn its provision over to the AC. The AC was itself divided into two camps, one of which reluctantly opposed the proposition for fear that it would be unable to take over relief and that insufficient funding was available. Besides, reported the Superintendent of the AC, "The outdoor relief as administered at present is as carefully done as we could wish. The investigators are old and experienced, who see to it that only the really needy are given aid. Politics does not enter into the outdoor relief work. This is

a great change from what it was fifteen or twenty years ago" (Almy 1899, 26).⁹ Cleveland presents another instance in which, in this case by its own account, a COS tried and failed to compel a city to abolish relief, and its failure was, as we shall see in the case of Boston, attributed to the effectiveness of relief provision. Such reductions in public out-relief that are evident occurred before the COS came into being: while 4,590 families shared in \$95,000 in relief in 1875, it declined steadily until 1877, then precipitously after a strict work-test was implemented so that by 1880 1,200 families shared in \$17,000 in relief (Low 1881, 152).

Boston, which had one of the nation's largest COSs by 1892, did not withdraw relief. Two attempts were made, in 1888 and 1901. Both failed (Watson 1922, 400fn). It is worth devoting some attention to Boston, for it presents an interesting case and offers some compelling if suggestive evidence. Like other cities, ethnic-based relief societies appeared early in Boston's history: the Scots Charitable Society was established in 1657, and Irish, German and many others soon followed. Boston's first almshouse was erected in 1660 (Watson 1922, 65). A Society for the Prevention of Pauperism was established in 1835, and in 1851 came the Boston Provident Society, patterned after the NYAICP (Watson 1922, 72-4). By 1868, free soup was widely distributed, typically by the police; as in so many other cities, this practice was condemned by charity reformers, and was discontinued in the winter of 1873-4. But unlike New York, where the depression marked the beginning of a long period of relief withdrawal, the following winter Boston resumed free soup and appropriated \$5,000 for its distribution (Feder 1936, 48); from the onset of the depression, the Boston Provident Association spent even from its reserve funds until 1877 when, fearing bankruptcy, it finally cut back on its relief-giving. But when it did so, it also hired another Visitor -- to help better distribute the funds remaining (Feder 1936, 54; Watson 1922). The number of Lodgers in police station rose from 2,574 in October of

⁹ While Watson (1922) records the AC as having been established in 1881 he argued that it had minimal influence until after 1900; Sage (1914) records its establishment as 1900.

1872 to 3,793 in October of 1873; in the year of 1875, police provided shelter to 45,000 “vagrants” and “tramps” and the public Overseers of the Poor distributed 27,000 free meals (Feder 1936; NCCC 1877, 105). By 1875 Boston had established work-relief programs and work tests (mostly stone-breaking), which paid \$1.00 per day (Feder 1936, 68), along models that would not be adopted in many other cities until the depression of 1893.

In the mid-1870s Boston began to organize its charities. By 1873 it had a Society for the Relief of Destitute Mothers and Infants. Influenced by both Octavia Hill and the Elberfield system, in its North End in 1875 Boston established the Cooperative Society for Volunteer Visitors Among the Poor, which soon spread to other parts of the city; it had a Registration Bureau by 1876; and its COS, the Associated Charities (AC) by 1879. As noted, Germantown, Pennsylvania established the first COS in 1873, and Buffalo the first city-wide COS in 1877, but Boston may well have been the first city to begin a comprehensive rationalization of its relief efforts. (And Rev. Joseph Tuckerman, one of its early leaders, was among the first of the nineteenth century charity reformers to articulate a diagnosis of poverty that depended as much upon an evaluation of economic conditions beyond people’s control as upon their own unwillingness and congenital inability to work.) This early organization would have other effects, too, for when reformers sought to establish the Boston AC, they were “bitterly opposed” by most every established charity in the city and had to win their favor “inch by inch.” They succeeded only by allowing delegates from other Boston charities to comprise much of its central and district leadership. As in other cities which the COS entered and relief funds were already in place, the AC itself offered no relief whatsoever. Thus, the Boston AC was in some respects less autonomous and less powerful than COSs in other large cities; while it had spread to most of the state by 1881, it served mainly to provide Visitors to other agencies and as an information clearinghouse. It appears, moreover, that there was less overlap in personnel between the Boston Overseers and the AC. Instead of New York’s relations between public and private relief, where, for example, Lowell served as head of the State Board of

Charities while director of the COS or, the very close cooperation between the city and the COS that Ziliak (1996b) reports in Indianapolis, where the township trustee was a member of the Executive Committee of the COS, in Boston institutions were more liable to be in competition with each other over the policy of poor relief and the money that went with it (Watson 1922; Devine 1904; Warner and Coolidge 1908).

By the late 1880s, reports circulated widely among charity reformers and public officials about the successes of Brooklyn, New York, Baltimore, the District of Columbia and Philadelphia, which had, reformers said, abolished all public outdoor relief and yet the poor had suffered no ill effects. The experiment had been made, they proclaimed, the results were in, and the findings were indisputable. In 1888, a Committee comprised largely of Boston Overseers of the Poor visited each city to evaluate reformers' claims and consider changes to their city's relief policy. They decided that any change "would be a change for the worse." In particular, they were concerned about how the city would respond in the event of a depression and, citing Brooklyn in particular, were concerned that large sums were given to private agencies, who, in turn, gave little aid to the poor. Moreover, they offered a little noticed critique that goes to the heart of nineteenth and twentieth century reformers' claims about the effects of public relief upon private giving, upon the cost-savings of relief cutbacks, and upon the potential labor-market effects of relief withdrawal: if Brooklyn was able to discontinue its public relief without any effects upon the poor, they mused, why should it not also discontinue its subsidies to private agencies now offering relief in its stead? (LAH 1888; LAH 1889; Warner 1894; Devine 1904). The *Boston Herald*, among others, disputed the Report, insisting that an analysis of individual cases revealed the evils of outdoor relief (Warner 1894, 172).

But that, it seems, was that. "If the report of the Boston overseers did not fully convince the residents of Brooklyn, Philadelphia and other cities that they had made a mistake in abolishing outdoor relief," wrote Devine (1904, 304), "it seems to have had a quieting effect on any agitation toward the same end at home, and in the period since the

report was published there appears not to have developed any very general sentiment against outdoor relief. Several of the active workers of the Associated Charities, if not converted from their earlier faith, have at least come to acquiesce in the present system as not likely soon to be radically changed. Some have gone further, and doubt whether Dr. F.H. Wines may not be right in pronouncing opposition to outdoor relief a 'fad' and insisting that the whole question is one of administration." One of the Overseers' central claims was that no good case had been made that private relief functioned differently in its effects upon recipients than public relief, that public relief was more "adequate and uniform, and that its burdens are fairly distributed, while private relief is spasmodic, rests entirely upon charitably disposed persons, and may fail entirely because of shrinking income at the very time when destitution is greatest and the need of relief most pressing." The Overseers also argued, contrary to anti-relief doctrine, that private relief might in fact pauperize more easily than public because private relief could carry less stigma. We might also consider that leadership here was important, and public officials investigated relief and proclaimed it not so harmful as others claimed, and that AC leaders seemed to have resigned themselves to it and, as a result, not sought to whip up public opposition to it. Boston did not abolish its public outdoor relief, despite having given the proposition serious consideration.

Campaigns against relief in Boston failed, according to Watson (1922, 399-400fn1), because of "an unfortunate loss of faith on the part of two or three of the natural leaders of public opinion" and because the bureaucratic division of responsibility for indoor and outdoor relief fostered internal dissent." Boston divided responsibility of outdoor and indoor relief among different Overseers, enabling, he suspects, each program to be better administered; that "better administration," in turn, "weakened opposition to it." Devine (1904, 309) similarly points to some decreases in relief and "stricter administration" as reasons that western cities were home to "fewer *successful* attempts" to abolish relief [*italics mine*]. The corruption of relief, as we have seen, was a central theme of charity

reformers. As Devine (1904, 345) put it: "Public outdoor relief was in many places lavish, and its administration careless, extravagant, and, in some instances, corrupt. There were no adequate safeguards against deception, no common registration of relief to prevent duplication, and private almsgiving, while it was profuse in meeting the obvious distress, was admittedly and wholly inadequate in meeting situations which require generous financial contributions, and persistent personal attention." It may follow, then, that cities like Boston that had managed to create public relief systems that were perceived to be better administered were less susceptible to this strain of the reformers' indictment. In fact, cash relief in Boston increased substantially: from 1877 to 1900 *total* Boston expenditures for outdoor relief declined from \$80,342 to \$64,502. The number of recipients declined, too, from 6,662 to 2,863 so that per family averages received rose from \$12.12 to \$22.53. In fact, from 1880 to 1890, the total expenditures of the Boston Overseers of the Poor (a subset of total relief expenditures) declined from \$34,459 to \$22,682. But these data also reveal that those declines all occurred in the funding allocated for in-kind relief for fuel and food; funding for immediate cash relief actually *doubled* from 1880 to 1890 -- from about \$230.00 to \$418.00 per family (Devine 1904, 303-8; LAH 1890 V5, 700).

Other Meanings of Reform

Devine (1904, 282), in trying to generalize about why certain cities did or did not abolish public outdoor relief ultimately threw up his hands. He said that in each city that abolished relief the change must be "attributed to special and local causes." As we have seen, there is something to be said for this approach, for there are few patterns across cities

that appear meaningful.¹⁰ The COSs, whether we interpret their activism as having failed or succeeded, were clearly central players; one of the key differences between the nineteenth and twentieth century campaigns against relief was that the COSs, unlike their think tank counterparts, failed to achieve some of their most ambitious goals. Chicago, Buffalo, Cleveland and, especially, Boston present interesting cases of the COSs' failure in which it seems that protest in Chicago and Buffalo and the belief in the effectiveness of relief in Cleveland and Boston may have helped stave off relief retrenchment. But the campaign itself, apart from whether it culminated in relief change, had meaning: "The message -- that the state might now take back what it had given -- could hardly have been lost upon dependent groups even in cities where philanthropy did not succeed in its quest to eliminate public relief" (Polsky 1991, 40). Katz (1986, 43) similarly writes that relief "was dangerous not because of whom it helped but because of the lesson it taught by example. Its very existence was a threat to productivity, morality and the tax rate."

The Return to Relief

One last set of observations is in order. By the depression of 1893, we can see many cities responding to turmoil by greatly expanding their relief programs. Relief was used to quiet the throbbing mob, *pace* Raymond Mohl. As Brooks described the changing scene in 1894 (p. 361-2),

¹⁰ Paul Pierson (2000b) would write some one hundred years later that "Different welfare state configurations are the products of complex conjunctural causation, with multiple factors working together over extended periods of time to generate dramatically different outcomes. There is no theoretical justification for arguing that a 10% shift in the value of one variable or another will have a simple direct effect on outcomes" (Pierson 2000b). In other words, there can be no monocausal explanations for welfare state development and expansion, despite scholars' attempts to correlate single factors such as GNP, labour party power, or political culture to explain variations across states. Nor, by extension, should we reasonably hope that complex variation in local relief policies across some three decades of the nineteenth century could be sufficiently explained by such factors as their size, the harshness of their winters, the racial or ethnic populations of their cities, or even general levels of protest.

Discontent never got so sharp and varied expression. Class hatreds never showed themselves in more sinister form. Socialistic opinions were never before so widely uttered, nor have they ever at any time received in the press such universal attention. . . . This new feeling comes from a democracy that has become conscious of definite political power. It at last believes that laws may be made and so directed that a broader and higher standard of living can be assured to the masses. . . [and with provocation from Socialists, men who used to accept seasonal unemployment] become restless and bitter against conditions which they have hitherto taken as a matter of course.

Charities Review reported in 1894 that "Some communities when the hard times came this winter, and the army of the unemployed swept through the streets, were panic-stricken, the inhabitants fortified themselves behind soup-houses, and threw loaves of bread out upon the besiegers; naturally the siege continued" (in Feder 1936, 155). Ironically, the places where relief cutbacks did occur were least prepared for the widespread dislocations of the 1893 (and 1907 and 1914) depressions and were sites of some of the greatest agitation for renewed public intervention and great increases in relief. Abolishing relief helped to create the conditions for expanding it, just as expansions of relief engendered calls for its reduction or abolition.¹¹ Many cities established what today we would call public works projects, and millions were appropriated for parks improvement in New York as a seemingly direct result of labor agitation. From 1893-1894 in the wake of widespread new demands, numerous cities that had previously abolished or reduced aid reinstated or increased it, by 300% in Pittsburg and Omaha, 200% in Milwaukee, and 43% in Detroit and Minneapolis (Closson 1894, *passim*). Put another

¹¹ This is a "feedback" phenomenon observed in analysis of modern welfare states, too. Pierson (1996) argues that welfare cutbacks can strengthen support for, and ultimately expand, the welfare state. Piven and Cloward (1982, Ch. 5 and 6) have made related arguments.

way, ending relief helped foster the conditions for expanding it. And, as we have already seen in New York and Philadelphia and shall see further in the next chapter, cutbacks in public relief often were followed by expansions in private relief and public subsidies to private providers that, in the case of Indiana, for example, replaced the public cuts 70 cents on the dollar (Ziliak 1997).

Restraining the Tramp

Most scholarly attention to means-tested relief programs has focused upon women. Indeed, much of the discussion in these pages has, explicitly or implicitly, attended to relief programs that were used mostly by women. But men were important players in relief dramas as well, though their involvement appears outside outdoor relief provision but well within the purview of the COSs and contemporary reformers.¹² Perhaps as vigorous as the late nineteenth century campaigns against outdoor relief were widespread anti-begging campaigns, battles to combat "Tramps," and a massive incarceration of poor people. All such campaigns had in common with anti-relief agitation stern punishments for those unwilling to work, mandatory work for all those who would receive any aid, and the incarceration (and forced labor) or expulsion from the community of any who would not accept the bargain. Tramp Acts were but one piece of a much larger, many-headed campaign to mold a workforce better suited to the new needs of industrial capitalism. Much of it is familiar -- the business-backed flood of immigrants as cheap, dependent, and expendable workers; the use of private Pinkertons and public police forces to quash strikes or kill strikers; the use of courts to prohibit such activities through injunction (Forbath 1989), or to control workers by applying feudal legal conceptions of property and of master-servant relations (Orren 1991). The late century assault on the Tramp, like the

¹² Katz (1986, 1983) has reported that most late nineteenth century relief recipients were women; still, men constituted almost 20% of applicants in New York and 13% in New Haven (Warner 1894, Table XII).

campaign against outdoor relief, offers further evidence that the COSs and their allies fought to compel labor from those it perceived to be surviving by other means, and to punish those who would refuse.

Prisons and Profit

By 1890 there were some 100,000 men in jails or penitentiaries nationwide (NCCC 1890, 403), most of whom performed labor for outside contractors. This was a source of much debate. Lowell complained (NCCC 1898, 449): "Do you know that when the stove men were on strike in Albany, the State penitentiary undertook the manufacture of stoves, and broke down the strike?" Citing a special committee of the Ohio legislature, Brinkerhoff (1887, 106ff) reported that "the contract system carried on in our penal institutions is directly responsible for a large percentage of the reductions which have taken place in the wages of thousands of our mechanics during the past four years. Nearly every manufacturer who testified before your committee attributed a large percentage of the reduction in wages to the system which enabled manufacturers who have prison contracts at cheap rates to go into the market and undersell them." Half of all total U.S. prisoners (54,495 in 1887) were employed in a mechanical industry; convicts made up 20% of all broom and brush workers, 31% of all chairmakers, 19% of all saddlery hardware makers and 12% of all the whip industry, but, he notes, in order to offer a defense of prison labor, only 2.5% of all mechanical labor in all industries was performed by prison labor. Just as specific trades were more adversely effected than others, state-by-state variation is obscured by low national effects. In Michigan, Indiana, Wisconsin and Missouri convicts produced 23% of all boots and shoes, for example (Lewis 1887, 113-15).

Mississippi recorded a net profit of \$30,090 in prison agricultural labor for 1896; Texas prisoners took in \$101,905 "over and above the cost of their keep" in 1895 and 1896; Virginia in 1897 netted \$14,232 (NCCC 1898, 53-5). In the late nineteenth century, prisoners in Alabama were "leased-out" to "businesses hungry for hands to work in farm

fields, lumber camps, railroad construction gangs and, especially in later years, mines” (Blackmon 2001). The practice was hardly limited to the South, although there convict leasing took on a particular character as it supplanted slave labor with new forms of indentured servitude. The percentage of all inmates in Nashville who were black rose from 33% in 1865 to almost 68% in 1879, remaining near that level into the new century, while 70% of Louisiana’s prisoners and 88% of North Carolina’s were black (Shelden 1993, 615-17). Businesses paid the State an average of 48 cents per day for labor, while competitive wages might have been as high as \$1.75 per day (Lewis 1887). Said the Rev. J.L. Milligan of Allegheny, Pennsylvania in 1879, “All our prisoners are employed” (NCCC 1880, xxiv). Blackmon (2001) observes, “Leasing prisoners to private individuals or companies provided revenue and eliminated the need to build prisons.” But its effects extend beyond the direct and economic: “its ideological and psychological importance should not be underestimated. Prison labor was widely *perceived* by workers as a potential or immediate threat, and thus lurked in the background of the general conflict between labor and capital as an instrument of discipline.” (Asylum labor was as widespread (see Rothman 1971; Ebert 1999), though less often decried.)

This new labor supply and prison population resulted from new laws and new enforcement, often strongly advocated and even enforced, by COSs.

Dangerous Men and the Tramp Acts

The Tramp was something of a stock character in late nineteenth century reform circles, variously a source of pity, fear, scorn and disgust (only early in the twentieth century would he become the benign tramp of Charlie Chaplin). Yale College’s Francis Wayland offered an apt summary for the NCCC of 1877 (p. 112):

as we utter the word *Tramp*, there arises straightway before
us the spectacle of a lazy, shiftless, sauntering or

swaggering, ill-conditioned, irreclaimable, incorrigible, cowardly, utterly depraved savage. He fears not God, neither regards man. Indeed, he seems to have wholly lost all the better instincts and attributes of manhood. He will outrage an unprotected female, or rob a defenceless [sic] child, or burn an isolated barn, or girdle fruit trees, or wreck a railway train, or set fire to a railway bridge, or murder a cripple, or pilfer an umbrella. . . Practically, he has come to consider himself at war with society and all social institutions. . . He has only one aim, -- to be supported in idleness. He has only one fear, -- to be deprived of his liberty.

Unlike most poor women or families, which, even if deemed “undeserving” of relief were understood to be *relief* problems (whether public or private), Devine (1904, 82) voiced the consensus opinion when describing the tramp as a *police* problem, not something to be remedied with charity. “Begging from strangers is *prima facie* evidence of unworthiness” proclaimed Alfred O. Crozier of the Grand Rapids COS (NCCC 1897, 158). Regarding these roaming beggars, the vagrants and the tramps -- the terms were often used interchangeably; they were also called vagabonds, ho-bos, pike bums, jumpers and shovel-bums (McCook 1893, 58) -- Devine (1904, 85) wrote that “there is no choice but to prosecute and deal with such offenders as criminals.” And indeed, in response to what reformers noted with alarm as a “tramp epidemic” (employing here again the “rhetoric of contagion” discussed in Chapter Three) (NCCC 1877, 104), new laws -- Tramp Acts -- were passed throughout the last third of the century “to check or exterminate the tramp” (NCCC 1879, 25), including those of 1871, 1876 and 1879 in Pennsylvania; 1874 and 1877 in Illinois; and 1880 and 1885 in New York, where the State Charities Aid

Association was especially involved in anti-begging and tramp laws. Many locales simply made it illegal to appear in public without a "visible means of support." Massachusetts vagrancy arrests doubled from 1892 to reach over 300,000 in 1895 (Howland 1922, Table D). In 1877 alone -- a year of widespread labor unrest, the year of the Great Strike, a year that the Beards (1944, 320) said made Shay's rebellion "appear like a mere argument at a garden party" -- there were more than one million vagrancy arrests in the United States, double the amount of the previous year (Stanley 1992; Ringenbach 1973). There followed nearly three decades in which throughout the nation cities and town enacted various statutes that made begging illegal, loosened legal standards for arrest and conviction, demanded work in exchange for any form of public assistance and made refusal to comply "*Prima facie* evidence of tramping," which could in Massachusetts be punishable by one to three years in a state prison, a labor colony, farm or reformatory. In Missouri, convicted beggars were offered as workers to the highest bidder (Closson 1895b; Millis 1897). Other locales enacted mandatory sentences as long as three years or fines of up to \$50 (NCCC 1903, 414ff) -- those who couldn't pay such fines were put to work, as were those who could not pay the fees often charged to cover the costs of arrest, conviction and transportation to public prison or private labor camp, which "gave sheriffs an incentive to arrest and detain as many people as possible," since those fees sometimes formed part or even all of their compensation (Blackmon 2001).

