Examining President Clinton's Response To Welfare

By Robert Wilkes
Clark Atlanta University

The major purpose of this paper is three-fold. The first aim concentrates on a re-diagnosis of welfare and what actually causes a need for it. The paper then attempts to examine a method in which the need for welfare can be alleviated. Third and most importantly, this research paper seeks to determine what American political entity is primarily responsible for ensuring that the needs of the "poor" and recipients of welfare are met in the most effective manner. However, prior to meeting these goals, a background on the role that welfare has played in the U.S. is provided.

INTRODUCTION

The essential question regarding welfare centered around what entity (federal, state or non-governmental) is responsible as a viable alternative to reforming America's welfare system. Even so, there was a sub-debate that focused on "taxing" and "spending" of U.S. revenue in regard to welfare. However, one should attempt to comprehend the debate over welfare within the context of the sub-debate igniting the larger debate over where responsibility lie regarding welfare.

Since the origin of Aid To Families With Dependent Children (AFDC), now called Temporary Assistance To Needy Families, more than a half century ago, the number of individuals and families in need of some type of financial assistance to support themselves, has consistently grown; thus, driving-up welfare costs and increasing taxes. In fact, folk have openly criticized government for allowing federal spending for welfare programs to total more than $5 trillion since the early 1960s. Consequently, perception


Clark Atlanta University, Department of Political Science
Atlanta, Georgia 30314
Clinton's Response to Reforming Welfare

among mainstream America that something must be done to offset this trend of rising costs prompted President Clinton to sign into law a bill that allows state governments greater latitude in creating and financing their individual welfare programs. The argument is that welfare costs were infringing upon mainstream American private budgets as well as a reduction in the U.S.' federal deficit. Embedded within mainstream perception is the conceptualization of the "blame doctrine" in which many indicate that folk are in need of welfare and governmental assistance due to immoral behavior (undeserving poor).

The major purpose of this paper is three-fold. The first aim concentrates on a re-diagnosis of welfare and what actually causes a need for it. The paper then attempts to examine a method in which the need for welfare can be alleviated. Third and most importantly, this research paper seeks to determine what American political entity is primarily responsible for ensuring that the needs of the "poor" and recipients of welfare are met in the most effective manner. However, prior to meeting these goals, a background on the role that welfare has played in the U.S. is provided.

There lies a misconception of the root causes of the need for American social programs regarding welfare, which this analysis attempts to put into proper context. Yet, due to this inadequate problem definition, ill-equipped alternatives have been advanced to remedy the need for welfare. In fact, findings of studies and reports have long indicated that spending for welfare should be capped, teenage mothers should be denied direct cash payments, a school voucher system should be established, responsibility over social programs should be shifted from governmental to non-governmental entities including churches. By signing the Personal Responsibility Act, President Clinton has provided states the following authority and options:

Instead of paying money directly to unwed teenage mothers, the money they would have received through Aid To Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) and Food Stamps should be given to the states. States could develop programs to assist teenage mothers, including promoting adoption, orphanages or assisting young mothers in tightly-supervised group homes. Since other families don't receive increased income when they have additional children,

Clinton's Response to Reforming Welfare

neither should women on AFDC and/or Food Stamps. Eventually, direct federal payments to unwed mothers of all ages should be eliminated, so there is no longer a government reward for having children out of wedlock.\(^3\)

These views provide credence to the notion that unwed mothers operate within a cognitive framework of having more and more children in order to receive additional benefits. Consequently, states across the U.S. are creating "copycat" laws of limiting welfare benefits and establishing time limits for receiving benefits.

Variables such as race and gender have also been manipulated to illustrate that the need for welfare is a problem experienced, primarily, by African Americans; therefore, African Americans live a life of immorality (undeserving poor). By examining the controversy surrounding welfare reform not only empirically but scientifically as well, my research attempts to offer a better understanding or more comprehensive view of the need for a national welfare program. Also, this research attempts to provide a more prudent way of releasing folk from the chains of poverty. As indicated earlier, government has been placing emphasis on the "blame approach"; therefore, failing to adequately deal with the need for a national welfare program as well as establishing a significant methodology for reforming it.

