

THE WELFARE STATE: TOWARDS A SOCIALIST-FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

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The conservative renaissance of the 1980s in the US and elsewhere significantly reduced public provision, most notably in the areas defined as 'welfare.' In the 1980s continuing deindustrialization combined with cutbacks in welfare spending and a regressive tax policy sharply increased inequality and poverty and many of their attendant sufferings—illness, drug and alcohol addiction, violence in both public and private spaces. In response, many socialists, feminists, and other Leftists have joined with a broader spectrum of progressives to defend the welfare programmes, admittedly puny, that we now have and to advocate new ones on a similarly stingy and stigmatizing model.

Such a defence is vital – one would have to be inhumane not to feel **compelled** to support campaigns for the immediate amelioration of misery at a time when homeless people are freezing to death in the streets of New York, when 90% of drug users applying for rehabilitation programmes are turned away for lack of places, when aid to single mothers is never high enough to raise them and their children out of severe deprivation. Still, one damaging effect of these new political alignments has been to suppress a Left discourse about what 'welfare' ought to be like. The conservative mood places the Left on the defensive with regard to many political issues, not just welfare, and defensiveness tends to squelch the visionary, 'utopian' dimension of socialist thought. But designs for welfare in its modern meaning are particularly truncated in the socialist tradition. Western Marxist socialism has never devoted much energy to imagining and designing ideal welfare programmes. The **core** notions of socialism imply that welfare as we know it – the 'dole' or various means-tested programmes – need not exist. In

*Welfare, of course, means, at least in the US, public provision for the poor; in fact, the US government gives much more to the rich and the middle-class, through loans for college education, subsidies for highway and airport construction, subsidies, mortgage programmes, and tax policies that favour wealth and capital over income.

fact, the implications of recent feminist thinking suggest that, short of a purely communist set of arrangements, such a hope may be futile, because reproductive responsibilities towards children, the aged, and the disabled may always leave some citizens less able to contribute to production than others.

A nonstigmatizing welfare programme is thus essential to sexual equality, unless and until we get a complete eradication of the sexual division of labour. Moreover, as feminists have argued, a valorization of nurturing, **caretaking** labour, is basic to constructing a noncompetitive, nonmilitaristic society, and the right kind of welfare policy could contribute to that development of new values. Very few voices today offer a truly democratic perspective on welfare policy. Socialistsought to turn their attention to elaborating a vision of a good and possible society that includes public provision.

Beginning such a discussion is not impossible even in these times of defensive politics. The current liberal politics of defending social **services** creates openings to a socialist discourse about welfare. For example, political mobilization against welfare usually occurs through anti-tax initiatives, especially in the US where relatively low taxes reflect and reproduce hostility to the public sector. Defence of welfare requires defence of the entire principle of public provision, of attending to 'the needs of strangers.' The growing need for welfare in capitalist society demonstrates the failure of the wage-labour system. The much discussed growing 'underclass,' if such exists other than as a pejorative term for the poor – **i.e.**, as a criminal, violent, and irresponsible group – is above all a group that has lost confidence in wage labour as a reliable means of living. Welfare rights movements, moreover, transcend this loss of faith; their assertion of an entitlement to state support challenges the notion that only waged employment 'earns' one a livelihood and roots their claims to aid in other, noncapitalist, values.

To a considerable degree, socialist discussion of welfare policy is emerging from among feminists. This should not be surprising because welfare has in some sense always been a women's issue. Women constitute the majority of the recipients and the providers of 'welfare.' In modern society, welfare appears as an extension of the traditional caretaking, nurturing roles of women. In the US women were disproportionately (that is, in relation to their overall political power) influential in the development of welfare programmes. Moreover, the greater part of the need for welfare arises not merely from 'natural' events such as death or disability, not merely from the failure of the wage-labour system to provide, but specifically from the failure of the family-wage system, that highly gendered arrangement in which breadwinning men are supposed to provide for all their **dependents**.¹

Despite the essential implication of gender in welfare needs and programmes, most of the liberal and **Left** discussion of this problem today continues without an adequate gender analysis.² This is a seriously weakening limitation. It may be precisely a feminist perspective on welfare that can make the difference between an analysis that simply calls for more generosity in

existing programmes, a recommendation that cannot prevent the influence of welfare in reinforcing inequality, and a genuinely transformative vision. With these purposes in mind, I offer here a brief introduction to the new feminist scholarship about the welfare state, after reviewing briefly the gender-blind scholarship to which feminists are responding.³ It is no doubt a particular reading of that scholarship, weighted towards that which offers historical as well as theoretical insight, and towards that which reaches the US, where feminist scholarship on this topic is just beginning. Although women's studies began earlier in the US and have proliferated more than in many other countries, on this topic we are retarded in comparison to the greater quantity of scholarship from other countries.⁴ Behind this slowness lie the relative lack of class consciousness in the US and the relative weakness and, even more important, low visibility of the US welfare state in comparison to its European counterparts – because of its decentralization through a federal system, and because of the mystification accomplished through labelling as 'welfare' only some of those state programmes which contribute to citizens' well-being. Also contributing to the disinterest of US feminist scholars has been the tradition of hostility to the state which marked the women's liberation movement here, influenced as it was by the New Left. Happily, in this area the discussion has been more international than on other topics of interest to feminists. Unfortunately, the segregation between feminist and nonfeminist thinkers has not been overcome; I should like this essay to contribute in some small way to that goal.

The Gender-Blind Welfare-State Scholarship

Most scholarship about the welfare state simply does not use gender as a category of analysis (by contrast most does understand welfare to reflect and form the class **system**).⁵ Some of the more recent historians of the US welfare state, such as Robert Bremner, James Patterson, Walter Trattner, John Ehrenreich, David Rochefort, and Michael Katz, do notice and specify women's particular welfare situation at times, but they do not consider it a major organizing principle of the system.⁶

The omission of a gender analysis distorts our understanding of the welfare state through many levels. Sometimes it obscures the existence of a policy altogether, especially if the policy is not spelled out at a general level but emerges from the intersection of many governing rules. One author, for example, recently concluded that the US has no policy towards pregnancy,⁷ a mistake that results from the tendency to perceive women's reproductive activity as 'natural,' from failure to understand that policy is as much constructed by denials of needs as by meeting them, and, because of the nature of the state in the US, from the difficulty of identifying policy that is constructed of the practices of private employers, educational institutions, medical insurance carriers, town, country, state, and federal taxation, employment, welfare, and family law. For example, an examination of US policy towards pregnancy

would have to consider the period in which pregnant women were excluded from certain jobs, such as teaching, and the evolution towards a standard that no longer considers pregnant women as symbols of or stimuli for immorality; the fact that **US** employers today provide virtually no paid and few unpaid maternity leaves; the fact that public funds will often pay for childbirth but not for abortion.

Without examining the impact of gender relations, many of the vagaries and inconsistencies of **US** welfare policy cannot be explained. The US has several levels of welfare, some of them – such as old age insurance – so privileged in relation to others that they are never considered 'welfare'. One source of this system of differential treatment was political pressure from employing groups to maintain low-wage labour forces, but since the labour force was hierarchically segregated along race and gender lines, so too were the welfare programmes. Another source of this differential treatment is our gender system, including norms that women, especially mothers, should be primarily domestic and supported by men. But these gender norms were contradicted by class norms, for the charity and welfare establishment expected poor mothers to earn. Thus for the entire 20th century, US national and local policy in aiding single mothers has been ambivalent and even contradictory, never supporting these women adequately but condemning their employment outside the home at the same time. The failure of several decades of 'workfare' programmes (efforts to **encourage** or coerce single mothers to find employment) can only be explained in terms of fundamental ambivalence on the part of legislators, welfare professionals, and voters about whether public support of single mothers is better or worse than sending mothers into the labour force. As waves of recent welfare reform have tried to get Aid to Families with Dependent Children (**AFDC**) recipients to 'work' – *i.e.*, take wage-labour employment – the lack of gender analysis obscures the labour-market sex segregation that makes it difficult for women to get jobs that provide even as good an income as welfare provision. Lack of gender analysis has also hidden the fact that even identical welfare programmes would have different meanings and consequences for women, especially mothers, who already do the vast majority of parenting and housework labour, which must then be added to whatever wage work they do. Assumptions about masculinity have equally affected the welfare system, as it has been mainly unthinkable for able male welfare recipients not to work, while welfare workers made it a priority to protect men's egos from the damage of being unable to support a family.

Moreover, gender distinctions helped create the meanings of welfare. In an insightful study of German welfare history, Heide Gerstenberger showed that just as welfare rested on a **worthy/unworthy** distinction, so it helped define the bounds of the 'respectable,' drawing a circle that excluded those who needed help.⁸ There has been too little examination of the gender sources of the stigma attached, both for men and for women, to receiving welfare.⁹

Since so many women's major work is taking care of children, it has been harder to define, perhaps, whether single-mother recipients are **working** or malingering; since their singleness usually involves an appearance of sexual freedom, the sexual double standard is easily exploited to label them immoral. Definitions of 'respectability' have been deeply gendered, and there appears to be some sexual as well as sexist content to taxpayers' hostility to independent women. For example, in my own recent study of the history of family violence, I found that although social work agencies accepted in theory a **deserving/undeserving** distinction which put widows in the former and illegitimate mothers in the latter category, in practice they did not necessarily treat the widows better than the 'immoral' women. This was because in practice any female-headed family seemed to them to threaten immorality.¹⁰

Even more fundamentally, lack of gender analysis obscures the roots of poverty, the inequitable distribution and production that create the need for welfare programmes in the first place. Much of US welfare expenditure goes to Aid to Families with Dependent Children, a programme founded on the principle that the norm is for mothers and children to be supported by men; that norm is, of course, the product of our particular **sex/gender** system – it is not a biological or divine given. A different **sex/gender** system might require men and women to share in child care and in earning; yet another might assume that the state should take all responsibility for the financial support of children. The **sex/gender** system is responsible for women's low wage rates and segregation in low-status jobs.