"The one noticeable thing about the length of a sentence," reported Millis (1897), "is that it is long in the New England states and gradually shortens as one travels toward the west and south, where the maximum is almost always fixed at ninety days" (yet the sheriffs fees in some jurisdictions could add years to those sentences, reports Blackmon). Some statutes placed the burden of proof upon the accused, and sanctioned summary judgments in jury-less trials that sometimes lasted less than one minute (Stanley 1992, 1279). Baltimore removed judicial discretion over punishment, condemning all convicted to prison (CR 1900, 162), while many statutes compelled intensified enforcement from

their local police (see NCCC 1903, 414ff). Twenty states had residency requirements (and all those without were in the South and West), most of about one year; in many states it was a crime to bring paupers across their borders; and in New Hampshire and Pennsylvania anyone could arrest a beggar for a ten dollar reward; the prize was five dollars in Connecticut and ten dollars in Nevada for each conviction (Millis 1897). Texas, and doubtless other states, passed statutes that required “pauper’s oaths,” which denied them the rights of citizens without affirmations that they had means of support (Monkkonen 1993). “Many of these statutes,” observes Stanley (1992, 1274), “were the direct accomplishment of charity reformers.” As Boston COS’s Robert Treat Paine told the Brooklyn Bureau of Charities, “even the tramps and paupers have organized a mighty assault against Christian benevolence; out of sheer protection it is essential that the charities launch a counter-organization” (in Gettleman 1963, 316). As Paine also said, “what influence can be worse for all who see that begging pays better than work?” (in Stanley 1992, 1271). There were no laws, it seems, that prohibited the *giving* of alms, though many critics condemned it and those who were foolish enough to do so (see Olasky 1994b).

In 1882, New York police made some 70-75,000 arrests; fully one-fourth were for intoxication or vagrancy (McCabe 1882), while Brace (1880) estimated the total homeless population to be between 20-30,000, excluding criminals. Jacob Riis (1890, 188) approvingly documents for 1889 nineteen New York arrests for begging and 2,633 arrests for vagrancy; for the same year, he says, some 22,477 were committed to workhouses and 1,419 admitted to insane asylums, and at year end 4,913 remained in them. “Nothing short of making street begging a crime,” he wrote, “has availed to clear our city of this pest to an appreciable extent.” Riis, best known as a journalist and photographer of the slums of the lower east side, worked closely with both the police, which was his beat, and the COS, for which he was a contributor and volunteer (Riis 1890). About 50,000 men each year were confined to the Tombs, the New York city jail that held those serving short-term sentences,

those awaiting trial, or those awaiting execution (local thieves called it City College); about 35,000 were there on drunk and disorderly charges, of whom some 12,000 were women (McCabe 1882) -- As Lowell said in 1876: "One of the most important and most dangerous causes of the increase of crime, pauperism and insanity is the unrestricted liberty allowed vagrant and degraded women" (in Watson 1922, 237fn2)

Charity Organization Implicated

Charity Organization and its benefactors were greatly involved in these campaigns. Businessman Alfred Mason (1891) recommended establishing a "Charity Trust," a combine modeled after Standard Oil so that begging should "not simply be lessened, but choked to death" with more effective use of the police. Many COSs included anti-begging campaigns as part of their advocacy work. Others went further. In Louisville, the COS was granted formal police powers, while in dozens of other cities the COS and police worked together to arrest and convict beggars. The most "continuous," "systematic," "efficient," and "severe" efforts were made in St. Louis, Boston, Detroit, Milwaukee, Jersey City, Newark, Cincinnati, Minneapolis, Worcester, Kansas City, Denver, New Haven, Hartford and Springfield (NCCC 1903, 414ff). Lowell wrote New York's 1880 anti-vagrancy law (Waugh 1997). The New York COS established its own Mendicancy Squad which, in cooperation with the police, detained vagrants and brought them to the courthouse for prosecution. It faithfully published its successes in each issue of the *Charities Review*, noting the number of cases, the total "warned" (i.e., banished from the city), the total committed, and the total number of months of incarceration or enforced labor they would serve; the average from 1891 and 1892 ranged from one to three months (CR, passim). When the Squad was discontinued in 1906, vagrancy arrests declined by 50% (Warner and Coolidge 1908, 252-3). At the 1883 NCCC (p. 93), a representative from Buffalo reporting on Vagrants and Tramps noted that "the Charity Organization Society has been most successful in preventing this class of cases from any thing like a permanent

abode with us and in no direction has exceeding vigilance been more rewarded. The society has found it necessary to prosecute these cases directly; and in each case unless its demand has been complied in, has had the persons arrested and prosecuted in the police courts; the result is that our streets are entirely free from these eye no sores [sic]." Gurteen (1882, 62) claimed that "the discontinuance of door-to-door begging is due to the Society *alone*." "In its crusade for the reduction of public outdoor relief," adds Watson (1922, 184), "the new society endeavored to gain not only the cooperation of ministers, bankers, merchants and all other influential citizens, but also of the officers of the various charitable institutions of the city and the Poor-Law officials."

Charity Organization Societies were dogged adversaries. Ringenback (1973, 57) reports that many personally appeared at trials to urge conviction and harsh sentences, and many expressed frustration at what they perceived to be the unwillingness of judges to convict enough of the accused (typically 20-50%). They fought also to ensure that once convicted, the tramp would be compelled to work. "At present," wrote Warner and Coolidge (1908, 256; see also Warner 1894), "a man who is sentenced for vagrancy is usually sent from ten to ninety days to a warm and pleasant jail, where he can play cards, chew tobacco, discuss crime, and tell indecent stories with his peers. To threaten a vagabond with arrest under such circumstances, is merely to promise to do him a favor." Ayers (1895, 263) reported that "Memphis has long been a central station for tramps, and only when the United Charities turned this undesirable element over systematically to the police who put each vagrant at hard labor, has the city been rid of them." Lowell fought to close police lodging houses (which functioned like twentieth century homeless shelters) noting that in 1889 there were 147,634 lodgings (69,111 of which were for women), averaging 189 women and 215 men each night. She notes more approvingly that the same year there were 82,200 arrests, 19,926 of whom were women -- those arrested, unlike lodgers, worked as part of their sentence (Stewart 1911, 327). Lodging houses were sometimes called "revolvers" because each allowed only one or two nights in each station

house; but once chiefs started to send lodgers to the workhouse instead, their numbers fell off sharply (Feder 1936, 64-5).

"Very few" lodgers were "native" (white) Americans -- that is, most in New York were Irish, German and Italian (McCabe 1882). Similarly, in January to March of 1874 there were some 30,000 lodgers in police stations per month, two-fifths of whom were women; 22% were natives; 52% were Irish immigrants; and the others were of 37 nationalities. Of the 49,423 in New York (City) prisons in 1879, 32,225 -- 65% -- were foreign-born; comparable figures were estimated to be as high as one-third in Pennsylvania, one-half at Auburn (New York), and six-sevenths at Sing-Sing (Brace 1880). Rothman (1971) confirms that prisons in New York, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, Illinois, Ohio, Kentucky and Tennessee were even in the late 1860s already populated with poor, uneducated, foreign-born men, almost all of whom were unskilled laborers.

By 1896, Theodore Roosevelt (son of Roosevelt Senior, Lowell's colleague on the New York State Board of Charities) formally ended the practice of police lodgings, under pressure also from Riis (Katz 1986). Lowell fought against private lodgings, too, citing their dangers in an 1896 letter to the Salvation Army when trying to dissuade them from opening a shelter. Lodgings, she insisted, had the "1. Danger of physical contagion; 2. Certainty of moral degradation; 3. Encouragement of vagrancy." Instead, send lodgers to the workhouse, she urged, and give them "moral and spiritual care," but don't offer poor men incentives to come to the city (Stewart 1911, 446-50). In an 1897 address she lamented that there were already in New York 105 cheap lodging houses, with 16,000 beds at 7-35 cents per night. Here's the main point: "One of the great evils of cheap lodging houses, whether commercial or charitable, is that a man who gets good wages can earn by one or two days' work enough to pay his way for a week, and a man who works two days each week and idles four is not a desirable person, whether regarded as an individual or as

a member of the community” (Stewart 1911, 458). That is, the chief danger of cheap lodging was that it made it possible for workers to survive while working less.

Another Pariah Class

That such criminalization of visible poverty sends a message or “sets a moral tone” (see Warner and Coolidge 1908, 235, 228-9; Warner 1894, 173; Ayers 1895, 262) has long been emphasized by Piven and Cloward (see 1971, 1987 especially). It is the “ritual degradation of a pariah class,” for “To demean and punish those who do not work is to exalt by contrast even the meanest labor at the meanest wages” (Piven and Cloward 1971, 149, 3). Stanley (1992, 1267) notes that the proliferation of vagrancy laws operated so that “it became a crime for propertyless persons to eke out a living outside the market,” and the punishment was often, sensibly enough, forced labor in prison or through the COS or another contracted agency.¹³ Said Glenn (1891, 67ff): “Labor is the life of society, and the beggar who will not work is a social cannibal feeding on that life -- a social highwayman with his hand upon the throat of that society, asking for both its money and its life, and just in proportion as society is greater than the individual, so in proportion is a beggar the highest of all criminals.” Begging harms both laborer and capital, he argued, and the “army” of beggars was increasing because capital, labor, the mayor, councilmen, the police, individual givers, almshouses, other institutions and the churches all were “thoughtlessly or intentionally co-operating to swell, and even to create, this hideous army, that, with its arrogant and sometimes fierce demands, is weakening the bonds of society, and which may threaten its very foundations.” Glenn captured the dual anxiety about the tramp -- the concern was not only about his effects upon the labor market, but as a reflection of the “urban crisis” or the “social question.” Many locales sought to resolve both simultaneously by advocating rural or farm labor colonies for tramps or colonization

¹³ See also Stanley (1992) for a discussion of how reformers reconciled such actions with their “free labor” ideology. For the classic statement on “free labor” see Foner 1970.

of the West (see Ringenback 1873, Ch. 4). In 1885 Cincinnati, like many other cities, established a woodyard specifically “to relieve citizens from the importunity of vagrants” (Johnson 1923, 42). Woodyards for men and laundries and other small businesses, often operated by the COSs as a “work-test” to determine who was worthy of relief (almost always paid in scrip, never cash), provided not only cheap labor but could provide revenue for the COSs as well. By 1895, seventeen COSs operated a woodyard or a workroom of some kind; Louisville’s made a profit that year (NCCC 1895, 95). In 1890, Chicago’s was a consistent source of revenue for the COS, though most, wrote Warner (1890, 5) either broke even (Roxbury, New Haven, Brooklyn) or recouped 50-75% of their expenses. New York’s woodyard sales totaled \$32,462 in 1897 (CR 1897, 782)

By late in the century, all sorts of strikers, rioters, marchers, soap-box speechmakers, and the various “industrial armies” of non-working men led in protest by Coxey (and the others that are less well known led by “Generals” Kelly, Frye, Browne, Fitzgerald and Swift -- see Rezneck 1953, 333) were typically castigated and dismissed as idle beggars or tramps (in Ringenback 1973, 44):

Hark, Hark! Hear the dogs bark!
Coxey is coming to town.
In his ranks are scamps
And growler fed tramps
On all of whom working men frown.

Barbour (1894, 11) captured the fear and made the connection between tramps and disorder. “Unless restrained from his nomadic course of life, the tramp and the beggar would ultimately threaten our very social existence. To-day we see them organized into what they are pleased to call ‘industrial armies,’ threatening the very heart of the nation with violence unless furnished with work which they never intend to do. What this

gathering horde really demands is that the Nation adopt the system of 'outdoor relief,' and that all its members shall be the recipients of that living which they conceive the world owes them, regardless of any effort they may make, regardless of any demand for particular kinds of work and prices in payment, regardless of all rights of property, regardless of the right of their fellows to accept work, and regardless of the right of society to do without them." Barbour stated specifically that State Boards of Charity could remedy this if they were staffed by men "who have been busy and successful in professional and other higher business walks of life."

Yet, as McCook discovered in an 1893 survey, of those tramps lodged at police stations 57% had a skilled trade or a profession (and 41% were unskilled), half had jobs that *required* them to travel (sailors, brakemen on railroads, etc.), 56% were born in the U.S. and 90% were literate. Most if not all were men and 90% were probably single, says McCook elsewhere (1895), because single men were typically laid off before married men were. Most worked, off and on. He estimated there to be just under 46,000 tramps in the U.S. in 1893. Tramp populations in large cities changed with the seasons. In an 1877 letter to the NCCC Charles Loring Brace reported that "Nothing can ever prevent the annual inpouring of vagrants and tramps every winter into the large cities, to enjoy the benefit of city charities and the excitements of winter life in the city; nor their exodus in the spring, to obtain chance jobs in the country, pick up alms, and enjoy a gipsy [sic] life in the warm months." He recommended that they not be allowed to travel without instituting "some pass-system." But at the same conference, another member noted that "the difficulty of deciding whether a man be a laborer in search of work, or a tramp trying to avoid it, is the difficulty which runs through the whole administration of the subject."

Their number only grew, from 46,000 in 1893 to 86,000 in 1895 to 430,000 by 1905, many of whom "infested the railways" (Warner and Coolidge 1908, 247). McCook (1895) estimated that the cost for their care in 1895 exceeded \$17 million, while Warner

and Coolidge (1908, 247) estimated \$18.5 million by 1905.¹⁴ Part of this “explosion” in tramping, which reflects a change in available employment, was likely a result of the deep depression of 1893-1898.

“It was both ironic and telling,” Keyssar (1986, 141) reports, “that tramps received less public attention once it became apparent that they were victims rather than villains, that they were obeying, rather than flouting, the dictates of the economy.” Feder (1936, 162) observed that “since the previous depression, thoughtful study and experimental treatment had clarified problems of the homeless. No longer merely a threatening mass, to be handled as cheaply as was consistent with community protection, homeless men had been revealed as persons with specific problems.” Just as the crises of the late century helped transform reformers’ thinking about poor relief and its recipients, so too might these large events have help change common understandings of those men who traveled the country in search of work. While it would still require even more severe depressions to engage the national government in response, we might see this period as an important stepping-stone in the long transformation in thought about the connection between industrialization, boom and bust cycles, employment and the capacity for individual self-sufficiency.

A New War on Welfare

The Personal Responsibility Act of 1996 marked another great change in relief policy. Like nineteenth century practices, late twentieth century reforms cut back the cash available to poor women and men and intensified work requirements for those seeking any aid. Just as the COSs were central actors in the nineteenth century, though by no means the only ones, so too were conservative think tanks important players in the twentieth century. Their impact, though mediated by partisan political struggles, budget pressures and interest group wrangling, was substantial. While scholars have perhaps overestimated

¹⁴ As Chapter 5 will show for relief costs in the wake of reform, it would appear that while public expenses for the “care” of tramps grew \$1.5 million from 1895 to 1905, per capita expenditures sharply declined.

the influence of the COSs, they have underestimated the role of think tanks, I argue. This description of late twentieth century relief reform and reformers will tell a different aspect of the story than recounted in the section on nineteenth century relief above, in part because we do not need to devote so much attention to trying simply to document what happened, where it happened and when. Further, in this case of national repeal (albeit one which consolidated some prior state-level changes), we have only one *why* to confront, not the multitudinous *whys* of local variation above. I will therefore focus here more on the ways in which anti-relief reformers came to dominate the debate about welfare, about poverty and about poor people and on how their once-radical policy prescriptions would, within three decades, rise to mainstream debate, and pervade it.

Other Explanations for Reform

Others have ably documented the political gamesmanship and brinkmanship that led to the passage of the PRA (see especially Weaver 2000) and have described the institutional and historical conditions that further enabled its passage (see Noble 1997; Brown 1999). When Weaver (2000) asks why welfare reform “succeeded” in 1996 after so many failures in the previous decade, he answers that “changes in this complex [electoral] environment significantly lowered the long-standing barriers to passage of welfare reform legislation, notably by weakening the capacity of liberals to keep proposals to which they objected off the legislative agenda.” Weaver attributes the agenda change that led to the passage of the PRA to the public “demand” for reform and the effects of party and electoral competition. Weaver has charted rising antipathy to relief to argue that it afforded political actors the opportunity to more aggressively, and ultimately more successfully, pursue reform. This is true. But public opinion for Weaver is created independent of the political system; politicians only react to it. “Overwhelming public rejection of the existing system led politicians to believe that there was credit to be gained by ending it,” he writes of welfare. But what if, as I have argued above, politics and elite opinion can drive public opinion?

This would then compel us to question the *sources* of that elite influence and to attempt to demonstrate a relationship between public opinion and policy outcomes that is exactly the reverse of what Weaver and others presume. Noble (1997) gives attention to business interests and the rise of the Right and class competition in welfare policy; he also observes that in a decentralized state, with so many “veto points” and opportunities to affect legislation, business’ power in America is significantly greater than elsewhere. Brown (1999) cites budget politics as key. All true. But they like Weaver enter the story too late to reveal the full shape of the narrative. That the PRA was ultimately so relatively uncontroversial is what is striking -- that the legislation passed with such wide support from both Democrats and Republicans, with so little protest from the public despite dire warnings from Moynihan and others. Like the COSs and the campaign against outdoor relief, it is this mobilization of opinion as it intersects with institutional constraints and public protest (or the lack thereof) that adds flesh to otherwise rich neo-institutional accounts like Weaver’s.

A Summary of Relief Retrenchment

The PRA ended the New Deal’s federal guarantee of assistance to eligible poor people by repealing Title IV-A of the Social Security Act of 1935; in place of Title IV’s Aid to Dependent Children (later Aid to Families with Dependent Children, AFDC), which was granted to all who qualified no matter how many qualified, came Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), “block grants” of fixed amounts (i.e., no matter how many people qualified for benefits, the money available to each State remained the same). As Section 401(b) of the PRA emphasized, “this part shall not be interpreted to entitle any individual or family to assistance under any State program funded under this part.” There were no federal criteria set for determining need: states were given broad latitude for setting benefit levels, with only the requirement that their program “serve all political subdivisions in the State (not necessarily in a uniform manner),” that eligibility be

determined with “objective criteria,” and that all recipients receive “fair and equitable treatment.” The PRA decreed that no one may receive benefits for more than five years during her life, exempting 20% of each State’s caseload. TANF recipients were required to work in exchange for any benefits after two years of assistance; Medicaid could be terminated if a recipient refused work. Because the PRA eliminated the automatic provision of Medicaid to welfare recipients, the PRA further “encouraged” poor women to move into the workforce by eliminating one of the most powerful “perverse incentives” of AFDC -- health care for themselves and their children. The PRA changed the method of calculating foodstamp eligibility, reducing the average benefit from 80¢ per person per meal to 66¢ per person per meal. Childless unemployed Americans age 18-50 were permitted to receive foodstamps for no more than three months per year. Even with subsequent revisions to the PRA, legal immigrants were denied almost any federal cash assistance. The PRA permitted reducing benefits if recipients’ children did not attend school (“learnfare”); allowed states to deny increased aid for children born while their mother was receiving benefits (the “family cap”); and allowed benefit reductions of as much as 25% if a recipients did not identify the biological father of her children. Some \$500 million was set aside for abstinence education programs and cash bonuses were made available for those five states that most reduced out-of-wedlock birth rates without increasing abortion rates (PRA 1996; Super 1996).