**BACKGROUND**

Following the devastating effects (e.g., high rates of unemployment, homelessness, etc.) of the depression of 1929 and the inability among state governments to respond (financially) to the depression and the financial needs of the American populace, welfare got its start. It was during this period that the philosophy dominating the political arena was that of government operating in a fashion to assist folk financially during economic hard times. In other words, it was "nationally" accepted among the American populace to allow government to enter into their private lives.

AFDC was structured to provide cash assistance to individuals based on two basic variables: 1) single parent households; and 2) income. AFDC provided "cash payments for families of needy children lacking adequate income support because of parental incapacity, death, absence, or

\[^3\]Ibid., 1.
Clinton's Response to Reforming Welfare

unemployment." In regard to American federalism, the cost of administering welfare was and is shared between the national government and state governments. Yet, the federal government covered the majority of the costs. In retrospect, states played a more activist role in the actual administration of welfare. Today however, the Personal Responsibility Act replaces AFDC, the once primary federal cash welfare program, and smaller programs with block grants that allow states to operate their individual welfare programs. This shift of responsibility has been sparked, in part, by two salient factors that have drastically changed since the late 1920s and early 1930s. 1) The notion of cause has changed; Americans no longer believe that people are in need of welfare due to factors beyond their personal control such as the effects of the "Great Depression." 2) This notion is coupled with the philosophy of the present time that government (national, state, and local) should stay out of the lives of private individuals. Originally however, welfare was termed Aid for Dependent Children to assist white widows primarily.

**DISCUSSION**

Before attempting to make sense of America's welfare programs, one must first look to the political philosophy that currently guides American consciousness regarding welfare and other social programs. Professor Mack Jones advances:

Liberal philosophy rises to the occasion by defining such poverty as a pathological condition occasion either by the deficiencies of the individuals themselves or by shortcomings of the groups to which the individual belongs.

---


5 Hasson, Judi, "Welfare Enters Whole New World: Rules Could Take Years To Settle In," USA Today, 8 August 1996, 6A.

Clinton's Response to Reforming Welfare

When the pathology is defined as resulting from individual deficiencies, it gives rise to rehabilitative policy solutions designed to reform the individual, while group explanations call forth policy alternatives tailored to alter the structural environment within which the individual lives.7

Jones also indicates that "by classifying the poor into these two artificial dichotomous categories - the deserving and nondeserving - liberal philosophy reinforces the notion that the vast majority of the poor are poor because of their own deficiencies."8 For instance, prior to Clinton signing the Personal Responsibility Act his former colleagues in the National Governors Association advocated reforming welfare by: 1) replacing the guaranteed federal, direct, cash payment under AFDC with block grants; 2) establishing a five year time-limit for most receiving federal payments; and 3) providing states the latitude to withhold additional federal cash benefits to those that birth additional children.9 The implication of this message presented by this political organization clearly feeds into the notion that welfare recipients are unworthy of governmental assistance without mention of the impact of the market economy or other salient factors.

Within this prevailing worldview and according to one of America's leading conservatives, Charles Murray, illegitimacy is also the root cause of other social ills (e.g., homelessness, drug-usage, crime, and illiteracy).10 Moreover, American sociologist, James Wilson, publicize the idea that unwed pregnant youth should "live in some type of supervised, privately run group home as a condition of receiving government benefits."11 To support