The contemporary discussion of the underclass in the United States is dulled by lack of a gender analysis. 'Underclass' is of course a vague and highly ideological term used in a variety of ways: stinging up fears of crime, supporting the 'war' on drugs, but also uncritically **mixing** into this amalgam hostilities to minorities, single-mother families, taxes, and welfare provision in general. There are serious and answerable questions about whether there is a shift among the very poor towards more criminal, self-destructive, exploitative, sexually irresponsible behaviour. It is difficult in any case to examine a topic about which there is so much hysteria, but lack of sex distinctions makes the discussion even more murky. Criminality, drug business, sexual and physical violence are overwhelmingly male; more, they are associated specifically with assertions of masculinity. When women participate in these behaviours it is usually as followers of men, a pattern associated precisely with one sense of femininity, as being both nurturant and loyal to men. Thus it is reasonable to hypothesize that this kind of increasing underclass, if it exists, is associated with crises of gender identity. Meanwhile many women, particularly single mothers, are often included in generalizations about the underclass even though they do not engage in violent or criminal behaviour; they are so categorized either because they are welfare recipients or because they are single mothers, **making** of 'underclass'

just another rhetorical device in the attack on social provision and depriving us of categories which might illuminate specific problems.

Not only problem definitions, but also their solutions, have been gendered. Most welfare programmes have been designed to shore up male-breadwinner families or to **compensate** – temporarily – for their collapse. But welfare clients must work to collect their entitlements, and women do a disproportionate amount of this work too. Medical aid, aid for the disabled, programmes for children with special needs, indeed educational institutions altogether assume that women will be available to make it possible for the aid to be delivered: to drive, to care, to be at home for visits, to **come** to welfare offices. Just as in the market economy women translate between the paycheck – that is, money as an abstract token of exchange – and the meeting of material needs of their families – for example, buying the food, cooking it, cleaning so that new food can be cooked the next day – so too in the 'welfare' economy women translate between the entitlement and the actual giving of **nurture**.¹¹

Blindness to gender exists in a sometimes contradictory but nevertheless mutually reinforcing relation to ignorance of the racial bases of the modern welfare state. This is particularly true in the **US**, where economy and government have been from the beginning of the state organized around Black subordination and the expropriation of Indians and Mexicans. The assumptions and priorities which guided the welfare system here, since the 17th century, have been as fundamentally white as they have been male. The vision of republicanism that underlies both **US** resistance to public welfare programmes and the design of those programmes was based not only on 'manly' definitions of dignity and independence, but also on co-existence with a slave society, with black servitude as a foil against which (white) citizenship and self-respect were defined. In the New Deal period, for example, the exclusion of African-Americans from welfare benefits was not peripheral to the new federal programmes but a fundamental part of their construction, part of the basic political realignment that created the New **Deal**.¹² Most good-quality welfare programmes were designed as emergency wage-replacement provisions for those accustomed to (at least) upper-working-class wages. For different reasons and in different ways, virtually all but white men were excluded from these jobs and thereby from the better welfare programmes.

The relation of the welfare state to both gender and race as fundamental social divisions is mutual. These divisions have helped create the need for welfare by creating poverty, and then shaped its nature and distribution, but the welfare programmes in turn have influenced the nature of the divisions. The situation of women and of minority men has been affected, for better and for worse, by the structure of the welfare state. Indeed the very meanings of femininity, masculinity, Blackness and other racial stereotypes in the **US** today derive in part from the shape and administration of these programmes. The exclusions and limits of unemployment insurance,

which thereby force many onto general relief or AFDC, create negative attitudes about the high levels of minority unemployment, for example. The definition of masculinity as breadwinning and independent is reinforced by the assumption, long present in AFDC, for example, that men should be responsible for the children of the women they live with. The consensus about women's normative domesticity has been shaped in a double-binding way by the structure of AFDC (keeping women at home but inadequately supported, thereby forcing them into the underground wage labour market, but declining to provide for **child** care).

Similarly contradictory is the rhetoric that welfare represents deplorable 'dependence,' while women's subordination to husbands is not registered as unseemly. This contradiction should not be surprising, for the concept of dependence is an ideological one that reflects particular modes of production. For example, in traditional societies only men of substantial property were considered independent, and not only women and children but all men who worked for others were considered dependents. Only in the modern era, where wage labour became the norm for men and voting rights were extended to all men, did employed men begin to be 'independent.' Women, for whom wage labour was not the majority experience until recently, and whose earnings are on average much less than men's, continued to be considered as dependent. Indeed, women's dependence (**e.g.**, their unpaid domestic labour) contributed to men's 'independence.' Only in this century has the term 'dependent' begun to refer specifically to adult recipients of public aid, while women who depend on husbands are no longer labelled as dependents (except, of course, for purposes of the Internal Revenue Service). There is also a class double standard for women: the prosperous are encouraged to be dependent on their husbands, the poor to become '**independent.**'¹³ Public dependence, of course, is paid for by taxes, yet it is interesting that there is no objection to allowing husbands tax exemptions for their dependent wives. The anti-dependence ideology then penalizes those who care for the inevitably dependent – the young, the sick – who are, of course, disproportionately unpaid women and low-paid service workers. In fact, the entire discourse about dependence masks the evident interdependence of vast numbers of the population in modern societies.

The gendered design of welfare programmes is by no means simply a matter of male policy-makers keeping women subordinate. Few scholars have noted the disproportionate influence of women in envisioning, lobbying for, and then administering welfare programmes, especially at the state and local levels where most programmes are located. This is not only a matter of giving recognition where it is due, although that is in itself important to compensate for patterns of systematically depriving women of credit for their work. It also requires incorporating the fact that women have often been influential in campaigning for welfare provisions that turned out to be quite discriminatory against women, as in the case of protective legislation or AFDC itself. An

analysis of women's activism requires understanding the complex relation that women, especially reformers, have had to conventional gender and family arrangements – often seizing upon what is beneficial to women in those arrangements, often distancing themselves from and seeking to control the needy quite as much as did men, often negotiating delicate compromises hoping to shift slightly the sexual balance of political and economic power.

Meanwhile, theoretical debates about the nature of modern welfare states have been similarly impoverished by the lack of gender analysis. Among historians two rather polarized perspectives competed throughout much of the mid-20th century. One is affectionately known to those who use a British model as Whig **history**,¹⁴ although the American Talcott Parsons was an **able** advocate of it. Jill Quadagno characterizes this view thus: 'As industrialization proceeds, it . . . **reduc[es]** the functions of the traditional family and . . . [dislocates] certain categories of individuals whose labor becomes surplus – the very young, the old, the sick, and the **disabled**.'¹⁵ Quadagno is here correct to leave out women, for the theories she is describing do so. And yet without women the theory is mushy, to say the least. These lost 'functions' of the 'traditional' family were mainly women's labour, and modern welfare systems do not in fact replace them with anything except differently organized women's labour: women are the main workers in the welfare system, still badly underpaid, performing labour that the current tax system could not support if living wages prevailed; and women continue to do the work of consuming welfare, always vastly underestimated – waiting in lines, making phone calls, filling out forms, submitting to interviews and questioning, scrimping when cheques are late, begging help and favours when cheques are inadequate.

The task of placing welfare developments into a longue *durée* story of progress was done best by T.H. Marshall, a sociologist who sought to justify the British welfare state. He constructed an influential theory of the evolution of citizenship rights, arguing that 'social' citizenship, what US President Franklin Roosevelt called 'freedom from want,' was a third stage following the guarantee of political citizenship, **i.e.** the vote. But Marshall's theory did not theorize women's citizenship, ignoring the contradictions of women's dependence on the male wage. As Gillian **Pascall** has argued, according to Marshall women's marital dependency should be called feudal because it is an ascribed rather than an achieved status, a relic that subverts his theory of the development of citizenship **rights**.¹⁶ Marshall's periodization is contradicted by the history of women's relation to the state. His stages of citizenship (first due process rights, then political rights, or the franchise, then social citizenship, or welfare entitlements) only describe the male experience; throughout the world women won important 'social' rights from the state before they got the vote. Indeed, for many poor women, the earliest relation to the state was as a recipient of relief.

This Whig view often assumed a kind of gradual progress that specified

no agent, other than sympathetic and wise legislators. A social-democratic version specified organized labour as the agent,¹⁷ but this was rarely argued historically. Most of these arguments were based on static sociological operations that correlated welfare programmes with union membership or some similar index of labour strength; few offered an actual historical narrative of union campaigns for welfare programmes. Moreover, without taking gender into consideration, none of this scholarship is correct. In the US and probably elsewhere as well, organized women, feminist and **nonfeminist**, devoted a higher proportion and sometimes absolutely more energy to campaigning for welfare programmes than did unions, and in certain periods – for example, the first decades of this century – were more influential. These were largely elite women and their class and race assumptions marked the welfare system indelibly. Furthermore a gender analysis of trade union activity is needed, to determine which unionists made welfare high priority, and which programmes aroused the most union support.