Welfare and the Think Tank

From the start of the post-1970s mobilization of business, welfare was a target of the think tanks, Heritage especially. In the 1970s, it was through articles in conservative journals like *The Public Interest* that began forcefully reconstructing perverse incentives arguments, explaining to readers how welfare discouraged work and so caused poverty; Heritage’s *Policy Review* explored the ways in which the War on Poverty had expanded the Black and Latino underclass; and Hoover, among others, fought the suggestion of a guaranteed income by arguing that it would discourage work effort (Callahan 1999a).

Olasky wrote his *Tragedy of American Compassion*, which harkened back to a largely mythologized golden era of Gilded Age charity to argue against public relief, while a Bradley Fellow at Heritage; Mead's *New Politics of Poverty* was funded by Bradley, Olin and Scaife; Schwartz wrote *Fighting Poverty with Virtue* while at Hudson. While Mead and Schwartz (see 2001) find Olasky's work wanting, their arguments ultimately have much in common: poor relief can cause poverty, which is moral at its base; and nineteenth century reformers should serve as a model for both our understanding of poverty and for our policies to reduce it. Gingrich famously required all incoming freshmen Republican Representatives to read Olasky's book (Alterman 1999); and Olasky went on to become an advisor to Bush the Younger and a leader of the "faith-based" advocates who urged that greater government funding for social services be granted to churches (even to those "pervasively sectarian" religious organizations precluded by courts from receiving state aid) because they would be, by their very nature he said, more effective than any public program. The Manhattan Institute can take credit for two of the most influential anti-welfare tracts of the early part of the contemporary period, Murray's 1984 *Losing Ground* and George Gilder's 1981 *Wealth and Poverty* (which Reagan, Gilder says, read and much admired). Murray went on to become a fellow at AEI, where he has been a Bradley Foundation Fellow. DeLollis (2001), speaking of the PRA, identified Heritage's Robert Rector as "one of the law's authors" and Haskins (2001) wrote that while Murray may have been the "intellectual leader" of the pro-family reformers it was The Heritage Foundation's Rector who plotted and pushed the most successful political strategies.

First Successes

Overall social welfare spending increased throughout the 1980s, mostly due to rises in Social Security and Medicare, but programs benefiting those most in need suffered as the Reagan Administration and a complicit Congress carried out policies much in line with Heritage's recommendations. Procedural changes for determining AFDC eligibility enacted

in Reagan's first budget alone "saved" \$93 million per month and rendered ineligible some 493,000 families (Brodkin 1995, 216). By 1983 food stamp spending was down 17%, school lunch programs were reduced by one third, the job-training program CETA was eliminated and housing spending was down by one-third from the Carter administration. From 1972 to 1984, the combined real value of AFDC and Food Stamp benefits for a woman with three children had declined by 22%. From 1970 to 1993, the real value of average AFDC benefits declined from \$665 to \$370 (from inflation in the 70s, from benefit cuts in the 90s). The value of the minimum wage fell by one-third for the same reasons. From 1982 to 1985 alone, expenditures for unemployment insurance declined by nearly 7%, AFDC by 12.7%, Food Stamps by 12.6%, child nutrition programs by over 27% (though WIC increased by more than 4%) and assistance to help pay heating bills declined over 8% (Katz 1986, 295-9; Hout 1997). From 1980 to 1984, a family with income below \$10,000 a year paid \$95 more in taxes while those with income over \$200,000 a year saw their tax burden decline by more than \$17,000 (Katz 1986, 295-9). By 1985, the official national poverty rate had risen to 14%; it was 28.4% for Hispanic Americans and 31.3% for African Americans. More than 20% of all children, and 39.6% and 43.1% of Hispanic and black children, were poor.

Nonetheless, by 1986 the Great Society concern for poverty had become firmly transformed into concern for welfare. The National Governors' Association, led by Arkansas Governor Bill Clinton, presented its plan for "reform," which stated that "the principal responsibility of government in the welfare contract is to provide education, job training and/or job placement services to all employable recipients" (NGA 1988). That plan would become part of the 1988 Family Support Act (FSA), another Moynihan work-centered approach, which expanded his 1967 Work Incentives program (WIN). FSA required workfare for 15% of all adult AFDC recipients while offering some job training (through the state-run JOBS program) and transitional child care and Medicaid benefits and mandated stronger child support enforcement measures. Like Progressive Era programs,

the federal government here was following the lead of the states. By 1987, 40 states already had some form of workfare program operating under provisions of WIN, the 1972 Talmadge Amendments that required recipients to register for work, and similar Amendments in 1981 (Trattner 1994; Brodtkin 1995; Weaver 2000). In the same year the Reagan administration issued the first grant of “waivers” of AFDC regulations to allow states to “experiment” with their welfare programs using a provision contained in a 1962 Amendment to the Social Security Act (Weaver 2000). Wisconsin received the first, allowing it to implement a “learnfare” program (Williams 1996). Other early waiver “innovators” New Jersey and California were soon followed by Michigan and Massachusetts, adopting learnfare, workfare, time limits and family cap provisions consistent with proposals put forth by Heritage and AEI; some were even implemented and evaluated by Hudson (Weaver 2000). By the time of the PRA’s passage, 43 states had been granted waivers.¹⁵

These changes followed sharp rises in poverty and declining city expenditures on the poor. By 1990, in the nation’s 100 largest cities fully one-seventh of all census tracts had poverty rates of 40% or higher (Wilson 1996, 114). The federal contribution to city budgets went from 18% in 1980 to 6.4% in 1990 (Wilson 1996, 49). Between 1970 and 1990 New York City per capita expenses for poor people declined from \$537 to \$285 (Dreier et al. 2001, 26). From the 1970s to the 1990s, the real value of AFDC benefits had declined by 30%; AFDC and Food Stamps combined by 25%. By 1992, both programs brought a typical family of three to 72% of the federal poverty line (Patterson 1994, 233). From 1979 to 1991 the ability of federal means-tested programs to lift families from

¹⁵ Some such innovations actually have much earlier roots. At the end of the nineteenth century Buffalo demanded that the children of the poor attend school in order for the family to receive relief (Feder 1936, 205; see also NCCC 1888, 145-6). Some few years later New York began fingerprinting all tramps and vagrants (Watson 1922, 301). The NCCC (1903; see also Devine 1904, 280) worried at length about the means to remedy the “desertion” by fathers of women and children who turned to relief providers, insisting that “the obligation to provide for the family must be recognized voluntarily or compulsorily enforced.” Buffalo opened a crèche, providing child care to working women, in 1880, charging five cents per day (NCCC 1886, 179).

poverty had declined 29% (Brodkin 1995, 217). During the same period, official poverty rates rose 23.9% (Katz 1986, 303). Meanwhile, notions of dependency notwithstanding, by 1992 “43% of all mothers who used welfare over a two-year period also worked while they were on the rolls” (Mishel et al. 1997, 334). Eighteen per cent of all poor families had a full-time worker in them (Mead 1994, 328). By 1995, 29.7% of all workers earned poverty-level wages (Mishel et al. 1997, 149).

Despite the confluence of events, economic, demographic and political, that had served to increase and deepen poverty -- by 1994, nearly 40% of those in poverty had incomes below 50% of the poverty level (Mishel et al. 1997, 11) -- Clinton in 1992 and the Contract With America in 1994 “promised to end welfare *first* and end poverty *later*” (Brodkin 1995, 218).

Enter Clinton

In 1991 Bruce Reed, a Clinton campaign volunteer who would later become a senior domestic policy advisor, wrote a speech that Clinton delivered on October 23 at Georgetown University. “In a Clinton Administration,” the candidate said, “we’re going to put an end to welfare as we know it. We’ll give them all the help they need for up to two years. But after that, if they’re able to work, they’ll have to take a job in the private sector, or start earning their way through community service” (in NYT 7/15/94). That pledge would take on a political life of its own -- “a guiding star” Reed called it -- leading Clinton to eventually abandon any notion of guaranteed jobs, training, child care or any increased spending for recipients themselves. “You let loose a lot of forces when you say “end welfare as we know it,” warned Moynihan. Ellwood would later call the pledge “vacuous and incendiary” (in NYT 12/8/96). Yet, as Wisconsin Gov. Tommy Thompson put it, “It’s a fantastic campaign issue” (NYT 10/20/94). (The Contract with America made that clear, for 1994 was proclaimed to be “a campaign in which voters rewarded a barrage of anti-welfare attacks” (NYT 11/13/94).) The 1992 Clinton campaign built its

advertising in close states around his welfare/workfare pledge (Kaus 1992, xiv): as he said in one advertisement, "For so long, government has failed us, and one of its worst failures has been welfare. I have a plan to end welfare as we know it -- to break the cycle of welfare dependency" (in Heclo 2000).

While Clinton's first bill built upon the FSA and its work requirements and established a more comprehensive set of measures to make easier the transition from "welfare-to-work," as the rhetorical flourishes of dependency merged with election year politics and a bold new Republican majority in Congress, the legislation that would ultimately get enacted contained fewer and fewer provisions for support and assistance and a greater and greater focus on punitive measures to force women into the workforce, whatever the availability of decent-paying jobs, health care and childcare.

Three proposals were made public in 1994 while Clinton's own first plan was in formulation: one fairly moderate bill with 160 Republican co-sponsors, H.R. 3500; a more conservative bill sponsored by Rep. James Talent and Sen. Launch Faircloth; and a third introduced by Democratic Senator Joseph Lieberman of Connecticut. All took the Clinton/Reed pledge to its logical conclusion and proposed to end welfare for younger women with children, as Murray had been proposing for so long. That they understood the potential consequences of the abolition of relief was clear when they included in their bills increased funding for homeless shelters and new funding to establish orphanages, another idea that Murray had long championed. Lieberman defended one such bill by noting that his father had been in an orphanage and had said that it was "a wonderful place" (Weaver 2000; NYT 4/22/94). Each of those alternative proposals cost more than the plan Clinton would submit (Economist 6/18/94). Charles Murray, William Bennett and Bill Kristol had decided that H.R. 3500 was "too timid" and jointly planned the more conservative strategy. Bennett's Empower America repeatedly condemned the Republican bill and urged Murray's abolitionist approach (Easton 1994), first in a public Memo by Bennett, Jack Kemp and Vin Weber (see NYT 4/22/94) and then in op-eds that appeared in

some 25 newspapers (Williams 1996). Gary Bauer of the Family Research Council lambasted conservatives for emphasizing the economic over the social, co-wrote family-focused op-ed articles about welfare reform with Texas Senator Phil Gramm, and pushed for the “family cap” provisions in the PRA that allowed states to deny additional support to children born to any women already receiving welfare benefits (Stone 1995).

Clinton’s reform bill was formally unveiled on June 14, 1994. Among its other provisions were the strictest time limits ever proposed by an American President. It was dismissed by Republicans as too liberal. This is one measure of the success with which the problem had been redefined and the political terrain had been reconfigured. Kristol had condemned it even before its unveiling as “merely a rhetorical diversionary tactic” and urged in the pages of the *Wall Street Journal* that conservatives focus more intensely on preventing illegitimacy by shaping a program that would frighten women about the prospect of welfare, one that enshrined as policy the belief that “if it is your own behavior that could land you on welfare, then you don’t get it, or you get very little of it.” Welfare reform legislation thereafter degenerated into something like an inverted arms race, with most all players struggling to propose stricter and cheaper measures than the most recent. While it seems undeniable that the Republicans, having gained majority Congressional control in 1994, pushed Clinton to the right, it seems equally clear that Clinton pushed Republicans to the right, too; they ultimately set aside H.R. 3500 for a more conservative bill based upon the Contract with America provisions. More critically, Clinton’s cavalier rhetoric, whatever his actual policy goals, made politically palatable even the more regressive proposals of Gingrich and other Republicans. As the *Weekly Standard* observed just prior to the PRA’s ultimate passage (8/5/96), “Ideas like limiting welfare benefits to five years and abolishing the federal guarantee of cash payments to single mothers were not even contemplated by congressional Republicans as recently as three years ago.” The Chamber of Commerce had reported only in August of 1994 that “Most welfare reformers, even conservative ones, generally dismiss Murray’s approach.”

This was a battle between Democrats and Republicans, to be sure. Clinton's decision to veto the first two reform bills, which also included significant and politically unpalatable "reforms" to Medicare, attests to that. But it was as critically a battle among Republicans themselves (see *Washington Times* 7/1/95 "Wobbly Shoves on Welfare," 1/17/95 "How deep the GOP divide on welfare," 11/22/94 "'Moderates' could derail GOP agenda," and 4/14/94 "Kemp urges GOP to drop welfare bill, fight 'soft' reforms" for examples). The family-focused arguments of the right gained increasing prominence and influence, even while a 1995 report from the Cato Institute, *The Welfare versus Work Trade Off*, offered widely circulated analysis arguing that "In forty states welfare pays more than an \$8.00 [an hour] job [and] in seventeen states the welfare package is more important than a \$10.00 an hour job" (in Weaver 2000, 156). Yet such divisions among conservatives may help explain the success of reform: much of Clinton's welfare bill was economically conservative and consistent with many Republican suggestions for reform; the marriage-focused reform plans offered Republicans who wanted to oppose Clinton for political (as opposed to policy) purposes a reason to oppose his conservative reform as too tepid.

Business Revealed

Concurrent with the activity of think tank reformers, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce worked to mobilize businesspeople to support Republican welfare proposals, and was so effective that NAM set aside its own plans to lobby for reform since it was so much in agreement with the Chamber's positions (see Post 1997, fn18).

As Post (1997) reports, "A [1994] *National Business Agenda* survey of approximately 5,000 of the Chamber's 210,000 members identified welfare reform as the fifth highest priority because it 'discourages marriage, underwrites out-of-wedlock births and creates an expectation of dependence rather than self-sufficiency.' A Chamber survey the following year (USCC Aug. 1995) found that 75% of its members thought a five-year

lifetime limit on benefits was too long (20% thought it “about right”) and 77% agreed that all aid should be denied to children of an unmarried teenager “except in cases of rape or incest.” Only 2% thought a requirement that all “able-bodied” food stamp recipients be required to work for benefits within 90 days “too tough.” Forty-six percent thought tax credits should be offered to businesses as incentives for them to hire relief recipients; 21% preferred training grants or wage subsidies; 19% chose “Flexible wage scales” that presumably would exempt them from minimum wage laws; while 14% percent thought that no incentives were needed or warranted.

As we might expect, the Chamber’s anti-welfare position emphasized dependency and work over illegitimacy and marriage; in 1995, its president made clear the purpose of pushing women off the rolls: “Well, there are lots of jobs. Anytime there’s high unemployment, there’s also [nonetheless] the long list of jobs that go a-begging. The fact of the matter is everyone wants to start in the middle or upper middle, and now you’re going to be driven to start at the bottom and begin to work your way up” (in Post 1997). They approvingly cited HHS Secretary Shalala who noted the inherent “unfairness” between “those who get up in the morning and go to work at entry-level jobs and those who stay on the welfare system” (USCC Aug. 1994). *Business Week* (6/13/94) made a similar observation, explaining to its readers that the “economic incentives for redesigning welfare” derived not just from the fact that “welfare wastes tax dollars” and causes crime and illegitimacy, but that the “cost to businesses of such wasted [human] potential is high, resulting in a dearth of qualified applicants for even low-skilled jobs such as running a cash register.” Much of the Chamber’s attention to welfare-to-work programs focused upon the importance of changing welfare recipients “attitudes” toward work -- especially toward low-status, low-wage work. It lauded programs that offered small businesses subsidies for employing recipients, and encouraged policymakers to follow the lead of Oregon, whose program, said one of the Chamber’s members, allowed him “to essentially get a good solid employee at a minimal cost” (USCC Aug. 1994), and agreed with House Ways

and Means Chairman Clay Shaw, who earlier introduced his welfare bill at a Chamber event and noted the ways in which welfare reform could “improve the quality and availability of people looking for work” (USCC June 1995; Nov. 1995). The Chamber urged that small businesses be “centrally involved in all phases of the new welfare system’s design, development, operation, and evaluation,” that reforms “Lower the cost of hiring a low-skilled worker,” that employees hired off welfare rolls be subject to a probationary period, and that “During that period they couldn’t sue under federal employment regulations pertaining to laws such as the Fair Labor Standards Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act, and the Occupational Safety and Health Act” (USCC June 1995). *The Economist* (6/18/94) avoided such self-serving claims, arguing instead that “For the sake of the poor themselves, welfare has to change.” In September of 1996, after the final passage of the PRA, the Chamber of Commerce reported succinctly to its members in a headline from its *Nation’s Business* journal “Welfare Overhaul Likely to Please Business Readers.”

Dominating Debate in the House and in the Home

Weaver offered data for twenty-seven categories of those who testified from 1993-1996 before the House Ways and Means and the Senate Finance Committee on welfare issues (2000, Table 6-2). No other single group, including members of the executive branch or of congress, advocacy groups, or university “experts,” testified more than conservative think tanks, which constituted 12.9% of all testimony. Social conservative groups constituted another 4.84%. That’s almost 18% of all testimony from conservative anti-welfare reformers before we include “centrist” think tanks (4.84%), and the conservatives who were inevitably among the governors, non-governmental service-providers, university experts and those in other categories. By contrast, liberal think tanks offered 4.84% of all testimony and “liberal/child/recipient advocacy” groups offered 8.06%. Labor unions were virtually absent (1.61% of testimony) while “private sector

citizens" and "everyday citizens," among whom we would presumably find recipients themselves, were entirely absent from the proceedings.

Activism from the Chamber, AEI (through Murray) and Heritage (through Rector) and others influenced not only the political debate and policy itself but polled public opinion also. From 1991 to 1995 alone, while the value of welfare benefits declined, those responding that too much was being spent on welfare rose from 40% to over 60%. A 1994 poll revealed that 20% of all respondents thought welfare spending higher than military spending,¹⁶ and public support for increased spending on "welfare," "the poor," and even "poor children" all declined from in the early 1990s. Eighty percent responded in 1995 that welfare required "fundamental" reform. Support for each of the PRA's major provisions (time limits, work requirements, and the family cap) increased throughout the early- to mid-1990s; respondents had no clear preference as to which party was more to be "trusted" on reform. From 1982 to 1995 the percentage of those who attributed poverty to "insufficient effort" on behalf of the poor nearly doubled. A poll in 2001 by National Public Radio, The Kaiser Family Foundation and the Kennedy School of Government found that half of all respondents with incomes at least twice the poverty line thought that each of the Welfare System, a Decline in Moral Values and Poor People Lacking Motivation was a "major" cause of poverty; about half as many (27%) thought a Shortage of Jobs a major cause. Most striking, perhaps, is that respondents with income below twice the poverty line responded similarly across most issues, and even *more* of them thought a Decline in Moral

¹⁶ This is a complicated question, however, that reveals a perennial problem in polling on "welfare" issues: if by "welfare" respondents included Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid, the response is accurate. If, instead, they associate "welfare" with AFDC and food stamps, it is wildly inaccurate.

Values a major cause of poverty.¹⁷ Over eighty percent of those polled supported the final reform bill (Weaver 2000, Ch. 7; Albelda 1996; NPR et al. 2001).

No Protest

Michael Laracy of the Annie E. Casey Foundation noted the virtual absence of anti-reform advocates during the process of drafting and passing the PRA, emphasizing instead the influence of Heritage, the Christian Coalition and the Family Research Council (see Anft 2001). Peter Edelman (1997, 47) described the lack of response as a “de facto conspiracy of silence.” More than once on the Senate floor Moynihan bemoaned the dearth of outrage from advocates for poor people. Indeed, national women’s groups were unable to mobilize their membership against welfare reform, perhaps, as Mink (1998, 147) argued, because “welfare reform did not directly bear on the lives of most [i.e., white, middle-class] feminists” or perhaps because middle-class women who were increasingly compelled to enter the workforce (in the wake of declining family wages since the 1970s) felt little solidarity with women who did not work, or, more prosaically, because once Republicans took over Congress in 1994, the Children’s Defense Fund (CDF) and other anti-reform advocacy groups simply had no influence over Republican representatives (Heclo 2000; see also *Washington Times* 1/9/95, “Guest lists for hearings on Hill undergo sweeping change, too”). *The American Spectator* (6/94) saw this dearth of protest as evidence that reform proposals couldn’t possibly be real: “Believe me,” wrote its Washington correspondent, “if a proposal to throw people off welfare after two years was anywhere near the drawing boards there would be the most unbelievable uproar you ever

¹⁷ And more blamed immigrants -- 39% of poorer respondents (versus 27% for higher-income respondents) cited immigration as a major cause of poverty. There were a few differences of note, however: 52% of poorer respondents (versus 27%) identified a Shortage of Jobs as a major cause; 64% (versus 50%) thought the quality of those jobs themselves to be a factor and 69% (versus 54%) blamed medical expenses. Differences by race were even more pronounced, even when controlled for income, with whites less likely to attributed poverty to structural causes.

heard in your life. . . If there is no uproar [in the mainstream press], the 'end of welfare as we know it' is nowhere in sight."