8 Ibid.


Clinton's Response to Reforming Welfare

the aforementioned methods of reform, conservatives highlight and overemphasize findings as expressed in Figure 1.1.; welfare has grown beyond control. Figure 1.1. indicates that the proportion of women receiving welfare benefits between 1976 and 1992 has more than doubled. For instance, in 1976, slightly less than 21 percent of never-married women were receiving welfare compared to more than 50 percent in 1992. The implication is that immoral behavior is on the rise. But the percentages, as represented in this chart, only give credence to conservative analysis that poverty among single women with children has become larger and larger. What this chart does not show is cause. In other words, one should not make hasty judgements about the nature of welfare based solely upon descriptive factors (see Figure 1.1.). In advancing their conservative viewpoint further, opponents of welfare cite the fact that more and more women are having illegitimate births that suggest why the percentage differential as expressed in Figure 1.1. is as wide; see Figure 1.2. Figure 1.2. suggests that due to the overall increase of women having children without being married, so did the number of women having children who could not afford to take care of them. Nonetheless, Figure 1.2. illustrates that even though the number of single women having children and receiving welfare payments between 1976 and 1992 increased drastically (see Figure 1.1.), this growth rate in births was also prevalent among unwed women not receiving welfare benefits; therefore, single women with children receiving welfare lifestyles are no different from the general populace of single women giving birth. For instance, the growth rate among all single women having children skyrocketed from 12.2 in 1976 to nearly 37 percent in 1992. In sum, the rate jumped nearly (3.9 percentage points between 1980-1984) or more than 4 percentage points every four years among single
Clinton's Response to Reforming Welfare

women having a child or children. Although the proportion of female-headed households increased by more than 5 million between 1970 and 1990, furthermore, this increase is attributed to births among the "non-poor" primarily. In addition, in an effort to overemphasize variables such as race and gender without examining the impact of independent variables (e.g., AFDC cutbacks, changes in the labor market, etc.), proponents of drastic changes in welfare or the elimination of welfare normally plaster figures as presented in Figure 1.3. (page 21) on the front page of national newspapers and the "Net." Figure 1.3. illustrates that African Americans receive welfare payments more than three times that of whites based upon their respective population standings. Although blacks receive more welfare according to percentages than raw numbers, African Americans, Hispanics, and undoubtedly, a significant number of whites reside in a substantial state of poverty. By focusing on race instead of poverty as a significant but descriptive variable, one does not seek to reduce poverty but only to subtly label blacks as irresponsible and deserving of non-governmental assistance; especially among teenage mothers having additional children. However, if one decides to play the "percentage game" Figure 1.4. on page 21 illustrates that while the rate of African Americans receiving welfare, 1976-92, dropped over ten percentage points the rate among whites increased more than 10 percentage points during this identical period. Yet, are whites becoming more and more irresponsible and immoral? Are whites less deserving of

---

Clinton's Response to Reforming Welfare

governmental assistance? Are whites lazy and attempting to have babies/infants and additional children in order to receive "free" or additional money from the government. Are some whites less willing to work and seek stable jobs? Or, should we attempt to alleviate or eradicate poverty without playing one racial cohort against the other? In other words, reducing the number of those living in a state of poverty is what should be paramount.

Figure 1.3.
1995 AFDC Recipients by Race
Source: http://www.townhall/tco/infocus

Figure 1.4.
Racial Composition, 1976 - 1992

Never-Married Receiving AFDC
Percentage
- Other
- White
- Black
Source: GAO/HEHS-94-92, 47.
Clinton's Response to Reforming Welfare

Age is not ignored within conservative analysis of welfare either. Those receiving welfare between ages 20 and 24 increased only 2 tenths of a percentage point (19.5 to 19.7) 1976 through 1992; see Figure 1.5. Between 1976 and 1992, those aged 15 to 19 receiving welfare, the percentage increased from less than 2 percent to more than 5 percent. Yet, while the "young" are increasing in birth rates, the largest decrease was among those 35 and over (41.6 to 28.5); indicating a teenage problem primarily. Due to the increase of teenagers becoming single parents at an alarming rate, states have begun to limit cash benefits to these teenagers in an effort to offset this increase. Conservatives broadcast these changes (Figure 1.5.) as on-going and pertinent to reforming welfare despite the fact that it has been empirically verified that single teenage mothers work at comparable rates as all single mothers, but they earn substantially less and have annual incomes below the poverty level. However, conservatives never

Figure 1.5.

Age Composition Recieving AFDC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Percentage</th>
<th>1976</th>
<th>1992</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15-19</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-24</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>16.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-29</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>19.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-34</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>18.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35+</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Clinton's Response to Reforming Welfare

indicate that folk receiving welfare still have incomes below the poverty line; see Figure 1.6. Figure 1.6 clearly indicates that welfare is in need of reform because the level of benefits allowed never allowed folk to escape the chains of poverty. Figure 1.6 also shows that in 1988, with the increase of those receiving AFDC, nearly 48 percent of them had incomes below the national poverty line. In fact, this increase has been consistent dating back over 15 years; see Figure 1.6. As a result of the findings in Figure 1.6 alone, the level of payments should not be capped. If so, clearly, children and families would fall deeper into poverty.