Opposing the Whig interpretation were both **Left** and Right-wing criticisms of **welfare programmes** as controlling: suppressing individual freedom, weakening resistance, **and/or** distracting the citizenry from the fundamental issues of **power**. The **Left** version of **this 'social control'** argument views welfare provisions (like higher wages) as encouraging workers to accept the capitalist **economy** and the liberal governmental system, essentially trading political power for a higher standard of **living**.¹⁸ This perspective has many problems but foremost is its hidden assumption that the workers making this bad bargain are male. Frances Fox **Piven** and I have both argued that working-class women, who received much less money from the welfare system, actually gained more power from it, because they could use different 'systems' against each other, **e.g.**, welfare provision against domestic **male-supremacy**.¹⁹

Both the Whig and the social control perspectives, as **Theda Skocpol** has argued, tended to remove politics from consideration, and to render the state merely an abstraction or at best a homogeneous and passive tool of larger interests. In the last two decades there has been a renaissance of **theorizing** about the state, particularly among Marxists,²⁰ and its richness has drawn some feminist theorists to appropriate this argumentation to welfare and gender issues. **Ralph Miliband** argued that the capitalist class, if it does not literally staff the state, nevertheless retains power to influence it from **without**.²¹ But what has great explanatory power about class relations by no means works equally well for gender. If we attempt to insert gender into this model we meet trouble: it is difficult to specify what 'male' interests are, and if we argue that 'men' (a dubious category as a universal) have the preservation of women as their long-term interest and will therefore support measures at least to keep them alive, then the theory becomes so vague as to be not **disprovable**.²²

Nicos Poulantzas met some of these objections with his functionalist view, arguing that direct participation of capitalists is not crucial in understanding

state functions, but that the state is *objectively* bourgeois and *definitionally* committed to maintaining those values and structures. Here the state becomes abstract; it has no necessary connection with any particular capitalists at all but serves to retain unity among them (and to promote disunity among the working class).²³ Can gender be added to this model? It has indeed been argued that the maleness of the state comes not only from its personnel, but is embedded in its nature, in bureaucratic and hierarchical forms. And in fact Poulantzas' emphasis on unity would find more evidence if it were understood as a class and gendered unity. But to argue that the state objectively **functions** to maintain male dominance *either* suggests that women have never advanced their position, that we are no better off now than a century ago, which is patently counterexperiential; *or* defines male supremacy in such a way as to include all concessions to women, in which case the premise is tautological.

Some of those interested in gender analysis have been attracted to a conflict model of the state such as that suggested in Fred Block's **class-struggle** approach. He postulates a group of state managers, separate from capitalists; but the managers' fortunes depend on a healthy economy which, given the real alternatives available to managers, can only be capitalist. Block rejects the view that the state can become a tool of working-class goals, as in the social-democratic model of the welfare state, but he also rejects 'social-control' theories on the grounds that capitalists are usually far too short-sighted to trade concessions for long-term stability. Instead these concessions represent victories for workers; but in making them, managers accumulate more power for the state which then, in periods of working-class weakness, allows it to re-form these concessions into structures that **support** the economic as well as the political **system**.²⁴ Organized feminists, too, have won major concessions, only to have these reshaped in periods of feminist decline. But of course those concerned with gender must also consider the possibility that the group of managers, being **male** and being influenced by its maleness, is in that respect similar to the ruling group, also male. Furthermore, **Block's** theory involves a fairly economic, mechanistic determination of when the 'working class' will be weak and when strong, and certainly there is no such model for predictions with respect to gender relations.

Among non-Marxist sociologists, 'state-centred' theories of welfare state development are most associated with Theda Skocpol who has argued for the influence of particular political configurations. (This model is less novel to historians and political scientists, for whom traditional scholarship has been 'state-centred'.) Theoretically it is not difficult to acknowledge the importance of such political factors on policy development, and historians in particular welcome this directive to return to narrative, detailed, causal explanations. Unfortunately in Skocpol's own historical work, the notion of state 'capacity' is a bit circular: lack of state capacity is invoked to explain the failure to enact certain conceivable welfare programmes at

certain times, even though such programmes are precisely what builds state capacity. Moreover her work redefines 'politics' narrowly as elite politics; she studies the decision-making processes of state and political party operators – bureaucrats and politicians – and tends to occlude evidence of non-elite, non-governmental **activism**.²⁵ Skocpol wavers in how much she claims for her politics-centred approach: to the extent that it calls for a more complex explanatory theory, adding political complications to simplified class models, it is evidently reasonable; but in other places, Skocpol seems to want to substitute politicians for social formations (such as class or gender or race), elite for mass politics, political conflict for social struggle; her work seems to erase the social movements of labour, the unemployed, the elderly, from the history of the New Deal, for example. Since there has been little previous acknowledgement of the role of organized women, or of social change with respect to gender, in the history of welfare programmes, here she is not erasing but merely continuing to paint around big blank **spots**.²⁶

Most welfare scholarship, especially in the United States, presents itself as operating without ideology altogether. I am **referring** to the establishment network of primarily liberal poverty researchers, funded primarily by the government, who have made of poverty and welfare (or 'income transfers' as they are mainly called) a **subfield** of economics and quantitative sociology. Historian Michael Katz in his new book, *The Undeserving Poor*, offers a cogent critique and history of this intellectual work. Some of the increased government spending in the US 'poverty program' inaugurated under the Johnson administration went to research; between 1965 and 1980, **annual** federal spending on poverty research increased from \$2.5 to \$160 million (in current dollars). The poverty researchers created large data archives and began longitudinal studies in attempts to measure trends in poverty and to evaluate the impact of welfare programmes. Much of their data is extraordinarily valuable, and their findings usually supported welfare spending. But they redefined the issues technically, mathematically, so as to be the responsibility strictly of experts; in this procedure they both followed and contributed to the transformation of much of American social science into quantitative work highly vulnerable to government and foundation agendas. The conclusions of the poverty research establishment were offered as **value-neutral**, although efforts to secure and retain government funding, especially as government moved to the Right, meant the adoption of highly ideological categories, such as 'underclass,' 'broken families,' 'transmission of welfare dependency.' As Michael Katz puts it, 'the capture of the social science agenda by government combined with the capture of poverty research by economists to confine the scope of debate within market models of human obligation and interaction. . . . By narrowing their criteria for public policy to the relation between income maintenance and work incentives, liberals had ceded the debate before it **began**.'²⁷ This kind of empiricist work sometimes (although on the whole rarely) included gender variables, but its research

procedures excluded the critique of existing systemic and individual power relations. Certainly it dampened public debate about the values which a welfare state might promote.

The New Feminist Scholarship

With the renaissance of women's studies in the 1970s, feminist thinking turned to welfare. The lowest common denominator of this new work shows that the premise with which I (deliberately) began, that previous scholarship about welfare had been gender-blind, is too simple. However 'blind,' that scholarship was hardly disabled, for it functioned effectively to mystify and thus defend a gendered and unequal society. In exposing that defensive function, the new feminist scholarship about welfare moved through discernible stages, albeit they are not neatly consecutive and the 'progress' involves no consensus but disagreement. These 'stages' exist only as analytic categories, but perhaps useful ones.

First there was a great deal of work that demonstrated the *discriminatory* character of welfare programmes, and their function to reinforce sexist arrangements in domestic and public life. In a rich article on the British poor laws in the 19th century, Pat Thane showed how the traditional distinction between the deserving and the undeserving poor was drawn for women in terms of their relations to men: widows were always deserving, deserted or unmarried mothers nearly always condemned.²⁹ In the US it was demonstrated that Social Security old-age insurance discriminates against women,³⁰ and how women have been excluded from unemployment compensation because of the kinds of jobs they do, for **example**.³¹ Analysts learned to recognize policies where they seemed invisible, such as Irene Diamond's work on discrimination against women in **housing**.³²

The critique of discrimination quickly developed into a *structural* critique of welfare, in what I consider a second stage of development of the feminist scholarship. A recent sustained example of this sort of approach is Mimi Abramovitz's *Regulating the Lives of Women*, the first book-length feminist analysis of the history of welfare in the US. Abramovitz moves beyond concern with discrimination to demonstrate how welfare policy functioned to reinforce the entire social system of women's subordination, particularly their constriction within the family and dependence on **men**.³³ Barbara Nelson and Gwendolyn Mink showed that gender assumptions about women's dependence were part of the historical bases of welfare **policy**.³⁴ Several scholars have noted the existence of inequalities within the welfare system, most commonly described as a double standard between privileged and nonstigmatized programmes **such** as Old Age and Survivors Insurance (commonly called Social Security) and stingy and humiliating ones such as **AFDC**, but most have viewed these as class divisions.³⁵ Others, such as **Hace Sorel** Tishler, thought the mothers' aid payments were small because the group of 'dependent mothers' was insignificant in comparison to unemployed

or injured men or the aged—an absolute myth based on the social invisibility of single **mothers**.³⁶ Several feminist scholars have interpreted these inequalities in gender **terms**.³⁷

Nelson's work is part of a new **school** of analysis that sees welfare programmes as having the function not only of keeping women subordinate, but, perhaps more importantly, of supporting a whole social system. I prefer to call this system the family wage, since it rests on a familial organization in which the **husband/father** is supposed to be the exclusive breadwinner and the **wife/mother** responsible for the large quantities of unpaid domestic labour which are essential to every aspect of human life, including the continuation of a capitalist economic **system**.³⁸ Internationally, feminist analyses have noted that the only explanation that can make sense of seemingly contradictory welfare policies is their function to keep this system (women's economic dependence on men, men's monetary dependence on wages and personal dependence on women) in place. Many students of welfare policy, including Jill **Roe** writing about **Australia**, **Hilary** Land, Jane Lewis and Mary **McIntosh** writing about Britain, **Mimi** Abramowitz and myself writing about the US have argued this perspective.³⁹ Indeed, in England where family allowance programmes were adopted after World War II, the payments were originally made to male heads of families and women were able to collect them only after considerable feminist campaigning.