No Relief

But it was. And by the time the CDF held a "Stand for Children" rally in June of 1996 the game was over. As Weaver (2000) so well describes, a confluence of events pushed reform ever more rightward and ever-more toward law. The new 1994 Republican majority, with its Contract with America promise to reform welfare in hand, and many Democrats tried to "outbid" each other for the status as reform leaders; Democrats wanted not to be caught to the left of Clinton on welfare; and Clinton and some of his advisors¹⁸ feared that vetoing welfare legislation for the third time during the 1996 presidential campaign against Bob Dole would harm the campaign. The outcome in this light makes some sense. But there is more to the story, as I have argued. Heclo (2000) similarly observed that "unlike the failed welfare reform efforts under Presidents Nixon and Carter, there was now a general agreement among national policymakers on the need to bring welfare recipients into the workforce. It was becoming more possible to mention work demands and welfare without being perceived as a racist." But again, that leaves too little attended the crucial question of how that transformation occurred. Let me offer one further example of these kinds of explanations, which predominate: in recounting Edin and Lein's research that revealed that some women on AFDC had unreported earnings from work, boyfriends or family, Weaver (2000, 104) writes that "these patterns raised further questions about the legitimacy of the AFDC program." But these patterns were not actors, patterns did not raise questions -- partisans and reform advocates raised questions and used their own interpretations of this and other research to further their own policy goals.

¹⁸ Dick Morris, Bruce Reed, Mickey Kantor and Rahm Immanuel, says Stephanopoulos (1999, 420-421). He reports that while Morris insisted to Clinton that if he vetoed the PRA he would lose the election by three percentage points, Stephanopoulos projected "a quick five- or six-point drop" that would "never cost [them] the race." One post-PRA poll revealed that only 13% of respondents knew that he had signed the bill (Lewis 2001, 193).

This highlights the ways in which the production of ideas, the creation of opinion, and the sources of “conventional wisdom” tend to disappear in accounts of welfare policymaking, as if somehow agendas set themselves and ideas emerge fully formed among politicians and the public once they “discover” the “truth.” The PRA, as I have sought to demonstrate, has roots some twenty years prior to its passage. That Reagan was unable to succeed where Clinton did is an indication of the confluence of events that had to conspire -- to overcome the resilience that Pierson (2001) and Piven and Cloward (1982) point to -- for such dramatic change to take place (see Ch. 6 below). The political dynamics Weaver identifies are essential parts of the explanation, but they are not the whole story. Only by acknowledging the ways in which welfare debate had been pushed so far to the right that a Democratic President would repeal AFDC without electoral consequences (indeed, perhaps there were electoral benefits) does the PRA become comprehensible. It was not, as the U.S. Chamber of Commerce would have us believe, that “Lawmakers at all levels of government [were] responding to public demands that welfare recipients be required to take more responsibility for ending, or at least easing, their dependence on public support” (USCC Aug. 1994). But dependence on public support was “eased” nonetheless. By 2000, there was a lower percentage of Americans on welfare than at any time since 1964 (see acf.dhhs.gov). The welfare “explosion” of the 1960s had been rolled back.

A New Prison Boom

We have seen above that the COSs led not only an assault on poor relief that went mostly to women, but were also at the forefront of a campaign to criminalize public displays of need that contributed to a massive incarceration of unemployed, immigrant men. As with nineteenth century relief battles over out-relief, the late twentieth century battles against AFDC were only one piece of a much larger campaign to re-assert the dominance of the gilded classes over workers and the unemployed. This section examines

the twentieth century counterpart to the war on the tramp, a battle against panhandling and homeless men. While only recently have scholars brought women more fully into comparative welfare state studies (see Orloff 1996; O'Connor 1996; Sainsbury 1996), the opposite has been true for domestic poor relief policy -- that is, most attention to poor relief (as distinct from welfare state programs like Social Security or unemployment relief) has been focused upon AFDC and TANF, almost all of whose recipients were women, while men have been present in discussions of poor relief mostly as the unemployed and therefore undesirable future husbands of poor women or as "deadbeat dads." But they are important players in these dramas, and during the counter-mobilization of business in the late twentieth century the United States underwent a period of mass incarceration -- this time of unemployed black and Hispanic men -- and of criminalizing poverty and homelessness not seen since the Gilded Age. This campaign pushed some poor men into the low-wage labor market, or some other means of survival, and pushed others into prison, where many also worked (though this practice was not as widespread as in the former period). Perhaps most importantly this renewed assault on the tramp sounded a clarion call that public displays of need would be dealt with harshly and that the search for public relief or private charity was as much a question for the police as for any department of social services.¹⁹

Prisons and Profit

The United States prison population increased 500% between 1972 and 1993, from 200,000 to 1.2 million in prison with another 500,000 in local jails. By 2000, the total

¹⁹ There is an apparent difference: while the anti-tramp campaigns of the former era were unmistakably an express activity of the same institutions leading the anti-relief campaigns -- the COSs -- the explosion in prison population of the late twentieth century was not so evidently the product of anti-relief think tanks. Some think tanks, the Manhattan Institute most notably, were active in at least celebrating in print the battles to criminalize homelessness and panhandling. And John Dilulio, who would come briefly to head Bush the Younger's Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives early in his term, helped stoke "lock-'em-up" rhetoric and policies with his 1996 *Body Count* about "superpredators." Dilulio was affiliated with both the Manhattan Institute and Brookings Institution (Weiss 2001). There are other examples, James Q. Wilson most notably, and other connections, but the case is less clear than in the Gilded Age.

number had grown to over 2 million, with 621,000 in local jails, 60% percent of whom were under the influence of drugs or alcohol when arrested. The United States, with 5% of the world's population, held 25% of the world's prisoners. Over one hundred thousand were juveniles. The per capita incarceration rate climbed from 160 per 100,000 in 1972 to 645 per 100,000 in 1997, 690 in 1998 and then reached 699 in 2000, finally beating out Russia to become the world's highest. Half of all prisoners and 70% of all state prisoners were incarcerated for nonviolent property or drug offenses. Federal public order offenses resulting in incarceration increased 99% from 1972 to 1998; drug offenses increased 446% and they accounted for one-fourth of all inmates in 1996, up from one-tenth in 1983. Half of all extant prisons in 1999 had been built since 1979. Half of all those imprisoned were African American. Sixteen percent were Hispanic. In New York in 1990, blacks and Hispanics constituted 91% of all those imprisoned for drug possession. While from 1985 to 1995 women's incarceration rate increased 204%, in 2001 93% of all inmates were still male. Sixty-eight percent of all state prisoners in 1997 had no high school diploma. In 1991, one-third of those in jail had been unemployed prior to their arrest. Twelve percent of all state prisoners in 1985-1995 were incarcerated for public order offenses (Cole 1999; Mauer 1999; Platt 2001; Sentencing Project 1993; Sentencing Project 2001).

Once again, it would seem, the tramp was behind bars.

Private interests profited from these mass incarcerations in some ways as they did in the late nineteenth century. By 1998, seven percent of all US prisoners were housed in private facilities; for-profit prison revenues exceeded \$1 billion, almost all of which went to twelve firms, while over 77% of all contracts went to two firms, Corrections Corporation of America and Wackenhut Corrections Corporation (AFSCME 2001a). Lexus, Boeing, Microsoft, TWA, IBM, AT & T and Victoria's Secret all used prison labor at some point in their production or sales process, most of such laborers were paid between twenty cents and \$1.20 per hour, often even cheaper than labor in a Mexican *maquiladora* or an Indonesian sweatshop (Dyer 2000); Starbuck's and Nintendo's contractor Signature

Packing Solutions paid their prison workers minimum wage, not incurring health or retirement insurance expenses, while the Washington State Department of Corrections kept half the prisoners' wages. "The mission is," said a DOC representative, "to give offenders, if nothing else, a work ethic and experience" (Seattle Weekly 1/2/02, "Prison Coffee").

Petchesky (1993) argues that prison labor began to decline in the late nineteenth century because the demands of efficient production were increasingly incompatible with the complexities of controlling inmates at work (see also "Board of Managers of Letchworth Village" in Breckinridge 1927); there are similar difficulties evident in late twentieth century production, perhaps accounting for why the market has grown only modestly (see Dyer 2000). Yet to confront the dilemma of profitable privatization, Wackenhut and Corrections Corporation of America have expanded their services to include other indoor relief like mental institutions and drug treatment facilities, with their eyes on care for prisoners with AIDS, older prisoners, and INS lock-ups (Weiss 2001).

New Laws

This wave of incarceration of poor black (instead of immigrant) men was, like the wave of the earlier period, in large part the result of a plethora of new laws increasing penalties for petty crimes or creating new kinds of crime. Drug laws were most notorious, beginning with New York's Rockefeller Drug Laws of 1973 which set long mandatory minimum sentences for what were arguably minor offenses; these were soon copied by other states. Congressional action followed in 1982 with regional drug task forces armed with \$125 million in new funding. During the 1980s, the Heritage Foundation and the American Legislative Exchange Council were among the many sources of "scientific" studies demonstrating the costs savings that resulted from incarceration and urging a tough approach to all "urban" -- that is, black -- crime. Before ending welfare, Clinton signed a \$30 billion crime bill that funded new prisons, toughened drug penalties, helped incarcerate

illegal aliens, expanded the death penalty and more (Mauer 1999, Ch. 4). Just as both the work-focused and family-focused counter-mobilizations described in Chapter Two above were reactions to developments located largely in the 1960s, this period characterized by the mass incarceration of unemployed black men from cities can also be traced to roughly the same period, this time a mass migration of blacks from the South to the North -- some five million from 1940 to 1970. This was simultaneously marked by urban riots, protest, and a significant rise in urban crime. AFDC rolls rose, unemployment among black men rose (see Piven and Cloward 1971, Ch. 7 and 1977, 204-6, 267-9). Labor force participation for black as well as white men from 16 to 24 in the 1950s was around 70%; by 1985 it had dropped to 65% for whites and under 45% for blacks (Foscarinis 1996).

Meanwhile, at the local level during the period of welfare reform, most noticeably since the late 1980s, "cities from Portland, Maine to Portland, Oregon" (Teir 1998) enacted strict anti-panhandling statutes, rousted homeless men, criminalized begging on subways, enacted or enforced new loitering statutes, rousted "Squeegee Men," beggars, and those sleeping in public places, and passed and enforced an array of "quality of life" statutes and selectively enforced curfews and laws prohibiting jaywalking, removing objects from trash cans, public urination and spitting on sidewalks (see NLCHP 1991).

This was no phenomenon limited to conservative or Southern cities -- the Castro District of San Francisco, Minneapolis, Honolulu, Santa Cruz and Los Angeles' Santa Monica (once nicknamed *Soviet Monica* by some for its leftist policies) enacted some of the strictest laws and enforced them most severely. Even Berkeley, California tried to ban all panhandling. Of forty-nine large and mid-sized cities surveyed by the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty in 1999, 86% had laws that criminalized begging and nearly one in five had either enacted new laws or toughened ones already on the books to restrict the use of parks, sidewalks and other public spaces by those who appeared homeless; almost three-fourths also had enacted laws that prohibited camping or sleeping in public spaces. From 1992-1996, 31% of the 50 largest cities enacted new anti-begging laws or

amended old ones. From 1997-1999, “36% of the cities initiated ‘crackdowns’ (aggressive, intense enforcement of some or all applicable laws) against homeless people, and 48% of the cities engaged in police ‘sweeps’ (targeted removal of homeless people from particular areas of the city.” One estimated that it would triple its “public nuisance” arrests. Atlanta, New York, San Francisco, Chicago and Tucson were among the strictest enforcers. One Nevada law prohibited loitering with *intent* to beg. Santa Ana adopted an official policy that homeless people “are no longer welcome in the city.” In Miami (where law provides that being “idle” constitutes “disorderly conduct”) police arrested homeless people, then confiscated and destroyed their belongings, including food stamps, eyeglasses and prescription medication. Fort Lauderdale successfully prohibited any begging on its beaches. The Dallas City Council proposed offering vagrants bus tickets to any other city, and police in Huntsville, Alabama, Long Beach, California and Cleveland, Ohio would drive vagrants to the edge of town and deposit them there. Cleveland also established a Panhandlers Hotline through which businesses and concerned citizens could report beggars to the police. Orlando required permits and licenses to beg. After a court struck down a colonial anti-begging law in 1994, the Boston City Council passed a new one that more specifically targeted “aggressive” panhandling (such statutes have been more likely to survive legal challenge; Evanston, Illinois defined “aggressive” in its statute as asking more than once). New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani made it clear that making his city inhospitable to homeless men and driving them to other places was an explicit goal. For an 11-month period in 1998, San Francisco issued over 16,000 “quality of life violations” and began enforcing a long dormant statute that forbids selling liquor to “habitual drinkers.” New York and San Francisco passed laws prohibited begging on subways.

Other cities sought to enact fines of up to \$500 and jail terms as high as six months, as Atlanta did prior to the 1996 Olympics there; loitering in Raleigh could bring a \$500 fine and 30 days in jail, or \$1,000 in Chester County, Pennsylvania. In one year alone, Atlanta issued two thousand \$220 tickets for camping violations at a cost of some \$120,000 to the

city (and may have spent between \$300-500,000 enforcing anti-homeless laws in 1993). Seattle law provided for a \$100 fine for violation of an anti-sitting ordinance. In the first year of the implementation of its Matrix program to coordinate anti-homeless policies, by 1994 San Francisco had issued perhaps as many as 22,500 citations and had arrested 350 others for offering free food in public spaces (Foscarinis et al. 1999; Barta 1999; NLCHP 1999, 1996, 1994, 1993; Brosch 1998; Howard and Gajilan 1998; Teir 1998; Nation 1997; Wood 1997; Foscarinis 1996; Ellickson 1996; Kaplan and Brant 1994; American Bar Association 1993).

In 1989, the same year that Dade County, Florida outlawed windshield washing (such "Squeegee Men" statutes wouldn't hit New York and Chicago for some years), the New York City Transit Authority implemented its no begging regulation, distributing pamphlets and posting warnings throughout the system that "Panhandling on the subway is illegal. No matter what you think. Give to the charity of your choice, but not on the subway." In upholding the program, a court noted that panhandling was "nothing less than a menace to the common good." (New York courts would later strike down the NYC law that prohibited begging in all public spaces on First Amendment grounds) (Barta 1999). "It may be working," reported *Newsweek* (6/24/91). "In the first three months of 1991, officers booted 28,000 vagrants from the subway, a big jump from 3,600 in the same period last year; in a six month period, ending in April, subway felonies dropped by 16 percent." Calvin Trillin would sing the praises of the anti-Squeegee Men campaign in New York City:

In years past, at certain intersections in Manhattan, menacing-looking characters used to approach cars at red lights and, without invitation, clean the windshield as well as a windshield could be cleaned with a filthy rag. For this they would expect money. They were called squeegee guys. Everybody hated them. If you called the board members of the American

Civil Liberties Union and the most faithful followers of Mother Teresa, assured them that what they said would go no further and asked them individually what they thought of the squeegee guys, I firmly believe they would have each said, 'I hate those squeegee guys' (Trillin and Adams 1997).

Some years later, shortly after he took over from Giuliani, New York (billionaire businessman) Mayor Bloomberg and Police Commissioner Kelly announced a renewed crackdown on "quality of life" crimes called Operation Clean Sweep. They established a Hotline (888-677-LIFE) to report low-level crimes -- panhandling, prostitution and squeegee men, especially (NYT 1/9/2002). These renewed efforts coincided with record levels of homelessness and local television news reports, for the first time in years, about those who slept on the streets and why they did so.

Dangerous Men

The reasons offered for passing such statutes and enforcing such laws tended to be much the same -- to protect the health of the public (from public urination and defecation) or its safety (from the dangers of mentally ill street persons or, as a Palo Alto law noted, to prevent the public from being distracted by or tripping over homeless people). Referring to Wilson and Kelling's "broken windows" theory of crime control, as the *Newsweek* story cited above does implicitly, many asserted that by controlling minor offenses a message is sent to the public that no lawbreaking will be tolerated. Nineteenth century reformers, you may remember, talked of it as setting a "moral tone." In fact, one Santa Monica police Sergeant admitted that actual arrests were less important than the threat posed by stepped-up enforcement. Some others cited the nuisance, inconvenience and unsightliness of public sleeping and begging. Many pointed to the threat to downtown business districts, voicing a fear that beggars would drive away customers (see Foscarinis et al. 1999; Foscarinis

1996; Wood 1997). As one Berkeley music store owner said, "People can buy pianos anywhere. . . Why should they have to crawl over half dead, smelly, awful-looking people [to do so]" (Impoco 1995).

Echoes of the Tramp and the Chamber, too

I am not the first to draw parallels between these two crackdowns on begging a century apart. Ellickson (1996fn75), commenting on the profusion of begging in Harvard Square, writes that its presence indicates not a failure of relief programs but instead "suggests the generosity of local welfare efforts. In the 1990s, panhandling has been most common in Berkeley, New York, San Francisco, Washington, D.C., and other cities that have relatively expansive social-welfare programs. It appears that taxpayers willing to support relatively generous welfare programs are also relatively more inclined to give to panhandlers. Panhandlers have no trouble recognizing these realities. . . The point was well understood in the late nineteenth century. 'Beggars increase in number in proportion to the means provided for their relief.'" This 1885 observation sounds much like Baltimore Mayor Schmoke's 1995 plea to his citizens that they should "Give to charities that provide for the truly needy, as giving to panhandlers merely worsens the problem" (in Brennan 1995) or the Maryville, California Police Chief who observed that "Panhandling is a supply-and-demand business. . . If there's no supply of spare change, then panhandling goes down immediately" (Wilcox 1998).

The comparison can go further, for just as the Chamber of Commerce worked with the COSs and local police departments to pass and enforce anti-tramping laws, so too were local businesses central players in these late twentieth century laws criminalizing and punishing public pleas for assistance and visible displays of need. D.C. and New York City Business Improvement Districts formed "Homeless Task Forces" to coordinate business community response and activism. Glendale, California roused all day laborers after repeated complaints from local businesses, then provided a single site for them to

offer themselves to prospective employers (Foscarinis et al. 1999). Charlotte cleared out selected parks and other public areas "to appease business owners," (NLCHP 1999), Seattle police and local businesses worked together to enforce trespassing laws (NLCHP 1994), while Baltimore passed redundant anti-panhandling laws "to prove to business that the city government is responding to the panhandling problem" (NLCHP 1996). In other cities (Tulsa, Albuquerque, Long Beach, Las Vegas, Reno), business organizations funded campaigns to discourage the public from giving any money to beggars (NLCHP passim).

The business press followed developments with particular attention. The *Economist* (7/6/96) reported that Sony banned people with "excessive packages" from its public spaces and that other shop owners ran water hoses over their sidewalks to prevent sleeping and loitering (*Economist* 2/26/94). *Crain's Cleveland Business* (7/5/99) described with some awe the collaboration between the Salvation Army and the Cleveland [Business] Partnership to stop panhandling. *Crain's Detroit Business* (7/26/99) noted that local businesses were urging police to more aggressively enforce panhandling punishments of fines and jail time. *Crain's Chicago Business* (3/22/93) lauded a new program based upon those in Berkeley and Seattle that issued vouchers as an alternative to cash: "aggressive panhandling has decreased in areas covered by vouchers," they reported. Elsewhere (see Crown 1993) it reported that "business owners who feel that the problem is spinning out of control" helped drive the "backlash" against panhandling. The *American Banker* (6/10/94) praised a New York law prohibiting panhandling near Automated Teller Machines that carried \$25 fines and ten days jail. The Disney Corporation, working with the Orlando City Council and the Chamber of Commerce, helped pass the licensing ordinance described above, which prescribed penalties for unlicensed begging of \$500 and 60 days in jail. One Orlando Sergeant admitted that "We're actually hoping we'll displace people to other cities" (Brosch 1998).