What figures 1.1 through 1.6 do not show is cause, which is fundamental to comprehensively understanding the need for welfare and the most appropriate ways of reforming it. Republicans, and subsequently President Clinton with the signing of the Personal Responsibility Act, champion the notion that immoral behavior is the root cause of poverty including welfare (micro-analysis), but [they] do so without examining or fully understanding the impact of other explanatory factors (e.g., declining wages, cap on asset accumulation among welfare recipients, structural changes in the U.S. and global market economy, etc.). For instance, U.S. hourly wages are significantly less than what they were [years ago]. On average, wages (non-agricultural industries) dropped from $8.55 to $7.39 during 1973-93; reaching nearly 14 percent during this ten year span. From a weekly perspective, wages declined slightly over 19 percent ($315.88 to $254.87)

Clinton's Response to Reforming Welfare

1973 through 1993. In addition to declining wages, Clark Atlanta University political science doctoral candidates, Frederick Mcbride and Tricia Headen, and other researchers cite the "Mismatch Hypothesis." According to this perspective, "the proportion of the labor force employed in goods-producing industries (with historically stable high wages) fell nearly 23 percent" between 1975 and 1990 while simultaneously "the proportion employed in service producing industries increased from 70.5 to 77.2 percent." Retail and hotel jobs, which are primarily low paying jobs are prevalent within this trend. Also, due to the overall population growth, more folk have entered and are entering the labor force which drives down wages and pushes some out of the labor force. For instance, "demographic factors such as immigration and the entrance of baby boomers into the labor force led to an overall increase of 54.3 percent in the size of the U.S. labor force from 1960 to 1980."

Even though America has not experienced a depression of the magnitude of 1929, changes in the economy have produced at least 6 recessions dating back to the early part of the 1960s. According to the findings of a report published in 1995:

From 1960 to 1991 there were six recessions (1960-61, 1969-70, 1973-75, 1980, 1981-82, and 1990-91). Normally unemployment declines within the first 18 months after recovery from a recession begins. However, for the first time in post-war history, unemployment continued to rise during the 18 months after recovery from the 1990-91 recession had begun, leading to higher than normal post-recovery unemployment levels.

America's overall social support system has also weakened. "From 1970 to 1992, average real monthly welfare benefits per family fell from $644 to

---

15 Ibid.
16 Ibid., 12.
17 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
Clinton's Response to Reforming Welfare

$388 (in 1992 dollars), a decline of 39.8 percent. In fact, since 1970 welfare benefit levels have consistently dropped in every American state; see Table 1. on page 26.

According to a study conducted by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, "from 1984 through 1990, the proportion of unemployed workers receiving unemployment insurance ranged between 31.5 to 36.8 percent, much lower than the average coverage of 52.3 percent during the 1970s." Moreover, "between July 1990 and November 1991, when an emergency unemployment benefits bill passed, the proportion of the jobless receiving benefits was at the lowest level (41.6 percent) ever recorded during a recession."

America's competitive nature, globally, has also altered America's job market. For instance:

Research sponsored by the U.S. Department of labor indicates that integration of world markets, excess production capacity worldwide, a rapidly growing world labor force, decline in wage-setting power among labor unions, and general trends in deregulation of industries by many Western countries, have all contributed to increasing competitiveness within the world economy over the past two decades. This, in turn, has led to greater reliance on less-expensive foreign labor by some U.S. firms. In addition, preferences among American consumers for less expensive consumer goods (produced in countries with lower-wage labor) has led to further declines in availability of manufacturing jobs in the U.S. economy.