Making the family-wage assumptions behind welfare programmes even more pernicious is the fact that few men have ever actually been able to earn a family wage, that is, a wage large enough single-handedly to support a family. Full dependence on husbands has actually been a 'privilege' of a minority of women. Thus negotiations between women and welfare givers were often ritualized exchanges of fictional slogans, with both parties aware that women's likelihood of stable reliance on male wages is not great. Furthermore, women have been coerced by welfare requirements into following paths of action which are least conducive to achieving ultimate independence of welfare – by pursuing men instead of their own upward mobility, or by accepting low-wage, unskilled, part-time jobs with terrible **working** conditions instead of holding out for education, good quality child care, and better jobs.

The family-wage assumption on which the welfare system has been predicated expresses some of the economic assumptions of industrial capitalism. In this century government intervention to stabilize relations of production has been more widely accepted – as in workmen's and unemployment compensation, industrial health and safety laws, agricultural stabilization programmes, even labour relations acts guaranteeing union recognition, for example – **while** the domestic sphere remains ideologically 'private'.⁴⁰ In fact, domestic, reproductive life is indeed governmentally regulated, certain forms of it supported and others penalized. Michael Walzer has argued slightly differently: that in the US governmental regulation of

distribution – i.e., welfare – is more accepted than is governmental control of production.⁴¹ This is true ideologically only, because in fact there is extensive state control of production. The differences concern the degree to which such controls are mystified, and the distributional results of both – not only in cash benefits but in power. With respect to welfare, the ideology of the privateness of reproduction is itself an influence, and one disadvantageous to those who do reproductive work, for it undermines their formation of a sense of entitlement to public help.

In its most extreme form, women's responsibility for domestic, reproductive work has deprived them of citizenship. Carole **Pateman** has argued that in liberal theory, the first criterion for 'citizenship,' as that concept evolved, was some form of 'independence,' defined in terms of the characteristic male experience – for example, property ownership, bearing arms, self-employment. **Hegel** was one of many who found a way to acknowledge women's membership in the human and national community without attributing to them citizenship by viewing women as members of families, i.e., nonindependent members. "The very concept of modern citizenship (in contrast to that of the rights of the subject) arose along with the **public/private** distinction that ideologically separated women from public life. Of course women were by no means as effectively cut off from public activity as these abstractions would suggest, but were active political and commercial figures long before the beginning of legal citizenship entitlements in the 19th century. Nevertheless the view of women as private, noncitizens, added to the expectation that they should be the dependents of men, made it difficult to conceive that they should have entitlements to state support.

Some versions of these critiques of the welfare state looked more to its contemporary functions than to its original assumptions, and adopted and adapted the New Left social-control model. They reflect the antistatist, **anti-expert**, participatory-democracy values characteristic of the late **1960s/early 1970s** women's liberation movement, originating in the New Left but also in individualist values and middle-class experience of many women's liberation theorists, and the anger of the welfare rights movement. A classic example was Barbara Ehrenreich's and Deirdre English's *For Her Own Good*, an indictment of physicians, psychoanalysts, child psychologists, and home economists for usurping women's traditional autonomous skills and then using their newly professional 'expertise' to control women's work and even identity.⁴³ Another is Alicia Frohman's analysis of day care. Following James **O'Connor's** *The Fiscal Crisis of the State*, which argues that such services function to regulate the labour market, subsidize the costs of production, legitimize the system ideologically, and provide social control, **Frohman** denies that day care programmes serve women in any way. Rather she relies on a reserve-army-of-labour theory to explain that such programmes emerge when needs for women's labour are paramount and contract at other **times**.⁴⁴ Others used social-control assumptions to challenge the

Whiggish view that the state functioned to protect the weaker social groups: for example, Diana Leonard Barker's article on the regulation of marriage argues that the primary effect of marriage law is to perpetuate the exploitative entitlements of the stronger spouse, the **husband**.⁴⁵ A more complex form of social control argument, and one that made many feminists uncomfortable, called attention to the role women reformers played in disciplining men, and to women's influence in definitions of 'respectability,' recognizing the socially conservative content of some feminist reform **work**.⁴⁶ Equally unsettling to a simple social-control model has been the evidence of women's choice in the family wage system— not only accepting it, but agitating for it. Patricia Tulloch, writing about Australia, concluded that care-giving was often women's chosen preference, notwithstanding its disadvantaged economic consequences.⁴⁷ (In scholarship outside the area of welfare – in labour history, for example – a great deal of evidence has accumulated that working-class married women would have preferred a family wage system had it been available, because they preferred a chance to devote themselves full-time to domestic labour.)

A common feminist theorization of the social control inherent in the welfare system was the notion of a public or state patriarchy as opposed to private, familial patriarchy. This perspective rested in part on the interpretations of **Talcott** Parsons, influential in the sociology of the family several decades ago, that family functions had been transferred to the state. Parsons and his predecessors such as W. I. Thomas had been positive about this transfer, for they believed that the state could provide experts who were needed to socialize citizens in our modern, complex societies; and indeed the strongest critique of this transfer-of-function tendency came from those, **Left**, liberal, or **Right**, who sought to support a family erroneously identified as traditional and who did not notice, or mind, the suppression of women it entailed. Feminists, by contrast, attacked both old and new forms. Carol Brown argued that patriarchy is an umbrella system in which there are public aspects, controlled by men collectively, and private aspects, run by men individually. Since male-headed families are no longer needed to maintain the overall patriarchy, men's individual powers in familial matters have been increasingly delegated, so to speak, to the **state**.⁴⁸ Political theorist Zillah Eisenstein has conceptualized a 'capitalist patriarchal state.' States are patriarchal, she argues, because the 'distinction between public (male) and private (female) life has been inherent in the formation of state **societies**.'⁴⁹ She too describes a transition from **husband/father's** control to state control, but sees the nature of the social control of women as continuous and essentially similar.

The 'state patriarchy' analysis was extremely useful in pointing to the growing independence of some women from fathers and husbands, but its way of seeing the state did not hold up in the face of mounting historical scholarship about women and family. In the first place, this school of analysis relied on the feminist appropriation of the word 'patriarchy' from an older

and richer historical usage. Deriving from the Greek, the first English usage, in the sixteenth century, referred to an ecclesiastical hierarchy. By the early seventeenth century 'patriarchy' was being used to describe a societal form whose organization was based on, and analogous to, a father's control over his family. It is of course logical that this meaning of the word developed precisely as patriarchal society was beginning to erode in the face of commercial capitalism and the individualist values it promoted. By using a word so filled with fatherly, familial, organic, fixed hierarchical relations to describe today's male supremacy, situated in a nonfamilial, inorganic, meritocratic society, we lose much of its power and nuance, and we mask significant historical change. In the second place, the emphasis on the continuity of 'patriarchy' obscures from view the gains of women, or, at best, represents them as an inevitable epiphenomenon of **modernization** or secularization rather than as the result of collective political struggle, *i.e.*, of feminism.

Another feminist scholar of the welfare state, Eli Zaretsky, broke with the emphasis on the continuity of patriarchy and argued, to the contrary, the transformative effect of capitalism on gender, achieved through the **public/private** distinction. Following from the important insight that only in modern society do we find intense subjectivity and consciousness of private life, Zaretsky argued (like **Abramovitz** and Nelson and many others) that the welfare state served to reinforce, not to subvert, the private family. Indeed, the very inadequacies of welfare programmes grew from the reluctance of welfare agencies and their leaders to undermine the male-headed nuclear **family**.⁵⁰ As Zaretsky noticed, the form of the welfare state – bureaucratized provision for strangers – is public, but its content – individual family 'independence' and women's responsibility for childraising and domestic work – private; the result was an alienated public life and an alienated private **life**.⁵¹ But while Zaretsky recognized historical change, he too argued primarily functionally, neglecting the political struggles over welfare policy and particularly the influence of organized women in the growth of welfare policies, the notion of the private, and the resultant alienation.