Other accounts confirm that local businesses were central players in many anti-begging campaigns of the late twentieth century, organizing an anti-panhandling campaign

with the Chamber of Commerce and the police department in Lawrence, Kansas (Neher 1996), driving reforms for undercover police officers and establishing “community courts” without standard civil protections for accused beggars in Baltimore (Brennan 1995), the business organization the Downtown Phoenix Partnership supported that city’s regulations that offered strict limitations on acceptable public behavior near businesses especially (Fiscus 1996) and, bringing things full circle, Buffalo, home to one of the nation’s most aggressive anti-tramping initiatives in the nineteenth century, in 1995 created its Downtown Initiative, a zero-tolerance for lawbreaking in its business district that strictly enforced no panhandling regulations. Said the Deputy Police Commissioner, “The business community wasn’t satisfied with the way things were. This is our response” (Stouffer 1995). One 1992 survey of law enforcement agencies found that 68.9% identified “street people” as a police problem (NLCHP 1993). Throughout the 1990s, homeless “sweeps” especially intensified under pressure from businesses before the arrival of sporting events, business or political conventions, board or trustees’ meetings, or any large, potentially profitable gathering in cities throughout the US (see NLCHP 1991, 1993, 1994, 1996, 1999), just as they did during the Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City, when some men were “deported” to other cities while some 2-3,000 others were herded into shelters and offered extra meals if they would remain hidden from view in them (NYT 2/14/02, “Loitering Behind the Clean Streets”).

Change in the Courts

One of the differences between such policies in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries was the courts’ twentieth century willingness to intercede on behalf of the poor; many such laws were struck down on First, Fourth, Eighth and Fourteenth Amendment grounds as violations of speech, search and seizure, cruel and unusual punishment and equal protection guarantees, respectively; other courts were able to use State Constitutions, some of which (New York most especially, and even Florida) offered greater protections to

poor people than the federal Constitution. But as the trend toward new anti-vagrant laws and enforcement continued throughout the 1990s, many cities began artfully drafting their laws and amending old statutes to withstand legal challenges, while some municipalities simply ignored court orders (see NLCHP 1991, 1993, 1994, 1996, 1999 for case law summaries; see Orren 1991 for a discussion of nineteenth century courts' unwillingness to intercede in similar matters).

Homeless Men and Work

Like nineteenth century lodgers, those arrested under anti-begging and other statutes worked at least part of the year; thirty percent of all shelter residents, for instance, worked during any given week (Foscarinis 1996). Up to forty percent were Veterans (National Coalition for the Homeless 2001).²⁰ Moreover, we should not (as many of the law review articles cited in this section do) assume that panhandlers and beggars were homeless. One Baltimore study concluded that a "very small percentage" of its street beggars were homeless; a Philadelphia study found that almost half of its panhandlers had a place to stay other than a shelter (see Teir 1998fn23); Chicago estimated that 60% of its beggars were not homeless (Crown 1993) and 65% of those arrested in one three-month period in 1993 in Atlanta were not homeless (NLCHP 1993). And like their nineteenth century counterparts, some claimed that begging offered a reasonable income. Said one Chicago police Sergeant, "Panhandlers are thieves. . . They make \$40 to \$90 a day. It's a darn good business" (Crown 1993).

General Assistance

Poor men faced yet another difficulty when state General Assistance programs were cut. By 1998, sixteen states did not even offer state aid to those ineligible for TANF or

²⁰ This is a pattern in evidence since at least the 1700s in Britain -- "usually following demobilisation [sic] from the army and navy, the number of beggars increased dramatically" (Marriott 2000).

other federal benefits. Of those that did, nearly half imposed a work test, eight states offered in-kind aid only, and ten imposed time limits. Most restricted benefits to “severely poor,” disabled, elderly “and otherwise unemployable individuals.” In twenty-seven states benefits averaged less than 40% of the poverty line, and in all states but seven the value of benefits had declined since 1996 (Gallagher et al. 1999). When combined with rules changes in SSI and Food Stamps that reduced the value of those benefits and made them harder to obtain, the late century reform era left men with very few sources of public relief, substantially less even than that lesser amount available for women. New York City extended its workfare principles to homeless shelters, too, denying beds to any who would not work (the plan was struck down but was under appeal by the city; see NYT 12/7/01), and restricted access to facilities by requiring drug screening or adopting onerous policies for admittance to emergency shelter -- of 24,739 applicants in one year ending in June, 1998 4,622 were granted admittance to the shelter system. Their “ritual degradation” was apparent most visibly among New York’s Work Experience Program workers, who cleaned streets and parks in bright orange vests worn only by them.

The message to others was clear, if more subtle than erecting the gallows next to the almshouse.

CHAPTER FIVE

Results of Reform

This chapter discusses the (often unanticipated) outcomes of relief reform. While proposed reforms were often touted for their cost savings and their efficiency, they were in fact more expensive and more difficult to administer than the cash relief they replaced. After the PRA states were given more money than they would have received under the old AFDC program and substantially wider discretion in its use: while some increased expenses for work-support services like child care or job training, others used such funds to replace general revenues. The abolition of AFDC, moreover, occurred while the Earned Income Tax Credit was expanding -- which shifted public relief away from those not working (not working above the table, at any rate) to those in the low-wage labor market, in effect acting as both a reward to the low-wage employee and as a wage subsidy to his or her employer. Much relief burden was shifted to not-for-profit service providers, who struggled to meet new needs. In the nineteenth century, expenses also increased in those cities that abolished or significantly reduced their public outdoor relief -- the costs shifted to public almshouses and asylums, or were borne by private agencies, often in the form of large service contracts from the city itself, which in turn led to new reform campaigns against these poorly monitored and expensive private charity subsidies. In the late nineteenth century, like the twentieth, in the wake of reform less money went to poor people, but more went to private and non-profit service providers. In both periods, declines in pauperism or dependence -- relief receipt itself -- was the most common measure of the success of reform. The tautology of this was (and is) largely lost on even the critics of reform in both eras: what was dependence but use of relief? what was pauperism but receipt of public aid? It is to be expected that pauperism and dependence declined -- new laws were passed and strictly enforced whose very aim was to push people off the rolls whether there was a job or other support available for them or not. Less

attended to was ample evidence that suffering among poor people increased in the wake of reform. This chapter will recount the ways in which reform failed.

Looking for the Poor in all the Wrong Places

Charles Bonaparte (1892, 201) lamented in *Charities Review* that “Experience leads me to think that an earnest reformer, were he also wise, would wish to die immediately after the practical adoption of his favorite reform; thus only will he be spared disappointment in its fruits.” Late nineteenth century anti-relief reformers largely failed. They promised that reductions in out-relief would reduce dependency, lower costs, produce more effective and efficient forms of relief, improve the lot of poor people, even reduce class conflict and create an improved moral climate. Instead, costs rose, need rose, suffering rose and unrest grew. The only one of their express goals that can be seen to have succeeded was to reduce dependence -- that is, to reduce relief rolls. We should not minimize the import of that. While few people in the nineteenth (or twentieth) century got much in the way of public relief, and those who did rarely received cash, to those who received such benefits they were important, even literally vital. When relief was made unavailable to them poor women’s lives were made more difficult. They sought private relief, they established credit accounts with merchants, they borrowed money, they worked more hours or took another job, they gave up their children in hopes of getting them back when they could better afford to keep them, they moved in with friends or family or a mate, they cut back their already threadbare budgets, they sold their furniture, they moved, they managed, with even more difficulty, to survive and to care for their children (see Clement 1992; Keyssar 1986). They were not made less “dependent,” but made more dependent upon sources of support other than public outdoor relief. In many cases, the abolition and reduction of relief drove poor people into workhouses and into prisons, where they could be made more compliant and forced to labor at low wages for the profit of their jailers or contractors, or they were driven into the labor market, forced to compete for low wages that would only be lowered more by their presence. Reformers didn’t find any increased

need because they didn't know quite what to look for and didn't look in the right places for it.

No Harm?

As we have discussed, reformers in the nineteenth century said that in cities that had abolished relief there was no indication of ill effects. Lowell (1884, 62-5) reported that "The poor have not suffered by the entire cessation of public relief; but there is less idleness." "Diligent inquiry showed," noted Kellogg (1893, 60), "that no suffering ensued in consequence of the withdrawal, while the admissions to almshouses and infirmaries in the cities named contemporaneously decreased." Warner and Coolidge (1908, 235) argued that "There is no well-authenticated instance where outdoor relief has been stopped and any considerable increase either of private charity has been required, or any marked increase of the inmates of institutions has occurred." District of Columbia Associated Charities Secretary Wilson said that "after a period of three years in this city practically without outdoor relief I am very strongly convinced that we are much better off without it, and when I say 'we,' I mean the poor people just as much as the tax-payers" (in Almy 1899, 71). Dissenting voices were exceedingly rare in the charity journals and during the proceedings of the NCCC, yet reformers were wrong -- need and costs rose in the wake of relief reform.

We do not have reliable poverty statistics for the period, and unemployment measures were new and even less meaningful than those of the late twentieth century (see Feder 1936, 79). It is difficult, therefore, to point to general measures of "suffering" to search for effects. We do have some few reports from contemporaneous observers that belie the conventional wisdom. Rev. C.G. Trusdell, for example, reported to the NCCC (1893, 102) that "On a visit to the city of Brooklyn a few years after this marvellous [sic] reformation [of abolishing relief], we were surprised to learn from the officers of the Association for the Improvement of the Condition of the Poor and from other private

charities that they were pressed to their utmost ability to relieve distress.” And as we have seen, the Boston Overseers failed to repeal relief in their city in part because they judged the results in cities that did to have been poor.

Not to the Poorhouse?

The number of people confined to a local public poorhouse did remain relatively constant in the wake of relief reform. In the city of New York throughout the 1870s the numbers fluctuated modestly between 27,000 and 33,000; moved from 38,771 in 1883 to 42,664 in 1888 and to 48,921 in 1889. In Brooklyn city almshouse paupers numbered about 10,000 from the late 1870s through to the mid-1880s and had even declined slightly by 1890 (Kauffman and Kiesling 2001; Katz 1986, Table 2.2). Indiana state paupers remained relatively constant throughout the 1890s (Butler 1906, 763ff). In the years immediately after Philadelphia abolished relief, Pennsylvania’s poorhouse population also changed little (NCCC 1887, 84-92, Sched. B), even while total population grew.

In wondering where poor people went after relief abolition in Brooklyn, two contemporary economists confirm: “Our analysis suggests that they did not go into the poor house, which leaves the options of either entering the labor market, relying on private charity, or relying on familial support” (Kauffman and Kiesling 1997, 446). Kauffman and Kiesling get us partway there, but they miss another option: While poorhouse populations in most cities remained relatively constant, they were actually flooded with new inhabitants as certain categories of other poor people -- children, the insane and able-bodied men -- were expelled or segregated in orphanages, asylums, penitentiaries and labor colonies (see also Katz 1983).¹ Gilded Age reformers would end (as early nineteenth century reformers had tried to do) the catch-all institution (usually the poorhouse) in which

¹ The argument is not that the same people moved from almshouse or poorhouse to another institution, although some surely did, but rather that the kinds of poor people who might have formerly found themselves in the poorhouse (or not confined at all) were imprisoned in jails, penitentiaries, workhouses or labor colonies or relegated to specialized facilities created for children, the elderly, the insane and feeble-minded, epileptics, women and others.

the poor, the insane, young children and the old, criminals, men and women, the sick and the healthy were all confined together. By 1891 there were in New York, for example, separate State-run institutions for the blind, deaf, dumb, idiots, feeble-minded youth, juvenile offenders, criminals and State paupers (those with no local settlement) (NCCC 1891, 265).

From 1874-1875 some 16% of New York almshouse inmates were children, 16.5% were "old and destitute," 25% were blind, deaf, epileptic, feeble minded or otherwise "temporarily or permanently disabled" and 32% were classified as insane (Warner 1894b, 57). By the mid-1880s, most New York almshouses were newly devoid of children (Hannon 1997, 425-7) and Folks (1894, 124-6) reports that most others states had done the same by the mid-1890s. By 1903, only seven percent of all the institutionalized "insane" were in an almshouse (Warner and Coolidge 1908, 196ff). By the turn of the century poorhouses were significantly a last refuge of old people, who had little value in the labor market (see Katz 1983); by 1904, report Warner and Coolidge (1908, 196ff) over 40% of the population of almshouses were over sixty years old. It is not that these classes of people were no longer poor, but that they were to be found in other institutions.

Into the Orphanage

Lowell (Stewart 1911, 244-5) reported that while in 1868 there were some 2,261 children under sixteen in New York almshouses, that number had been cut in half by 1873. From 1870 through the 1880s children were moved from poorhouses into orphanages, foster homes and group homes (see Katz 1986), in part because of the passage of the 1875 Children's Law, which compelled the removal of children aged 3-16 from poorhouses. (Michigan, Wisconsin, Massachusetts, Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Minnesota, Rhode Island and Kansas soon passed similar bills; see Folks 1894, 124-6). Half were removed within a year, and by 1883 most were gone (Hannon 1997, 427). By 1875 there were

already 123 separate children's homes with 17,791 inmates. Folks (1901, 272) complained that "New York city in 1897 was supporting, by public or private charity, in round numbers one thirty-fifth of all the child population of the city in charitable institutions." Between 1877 and 1880 alone the number of children placed in the Catholic Orphan asylum doubled to 1,640; Catholic agencies received a large number of transfers of children from the poorhouse. Others were sent West to work on farms (see O'Connor 2001) or adopted by local families; Brace's Children's Aid Society alone would send off some 90,000 children over the last half of the century. For some families it was one strategy of coping with constant scarcity, while other children were taken by force. Lowell (Stewart 1911) was, as usual, succinct: "If parents do not want to give up their children they must support them or put them in private charity to maintain." In the wake of relief abolition, the number of "dependent" children in New York climbed from 14,773 in 1875 to 35,404 in 1898 (Fetter 1901, 377), in part no doubt because those adults who did enter the poorhouse were typically required to surrender their children (see Devine 1904, 109).

Into the Prison

We have seen that most inmates of jails and penitentiaries were poor, uneducated immigrants in the nineteenth century and that the populations of those institutions increased many times over during these reform eras. There is no need to recount those data or that history. The point is that just as in the wake of relief reform poor children were to be found in substantially greater numbers -- but not to be found in the poorhouse, generally -- so too do we find substantially greater numbers of poor men -- but we do not find them in the almshouse but tramping the country searching for work or paying the penalty for that search by "working" in a jail or penitentiary. Pennsylvania's Diller Luther noticed with some satisfaction this shift from housing vagrants in poorhouses to jails at the NCCC of 1883 (p. 38).

Into the Asylum

It is difficult to know how many people moved from the poorhouse to the asylum, but it is likely that a non-trivial number did in the wake of reform. Herkimer, New York Superintendent to the Poor John Crowley observed in a puzzled letter to Lowell (Stewart 1911, 62-5) that “the number of our insane is increasing; while pauperism is slightly decreasing, insanity is increasing with us.” Such accounts can be found throughout the late century proceedings of the NCCC.

The population of late century asylums was similar to that of the prison and the poorhouse. They served as a “dumping ground for social undesirables” (Rothman 1971). Ebert (1999) reports that *all* of the inmates in the Wisconsin asylums he studied were “poor or very poor;” 71% percent of the men and 57% of the women (who could be as much as half the population) were foreign-born; 39% of inmates had no education or a very poor one; 24% had a “common” education; 21% had a “fair” education and only 16% a “good” education. Those confined were not necessarily mentally ill in any way we might today acknowledge; definitions of insanity were imprecise, and one typical statute defined the insane as someone “unable to function in society.” Tobacco and alcohol use, masturbation, grief, overwork and heartbreak were all considered causes of or symptoms of insanity. Poverty itself was seen by some as a form of insanity or a cause of it. One asylum director noted that

The insufficiency of wages, the uncertainty of employment, the cares of a family whose wants harass him from day to day, the thought that next year and succeeding year will find him engaged in the same hard struggle for subsistence; all these prey upon the health and vigor of his mind, to an extent that few, perhaps, appreciate (in Ebert 1999).

The recovery of patients in one Worcester facility was judged by whether they were “Able and willing to work” and “Able to act like normal” versus those who were still “Lazy and shiftless,” “Too proud of own ideas,” or “Not very cooperative” (Rothman 1980). An 1880 Wisconsin law made it possible for “any respectable citizen” to commit someone to an asylum, and Wisconsin and other states were well aware that some families in deep poverty would commit one or more of their members in order to shift the burden of care onto the state or county (Ebert 1999). “Before 1910 voluntary patients were extremely rare.” As many as fifteen percent may have been alcoholics (Ebert 1999). “Undoubtedly,” writes Scull (1977), “one of the attractions of the asylum as a method of dealing with the insane was its promise of instilling the virtues of bourgeois rationality into that segment of the population least amenable to them.”

Another Kind of Workhouse

It is not just that poorhouses, prisons, workhouses and asylums were populated with the same classes of people, but that they functioned in similar ways: seventy percent of late century Wisconsin asylum inmates worked, as did roughly the same percentage of state hospital inmates. They labored in the laundry and kitchen, made boots in the Willard asylum and slippers, linens and towels elsewhere, or worked on out-of-door projects building roads or farming. The Outagamie asylum, like many others, was a profitable enterprise as a result, earning some \$8,000 in the mid-1890s and \$20,000 by 1905. That throughout the late century they emphasized work while limiting medical staff and maintaining high inmate-to-staff ratios helped such institutions profit through methods similar to those pursued by late twentieth century institutions. At the turn of the century by one estimate New York asylum labor produced over one million dollars worth of goods (Ebert 1999; Rothman 1980).

The Deterrent of the Poorhouse Itself

There is another reason to be wary of the argument that the abolition of relief caused no harm if it offers as evidence statistics on steady or declining poorhouse and workhouse populations. Strict less-eligibility principles were enforced; indoor relief was therefore very undesirable indeed. If a woman lost her cash or in-kind benefits from the city or county it was likely, indeed it was encouraged as a matter of policy, that she would seek every conceivable other remedy before admitting herself to the poorhouse, since admittance would usually be considered evidence of her “unfitness” and result in her losing the right to care for her children. “The fact that a person wishes to be admitted to a poorhouse is usually considered *prima facie* evidence that he ought to be” (NCCC 1889, 200). That people did not choose to enter the poorhouse can offer no evidence to support the proposition that they were therefore not in need, even dire need.

And yet more people probably did choose to enter the poorhouse. The, albeit suggestive, evidence above shows that during the period when reformers claimed that suffering did not much increase because poorhouse populations remained steady, large (if here unquantified) numbers of poor children, the poor insane and the unemployed moved out of the poorhouse into orphanages, asylums and jails and workhouses. The logical implication is that if so many groups of people were transferred from the poorhouse to other institutions while at the same time the population of poorhouses remained relatively constant then paupers in numbers roughly equivalent to those who moved out moved in. In this sense, poorhouse populations did increase.²

² That said, I do not find evidence to suggest that nineteenth century reformers were engaged in deceit, or attempting to hide bad outcomes; their analyses of post-reform events suggest, instead, that they did not understand that what they were measuring could not offer data on what they sought to explain. They were trapped by what Schram and Soss (2000) described as “a political climate that privileges some facts and interpretations over others.” Because the few arguments that reformers encountered against abolishing outdoor relief often pointed to the rise in indoor costs it caused, addressing that critique was how pro-abolition reformers sought to publicly defend their policies.