Clearly, the above-mentioned structural conditions contribute to poverty in America and the growing need for welfare. In other words, changes within society that are beyond the direct control of beneficiaries of

---

19 Ibid., 13.
20 Ibid., 14.
21 Ibid.
22 Ibid., 16.
# Clinton's Response to Reforming Welfare

## Table 1.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Percentage Drop</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>-33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alaska</td>
<td>-25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>-33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>-39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>-13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>-51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecticut</td>
<td>-36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delaware</td>
<td>-44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District of Columbia</td>
<td>-43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>-29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>-30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawaii</td>
<td>-16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idaho</td>
<td>-60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>-58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indiana</td>
<td>-36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td>-43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas</td>
<td>-48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kentucky</td>
<td>-59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>-42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maine</td>
<td>-17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maryland</td>
<td>-40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Massachusetts</td>
<td>-42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michigan (Wayne county)</td>
<td>-44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minnesota</td>
<td>-45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mississippi</td>
<td>-43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missouri</td>
<td>-25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montana</td>
<td>-47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nebraska</td>
<td>-43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nevada</td>
<td>-23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Hampshire</td>
<td>-44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>-63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Mexico</td>
<td>-36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York (New York City)</td>
<td>-45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>-50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Dakota</td>
<td>-49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>-44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oklahoma</td>
<td>-43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>-33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td>-58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhode Island</td>
<td>-35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>-37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Dakota</td>
<td>-58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>-56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>-67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utah</td>
<td>-37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vermont</td>
<td>-36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>-42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>-44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Virginia</td>
<td>-42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>-25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wyoming</td>
<td>-55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Clinton's Response to Reforming Welfare

welfare lead to a rethinking of welfare that addresses the question of how do we get people out of poverty, and ready to compete for high-paying and stable jobs. In fact, Clinton acknowledges the dangers or the backwardness of the Personal Responsibility Act in his 1997 State of the Union Address. For instance, Clinton challenged the private sector to provide jobs to welfare recipients via tax credits after granting states block grant authority instead of before. Implicit in this charge is Clinton's "new" awareness of the market economy's impact on lifting folk out of poverty. Most important though, it has been proven that the "education approach" is paramount in offsetting poverty in this country; not just a GED, high school diploma, or a job but the college option. In spite of Clinton's 10-part proposal to better the educational system in America, the actual benefits of such a plan, if implemented, will more than likely benefit middle class America instead of individuals currently seeking welfare and who live in the state of poverty. According to one recent study, of many, examining the impact and significance of post-secondary education on reducing the proportion of those in need of welfare indicate:

Changes in the labor market underscore the importance of post secondary education. Between now and the year 2000, the number of low-skilled jobs is projected to decline significantly. Not only do such jobs fail to guarantee stable employment at an adequate family wage, they are also disappearing. Increased educational attainment is thus not only more necessary for economic well-being but is also necessary for sustained participation in the labor market. U.S. Department of Labor Studies show that the number of low-skilled jobs will decrease markedly over the decade. Low-skilled occupations currently compromise 40 percent of the demand for labor. By the end of the decade, this figure will drop to 27 percent. Conversely, the percentage of jobs that are highly skilled will increase from the current 24 percent to 41 percent [Gold, nd]. By the year 2000, the vast majority of new jobs in the U.S. will require post secondary education.\(^23\)

Clinton's Response to Reforming Welfare

Yet, states are attempting to cap and limit welfare benefits through the use of block grant authority instead of pushing the college option and higher wages as a viable means of reform. (also see Table 1. on page 26)

INTERGOVERNMENTAL-RELATIONS

The need for block grants? Block grants are the financial outcomes awarded to state officials by decision-makers in Washington (President Clinton and Congress) in terms of how programs, especially social programs, will be established, maintained and enforced on the regional level. Nonetheless, if one were to examine this concept beneath the lenses of a microscope, one could undeniably support the fact that the operationalization of block grants include giving complete control to state officials to set new eligibility requirements for social programs that would deny aid to many, allowing states to withhold intra-funding from programs, and legitimatizing states refusal of financially assisting to many when federal money is depleted (under block grants) or the country takes an economic downturn, such as a recession or depression.