All these structural critiques of welfare policy, emphasizing social control, share a major limitation: they rely only on functionalist argumentation, focusing on the rationality of welfare programmes for those in power. This is a limitation, not a defect; functionalist analyses are often illuminating. But they assume that welfare policy is coherently beneficial to some group or groups. Thus they cannot explain its often contradictory, even self-defeating aspects. These emerge both from the fragmented and inconsistent goals of policy-makers – a complexity that could be fitted into a functionalist theory that was supple enough – but also, **most** importantly, from the fact that most welfare policies represent the jerry-built compromises which are the artifacts of political and social conflict – a dynamic that functionalism cannot encompass.

It is not surprising then that the major critique of this social control model came from scholars looking at welfare historically. Carole **Pateman**,

for example, despite her insistence on the patriarchal nature of welfare, recognizes that dependence on the state may be preferable to dependence on individual men; since women do not 'live with the state' as they do with men, they are better able to make collective struggles about their entitlements.⁵² Frances Fox Piven points out a remarkable and constructive contradiction in the welfare system: that this form of support for 'dependent' women has in fact made many of them 'independent' by giving them employment in the welfare **system**.⁵³

At a certain point, the efflorescence of empirical, historical scholarship about welfare created in the US a third 'stage,' documenting *women's political activism and influence* in the making of that system. At first this work, unlike the critical theoretical work, was primarily celebratory, and rightly so. Historians, on the basis of archival research, uncovered a virtually lost history of women's leadership in welfare in the US, arising from such organizations as the National Consumers' League, the Women's Trade Union League, the National Association of Colored Women, and the YWCA. But much of the feminist critique of these Progressive-era liberal programmes was lost in this work. More recently, historians have begun to synthesize this recognition with a critical perspective. Paula Baker discussed the influence a women's political culture had on American politics by the early 20th century, thereby illuminating with historical specificity some of the previously unchallenged male aspects of the state, such as the fraternalism of political parties. She showed that women engaged in political activity long before they won suffrage, a point which adds to a growing theoretical understanding that we must enlarge what counts as politics and the political far beyond electoral **activity**.⁵⁴ Moreover, this women's politics fundamentally changed the nature of the US state. Baker concludes that in the Progressive era, reaping the harvest from their cultivation of a new kind of state responsibility, women's very successes permanently ended the separate male and female political cultures that had characterized the previous centuries of US history, a convergence that was by no means without costs for women. In the early 20th century middle-class men too began to take up the kinds of single-issue, extra-electoral agitating and lobbying campaigns around welfare issues and, indeed, soon came to dominate at least the leadership of this politics.

This history often suffers from class and race biases, recognizing as welfare activity only the contributions of elite white women. Let us consider these limitations one at a time, beginning with the racial. This blindness was not only a matter of undervaluing the history of minorities, but resulted from the very definitions of what constituted welfare and welfarist work, developed from the white experience. A more complex, non-exclusive historical understanding of welfarist work is beginning to emerge, especially about that of African-Americans thanks to the development of black women's historical scholarship; the histories of Asian-American, Hispanic-American, and Native-American women are also gaining momentum. The new historical

scholarship suggests that women played a particularly influential role among African-Americans, as among whites, in providing for the public welfare, but with considerable differences in form and content.

White women's strategies were often based on the substantial political influence, economic resources, and social mobility which many had, relying on wealth and connections to lobby for legislation and **win** administrative power through jobs and appointment to committees and commissions. Minority women, especially women of colour, usually lacking influence on government at any level, had to turn to 'private' welfare provision. (Ultimately studying this activity may contribute to an expanded and developed theory of the state, as constituting more than government.) While white women were lobbying Congressmen, blacks were raising money in the most difficult way – collecting from the poor to help the poor – in order to create their own schools, hospitals, orphanages, pension programmes, health **insurance**.⁵⁵ The evident inadequacy of such provision made it necessary for minorities simultaneously to campaign for access to private and governmental white welfare institutions and programmes. Thus minority welfare activity was often indistinguishable from civil rights **activity**.⁵⁶

Out of the minority experience also came different welfare priorities. Particularly influential was the fact that black women were more likely to be employed than white women, black mothers especially more than white mothers; statistically black women were less able and possibly less willing to depend on male wages than were whites. Minority women in general worked in very different jobs from whites, as domestics, agricultural labourers, and laundresses, for example. These limits and choices were partly shared by working-class and other poor white women, but there were also considerable cultural differences. African-American reformers were also committed to the family wage ideal, but minority women activists were considerably more likely than whites to accept women's and even mothers' employment as a long-term reality and to seek programmes that would make it easier, such as child care facilities or protection against sexual harassment. This history suggests how racially specific have been what whites regard as mainstream welfare proposals; how deeply our welfare debates have taken place within a uniquely white set of political, economic, and familial assumptions. Moreover, the white women's welfarist activity played a role in maintaining, even reinforcing, class and race exclusions. Their organizations remained all white, not only because they had little interest in or sensitivity to women in other circumstances, but because on occasion they acted to exclude black women. Equally important, the white vision of public welfare – aid to needy children, replacement of male wages for dependent wives, protection for working women in industrial and urban enterprises – took as given the structures that not only excluded blacks but confirmed them in **subordination**.⁵⁷

For white, even working-class white, women, the history of their work

for public welfare confirms the notion that they were struggling within a masculine state, leaving aside the issue of how that maleness was structured and expressed. Even poor, immigrant white women were often operating in cities in which their men were organized, albeit as vassals, into party politics. For black women it is not clear that this conceptualization – a male state – holds. The modifier 'white,' as in a white male state, was in fact far more than a modifier; it was an absolutely fundamental structuring principle.

Historians have more often recognized the influence in welfare policy of a class perspective—that of the charity workers who were the direct antecedents of today's welfare policy makers. Critique of class interests expressed in welfare policy has been the basis of many **social-control** interpretations. But sorting out class from **racial/ethnic** interests has been particularly difficult in US history; in the US the class 'otherness' of the objects of charity became by the late 19th century indivisible from an **ethnic/religious/"racial"** otherness because of the heavy immigration of southern and eastern Europeans coincident with peak rates of urbanization and impoverishment. Just as whiteness was so important a part of the development of upper- and middle-class consciousness in the US, so too was being 'American' as opposed to immigrant. The social-control interpretations emphasized discrimination against, and disdainful attitudes towards, immigrants; they have not analyzed the contribution of the **native-born/immigrant** relationship to the formation of the consciousness of the welfare reformers themselves. Thus even the class character of a welfare system will be more fully revealed by the growth of scholarship about minorities.

Scholarship that puts together class and race and gender differences in visions of and campaigns for social provision is even less developed. For example, the standard view regarding working-class attitudes to welfare in the welfare-state histories relies on the pronouncements of Samuel Gompers, national leader of the American Federation of Labor, in opposition to governmental programmes. The opinions of rank-and-file unionists remain unexplored, and evidence that union locals often supported welfare campaigns neglected. Working-class women, unionized and not, seem unlikely to have been faithful devotees of Gompers' anti-public welfare attitudes. No scholar has inquired whether racial minority workers had different views about welfare programmes. Welfare policy has also had a substantial influence on the class consciousness of the privileged classes. In the US today, the tendency of the great majority to call themselves middle class reflects a definition of that term as meaning, not 'on welfare'. This equation of labour with middle-class status is also gendered, for it denigrates domestic labour. Here too there is a class division however: poor women who are not employed are vulnerable to being labelled lazy and parasitic, while prosperous women who are 'only' housewives are not. But for all except the wealthiest women, fears of being alone and willingness to stay with difficult and often violent men are conditioned by the deprivation and humiliation that welfare brings.

These class, race, and gender structures have been constantly contested. A framework for understanding the historical development of the welfare state, if it is to have actual explanatory power, must keep in focus not only the powerlessness but also the challenges and occasionally power of the resistant and sometimes organized subordinates. The reform activity of white middle-class women is only one kind of activism. For example, the 'child savers' who sought to 'rescue' poor children in the industrial cities from poverty and mistreatment were perceived by the poor as child **kidnappers**; in Boston poor people called the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children 'the Cruelty'. But their response was by no means simply resentment and refusal to cooperate, as the social-control theorists imagined. Many of the poor sought out the help of the SPCC, despite their understanding that it might take their children away, particularly women hoping to use the agency's power against the domestic tyranny of **husbands**.⁵⁸ In New York the Irish immigrant **working** class defined the threat of the child savers in religious terms, as Protestants trying to proselytize by stealing Catholic children and placing them in Protestant institutions and families. These immigrants managed to force upon the city the 'Children's Law' of 1873, which required that children **be** placed in homes of their own religious persuasion; and nuns, mainly working-class Irish immigrants, created Catholic children's homes as a means not only of fending off Protestant institutions but of aggrandizing their own power within the Church against the male **hierarchy**.⁵⁹

Moreover, a scholarship that looks at conflict about welfare policy will recognize that the subordinates are not a homogeneous group. Within working-class, poor, and minority families and communities, there are power hierarchies. **In response** to the legacy of racism, too much US scholarship generalizes about African-Americans as if they were all homogeneously poor, thus failing to recognize sharp class differences among blacks. Similarly the rise of feminism led to generalizations about women as if all were equally subordinated and victimized. Scholarship that recognizes the intersections of gender, class, and race has at times yielded conclusions that are unexpected and, to some feminists, even threatening, for if women's power is to be recognized, their responsibility must be also; and not only distinctions but even relations of domination among women become influential. Nancy Hewitt's study of women's activism in 19th-century Rochester, New York, is a good example of feminist critique of the universality of sisterhood and the often dominant influence of women's class allegiances in their reform activity.⁶⁰ Paula Giddings and Rosalyn Terborg-Penn have documented the racist exclusionary practices of many white women's reform organizations.⁶¹ Similarly, my studies of family violence revealed women charity and case workers as controllers of poor women, cast doubt on whether there were any distinctions between the approaches of male and female child protectors, and showed women 'clients: actively struggling against efforts to 'help' them by their wealthier, altruistic 'sisters'.⁶²