The Rising Costs of Public Relief and Private Subsidies

Relief was cut. Need rose. And so did the burden on public coffers, in part because indoor relief always costs more per capita than outdoor relief (Piven and Cloward 1971; Katz 1986, 15). Noted Massachusetts's F.B. Sanborn, "Here we see one reason why outdoor relief is everywhere and always more common than indoor relief, -- for the same sum of money a much greater number of poor can be aided," moreover, he added, there are simply never enough almshouses or workhouses available (NCCC 1890, 76). As Davis (1874, 10) said at the very first meeting of the NCCC, "There is not a State nor a city wherein the cost of public out-door relief exceeds that of in-door relief." To provide institutional aid, after all, one must build, maintain, staff and operate an institution. Outdoor aid is comparatively cheap -- one distributes money or supplies. Thus, "cutbacks" in relief may in fact increase municipal spending. For the city of New York Hannon (1997, Table 4) reveals that while the number of poor relief recipients as a percentage of the population steadily declined (from 1860-1864 when it averaged 20.46%, to 10.24% from 1870-1874, to 9.98% from 1880-1884 and 6.7% from 1890-1894), real per capita expenditures on relief *doubled* (from .460 in 1860-1864 to .898 in 1890-1894) as the percentage of all recipients relieved in the poorhouse *quadrupled* (going from 10.99 from 1860-1864, to 31.10 from 1870-1874, to 29.29 from 1880-1884, finally hitting 46.75 from 1890-1895). The pattern for the rest of the state, though not as pronounced, was similar. A report from the President of the New York State Board of Charities (in Woods 1895, 367) similarly showed that all "expenditures for charitable and reformatory purposes" more than doubled to \$17,605,661 from 1880 to 1891. Public indoor relief expenses from the mid-1880s to mid-1890s nearly tripled in Pennsylvania, doubled in Michigan and rose five-fold in Wisconsin (NCCC 1887, Sched. B).

Costs rose also because the only way that private institutions could step in to assist those abandoned by the city was to turn to the city for funding; not only did public expenditures for public indoor institutions grow, so too did public costs for private

institutions. New York subsidies to private institutions grew from a mere \$9,863 in 1850 to \$128,850 in 1860, \$334,828 in 1870, \$1,414,257 in 1880 and \$1,845,870 in 1890. In 1900 total subsidies were \$3,079,259, none of which was distributed to organizations for direct cash relief to the poor, except for a small amount for aid to the blind (NCCC 1901, 132; Fetter 1901, 363 shows slightly different figures). In 1899, of a similar total amount (\$3.2 million) only \$19,251 went to agencies that delivered any relief (Warner and Coolidge 1908, 405). In Philadelphia, subsidies rose from \$201,250 in 1870 to \$506,254 in 1893 (Clement 1992, Tables 1 and 2). In 1889 fully one-third of all of Pennsylvania's expenditures for charities and corrections was paid to private institutions (Warner 1894, 339), and from 1850 to 1905 Pennsylvania consistently divided its high indoor relief expenditures about equally between public and private institutions (Warner and Coolidge 1908, 403). Even as early as 1870 one-half of the New York Children's Aid Society budget was paid by the city (Katz 1986, 111). Fetter (1901, 371-2) reports from the 1899 Comptroller's Report that "In the period 1850 to 1898 the population of New York city was multiplied by 6.66, the cost of prisoners and public paupers was multiplied by 5.53, and the cost of subsidizing private institutions was multiplied by 317.51." His data (see his Table II) make the shift clear: the percentage of total New York city indoor relief appropriations that were devoted to caring for prisoners and paupers in private institutions rose from 2.3% in 1850 to 14.7% in 1860, 19.8% in 1870, 51.2% in 1880, 45.9% in 1890 and 57.3% in 1898, when such support totaled over \$3.13 million of \$5.47 million expended.

While this phenomenon was most pronounced in New York and Pennsylvania -- leaders in relief abolition, we might observe -- subsidies were identified as a problem throughout the country. Of thirty-four states surveyed by Fetter (1901, 363), only Arizona, Nebraska, Nevada, Washington and Wyoming reported offering no state or local subsidies to private charities -- only in these few (western) states did private charities raise all their funding from private sources. This would not have surprised members of the

NCCC. "As almost everyone knows, the private charities are supported largely by public funds" reported *Charities Review* (CR 1899 V9N2, 79). Of the twenty-nine other states supplying data, total state subsidies were \$6,668,600 and total local subsidies to private charities were \$4,316,115. In twelve states (CO, VA, MI, RI, DE, NJ, AL, MN, OH, IA, IN and UT) combined public and private subsidies were minimal and totaled less than \$10,000. In eleven states (IL, VT, GA, NC, NH, MA, WI, LA, MO, OR, and KS) combined subsidies ranged from a high of \$63,796 in Illinois to a low of \$14,400 in Kansas; most subsidies in these states were local, with the exception of Oregon and Kansas. But in other states, subsidies were much higher. For Connecticut, state subsidies were \$101,750 and local were \$24,500; D.C. reported \$200,000 in local subsidies; for Maryland, there were \$96,000 in state and \$185,000 in local payments and California reported \$410,000 in state subsidies to private charities. For all those states above total state and local subsidies amounted to \$1,486,215, roughly 14% of the total for the year. The other 86% of all public subsidies for private charities were from two only states -- New York (\$3,645,000 -- 94% local) and Pennsylvania (\$5,853,500 -- 98% state) (Fetter 1901, *passim*).

A New Campaign, Against Subsidies

The COSs almost unanimously supported the complete separation of public and private relief, perhaps because one-third of all private charities were "under ecclesiastic control" (Warner and Coolidge 1908, 377). Almy (1900, 135) argued that "Private charity can be just as vicious and pauperizing, just as wasteful, just as corrupt and profligate, as public charity. . . To acquiesce supinely in a debauching city government, and to attempt to organize a private agency to do the city's work, is a surrender of manhood." Fetter (1901, 368), referring to a *Charities Review* article on the subject of Pennsylvania, remarked that "distribution of subsidies becomes one of the most subtle and insidious forms of the spoils system in politics." Warner and Coolidge (1908, 415ff) were reluctant, too, to see public

funds supporting private charity, arguing that those which had received subsidies the longest were those least willing or able to secure private funding, that subsidies no less than public relief offered too much opportunity for patronage and corruption, and that funding did not necessarily go to the most effective or efficient institution but to “those applicants most skilled [at lobbying] or most personally attractive.” Fetter (1901, 375) was willing however to accede to subsidies in lieu of an enlarged public role: “The prime reason, no doubt, for the introduction of subsidies is that it seems the most economical way for the public to meet an obligation it has come to recognize, and which has outgrown the means provided by private generosity.” In New York, reported Barbour (1901, 125) “Public sentiment in every case appears to be growing in opposition to the practice.” One result was an 1896 Constitutional Amendment prohibiting the legislature from requiring counties or cities to contribute to any private charity. Another law was passed in 1899 amending the New York Charter so that

the board of estimate grants aid to institutions which are partly or entirely of a private character only out of public funds and only on behalf of such persons as are received in compliance with regulations made by the state board. The last report of the state board remarks that this law has already held off a number of applications and reduced the grants, which in 1898 had reached the sum of \$3,130,000; and besides these public subsidies, which were divided among 250 institutions, they received from other sources \$5,800,000. The city of Brooklyn has recently, on similar grounds, withdrawn subsidies from 40 out of 150 societies which have hitherto been receiving them (Munsterberg 1902, 678-9).

Reformers in both periods under consideration here worried about the “crowding-out” effects of public relief: that by offering public support, private generosity was

inhibited. "Where there is liberal public relief there is little of the more personal and uplifting private charity, and with liberal private relief we find little or no public charity" (Almy 1899, 67). The New York State Charities Aid Association complained that subsidies to private charities diminished the funds available to public indoor institutions, which they said were sorely in need of support (Warner and Coolidge 1908, 406). Lowell complained that support of private institutions came at the expense of public facilities when urging the Board of Estimate and Control to cut their appropriations to private charities. "The point to which I wish to call attention," she said, "is that the city continues, at the bidding of the Legislature, to pay, without protest, year by year, increasing sums for the support of public dependents under care of private persons in private institutions, many of whom, but for this provision, would probably not be dependent at all, while at the same time the public dependents under the care of public officers in public institutions are housed in buildings which are in danger of falling down and are a discredit to the city" (in Warner 1894, 337-8).

Said Warner and Coolidge (1908, 406), "We find that appropriations of public funds to private institutions inevitably tend to diminish and discourage private charity; that the system confuses the duties of the public authorities and of private citizens and private organizations. . . it is always in the long run enormously expensive. . . its permanent disadvantages far outweigh any immediate and temporary benefits." Fetter (1901, 373) added that "It reduces the effort on the part of many of the least self-seeking citizens to purify the politics of their communities," and, quoting a writer in the *Philadelphia Ledger*,

“the charitable spirit in public men is dried up when they can refer applicants for help to the state treasury.”³

Private Charity Overwhelmed

The success of relief reform must also be judged in light of the demands placed upon private charities during the depression of 1893-1898 and the measures they undertook to confront destitution so severe as to “to break hearts of oak,” as the Director of New York’s United Hebrew Charities put it (NCCC 1894, 303). Again, reform failed. By the Depression the inability of private institutions to either ration relief or meet the need was apparent. Closson (1894, 476) reports that in New York between February 1893 and February 1894 “a careful estimate places the value of private, family, and office giving in New York City during the year ending with February at \$7,300,000, as against \$1,300,000 in a normal year.” By 1897 in New York, over 100,000 (1 in 70) were incarcerated in public or private charitable or correctional institutions at the cost of over \$25 million, and that does not include church, newspaper and other funds (NCCC 1898, 9).

³ What those who argue for crowding-out effects may miss, and Ziliak (1996a) points us toward, is a possible corollary: the *crowding-in* effects of relief *cutbacks*, that is, the ways in which declines in public relief encourage increases in private spending. The implications are broad, for if in fact there is a crowding-in effect, then the withdrawal of relief would not have the economic effects that their supporters hoped for, or that their critics feared. Perhaps Solow (1998a; 1998b), Hout (1997) and Tilly (1996) might be wrong to expect significant effects upon unemployment rates and wages from the cuts in public cash relief enshrined in the PRA and state TANF laws as long as private charity was able to provide support in rough equivalence to what was formerly available from the state. As Ziliak (1996b) discovered in Indianapolis, “shutting down public outdoor relief is not necessarily consistent with a goal of increasing self-reliance. As the public expenditures per relieved household were taken to the relatively low level of \$3.40 per year by 1890, private expenditures rose to \$15.10, ironically approaching the ‘lavish’ public expenditures in Boston, and exceeding that in Brooklyn.” Moreover, he notes elsewhere (1997) that “following the near abolition of public outdoor relief in Indianapolis, 1877-85, public outdoor relief was replaced by private outdoor relief nearly \$0.70 per \$1.00.” However, total per capita relief expenditures were still higher in Boston in 1897 (\$1.379), which did not abolish public outdoor relief, than in cities that did abolish relief, including New York (1.081), Baltimore (1.068) St. Louis (.933), Philadelphia (.824), San Francisco (.812) and were substantially higher than Atlanta (.406), Memphis (.234), New Orleans (.148), Denver (.146), Kansas City MO (.108), Brooklyn (.047), Salt Lake City (.013) and Louisville (.012) -- all cities that also abolished public out-relief (my calculations from Folks 1898; COS 1896; Gibson and Lennon 1999). Similarly, Boston boasted the highest per capita private outdoor relief expenditures in 1897 (.261) followed by Cambridge (.247) which reduced but never abolished relief. For other cities the expenditures are .178 in New York, .163 in San Francisco, .076 in Baltimore, .063 in Chicago, .050 in Indianapolis and .047 in Brooklyn (ibid.).

After two relatively stable decades, New York poorhouse populations climbed more sharply in the early 1890s, hitting 67,828 by 1895 (Kauffman and Kiesling 2001). In 1899 Philadelphia SOC Secretary James Walk said that "We feel that there is no need whatever in this city for the restoration of municipal outdoor relief and that the private benevolence of our citizens is sufficient to supply the need" (Almy 1899, 71); but after abolishing relief in Philadelphia women simply were confined in private asylums instead of public almshouses, private charity expenses exploded, especially for the (heavily subsidized) private indoor institutions (Clement 1992, 49ff). Private charities were still not up to the task, and by 1901 the SOC had "lost a grip on the situation." There were by then 2,400 separate relief agencies, and 11 soup houses feeding 80,000 and spending \$25,000. "The city was, moreover, competing with Chicago as to which sheltered the larger number of vagrants" (Watson 1922, 283-4). The New York Charities Directory of 1896 (COS 1896) listed 89 public charities, 343 agencies for temporary relief, 111 for permanent relief, 73 for "special" relief, 35 for relief for foreigners, 220 for medical care, 72 mutual aid societies, and 263 "miscellaneous" agencies -- and this does not include the (likely) hundreds of churches providing aid. The Society of St. Vincent de Paul reported a 300% increase in their expenditures; AICP expenditures more than tripled; COS expenditures were up 20% over the previous year as their caseload tripled (Feder 1936, 138-9). And still reports of widespread suffering and the clamor for aid abounded as "the columns of the newspapers were given up during a large part of the winter to long accounts of suffering and exaggerated reports of sore distress. These were coupled by frantic appeals for the establishment of new agencies for aid and relief" (Watson 1922, 263-5; see also Burgess 1962, 262). Such events were repeated throughout the country, and most emphatically in those cities that had substantially reformed their relief provision. Many moved quickly to resume outdoor relief (Feder 1936, 325ff). By 1896 national relief expenses were estimated variously at \$50 to \$75 million (Gunckel 1897, 755; NCCC 1896, 17) yet still by the turn of the century some ten million Americans and more than one-fifth of the

populations of New York, Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Illinois, Indiana and Michigan lived in deep poverty (Hunter 1904, 60-2). Reform, even on its own terms, had failed.

The Poverty of Reform

Supporters of the PRA amassed a body of evidence to support their claim that reform had succeeded. From 1993 (when waiver-granting under Clinton's HHS was in full swing) to 2001 the number of relief recipients was reduced by sixty-two percent, from 14.1 million to 5.4 million. At the same time, poverty rates declined, and did so for children and even for African American children, whose poverty rate reached an historic low in 1999 (Haskins and Primus 2001). Many women, formerly on relief, were working, and some were earning more than they were as welfare recipients -- most were, says Haskins (2000). By those measures -- fewer "dependent" women and fewer poor children -- we might call the reforms of 1996 a success, as their advocates did.

No Harm?

Welfare rolls did sharply decline; they had fallen 32% by 1998. From then on, however, in some states declines began to level off and even reverse (Oliphant 2000). Such declines varied greatly by geography, too, and were more likely in non-urban areas, with the result that welfare recipients were increasingly concentrated in major cities, and by 1999 ten urban counties contained one-third of all TANF recipients (Allen and Kirby 2000). At best, sixty percent of those who left (or were pushed off) the welfare rolls were working at any given time (Greenberg et al. 2000; Haskins 2000; NCJIS 2001); moreover, women have historically cycled on and off the rolls, in and out of the workforce -- this was not a new achievement of the reform legislation (see Mishel et al. 1997, 334). Many of those who did find work -- perhaps 70% of them -- earned wages at or below the official poverty line in jobs without benefits (Greenberg et al. 2000; NCJIS 2001; Boushey 2001).

An Economic Policy Institute economist (Boushey 2001) estimated that while in 1994 8% of AFDC recipients were employed, in 1999 28% of TANF recipients were, and labor force participation among single mothers increased generally, by almost 10% from 1989-2000 (Blank and Schmidt 2000). Wages for low-skilled workers, however, did not rise, sitting below their 1979 levels in 1999 (Boushey 2001; Blank and Schmidt 2001).

Children

From 1993 to 1999, child support payments to welfare recipients increased by an impressive forty-four percent; it is less impressive when one notes that the increase is over a “somewhat paltry base of \$253” annually (Haskins 2000). A lower percentage of poor children were receiving food stamps (while total food stamp participation declined 38% from 1994 to 2000), fewer eligible families were receiving Medicaid (Greenberg et al. 2000; NCJIS 2001), and 400,000 more poor children lived in deep poverty in 1997 than in 1995 (CDF in Haskins 2000). The average poor person was poorer in 1999 than in 1993 (NCJIS 2001; Boushey 2001). Sawhill (Brookings Review 2001) estimates that 700,000 families were “significantly worse off in 1999 than their counterparts” were in 1995. The number of children in foster care climbed to 547,000 in 1999 from 483,000 in 1995 (Greenberg et al. 2000), while only 12% of those eligible received subsidies for child care (NCJIS 2001). Some Head Start providers reported increased signs of anxiety, abuse and neglect among children of “workfare” participants (Pimpare 2000), while another study found increased behavioral problems and lower academic achievement among children of workfare participants (see NYT 8/7/01, “Surprising Results”).

To the Souphouse

The number of people seeking food at soup kitchens and food pantries rose nationally some 17% in 2000 alone (NCJIS 2001). One Urban Institute study (Loprest 1999) reported that one-third to one-half of all those who left welfare had difficulty buying

enough food for their families. Catholic Charities reported in 2001 that since 1996 their affiliates' emergency food programs served 20% more working people each year (CP 9 Aug. 2001). In Wisconsin, home of innovative early reforms pioneered by Gov. Tommy Thompson (who would become Secretary of HHS under Bush the Younger) and Jason Turner (who became Commissioner of the New York City Human Resources Administration and then in 2002 a Fellow at the Heritage Foundation), emergency food referrals climbed 136% between 1996 and 2000 while food stamp enrollment declined 30% from 1995-2000 (Fendt et al. 2001).

And much of these data mark trends in evidence largely *before* the recession of 2001 (and obscure significant variation among the states.) As an October 8, 2001 headline in the *New York Times* read, "A Mass of Newly Laid-Off Workers Will Put Social Safety Net to the Test." The *Chronicle of Philanthropy* reported on August 9 of that year that the "Welfare Law Puts Strain on Urban Charities That Serve the Poor." More poor Americans were receiving emergency food from soup kitchens and food pantries than were receiving food stamps; this, at the same time that many food providers reported decreasing private donations (Second Harvest 2001; NYT 11/14/01). In Milwaukee, as elsewhere, private providers, especially churches, were overwhelmed and unable to adequately meet new demand thrust upon them in the wake of retrenchment (Fendt et al. 2001).

To the Poorhouse

Demand for emergency shelter increased nationally by 15% (NCJIS 2001) in 2000 despite AEI's (Besharov and Germanis 2001) claim that welfare reform caused no "extreme hardship." By August, 2001, the New York City homeless population reached an all-time high -- 6,252 families with 11,594 children for 20,655 people total; applications for shelter rose 30% just from 2000 to 2001 and the number of children living in homeless shelters rose 29% from 2000 to 2001. D.C., Chicago and Oakland, California reported similar increases (NYT 8/1/01, "Use of Shelters By Families Sets Record in New York," NYT

2/13/02 "Many More Children Calling New York City Shelters Home"; see also NYT 2/7/01 "Shelter Population Reaches Highest Level Since 1980's"). The New York City Coalition for the Homeless reported figures even higher -- 29,498 nightly shelter residents of whom 12,414 were children (NYT 11/20/01, "Advocacy Group Says Homeless are Breaking Shelter Records"). It was over 31,000 by February 2002 (NYT 2/13/02). In Milwaukee, emergency shelter referrals rose 88% between 1997 and 2000, city and county disbursements for emergency housing doubled to \$650,000 from 1995-2000, and evictions simultaneously climbed 13% from 1995 to 2001 (Fendt et al. 2001).

The Expense of Reform

Reforms in the 1990s were expensive, too, although the Contract with America (Gingrich 1994) predicted that welfare reform would save some \$40 billion. Four billion dollars more was being spent under TANF than was projected under AFDC, says Lawrence Mead (2000), although less was going to poor people and more was going to not-for-profit training or service providers or to private corporations like welfare-to-work specialist Maximus. Among the first to institute time-limited programs under pre-PRA waivers, Vermont, Florida and Wisconsin all saw their welfare costs increase substantially (Pandey and Collier-Tenison 2001).