Block grant proponents primarily base their states’ rights thesis on three criteria. One, welfare will be administered less costly by state governments as opposed to direct intervention by the federal government. Two, these proponents maintain that by allowing state officials total authority in the administration of social programs (state flexibility), states will better administer them due to their hands-on experience and cognitive ability to accurately diagnose problems that directly affect those residing within their limited polity instead of relying on external input. However, one must be cautioned, external input in this instance refers only to guidelines, policies and procedures designed by the central government and not its financial resources. Remember, states are in constant competition against one another for external monetary support to fund numerous and diverse programs. Three, the migration perspective; there is this notion that welfare recipients move from one state to another in hopes of settling down in the state that provides the highest welfare payment, which states indicate

---


Clinton's Response to Reforming Welfare

escalate state budgets, and that only states are capable of solving this problem.²⁶

Although proponents of states' rights possess merit in their argument, due to block grants poverty will heightened nationally. This increase in poverty will be attributed to the manipulation of transformational leaders, the rise of party politics, timing and indeed, non-regulated practices. In fact, similar events can be empirically verified via historical data.

Relevant literature indicates that despite the notion advanced by proponents of block grants, citing that state governments will administer and monitor social programs cheaper once they possessed "great latitude" over them, from past experience, these reductions have only been modest.²⁷ In fact, the literature indicates that a significant amount of money used to finance past and present social programs was and is used to prevent and eliminate practices of fraud.²⁸ Therefore, if significant amounts of revenue is employed as a verifying scheme, what are states actually planning to do in order to actually reduce spending costs? One should not ignore the fact that state officials will continue to eliminate benefits for numerous individuals who are currently seeking financial assistance under the guidelines once provided under entitlements by creating new and harsh qualification criteria that will worsen the conditions of poverty in this country. For instance, "states have been in something of a race to lower welfare benefits for fear that high benefits could attract poor people to the state - thus raising social spending and perhaps triggering an exodus of taxpayers."²⁹ Indeed, this perspective is the only reasonable explanation that could shed light on states thrust for additional power over social programs. Moreover, if fraud was a major problem under entitlements, the sheer change from entitlements to block grants (Personal Responsibility Act) will not eliminate the significant amount of dollars that are currently being spent to alleviate and eradicate the

²⁶Ibid., 29.


Clinton's Response to Reforming Welfare

practices of fraud unless qualification criteria is altered to reduce the number of those requesting assistance. In this instance, the lesser the number of individuals requesting assistance, the less money will have to be spent to insure that the information that they are providing is accurate. Deductively, since states are interested in reducing the amounts of revenue they spend to assist in financing social programs, they will continue to spend a great deal of money to offset fraud; therefore, reducing the number of those who once qualified. If this is the case, families and children will be without financial help. In other words, this process places individuals at great risk of becoming not only poorer but indeed homeless. For instance, a trend beginning in 1972 indicate that "72 percent of all children in poverty received welfare," however, by 1992 the rate fail "to 63.1 percent." Furthermore, the proportion of "families receiving welfare in 1993 comprised more than 14 million [folk], in which nearly 10 million (67.5 percent) were children. However, during that same year, more than 39 million [Americans] lived in poverty, including nearly 15 million children.

In the area of state flexibility, it is not so much the power to become innovative in administering social programs but instead the power to destroy that block grant authority welcome. In other words, given this power, states will inevitably destroy the lives of many of America's "poor" population. This is what will result from usage of block grants coupled with transformational leadership and party politics:

In late January, the welfare mothers of Massachusetts got a nasty shock. From the Governor, William Weld, came a letter telling them that unless the state legislature passed a welfare-reform law to his liking, the benefit cheques they were to receive in February would be their last. Days later the legislature complied. Meanwhile, 3,000 miles away; California's governor, Pete Wilson, was submitting a budget that proposed billions in welfare cuts while at the same time pursuing a court case to let California pay lower