Lisa **Peattie** and Martin Rein have offered a conceptual approach to welfare contestation that makes gender central, and their perspective is valuable and underrecognized. They develop a notion of claims (to goods, services, resources) that does not privilege wages but considers the wage form merely one variety of claiming. Industrial societies have, they argue, three realms within which claims are generated: family, economy, government.⁶³ These have different **logics**: family claims rest on assumptions of what they call 'solidarity'; wage claims on assumptions of exchange; and the basis of claims on government is precisely the subject of dispute. Women's methods of claiming have been based more on familial assumptions – not only kinship solidarity but acceptance of interdependence – because family work has been more important and wage labour less important in most women's histories. The **Peattie/Rein** approach rejects the dominant view of wages or 'earnings' as somehow naturally deserved, but tries to situate wages as one among several potentially legitimate claims for goods and services, such as those arising from kinship or friendship obligations or from a welfare system. **Peattie** and Rein's discussion has the particular value of **identifying** what has been a Marxist, liberal and conservative consensus in privileging the wage form as the means of providing for the citizenry and the implications of this assumption for welfare and for women: dependence on men, with welfare functioning to replace the male wage when it is not forthcoming. (Most feminists who have recognized and criticized this assumption have concluded from this critique that women were only victims, missing the mixture of women's support for the family wage system and their resistance to it, and especially missing women's successes.)

Peattie and Rein's concept of solidarity-based claims has something in common with the new discourse of 'needs.' Neither are based on principles of exact exchange or meritocracy. Both Marxist and conservative social critics have remained suspicious of needs as a base of political struggle, because they are so obviously constructed historically by hegemonic cultural and economic **powers**.⁶⁴ Feminists are beginning to examine how a 'needs' discourse can remain a democratic, oppositional one. The Italian sociologist Laura Balbo and American philosopher Nancy Fraser have recognized the importance of women in the creation of a 'needs-oriented culture,' and that women have gained thereby a position of unprecedented strategic political strength and public **importance**.⁶⁵

But Peattie's and Rein's perspective, although **coming** from a very different intellectual tradition, has some of the weaknesses of Foucault, another interpreter of welfare measures. In his work on, for example, prisons, Foucault was a member of the social-control group of theorists; in other respects – notably in the work on sexuality – Foucault argues for a multiplicity of competing discourses constructing needs. The **Peattie** and Rein view of competing claims is like Foucault's view of swirling discourses, tending towards pluralism, suggesting at times an indeterminacy so total as to deny

the possibility of identifying any particular structures of hegemonic power. (In fact at other times Foucault returns to a quite conventional Marxist view that specific discourses express the material relations of specific historical stages.) The historical evidence will not confirm such an open-ended, **power-agnostic** view. *Not* everything is possible at every historical moment. Just as definitions of poverty have changed as minimal standards of living grew, so too aspirations and expectations of entitlement have grown. One hundred years ago many single mothers accepted – albeit with agony and fury – that they might have to lose their children in order to secure support for them. Today single mothers feel entitled to raise their own children. This transformation of hopes, indeed of 'needs,' is an historical artifact, explicable through the study of social and political movements. Histories that trace only legislation and political alliances and explanations based on an abstract concept of 'modernization' are not adequate to chart such transformations.

Towards a New Welfare Scholarship

Although scholarship about the welfare state is proliferating, much of it does not yet fully break with the many ideological factors that have surrounded charity, 'relief,' the dole, and even social 'insurance.' These include not only perceptions of welfare recipients as blameworthy or pitiable in their 'dependence,' not only beliefs that the need for public aid is exceptional, a need that would disappear if the economy was properly flourishing, but also ideas about desirable gender and family arrangements. We can begin to specify the axes of analysis that a critical scholarship must include.

Since, as we have seen, welfare systems both reflect and support gender systems, and since so many welfare recipients are women, we cannot understand these systems without considering the overall status of women. Studies of welfare lack explanatory power if they do not include the surrounding context of options for women – for example, contraception and abortion; deindustrialization and the relative increase in low-wage, unskilled, service jobs; the masses of women now in higher education; the contemporary conservative and religious revival which threatens many women's rights and benefits. A scholarship attentive to gender must also recognize as distinctly male many behaviours and expectations usually perceived as universal.

An accurate welfare scholarship must not only incorporate racial and gender relations of power as fundamental, but must also register the agency of these subordinated groups in the construction of programmes and policies. It must recognize the 'relative autonomy' of the welfare state from direct control by a unified ruling group and register instead that the state is a complex, multi-layered and **often** contradictory cluster. Its welfare arenas contain conflict at all levels, from the Congress to the caseworker's cubicle. This means, for example, that recent welfare reform should be examined in the context of the decline of a welfare rights movement, and a lack of unity among welfare 'experts' about what should be the content of

such rights if there are any. For example, the development of welfare 'rights' has been neglected by historians, and left to legal scholars, who examine not the social movements for welfare rights but their legal 'tracks'. These 'tracks' are ambiguous. Somewhere in the 20th century recipients gained some kind of legal claim to this 'welfare' and to judicial recourse if grants are denied without due process.⁶⁶ This recourse is of course mainly theoretical, since most welfare recipients by their very need for welfare are unable to mount suits to claim the rights. Moreover some scholars, notably those identified with the 'critical legal studies' movement, have taken a negative view of this rights discourse altogether, not only because the claimants are so often unable to make them real, but also because the claims are by nature individualized and individualizing, perhaps even antagonistic to collective action. An historical view belies that criticism, since there are many past instances of rights claims provoking, rather than dampening, collective militance. In the National Welfare Rights Organization during the late 1960s and early 1970s, the discourse that named AFDC a right was important in shaping not only the political potential of welfare recipients – their sense of themselves as citizens – but also their personal identities.⁶⁷

This acknowledgement of the power of social movements should not diminish understanding of the powerful weapons of domination that welfare programmes put in the hands of controlling groups. Sophisticated studies of welfare will need rather a better specification of the balance between 'structure and agency,' that is, between the long-term economic and ideological patterns that organize societies and the more short-term influence of politically active elites and subordinates. More particularly this will require synthesizing structural and functionalist critiques of the operation of welfare programmes with histories of their development. It will require a rejection of determinist models of historical narrative which assume that final outcomes were somehow inevitable and that defeated proposals were *ipso facto* impossible;⁶⁸ it means writing history with foresight as well as hindsight, so to speak, from the vantage point of participants who did not already know the outcome. It also means more effort to bring into scholarship the actual experience of welfare recipients. This is especially important because of the domination of welfare scholarship by technocratic 'experts' who not only narrow their focus to microeconomic questions but who usually exclude all but quantitative questions. Radical academics are in a position to challenge this definition of scholarship.

Another need is the fuller integration of evidence about minority groups and the influence of racial attitudes and practices throughout the society. Such considerations must include the racial content of the design of welfare programmes, the ways in which the experiences of minority welfare recipients have been distinctive, and the relation of civil-rights and other minority activism to welfare demands. To the extent that we have made any progress

in this area so far, it has been primarily about African-Americans and there has been a tendency to use the terms 'minority' and 'black' interchangeably. A racial analysis in turn suggests a needed advance in gender analysis: examining not only the relationships between women and other family members, and between women and the state, but among women as well. Women are not only divided by class, race, and other 'differences,' but may enter actual conflicts of interest with other women that directly affect their views on welfare policy. One obvious example has been the role of women as the employers of domestic servants, and the interest of the first group in maintaining other women's dependence on low wages. The concept of 'difference' does not capture what is at issue because it implies a pluralist multiplicity of stories which benignly coexist or interact; it may obscure relations of inequality, domination, and even exploitation among women.

Towards a New Welfare Politics

Gender-conscious scholarship on welfare is flourishing, but 'gender-blind' (or really, gender-obscuring) scholarship is also. This intellectual divide represents something about our historical moment: the women's movement produced a powerful feminist intellectual renaissance, within and without the universities; but it has never been hegemonic and is now facing particularly sharp attack from conservatives and dismissal as impractical from liberals. This is to say that gender is also involved in welfare scholarship through the personal and collective transformations of many feminist scholars; and to say that this body of scholarship is inseparable from politics. The feminist critique of welfare reflects our own raised aspirations for ourselves and other women. But the steadily increasing inequalities, increasing particularly dramatically in the US, implicate women as well as men and often separate intellectuals sharply from the **subjects/objects** of our work. Thus while the conservative attack on social services places us on the defensive, academics are also farther than ever from the poor. Probably none of us in the US, however critical, can remain uninfluenced and unfrightened by the increasing alarm about the growth of an 'underclass;' few of us know how to sort out the real evidence of increasing violence, disease, and child neglect from a moral panic.