While total spending increased, median monthly TANF benefits declined to \$381 in 2000 from \$399 in 1996 (Blank and Schmidt 2000). By 2002 more was projected to be spent nationwide in the name of welfare on contracts and "services" than on relief; before the PRA, states and localities typically spent 80% of their welfare budgets on cash relief. By 2001, that had dropped to 50%. Federal child care expenditures rose \$4.5 billion from 1997 to 2002, while states used an additional \$3 billion of their TANF funds to purchase child care (Haskins, Sawhill and Weaver 2001b). In 2001 nearly \$8 billion in TANF funds remained in state coffers, unspent, while many states, including welfare reform pioneers Wisconsin and Michigan, had used significant portions of their TANF funds for

non-welfare-related programs. All states but three were spending less on anti-poverty programs than in 1994 (Greenberg et al. 2000; NCJIS 2001; Haskins, Sawhill and Weaver 2001a). Others spent money on monitoring and punitive programs in lieu of relief itself -- in 1999 Wisconsin and New York, for example, spent \$9 million and \$4 million respectively on operating their "learnfare" programs that penalized recipients for their children's school attendance failures (Grossman 1999).

While less money was received directly by poor people in the wake of reform, private companies saw increases in their revenues from government welfare contracts. New York City alone awarded \$400 million in welfare contracts from 1998-2001 (McMillan 2001). Randstad, an Amsterdam company that owned a New York TempForce franchise, received a \$578-million, three-year contract (\$75 million of it in federal monies) to employ former recipients (NYT 1/5/02). Five companies saw combined profits of over \$27.5 million for W-2 ("Wisconsin Works") services in Milwaukee from 1997-1999. Maximus, one of the five, had welfare contracts in 2001 of over \$350 million (AFSCME 2001b) and saw its stock price rise 63% from 2000-2001 and profits increase 15% to \$9.9 million (Washington Post 5/7/2001). By 1997, Lockheed Martin IMS had welfare contracts in thirteen states (Financial Times 12/22/97). Citigroup was awarded the lone contract to provide electronic food stamp and welfare benefits services in Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut and New York (NYT 2/7/1996); complaints from recipients and officials were abundant (see for one example NYT 4/11/2001). Maximus, Inc. won its first welfare contract in 1985, when hired to rout out fraud in New York City's programs, and in 1988 was hired to operate welfare-to-work programs in Los Angeles. By 1999, it had secured contracts for social service provision in fifty states (Washington Post 9/20/99) despite charges of fraud, corruption and mismanagement in Los Angeles (see LA Times 6/20/2000), Milwaukee (Milwaukee Journal Sentinel 5/10/2000), and New York (NYT 10/25/2000) (see also Berkowitz 2001).

Other Costs

As Solow (1998b) reports, "Employers should understand that they benefit from the EITC too, because, like any subsidy, it puts a little downward pressure on the market wage." Between 1993 and 1999, federal spending through the Earned Income Tax Credit, which subsidized the wages of low-paid workers with children, increased from \$15.5 billion to \$30 billion, and the number of families receiving the EITC climbed from 15.1 million to more than 20 million. By 1995 the federal EITC cost more than the combined national and state share of AFDC (Weaver 2000). Its effects were not trivial: Berlin (2000) reports that the federal EITC turned a \$6 per hour job into one worth \$8.40 per hour, when combined with the additional EITCs operating in many states it rose to as much as \$9 per hour. Haskins (2000) makes the crucial point, however:

Despite the effectiveness of the EITC and other [changes in personal income] taxes, the overall impact of government programs in 1999 reduced the poverty gap by only 56.3 percent, less than in any previous year except 1983 and well below the 62.4 percent reduction of 1979. . . . The major reason for the reduced effectiveness of government programs in reducing the poverty gap is a decline in the impact of means-tested cash benefits.

Relief reduced the poverty gap by 14.9% in 1999 compared to 28.8% in 1979. Put another way, half as many poor people were lifted to or above the poverty line by welfare and food stamps in 1999 than were in 1979. And the EITC could not be depended upon to make up the difference, nor could it benefit any former recipient who was not working. Yet without it, many families would be even worse off. While the percentage of income of female-headed families in the bottom fifth of the income distribution derived from cash welfare benefits declined 42% from 1993 to 1999 and the percentage from food stamps

dropped 23%, the percentage of their total income derived from the EITC jumped 243%, from earnings 82% and from child support 44%. For similarly situated families in the second-fifth of the income distribution, the portion of their income derived from the EITC rose 191% (Haskins, Sawhill and Weaver 2001a). It thus did serve as a reward for low-wage work.

Births and Marriage

Some supporters did complain that principal goals of the PRA had not been achieved: increases in marriage and reductions in out-of-wedlock births. The percentage of all births to unmarried teenagers rose after the passage of the PRA (Oliphant 2000). By 2000, 34 states had used TANF funds for teen pregnancy programs, and all but Oklahoma had begun some form of pro-marriage program (Greenberg et al. 2000), although in three of the five states that received the PRA's "illegitimacy bonus," no dedicated programs or special activity was undertaken to reduce out-of wedlock births or abortion (Greenberg et al. 2000).⁴

Why Declines?

Reviews by Blank (2001) and Besharov and Germanis (2001) of studies of those who left welfare suggest that about 30-45% of the declines in caseloads could be attributed to the incentives or sanctions of the PRA; about 15-30% to economic growth; and (for Besharov and Germanis) some 30-45% to the EITC, child care and other assistance to recipients. Rector (2000) argues that it was "policy reforms, not economics, [that had]

⁴ As of this writing, it has been the Malthusian pro-marriage and anti-pregnancy arguments on the right that have been most prominent in re-authorization debates (see Goldstein 2001). Brookings' Isabel Sawhill, though she has described marriage as a possible "anti-poverty strategy" (Thomas and Sawhill 2001) argued elsewhere (2001a, 2001b) that instead of emphasizing programs to promote marriage, as Murray and Rector do, re-authorization should instead focus upon offering incentives for states to implement programs to reduce teen pregnancy and out-of-wedlock births generally and should consider an aggressive national media campaign, based upon the success of some anti-smoking initiatives, to reduce out-of-wedlock pregnancy. In February 2002 the Bush Administration announced a \$100 million initiative to promote marriage (see NYT 2/19/02).

been the principal engine driving the decline in dependence." Soss et al. (2000) have shown that sanctions and work requirements imposed by states varied according to the racial composition of the rolls, the rates of births by unmarried women, the relative tightness of labor markets, incarceration rates (see also Fording 2001 on this question) and prior caseload levels. That is, "path-dependence" was important, and states that had been more generous in the past were less likely to impose harsh penalties after the PRA (see Pierson 2000a and Pierson 2000b for discussions of path dependence and welfare policy). All concur that it was not the economy alone that pulled people off the rolls (any more so than it had been in the past), it was governors, legislators, mayors, city commissioners and, ultimately, welfare workers themselves who pushed (or did not push) people off the rolls.⁵ New York Mayor Giuliani and his Human Resources Administration were repeatedly sued (and consistently lost) for illegally discouraging poor people from applying for relief (TANF, food stamps and Medicaid especially) and illegally dropping people from the relief rolls; others were effectively denied relief by being refused a translator (FPWA 2000). Many other states engaged in similar actions to inhibit food stamp applications (NYT 8/12/00). From one-quarter to one-third of the relief-roll declines in Arkansas, Florida, Missouri, South Carolina, Idaho, Iowa and Missouri can be attributed to sanctions alone (Kaplan in Oliphant 2000).

Where Rector and others err is in trying to argue that the decline in rolls is some measure of anything more than that fewer people were able to receive relief -- it does not reveal any changes whatever in need or in desire for relief, even. It is the same blind spot nineteenth century observers had in the wake of relief abolition in New York, Brooklyn, Baltimore, Philadelphia and elsewhere. By misreading the meaning of declines in relief receipt (that is, by presuming that they constituted evidence that prior relief had been unnecessary or over-generous), they were unable to see widespread immiseration and

⁵ Murray (1998) offered this explanation: "My interpretation of the trends in welfare rolls is that the rhetoric worked. The welfare population includes a fairly large number of women who could work if they wanted to badly enough, and all the hoopla moved some portion of these women to act."

growing discontent among the city's poor and hidden classes. So too for Rector and his colleagues. "The fact that the welfare rolls have fallen by over half in the last five years, with most of the leavers working and without much hardship, confirms that more of the poor can work than most academics believed. Work enforcement appears to be the main reason for the fall, although economic conditions and wage subsidies also mattered," says Mead (2000). Without *much* hardship, note.

Retrenchment Reveled

But this helps us to see that the twentieth century "cutbacks," as Piven (1999a; 1999b) has argued, were no such thing, but rather a shift from what Esping-Andersen (1990) would call *decommodifying* programs to more expensive ones that rewarded or compelled work and shifted funding from poor people to private and not-for-profit contractors; "Welfare state spending has not been slashed; it has been increased, much as academic theories would have predicted. What theories did not predict is the ongoing reorganization of the American welfare state. . . [to] reinforce labor market participation" (Piven 1999a; see also Piven 1999b; Pierson 2001). As Joel Potts (2001) of the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services candidly put it: "For the first time in Ohio's history we are spending more welfare dollars to support work than to support dependency."

London researcher Charles Booth (see Himmelfarb 1992) and Josephine Shaw Lowell (1884) argued that poor relief depresses wages for the laboring classes. Warner and Coolidge (1908, 190) summarize their point nicely: "The weakness and misfortune of the poorest continually drain the resources of their more competent and more prosperous neighbors. . . The competition of the least competent is the most injurious in the labor market, and their lower standards of decency a menace to the self-respecting poor." But poor relief does quite the opposite, it sets a floor for wages (see Piven and Cloward 1971;

Solow 1998; Hout 1997; Peck 2001).⁶ Lowell often discussed the ways in which whatever injuries may be done to the poor man by pauperizing him, and they are many, those who ultimately suffered most were those who “work all night in cellars to give us our daily bread. . .who carry us safely on thundering railway trains. . .who cook for us and wait upon us and clothe us; all those men and women without whom we could not live in comfort for one day” (Stewart 1911, 191). This is Booth’s argument, too, as it was Sumner’s. There are the workers and the idlers, and offering aid to the idlers harms the workers, whom we should celebrate, as Lowell does above in a passage sounding for all the world a little like Whitman. But she and Booth and so many others overlook that these are not distinct classes, not then and not now -- the line between working and idle, between just getting by and not getting by at all, is a thin one, a permeable membrane through which people pass back and forth and back and forth. It is here where changes in relief and in labor policy have their most important effects on people’s ability to get by. Class is fluid in America -- but not in the way that Tocqueville or Horatio Alger or Newt Gingrich would have you believe.⁷

Chris Tilly (1996), like Solow (1998a; 1998b) and Hout (1997), argued that an influx of welfare workers into the labor force would have effects: job displacements,

⁶ See Whitaker and Time (2001) for data showing that states with higher AFDC benefits also had higher per capita incomes. Hout (1997) also offered confirmation of Piven and Cloward (1971) and Piven (1998) by demonstrating that, state-by-state, the lower the welfare benefits the lower the wages for women with a high school diploma or less -- low benefits hold less attraction to potential recipients (there is truth to the “perversity thesis”), who instead enter the low-wage labor market, further depressing wages. For the mid 1800s, Kiesling and Margo (1997) found instead an inverse relationship between the “pauperism level” and the “real unskilled wage.” Hunter (1897) undertook to debate this issue with Hyslop, who in the June, 1897 *Forum* claimed that out-relief increased wages.

wage reductions (especially at the lower end) or both. Even ardent pro-work reformers, like Mead, acknowledge this: "I think there is enough increase in the labor supply due to welfare reform that there might be some tendency for real wages to fall slightly," he said (see NYT 4/20/00, "Poverty Snaring Families Once Thought Immune"). In September 2001 official unemployment reached its highest level since 1995. We must at least consider the possibility that Solow and Tilly predicted accurately.

There were other labor market effects. As Marchevsky and Theoharis (2000) summarize the data, New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani cut 22,000 municipal jobs between 1995 and 2000, and most were replaced by welfare workers. Part-time welfare workers constituted 75% of the labor force of the Parks Department and one-third of Sanitation. The average city clerical salary was \$12.32 per hour, while it was \$1.80 per hour for WEP workers, who received no benefits. The city's Department of Homeless Services itself replaced unionized city workers with welfare recipients fulfilling welfare obligations (Johnson 1998). One Salt Lake City official told the *New York Times* (in Piven 1998b) that "Without the welfare people. . . we would have had to raise the wage. . . maybe 5 percent." Many welfare recipients, contrary to most assumptions, replaced moderately-skilled workers and have assumed some key responsibilities from managing case files, conducting safety checks and opening and closing public facilities to providing care to children and the elderly (Community Voices Heard 2000). In 2000, New York City welfare offices distributed fliers from a security company seeking 500 replacement workers in anticipation of a possible strike (NYT 4/8/00).

⁷ In one study of families in D.C. (Forman 1906), it was estimated that one-fourth to one-fifth of the population "moves along the poverty line" because food expenses fluctuated, unforeseen expenses cropped up and employment was unpredictable. Many experienced a monthly food shortage when rent was due (in the twentieth century a similar dilemma was referred to as the choice to "heat or eat"). Half spent half their income on food and as much as twenty-five percent on installment payments for chairs, tables, stoves and other goods. Hunter (1904, 51-5, 58) showed that in New York rent alone could be up to 40% of monthly income and "laborers of the poorest class pass backward and forward over they poverty line." See Stanley (1992, 1272-3) for how "laborers repeatedly crossed back and forth from depending on wages to depending on alms, from inside to outside the wage contract. For them the beggar was neither a deviant nor a disingenuous figure, but one who personified, in an extreme way, the dependence and compulsion implicit in the wage contract itself."

The Hudson Institute -- an advisor to welfare-to-work programs in Wisconsin, Indiana and Florida -- made the connection between labor market needs and welfare reform explicit. While in advance of the PRA it conceded that wages for other low-skilled workers might be driven down if a sufficient number of former recipients were pushed off the rolls into the labor force (see Weicher 1995), the real advantage was that “replacing” welfare “is a boon for low-income citizens who want a career rather than a welfare check, and for business managers seeking quality employees in a tight labor market” (Hein 1999a; Hein 1999b). Moreover, training programs for recipients can help employers reduce their training costs and minimize employee turnover without having to retain workers by raising wages (Jonas 2001; Jonas 1999). With Hudson’s leadership and the cooperation of the Chamber of Commerce, Orlando instituted a “business-driven reform effort.” Hudson Research Fellow Jonas (1999) wrote:

Leaders in Florida’s statewide welfare and workforce agencies took the enlightened step to recruit the business community in the search for solutions to this seemingly ever-shrinking labor market. Beyond heightening the business community’s interest in welfare reform, Florida officials wanted a local business community to take ownership in smoothing the process of connecting workers who need jobs with employers who need workers. . . Welfare reform opened a window for the business community’s return to its necessary seat at the policy making table.

Jonas adds,

With welfare reform, Florida and other states are presented with a golden opportunity to upgrade their pool of available workers to compete for the best jobs in the global economy.

Much of this training was not in the “hard” skills needed for particular jobs but focused upon “soft” skills like dressing appropriately, timeliness and attitudes in the workplace (see *Financial Times* 12/22/97) -- that is, ensuring a compliant, docile and dependent workforce for private companies with the use of public funds. Peck (2001, 6) summarizes it succinctly: “workfare is not about creating jobs for people that don't have them; it is about creating workers for jobs that nobody wants.” In this light, the PRA's sharp limitations on aid available to legal immigrants is part of a comprehensive retooling of relief to drastically reduce the number of people able to refuse low-wage work. As economist Rebecca Blank (2001) writes: “the changes in welfare program design have almost surely made less skilled women -- and particularly single mothers -- more vulnerable to the economy.” And those pushed into the labor market do seem more vulnerable: The Manhattan Institute (O'Neill and Hill 2001) noted that the sharpest declines in welfare receipt and the largest gains in employment were among “young (18-29) mothers, mothers with children under seven years of age, high school dropouts, black and Hispanic single mothers, and [for welfare receipt only] those who have never been married.” Blank (2001) continues, “As these women rely on earnings for an increased share of their income, and as they face tighter restrictions on their access to public assistance, they will be more subject to the vagaries of the labor market.”

That was the outcome of reform.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

While for the present, charitable organization, both public and private, is perhaps necessarily dealing with the symptoms rather than going to the root of the disease, alleviating distress rather than taking measures to prevent its recurrence, the time is near at hand, I trust, when public charity will not consider more radical measures beyond its scope, -- when it will recognize even more distinctly and comprehensively than it does to-day the intimate relation between the problems with which charity has to deal and those larger social, moral, and industrial problems which are beginning to perplex and oppress the world. . . . As we come to have a more correct conception of the causes which fill our charitable institutions with inmates and lead to a constant increase in the demands for outdoor relief, we shall, I think, come to realize that a great deal of the occasion for charity, public or private, can be avoided in the future, if not in the present, by a wise extension of political democracy into social and industrial democracy

-- Josiah Quincy, NCCC 1898

The late nineteenth and late twentieth century campaigns against relief and public displays of need achieved two results: the policy changes they helped bring to fruition made poor men and women more vulnerable to the demands of the low-wage labor-market and more dependent upon it or the caprice of private charity, while the campaigns themselves sent a symbolic message to others that relief was a mark of failure, of punishable failure at that, and that work alone was the means toward security or salvation. These were not the public explanations reformers offered as to what they were doing. Instead, they concealed their desires. Through the "objective" "experts" of Charity Organization Societies or think tanks, which businessmen funded generously, anti-relief reformers argued that to take away welfare from poor people was to give them freedom and

opportunity. They told lurid but familiar stories about the dangers of relief and the poor themselves. They repeated their tales over and again, telling them to politicians and the public alike with such consistency and such frequency that they effectively drowned out alternative narratives, such as they were, of poverty and relief. Over time anti-relief reformers succeeded in insinuating these ideas, and with them the reforms they contained, into mainstream policy debate and public discussion. Instead of a public discussion about poverty -- which might focus attention upon corporate power, economic inequality, the real value of wages, regressive taxation or exclusionary politics -- reformers launched a debate about welfare and cultivated antipathy not to poverty but to the Pauper and the Panhandler, to the Welfare Queen and the Tramp. This debate, under the banner of reducing dependency and illegitimacy and rewarding work, supported by the logics of Thomas Malthus in the nineteenth century or Charles Murray in the twentieth, shaped and constrained the actions of policymakers and encouraged them to advocate and enact harsh new policies that would render poor men and women more vulnerable. These reconfigurations of relief and the meanings they conveyed pit poor and working classes one against the other, limited their ability to identify common cause in and therefore defend liberal relief, and shifted social expenditures from people most in need to wage subsidies for employers and contracts for for-profit and non-profit business, as James O'Connor might predict. Reformers simultaneously preached the virtues of work to the working poor, punished the idle, pushed welfare recipients into low-wage jobs, and further lowered the price and power of labor, just as Piven and Cloward would expect.

In the preceding pages I have offered into evidence some of the specific means by which these class-dividing, ideology-enforcing and labor-regulating functions were achieved in two periods, and have shown how they affected men and women differently. Though it remains incomplete, I have painted a fuller picture of late nineteenth century relief policies and their variation from city-to-city. I have offered descriptions of the particular manner by which the supposedly "functionalist" explanations of relief offered by O'Connor

and Piven and Cloward were achieved, and in so doing have shone a light on powerful forces that are largely absent in other accounts of reform. I have identified some of those who strove to withdraw relief and what they did to achieve their goals, revealing in the process the striking similarities between actors, institutions, ideas and events a century apart. These pages have sought to demonstrate that there is more to the story of relief withdrawal than what is told in accounts that depend upon the "normal" politics of electoral competition, the partisan balance of Congressional or municipal power, the structure of political institutions, the press of constituent opinion, the constraints of budget deficits, the politics of race, and the legacy of prior policy. In so doing, I have tried to bring attention to a neglected aspect of American social welfare policy and history -- the instances in which the state has withdrawn social benefits from its citizens with relative impunity.

Relief retrenchment occurred twice because twice powerful interests felt sufficiently threatened by the power of poor and working people that they united to form and fund institutions through which they aggressively pursued their common goals in economy, politics and culture. The reforms discussed here were among those goals, relief an explicit target. Without these mobilizations and their ideological assault on "lavish" relief and "failed" poverty programs, relief reform cannot be adequately explained, although it cannot be explained by these mobilizations alone. The arguments used to justify relief withdrawal -- that giving cash, food or shelter to poor, hungry or homeless people would only impoverish, injure and debase them -- have always had adherents. These ideas have always been taken seriously by some, but never by so many. Never have they so formed the basis for public policy as they did in the late nineteenth and late twentieth centuries. I have endeavored here to show that they were pervasive in two eras because certain interests sought to make them pervasive. Relief retrenchment was, in part, the result of a successful propaganda campaign.