31 Ibid.

32 Ibid.
Clinton's Response to Reforming Welfare

benefits to poor people newly arrived in his state.33

Although such measures can be corrected by the federal government, timing is of essence. For instance (inductively), prior to the decision rendered by the Supreme Court in *Plessy v. Ferguson* in which the court legitimatized the practices of states that allowed unconstitutional segregationist practices (see 14th Amendment of U.S. Constitution) against black folk, racism was a common way of life on the regional level as well. Even though the high court recognized its earlier illegal act by overturning the *Plessy* decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*, blacks had to endure these unjust practices for decades. In fact, even with the *Brown* decision, the court ruled that compliance with its ruling should be adhered to with "all deliberate speed", which still has not prevailed. In other words, although possible unjust and unconstitutional acts by state governments can be remedied, the process could be long and arduous while those who are most affected would have to endure long-term suffering. In this instance, poor folk will more than likely starve to death and/or become homeless. Children would also be unfairly punished due to the notion that single mothers birth additional children in search of additional benefits despite back-to-back studies (1993 and 1994) indicating welfare "payments have no significant effect on decisions to have children among single mothers."34 It is block grants that allow for such shrewdness.

Furthermore, in response to the charge that welfare recipients migrate from one state to the next in order to receive higher benefits; it just does not add up. For instance, Figure 1.7A. on the following page supports states' rights advocates in their charge that welfare rolls are constantly increasing and rising in costs as well as Figure 1.1. Figure 1.7A. illustrates that within a 14 year span, the number of welfare family recipients has more than doubled since 1970. However, the numbers represented in this chart do not support block grant proponents deeper argument that individuals are migrating to states with the highest benefit levels; see Figure 1.7B. on page 33. The percentages represented in the pie chart indicate that welfare recipients typically receive welfare for 5 years or less. In fact, fewer than 7

---


Clinton's Response to Reforming Welfare

percent receive welfare after ten years. If recipients are actually attempting to live on welfare for life or become welfare dependent and irresponsible, it would seem logical that the percentages in Figure 1.7B. would show, at minimum, that most would receive welfare benefits for ten years or more, which entitlements allowed for. However, these data do not convey such information. In sum, advocates of block grants base their claim on myths as opposed to factual data, which is consistent with their view of the root causes that lead to welfare and the role of government. Consequently, there is no mention of the college option in the states approach.

**Figure 1.7A.**

Number of Families on AFDC

(in millions)

Clinton's Response to Reforming Welfare

CONCLUSION

In order to reform welfare, one must first examine the "real" causes of the need for welfare. Due to its lack of macro analysis, immoral behavior as a vital predictor of needing welfare is insufficient. On the contrary, structural factors are salient predictors. In fact, it has been empirically and scientifically proven within this paper that structural conditions play a significant role in placing folk on welfare as opposed to immoral behavior solely. Completing post-secondary education is a viable method in lifting folk out of poverty and off of welfare permanently. However, President Clinton, the national government, and states have ignored this finding and allow the use of block grants as a means of welfare reform as we enter into the 21st century.
Block grants allow for the ultimate destruction of America's poor population, especially children. What one must not fail to realize is that this whole debate over welfare and the usage of block grants to reform it has arisen solely from transformational leaders backed by Republican party politics. For the past several years, Americans have been losing jobs due to, but not limited to, downsizing, global competition, and unquestionably, racism. As a result of this economic crisis, many are in search of answers. All too often however, they, including Clinton, listen to transformational leaders that provide them with misleading information, which will supposedly contribute to a reduction in taxes (national and local) and the national debt.

Because of block grants, many of America's poor will no longer be able to survive in this capitalist state due to states determination to cut its current level of spending for social programs while ignoring the fact that post-secondary education is paramount. It has been shown throughout this paper that the only way in which state governments can reduce current spending for social programs is by establishing new eligibility requirements that would limit the number of individuals who are currently eligible for welfare. The evidence shows that it is up to the national government, since states have not, to illustrate nation-wide the need for post-secondary education in remedying not only the need for welfare but also in eradicating poverty in America.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

**Book**


**Reports**


Parrott, Sharon. *How Much Do We Spend on "Welfare?"* Washington, DC:
Clinton's Response to Reforming Welfare


Teenage Mothers Least Likely to Become Self-Sufficient.

Journal Articles


Newspaper Articles


Robert Wilkes is a graduate student in the Department of Political Science, Clark Atlanta University, Atlanta, Georgia