A good example of the resulting political confusion was the 1988 US welfare reform (the Family Support Act) which, among other provisions, mandates 'workfare,' requiring single mother welfare recipients to find employment. This legislation reflects a combination of conservative motives (tax-cutting, racism, hostility to single mothers and women's sexual and reproductive independence) with an acceptance of mothers' employment that most liberals and Leftists share. Indeed, the reform rests on an alliance between those who believe that employment and reliance on

wages are on the whole strengthening to women and those who would use employment as a punishment for deviant women. Unfortunately the liberal as well as the conservative programmes are injurious to women, doing nothing to expand most women's choices beyond the alternatives of dependency (on men or the state) or inferior employment – underpaid, **nonunionized**, with poor **working** conditions. A democratic welfare reform will require a campaign against **sex** and race segregation in the labour force as well as against women's subordination in domestic life and labour. Thus the transformation of welfare into a **nonstigmatizing**, empowering system, one that **encourages** independence rather than dependence, must include a higher valuation of the work of child-raising and nurturance of dependents, an end to discrimination against women and minorities in the labour force, **and** a radical increase in employment opportunities overall.

This goal rests, too, on a redefinition of independence. We remarked above on how this notion described a male privilege, but we need also to question its very content as an ideal. The original meaning of independence, a word which appeared in English only in the 17th century, was: not needing to work for a living by having an independency, or competency – that is, a fortune. Since it was precisely such wealth that gave a man rights in early modern England, 'independence' also meant freedom. Later it evolved to describe the situation of a proprietor who owned everything he needed to live, such as land, tools, animals. In this pre-industrial and early industrial world, wage-earning meant dependence; it was a sign of the hegemony of capitalist political culture that wage-earning was redefined to mean the opposite, independence, thus denying or at least mystifying the abject dependence of workers on their employers. In this redefinition, women remained dependent, as non-wage-earners or lesser wage-earners, codified officially as dependents for tax purposes in the 20th century. Of course all these meanings are ideological, as all members of modern societies live in interdependence. Moreover the ideological functions support gender as well as class relations, justifying the undervaluing of unpaid reproductive labour and, through women's exclusive responsibility for it, the subordination of and disrespect for women. Thus a democratic welfare reform programme would include also a critique of fundamental social relations in capitalist society.

Clearly the articulation of a socialist-feminist welfare programme should be directed not only at other Leftists and other academics but also, somehow, at welfare recipients themselves. No serious reform seems possible in the absence of a strong movement of welfare recipients themselves, and it is hard to know what might bring that about. **This** is not, however, a good reason for silence or intellectual laziness among socialist-feminists with respect to welfare. Thinking and **talking** about these issues is a way of raising critical questions about our fundamental social organization.

NOTES

1. I have developed this point in my 'What Does Welfare Regulate', *Social Research* 55, 4, Winter 1988, pp. 609–30.
2. Oddly, this is less true of the conservative discussion. Commentors such as George Gilder and Charles Murray directly accuse feminism and resultant family breakdown as the source of welfare 'dependency,' and their goals explicitly include the maintenance of certain non-neutral gender patterns, especially the division of labour in the family. See Allen Hunter, 'Children in the Service of Conservatism: Parent-Child **Relations** in the New Right's Pro-Family Rhetoric,' University of Wisconsin Institute for **Legal Studies Working Paper 2–8, April 1988**, for **references**, especially George **Gilder**, *Wealth and Poverty* (NY: **Basic Books**, 1981) and Charles Murray, *Losing Ground. American Social Policy, 1950–1980* (NY: **Basic Books**, 1984).
3. This article appears, in another version, in my forthcoming anthology, *Women, the State, and welfare* (Madison: University of **Wisconsin Press**, 1990).
4. There are already several collections of feminist articles on welfare from the U.K., Norway, and **Australia**, for example: Cora V. Baldock and Bettina Cass, *Women, Social Welfare, and the State in Australia* (Sydney: Allen and **Unwin**, 1983); H. Holter, ed., *Patriarchy in a Welfare Society* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1984); Jane Lewis, ed., *Women's Welfare, Women's Rights* (London: **Croom Helm**, 1983); Jennifer Dale and Peggy Foster, *Feminists and the Welfare State* (London: Routledge and **Kegan Paul**, 1986). In Britain a stronger radical social-work perspective has produced more feminist scholarship on social welfare. There are excellent books such as Gillian Pascall's *Social Policy. A Feminist Analysis* (London: Tavistock, 1986) and Elizabeth Wilson's *Women and the Welfare State* (London: Tavistock, 1977).
5. Jill Quadagno, 'Theories of the Welfare State,' *Annual Reviews in Sociology* 13, 1987, pp. 109–128.
6. Robert Bremner, *From the Depths. The Discovery of Poverty in the United States* (NY: New York University Press, 1956); James T. Patterson, *America's Struggle Against Poverty 1900–1980* (Cambridge: **Harvard University Press**, 1981); Walter I. Trattner, *From Poor Law to Welfare State. A History of Social Welfare in America* (NY: Free Press, 1974, 1984); John Ehrenreich, *The Altruistic Imagination: A History of Social Work and Social Policy in the United States* (Ithaca: **Cornell University Press**, 1985); David A. Rochefort, *American Social Welfare Policy. Dynamics of Formulation and Change* (Boulder & London: **Westview Press**, 1986); Michael B. **Katz**, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse. A Social History of Welfare in America* (NY: Basic, 1986).
7. Patricia Huckle, 'The Womb Factor: Pregnancy Policies and Employment of Women,' in *Women, Power and Policy*, ed. Ellen Boneparth (NY: Pergamon, 1982), pp. 144–161.
8. Heide Gerstenberger, 'The Poor and the Respectable Worker: On the Introduction of Social Insurance in Germany,' *Labour History* 48, May 1985, pp. 69–85.
9. For example, **Patrich M. Horan** and Patricia Lee Austin in their 'The Social Bases of Welfare Stigma,' *Social Problem* 21 (1974), pp. 648–657, virtually ignore gender.
10. Linda Gordon, *Heroes of Their Own Lives: The Politics and History of Family Violence, Boston, 1880–1960* (NY: **Viking/Penguin**, 1988), chapter 4.
11. For examples, see Emily I. Abel, 'Adult Daughters and Care for the Elderly,' *Feminist Studies* 12 3, fall 1986, pp. 479–97; Laura Balbo, 'The Servicing Work of

- Women and the Capitalist State,' in *Political Power and Social Theory*, ed. Maurice Zeitlin (Greenwich, Ct.: JAI Press, 1982), pp. 251–270). On women as translating between money and needs, see Batya Weinbaum and Amy Bridges, 'The Other Side of the Paycheck: Monopoly Capital and the Structure of Consumption,' in *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism*, ed. Zillah Eisenstein (NY: Monthly Review Press, 1979), pp. 190–205.
12. Jill Quadagno, 'From Old Age Assistance to Supplemental Security Income: The Political Economy of Relief in the South 1935–1972,' in *The Politics of Social Policy in the United States*, ed. Margaret Weir, Ann Shola Orloff, and Theda Skocpol (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988); Jerry Cates, *Insuring Inequality: Administrative Leadership in Social Security, 1935–1954* (AM Arbor: University of Michigan, 1983); Harvard Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks. The Emergence of Civil Rights as a National Issue: The Depression Decade* (NY: Oxford, 1978); Raymond Wolters, *Negroes and the Great Depression: The Problem of Economic Recovery* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1970); Wolters, 'The New Deal and the Negro,' in John Braeman et al. eds, *The New Deal: The National Level* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1975).
 13. Martha Ackelsberg, 'Dependency, Resistance and the Welfare State. Contributions and Limits of Feminist Theory,' in *Gender and the Origins of the Welfare State*, Proceedings of Conferences at the Harvard Center for European Studies, 1987–88.
 14. The first to apply the characterization 'Whig' to a view that the progress of representative government led inevitably to the welfare state was probably Asa Briggs in his 'The Welfare State in Historical Perspective,' *Archives Européennes de Sociologie*, II 2, 1961, 221–258.
 15. Jill Quadagno, 'Theories of the Welfare State,' p. 112.
 16. Pascal, *Social Policy*, p. 9.
 17. Michael Shalev, 'The Social Democratic Model and Beyond: Two Generations of Comparative Research on the Welfare State,' in *Comparative Social Research* (1983) 6, 315–51; Quadagno, 'Theories of the Welfare State,' p. 115.
 18. This model is used by John Ehrenreich, *The Altruistic Imagination: A History of Social Work and Social Policy in the United States* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985).
 19. Frances Fox Piven, 'Ideology and the State: Women, Power, and the Welfare State,' in Gordon, ed., *Women, the State, and Welfare*; Linda Gordon, 'Family Violence, Feminism, and Social Control,' *Feminist Studies* 12 3, Fall 1986, pp. 453–478; this point is also extremely well argued in a review of Gordon, *Heroes of Their Own Lives* by AM Withorn, 'Radicalizing History: Writing about Women's Lives and the State,' *Radical America* 22 2–3, 1989, pp. 45–51.
 20. In the following discussion I am indebted to Theda Skocpol's 'Political Response to Capitalist Crisis: Neo-Marxist Theories of the State and the Case of the New Deal,' *Politics and Society* 10 2, 1980, 155–201.
 21. Ralph Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society* (London: Weidenfield & Nicolson, 1969).
 22. The difficulty in positing a homogeneous set of interests among men has been a problem for all theorizing about 'patriarchy' or male supremacy. This difficulty is one reason that I prefer an historical approach to conceptualizing male power, describing its actual operations in specific historical circumstances, examining class and ethnic groups among men as well as particular relations between men and women.
 23. Nicos Poulantzas, 'The Problem of the Capitalist State,' in *Ideology in Social Science*, ed. Robin Blackburn (NY: Random House, 1973).
 24. Fred Block, 'The Ruling Class Does Not Rule: Notes on the Marxist Theory of