One Return to Relief

The considerable successes of anti-relief campaigns were short-lived in the late nineteenth century, however. While many charity reformers in the 1870s and 1880s helped convince their cities to abolish or sharply restrict public poor relief and to shift the burden of care to the voluntary sector, in the wake of the depression of 1893 many cities found themselves overrun with the newly unemployed, a growing, angry, dangerous class desperate for food, fuel, and work. Despite innovative efforts and works programs that anticipated the larger-scale programs of the New Deal (see Closson 1894), most cities found that voluntary efforts were insufficient to confront the need they faced. In some cities people who had once been anti-relief reformers petitioned local governments to intervene and offer outdoor relief; chastened (and afraid), many reformers softened or abandoned their opposition to public aid and waged new campaigns to expand public relief and to increase government regulation of the turbulent economy through efforts we now identify with the Progressive Era -- struggles for unemployment insurance, state pensions for widows, sanitation, housing and workplace reforms, controls on monopoly capital, regulations to govern manufacturing, and more.

Charity Organization Societies were engaged in a difficult task throughout the late 1800s, often ambivalent about their own effectiveness, struggling to maintain their idea of social order in the midst of radical transformations in the nature of work, of social relations, of family ties. That reformers' ideas of pauperism (soon called *poverty*), and workers' ideas of relief, too, would be jumbled, shifting, contradictory, inconsistent, and oddly conjoined is to be expected -- what we observe by examining closely charity reformers attempts to understand the world is a people, albeit a privileged and educated one, trying to come to terms with a fundamental transformation in human society and to find a role in it. Only once reformers realized that restoring to city-dwellers the social relations of the countryside was not possible in a new, urban, industrial world, did they attend to those very industrial changes themselves and seek to ameliorate their effects on

those least suited to survival in a free market. Only once they realized that private charity could not hope to alleviate the distress this new world demanded of some for the advancement of others did they relinquish their ardent opposition to relief and state interventions on behalf of poor and working people.

Lee Frankel, Manager of the New York United Hebrew Charities, noted the change in 1903 (317-8):

No more significant fact was developed at the last meeting of the National Conference of Charities and Correction than the changed attitude of its members to the use of relief, or more specifically, of material relief, in the care and treatment of needy families. The revulsion of feeling in favor of relief in the proper treatment of the family taken as a unit, was as marked as the stand taken against its indiscriminate use twenty-five or thirty years ago, when charity organization movements were brought into existence to counteract the evil influences of such indiscriminate and ill-advised giving.

Frankel (1903, 320) went on to offer a defense of outdoor relief:

With all the good that has been accomplished throughout the long and incessant campaign for improved methods in relief giving, we have also done harm. So long and insistent has been the demand for 'substitutes' for material relief that in many quarters the opinion is current that material relief of itself is evil. Let us once and for all get rid of this fallacy. Let us realize that material relief is as efficient an agent in the removal of certain forms of dependency as the substitutes which have been recommended in its place and that there are specific forms of poverty in which material relief, and material relief only, can effect the desired result. The pauperism and the

resulting evils arising from the giving of material relief have been largely exaggerated.

Wrote Watson (1922, 325), "During the period under review [1896-1904], material relief acquired a new dignity" that "would have been heresy twenty-five years ago," added deForest in 1908.¹ Frankel (1903, 322) again:

We have divided and subdivided them [the poor] until today we have a grand array of causes, objective and subjective, direct and indirect. We have classified our poor into categories and groups until they appear as objects distinct from ourselves, possessed of different attributes, aims and ambitions. We have the sluggard and the shiftless, the drunkard and the criminal, the sick and the aged, the improvident and the deserter. In our treatment of needy families we have assumed that the cause of distress and dependence which we find on the surface are primal and basic and have lost sight of the fact that the causes which are immediately apparent are in most instances but the resultant of causes more deep seated and occult. Many of

¹ But I nonetheless wonder how to here separate philosophy from necessity -- that is, most particularly after the onset of the 1893 depression and the great new needs that arose, the moral education that was the hallmark of the COS project was likely much too labor-intensive and time consuming for many COSs, especially given the lack most had of sufficient staff and Visitors (NCCC 1887, 134; Warner 1894, 373). Some COSs may well have turned to relief because distributing goods or cash was cheaper and easier; it may have been the only way to act given the constraints they operated under. Hubbard (1901) reported that 51 of 75 Societies surveyed offered relief from their own funds by the turn of the century, and thirteen others did so during "emergencies" because there was no public relief in their cities, no private relief society or no cooperative arrangement with them through which they might secure aid for their cases. He concluded that "Relief-giving was omitted from the work of the first charity-organization society for special reasons, but the conditions do not seem to have made it possible for the societies in the United States to follow the original plan with success." Or the general turn of the COS to relief giving may be the result of its structural and organizational failings. As Greeley (1995, Ch. 3) demonstrates, the dearth of Friendly Visitors in New York and the difficulty in securing adequate participation from the volunteers who served on the District Committee tended to devolve responsibility upon the paid agents -- generally low-paid, working-class women whose function was originally conceived as clerk and assistant. Because they were less exposed to and perhaps little sympathetic to COS philosophy, they were more liberal with relief than the Central Committee cared for.

the subjective causes which are laid at the door of the dependent family's condition are the product of anterior objective causes for which the Society itself is responsible.

This is an important insight, that what are judged causes may instead be effects, and it characterizes succinctly the changing understandings of poverty and poor people in the late century. (By 1896 even the Charter of the New York COS had been amended to discontinue distinguishing applicants between the “deserving” and “undeserving” -- see Tousley, CSS Box 128.) It is an insight that could be learned anew by contemporary anti-relief reformers. As I write, some months before the formal re-authorization of the Personal Responsibility Act is slated to occur, the American economy is in recession, unemployment has been climbing, hunger has risen, poverty has deepened, homeless populations are at record levels and even the Squeegee Man and the subway panhandler have reappeared in New York City. Some of the conditions, though writ small, that led to a repudiation of relief retrenchment in the late nineteenth century seem in evidence again. Yet there is no indication that we shall soon repeal our recent reforms, absent a crisis comparable to the deep depression of the late Gilded Age, and few of even those Congresspeople who decry the failures of the PRA propose fundamental changes to its most radical reforms.

Resistance to Reform and the Resilience of Relief

As I have sought to argue, these periods of reform were about more than mere poor relief. In the wake of threats by the poor and working classes, the gilded classes of both eras launched counter-mobilizations to restore or secure their power and their profitability. Relief policy was one battleground of a larger war, a battle in which the relative power of poor and working people was contested by self-interested actors who fought under cover of their “scientific” reform organizations, losing some battles, winning many others,

meeting with varying degrees of resistance in different cities. The Charity Organization movement did not sweep across the country like a beneficent contagion, as some would have it (nor did the public in the late twentieth century rise up and demand welfare reform). These were long complicated struggles, and they changed over time -- their rhetoric, their diagnosis of the problem, the policy solutions proposed, the relative influence of one group over another, the political climate, and even the composition of the contestants themselves. Classes were never static, nor were class interests. That the COS's philosophy was not the mere "social control" so many have characterized it as is testament, perhaps, to the enduring difficulty inherent in ameliorating misery without upending an industrial order that depends upon it for its advancement. While some business and professional men (and some women) were active, either visibly or behind the scenes, in anti-relief campaigns, other of the better-off classes were advocates of ample, relatively unrestricted charity, unconcerned or unaware of its potential effects upon business profitability, and were acting out a different set of more socially-grounded class interests -- the preservation of a less contentious social order (see esp. Greeley 1995). Those pro-relief forces were minor players in most of these dramas, however, and when the dust settled, poor people in most cities were worse off than they had been before, having lost what few gains they had previously fought to win.

But not in nineteenth century Boston, Cleveland, Chicago and Buffalo. Some cities were able to fend off attempts to roll back their public protections, however inadequate, for their most vulnerable citizens. Chicago and Buffalo failed to repeal relief in part because the threats posed by a mobilized poor inhibited them from doing so, just as Piven and Cloward (1977) might predict. Lowell characterized such events as a kind of *extortion*. The resistance to relief withdrawal exemplified by Boston, on the other hand, seems to have been partly institutional. Institutions not only *channel conflict* in particular ways, as Schattschneider (1960, 70) tells us, they also are sticky, stubborn things; they *congeal preferences*, in William Riker's phrase (see Brady 1992, 42). The formal structures and

rules of decision-making affect the ability of even powerful actors to exert their will. The Guardians and Overseers of the Poor in Boston, and as we have seen in other cities as well, fought to retain their prerogatives over what were in some places powerful pools of patronage. That was the source of some of the strength of outdoor relief, and is at the heart of Lui's (1993; 1995a; 1995b) interpretations of outdoor relief battles in late century New York.

Many people's support for contemporary welfare programs is also rooted in the distributive benefits they dispense or receive. This kind of support by the recipients of relief is not absolute, however -- some of the harshest critiques of welfare and of its recipients could be heard from recipients themselves, as I have noted. Why should this be so? Because, as we saw in Boston and in Cleveland, the resilience of relief to the assault against it was based both in the actual operations of those institutions, and thus the patronage-based support for them, and in the public *perception* of those institutions independent of knowledge of their performance. The Boston public was told a story about the effectiveness of relief and the efficiency of its administration that was little disputed by local actors; in fact, because Boston was the home to so many traditional relief-giving organizations, some dating from the 1600s, the dominant refrain appears to have been in favor of relief, not opposed to it, and anti-relief reformers met greater resistance from other organizations than they did in other locales when they tried to take over or withdraw relief. Public opinion of relief is rooted in people's experience of it but also in their understandings of it too, its *meaning* to them. That meaning is conveyed in many ways, partly through people's own experiences to be sure, and through family and friends, but also through the stories they are told by elites and experts (in newspapers and magazines or on television and radio), and through the "dramaturgy" of the "public rituals of degradation" they witness -- the workfare worker in an orange vest picking up trash from the ground, the arrest of vagrants and panhandlers -- that so dramatically link poverty and punishment. Different relief dramas convey different meanings; in Boston's drama, relief

was not the antagonist. But in other late nineteenth century cities and throughout the nation in the late twentieth century the story told by anti-relief reformers occupied almost the entire stage.

Public opinion polling typically measures attitudes or asks respondents to assess their knowledge, involvement and concerns about various policy questions. Less often does it seek to measure people's knowledge of facts. When it does, the public is found to be largely ignorant about welfare (see Lewis 2001). It is in such ignorance that their antipathy is usually rooted. People hate welfare for what they think it is, not for what it actually is. Or, perhaps more accurately, they have only been told one story about welfare, and have rarely been told one that celebrates welfare as a force that allows men and women to lead their lives and care for their families in ways that are impossible when their very survival is tethered to the relentless and greedy demands of the insatiable labor market. They have never been told the story of how welfare can make them more independent, how it can make them more free.

The repeal of AFDC may be partly because this targeted, means-tested program had a smaller constituency than relief programs in some other Western nations and could not claim the concentrated local support outdoor relief enjoyed in some Gilded Age cities. A moribund and legally circumscribed labor movement limits opportunities for organizing resistance among working people, as does an electoral system that systematically limits the access and the formal influence of dissenting voices. Race, as so many have documented and so many have experienced, has hindered American welfare state development and relief provision in profound ways. The movement of so many women into the workforce in the 1960s affected support for AFDC because it allowed some poor women to remain at home with their children when other less-poor women could not. And as others have observed, welfare can conflict with some widely held tenets of American political culture. These and other explanations are important, and I do not want to minimize them. But the significant successes of the anti-relief efforts discussed here must also be attributed to the greater vigor

of coordinated, well-funded American anti-relief efforts and the pervasive ideological assault against relief waged through a sophisticated state-of-the-art propaganda campaign and the absence of a large-scale counter-offensive by welfare recipients and advocates.

Institutional resilience alone is likely insufficient to protect what powers poor and working people still retain, normal politics affords them little influence, and a social movement is a difficult thing to plan. What must therefore be included as part of any project to advance the reach of American poor relief (absent more radical transformations) is a kind of ideological offensive against neo-liberal hegemony that Susan George (1999) has called for. The Left must better understand, as Weyerich and others on the Right have since the 1970s, the Gramscian insight that, as George puts it, "If you can occupy peoples' heads, their hearts and hands will follow."

The Campaign Continues

Pierson (2001; 1996) and Piven and Cloward (1982), despite the apparent accuracy of their predictions so far that democratic support for distributive benefits will prevent outright cutbacks in the key protections of the American welfare state, might nonetheless put too much faith in the institutional resiliency of such programs and give too little credit to those who wish to dismantle them. William Kristol (1995) in a lecture for the American Enterprise Institute demonstrates that he, too, understands the ways in which the welfare state has become entrenched by extending its reach. And how it might be quietly uprooted:

We now have a public opinion that could support a broad attack on unlimited government. But because particular policies have beneficiaries who will fight to keep them, while the opposition to these policies is often diffuse, the best strategy for containing and rolling back the liberal welfare state may be for ways to cut the Gordian knot, rather than trying to unwind it one string at a time. Thus the attraction of proposals such as the balanced budget

amendment, term limits, tax and spending limitations at several levels of government, the devolution of power to states and localities, and the privatization of government functions. Such policies are radical in the sense that they do not seek simply to contain some of the damage done by the welfare state, or to address its particular pathologies one by one. Rather, they seek to change the patterns of behavior of the political system as a whole and to make it more supportive of relimiting government.

This is a “politics of liberty,” he says, that would open new avenues for and be “softened” by a “sociology of virtue,” that is, the transfer of government functions to the private for-profit or voluntary sphere. In this way, we can see how the moral goals of the religious counter-movement coincide with the political and economic goals of the corporate counter-movement -- to simultaneously limit government interventions on behalf of its economically marginal citizens and to channel its support to private and religious agencies. Bush the Younger’s Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives thereby takes on a new character -- to view its agenda as most perniciously a threat to religious liberty is to be

run over by a Trojan horse.² We have seen this rhetoric successfully wielded in the campaigns against relief; we see it again in the campaign for the privatization of Social Security. Indeed, that battle is being built upon the rhetorical foundation that made possible the PRA.

People can resist ideas just as they resist other forms of control, of course. As a result, advocates of harsh reforms that harm poor and working people have had to confront the fact that Americans have consistently reported that they do not wish to see enacted policies that leave poor people, and children especially, to the vicissitudes of the marketplace if that means that they will suffer (see Weaver 2000; NPR et al. 2001). Any successful reform is best portrayed as beneficial to poor families. This potential dilemma has been circumvented in two ways. First, reformers returned to old distinctions between worthy and unworthy, to segregate those who are truly in need of relief from those who are capable of work (always with the presumption that they are unwilling and that work is available), which serves to recategorize need as laziness, unfitness or dependence and to stoke resentment among overworked, under-paid wage-earners (see also Gans 1995;

² And those who urge a return to private charity through faith-based organizations (FBOs) should read the reformers of the late nineteenth century. They, like many today, urged discrimination in relief-giving, limited cash assistance, and moral education, each tailored to the specific needs of each individual; but it was for precisely this reason they argued that church-based philanthropy was ineffective, for it would fail to refuse relief to those members ill-deserving of it, and might be tempted to extend "pauperizing" relief in order to attract adherents. Wrote Fetter (1901, 366): "It must be noted, however, that there is much idealizing of this religious control, and that few subsidized institutions accomplish the results the ideal would require, while it is by no means impossible to arrive at these results by other agencies, or in institutions publicly controlled." Moreover, as Kennedy (2001) argued, the "Charitable Choice" provision of the PRA advocated a public-private partnership that was not new. A 1965 survey of 406 religious organizations in twenty-one cities found that 70% had some kind of service contract with government; in 1994 government funding comprised 65% of Catholic Charities' two billion dollar budget. The Salvation Army has been a long-standing recipient of government funding despite its very "pervasively sectarian" approach. Charitable Choice is based on the assumption that FBOs are more effective and efficient. "However," notes Kennedy (2001; see also Press 2001 and NYT 4/24/2001 "Church-based Projects Lack Data on Results"), "there is no empirical data available either to support or rebut that presumption." Even Amatai Etzioni (2001), saying in one breath that the third sector "is often more effective in providing education, health care, and welfare," concedes that there was no comparative data to support such a claim beyond educational and cultural institutions -- i.e., not-for-profit or private universities and museums might be more "effective," but no such claims can be made for social service provision. And, in fact, there are powerful arguments that not-for-profit programs can ill-serve their supposed constituency (see Poppendieck 1998; Wagner 2000).

Schram and Soss 2000). The second method is to denigrate the value of relief itself -- to demonstrate that it causes poverty, not reduces it, and that the most charitable gift to the poor man or woman is to deny them relief because relief will sap them of their industry, instruct them in the wrong lessons and speed them toward their own pauperization while breeding a potentially dangerous class of dependents. What may seem compassionate is, in truth, doing great harm. Victorians and their revivalists consistently urge us to resist the "lazy benevolence" of giving alms (Gurteen 1882, 30) and to "resist the temptation of cheap virtue" (Lee in Ebeling 1995, 100). Charity, we have learned, is Injury. Suffering is Compassion. Liberty is Responsibility. As Josephine Shaw Lowell or Marvin Olasky might argue, what the poor need is *Not Alms, But a Friend*.

Such ideas, whatever their power, do not themselves make policy, and culture and propaganda are not causes of welfare reform; rather, they have created the context within which relief contests have been fought and constituted tools wielded to advance one kind of policy over another. That is why I have described these tropes as *rhetoric*, not discourse. It is not that American cities abolished outdoor relief because the nation is classically liberal or individualistic and it is not that we repealed AFDC because we have a Puritan work ethic, but, rather, it is that shrewdly crafted rhetoric that tapped into deep-seated American cultural myths of self-sufficiency and work was repeated so endlessly and reinforced so often in an environment in which alternative messages were so rare that as Zaller (1992) would predict the public followed the lead of elites and repeated their political arguments back to them as if they were carefully considered and deeply held beliefs. As Piven (1998a) wrote, the Right "launched an *argument*" in the 1970s. Charity reformers of the 1870s did the same. Whether by emphasizing the laissez-faire of Spencer or the moral education of Malthus, or with both, like Sumner or Rector, late nineteenth and late twentieth century reformers used such ideas to convince policymakers and the public that relief caused poverty and that government intervention harmed not only the poor but working people, too. This despite the fact that, quite to the contrary, relief, however

inadequately, protects its recipients from poverty-wage work, and government intervention offers workers some leverage against the market and their employers.

The challenge for poor and working people and their allies is thus great indeed, for they must not only make their own arguments, craft their own rhetoric and find their own stories to tell that are as compelling as those of our Old and New Victorian friends, but they must then find the financial and institutional resources with which they can insinuate them into the discourses of policymakers and the public as effectively as those on the Right have done with their stories over the last three decades, just as they did in the last three decades of the nineteenth century. But poor and working people, unlike the barons of capital and the burghers of finance, have little political power and little to offer the state in exchange for enacting their policies. Little, that is, except for their willingness to remain passive in the face of degradation and immiseration.

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KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS:

- AJPS:** *American Journal of Political Science*
APSR: *American Political Science Review*
Am J Soc: *American Journal of Sociology*
CP: *Chronicle of Philanthropy*
CR: *Charities Review*
CSS: *Archives of the Community Service Society of New York*
FPWA: *Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies*
JPE: *Journal of Political Economy*
LAH: *Lend-A-Hand*
NCCC: *Proceedings of the National Conference on Charities and Corrections*
NCJIS: *National Campaign for Jobs and Income Support*
NCRP: *National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy*
NLCHP: *National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty*
NYAICP: *Annual Reports of the New York Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor*
NYCOS: *Annual Reports of the New York Charity Organization Society*
NYT: *New York Times*
PSQ: *Political Science Quarterly*
Sage: *Charity Organization Department of the Russell Sage Foundation*
SSR: *Social Service Review*
USCC: *United States Chamber of Commerce*
WSJ: *Wall Street Journal*

NB: Citations show date of original publication followed, as necessary, by date of edition used.

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