- the State,' in *Revising State Theory. Essays in Politics and Postindustrialism*, ed. Fred Block (Philadelphia: Temple, 1987), pp. 51-68.
25. Theda Skocpol and John Ikenberry, 'The Political Formation of the American Welfare State in Historical and Comparative Perspective,' *Comparative Social Research* 6, 1983, pp. 87-148, for example.
 26. Skocpol's *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Politics of Social Provision in the United States*, forthcoming, may represent an improvement in her oeuvre in this regard.
 27. Michael B. Katz, *The Undeserving Poor: From the War on Poverty to the War on Welfare* (NY: Pantheon, 1989), pp. 122, 138, and passim. See also Robert Haveman, *Poverty Policy and Poverty Research: The Great Society and the Social Sciences* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987).
 28. Sylvia Law, 'Women, Work, Welfare, and the Preservation of Patriarchy,' *University of Pennsylvania Law Review* 131 6, May 1983, 1251-1331; Joan Cummings, 'Sexism in Social Welfare; Some Thoughts on Strategy for Structural Change,' *Catalyst* 8, 1980, 7-34; Hilary Land, 'Women; Supporters or Supported?' in *Sexual Divisions and Society: Process and Change*, ed. Diana Leonard Barker and Sheila Allen (London: Tavistock, 1979), pp. 1081.132; idem., 'Who Still Cares for the Family? Recent Developments in Income Maintenance. Taxation and Family Law,' in *Journal of Social Policy* 7 3, July 1978, 275-84.
 29. Pat Thane, 'Women and the Poor Law in Victorian and Edwardian England,' *History Workshop: A Journal of Socialist Historians* 6, Autumn 1978, 29-51.
 30. Gail Bushwalter King, 'Women and Social Security: An Applied History Overview,' in *Social Science History* 6 2, spring 1982, 227-232.
 31. Diana M. Pearce, 'Toil and Trouble: Women Workers and Unemployment Compensation,' *Signs* 10 3, spring 1985, pp. 439-59.
 32. Irene Diamond, 'Women and Housing: The Limitations of Liberal Reform,' in *Women, Power and Policy*, ed. Ellen Boneparth (NY: Pergamon, 1982), pp. 109-117.
 33. Mimi Abramovitz, *Regulating the Lives of Women. Social Welfare Policy from Colonial Times to the Present* (Boston: South End Press, 1988).
 34. Barbara Nelson, 'The Origins of the Two-Channel Welfare State: Workmen's Compensation and Mothers' Aid,' and Gwendolyn Mink, 'The Lady and the Tramp: Gender, Race, and the Origins of the American Welfare State,' both in Gordon, ed., *Women, the State, and Welfare*.
 35. For examples: Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse*, pp. 238-39; James Leiby, *A History of Social Welfare and Social Work in the United States* (NY: Columbia University Press, 1978), p. 247; Samuel Mencher, 'Status and Contract in Assistance Policy,' *Social Service Review* 25 1, March 1961.
 36. Haze Sorel Tishler, *Self-Reliance and Social Security 1870-1917* (Port Washington, NY: National University Publications, 1971), p. 142.
 37. Nelson, 'The Origins of the Two-Channel Welfare State'; Diana Pearce, 'Welfare is Not for Women,' in Gordon, ed., *Women, the State and Welfare*; Nancy Folbre, 'Intergenerational Transfer and the Origin of Social Security,' unpublished paper, Population Association of America, 1987.
 38. See my 'What Does Welfare Regulate?' *Social Research* 55 4, Winter 1988, pp. 609-630.
 39. Hilary Land, 'The Family Wage,' *Feminist Review* 6, 1980, pp. 55-77; Jill Roe, 'The End is Where We Start From: Women and Welfare Since 1901,' in *Women, Social Welfare and the State in Australia*, ed. Cora V. Baldock and Bettina Cass (Boston: George Allen & Unwin, 1983), 1-19; Jane Lewis, 'Dealing with Dependency: State Practices and Social Realities, 1870-1945,' in *Women's Welfare, Women's Rights*, ed. Jane Lewis (London: Croom Helm, 1983), pp. 17-37; Mary McIntosh, 'The

- Welfare State and the Needs of the Dependent Family,' in *Fit Work for Women* ed. Sandra Burman (NY: St. Martin's Press, 1979), pp. 153–172; Mimi Abramowitz, *Regulating the Lives of Women. Social Welfare Policy From Colonial Times to the Present* (Boston: South End Press, 1988), esp. chapters 1 and 3; Linda Gordon, 'What Does Welfare Regulate?'
40. Helene Silverberg, 'Women, Welfare and the State,' *Cornell Journal of Social Relations*, vol. 18, spring 1985, pp. 1–12.
 41. Michael Walzer, 'Socializing the Welfare State,' in *Democracy and the Welfare State* ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), pp. 13–26.
 42. Carole Pateman, 'The Patriarchal Welfare State,' in Gutmann, ed., *Democracy and the Welfare State*, pp. 231–260. See also her *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988). On issues of citizenship see also Susan Moller Okin, *Justice, Gender, and the Family* (New York: Basic Books, 1989).
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 45. Diana Leonard Barker, 'The Regulation of Marriage: Repressive Benevolence,' in *Power and the State*, ed. Gary Littlejohn et al. (NY: St. Martin's Press, 1978), pp. 239–266.
 46. Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (NY: Knopf, 1977); William Leach, *True Love and Perfect Union. The Feminist Reform of Sex and Society* (NY: Basic Books, 1980); Ellen DuBois and Linda Gordon, 'Seeking Ecstasy on the Battlefield; Nineteenth-century Feminist Views of Sexuality,' *Feminist Studies* 9 1, spring 1983; Linda Gordon, *Heroes of Their Own Lives: The History and Politics of Family Violence, Boston 1880–1960* (NY: Viking, 1988); Linda Gordon, 'Women and the Creation of Public Welfare, 1890–1945,' paper given at AHA/Smithsonian Institution conference on the Progressive Era, March 1988, unpub.
 47. Patricia Tulloch, 'Gender and Dependency,' in *Unfinished Business; Social Justice for Women in Australia* (Sydney: George Allen & Unwin, 1984), 19–37.
 48. Carol Brown, 'Mothers, Fathers and Children: From Private to Public Patriarchy,' in *Women and Revolution*, ed. Lydia Sargent (Boston: South End Press, 1981), pp. 239–67. Norwegian scholar Helge Maria Hernes conceptualizes this as a transition from private to public dependence; see her 'Women and the Welfare State. The Transition from Private to Public Dependence,' in Holter, *Patriarchy in a Welfare Society*, op. cit. U. S. Feminist philosopher Ann Ferguson makes a finer and somewhat different distinction between 'father patriarchy,' 'husband patriarchy' in the modern period, and 'public (capitalist) patriarchy.' See her 'On Conceiving Motherhood and Sexuality: A Feminist Materialist Approach,' in *Mothering. Essays in Feminist Theory*, ed. Joyce Trebilcot (Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Allanheld, 1984), pp. 153–182.
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- in *Rethinking the Family. Some Feminist Questions*, ed. Bame Thorne (NY: Longman, 1982), pp. 188-224.
52. Pateman, 'The Patriarchal Welfare State.'
 53. Piven, 'Ideology and the State.'
 54. Paula Baker, 'The Domestication of Politics: Women and American Political Society, 1780-1920,' *American Historical Review* 89 3, June 1984, pp. 620-47. On enlarging the notion of the political, see Linda Gordon, 'What Should Women's Historians Do: Politics, Social Theory, and Women's History,' *Marxist Perspectives* 3, fall 1978, pp. 128-136.
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 56. Linda Gordon, 'Race and Class Divisions in Women's Welfare Activism,' forthcoming.
 57. Gordon, *ibid.*
 58. Gordon, *Heroes of Their Own Lives.*
 59. Maureen Fitzgerald, 'Saints, Seduction, and Social Control: Irish Catholic Nuns and Immigrant Women in New York City, 1845-1900,' dissertation in progress, Department of History, University of Wisconsin.
 60. Nancy Hewitt, *Women's Activism and Social Change. Rochester, New York 1822-1972* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984.)
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 62. Gordon, *Heroes of Their Own Lives*; and Gordon, 'The Frustrations of Family Violence Social Work: An Historical Critique,' *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare*, XV 4, December 1988.
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 65. Laura Balbo, 'Family, Women, and the State: Notes Towards A Typology of Family Roles and Public Intervention,' in *Changing Boundaries of the Political*, ed. Charles S. Maier (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 201-219; Nancy Fraser, 'Struggle Over Needs: Outline of a Socialist-Feminist Critical Theory of Late-Capitalist Political Culture,' in Gordon, ed., *Women, the State, and Welfare.*
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