

THE 'UNDERCLASS' AND THE US WELFARE . STATE

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In the US as in Britain, conservatives – including those in the Democratic Party – repeatedly proclaim that the welfare state engenders dependency, laziness, and immorality, a new pauperism sometimes labelled with an old name – the 'underclass.' Under the force of that conservative attack, many liberals have joined in the **clamour** for or acceptance of cutbacks in social spending. Those on the Left who have resisted this moralizing against the very poor have been reduced to defending the puny and humiliating welfare provision we have in the US, so that our earlier radical critiques of the welfare system now seem frivolous and utopian. Even if one leaves aside questions of the accuracy and morality of this defence, it is not at all clear that it is instrumentally effective, because the negative consequences of the US welfare system are so palpably evident that our denial is transparently ideological.

Fifty years ago T. H. Marshall theorized a notion of a welfare state as a final, social, state of citizenship. His persuasive and optimistic idea arose in large part from the effort to make civil and political citizenship actual, acknowledging that poverty could effectively exclude people from actively exercising political rights or even defending their civil rights in a democracy.' Today it has become clear that not all versions of social citizenship are equally effective in providing a corrective to exclusion. It turns out that no type of citizenship is a binary, yes – or – no condition, free from stratification, and that certain constructions of social citizenship, certain welfare states, even as they extend the theoretical reach of citizens' entitlements and relieve poverty, may also worsen the exclusion of the poor from all kinds of citizenship.

These exclusions rarely target 'simply' the poor; they do not follow 'pure' class lines. Indeed, there is no such thing as simple poverty or pure class because these abstractions **cannot** encompass the actual, historical construction and reproduction of social divisions. In the US as in all modern states, social citizenship is organised according to gender, racial and familial as well as class systems. In US history, for example, **exclu-**

sions from first-class citizenship have affected not only those without property but also specifically American Indians, slaves, post-slavery African Americans, the Japanese during World War II, and women of all groups, to cite but a few examples.

I am interested here in a contemporary and expanding exclusion, that of an alleged 'underclass'.² I concentrate on one aspect of the construction of this 'class,' a paradoxical one. US welfare programmes, designed to alleviate poverty and even to mitigate inequality, ended by increasing inequality and exclusions from citizenship. Specifically, the Social Security Act of 1935 helped recreate the class structure in the US and in doing so promoted the development of an 'underclass.' The claim is not simply that Social Security's inequities and exclusions left some people economically disadvantaged, but that the legislation contributed also to civil, political and social inequities, exclusions from 'the edifice of citizenship,' which rendered some of the poor an 'underclass.'

The particular kind of exclusion I am discussing arose as the US state began to expand in the 19th century to include measures for the public welfare. Exceptionally poor, stigmatized strata have long existed in a variety of societies, but a uniquely modern, and now perhaps postmodern, discourse about an 'underclass' developed in the last 150 years to describe those who were at once the targets but not the beneficiaries of that state development. The state constructs citizenship hierarchy as much by inaction as by action, and, as we shall see, as much through the construction of discursive categories as through unequal distribution of funds and privileges.

I want to argue, first, that such definitional questions – connotative as well as denotative – are significant because they tell us, if approached historically, something about the work of this pejorative concept, work which reinforces exclusions from citizenship and confirms regressive social divisions. Second, I argue that the alleged group was created not only by economic developments, but also by deliberate state action; and third, that the group only takes shape out of relation to other groups. This paper springs also from a theoretical or metahistorical project, an attempt to integrate structural analysis of social problems with critique of how their meanings were constructed, including the role of social policy in creating these meanings.⁴

The Historical Career of 'Underclass' Talk

There *is* a distinction, albeit not always easy to draw, between the poor in general and that portion of the poor engaged in antisocial, destructive, and self-destructive behaviour. 'Underclass' is not only a middle-class concept used to beat up on the poor. Poor and especially working-class people distinguish and condemn this bad behaviour. In the US today, where

'welfare dependency' has become a synonym for the 'underclass' condition, poor and minority people are often as quick as the prosperous to perceive those who rely on government 'hand-outs' as disreputable and lacking in morals, in contrast to the employed. While some romantic outsiders and militant insiders have at times glorified criminal, daredevil, and violent behaviour, these have usually been men, and only some men, while women, often the victim of underclass behaviour, as of poverty itself, have been more sceptical if not downright hostile. The problem for a critical observer is to distinguish what is antisocial, destructive and self-destructive from what is impoverished, angry, and out of the 'mainstream,' to use the currently fashionable American word, and to cut through the moralism to analyse how an 'underclass' was produced discursively and structurally.

'Underclass' talk leapt into popularity in the US soon after Ken Auletta's 1981 *New Yorker* articles on the subject? If Auletta's usage hadn't grasped popularity, someone else's would have. The phrase attracts because it is so rich, encapsulating many escalating anxieties in the US – about increasing unemployment, continuing racial inequality and growing opposition to affirmative action remedies, women's changing sexual and reproductive behaviour and public participation, widespread use of hard drugs and dangerous weapons, highly visible homelessness, massive health problems and the near-collapse of public health facilities, the actual collapse of several state and local governments' ability to provide minimal services which are legally required, and the hegemony of a conservative agenda cultivating animosity to taxes.

'Underclass', like many politicized and moralized words, has fuzzy and often contradictory meanings. While social-science poverty experts have recently attempted to 'operationalize' a definition, popular usage only tangentially incorporates their instructions. Indeed, it is precisely the fuzziness of 'underclass' that gives the word its power. This particular word is one of a number of synonyms used widely in English for nearly a century and a half. Thus in the mid-19th century we meet 'dangerous classes,' 'outcast,' 'scum,' 'refuse,' 'residuum,' 'rough,' 'ragged,' 'lumpen,' 'casual poor,' 'paupers,' and many others. In the historical discussion that follows, comments about 'underclass' refer to many of its synonyms as well.

Because the concept is rich, its meanings contain a number of paradoxes and subtexts. First, the concept arose from efforts to distinguish among the poor, to create a distinction slightly different from that between the deserving and undeserving: this new line was to separate the benign from the dangerous. Yet in practice the work of 'underclass' and its synonyms has been to blur that line of demarcation by making a broad segment of the poor generally threatening. Second, 'underclass' talk had a contradictory

pity/revulsion/titillation effect. The earliest muckrakers, such as Henry **Mayhew** writing of the London poor beginning in 1849, often attempted to explain the bad conditions and behaviour of their objects of study in such a way as to excuse them on account of their very difficult environment and lack of choice. But the writers' attraction to extremely sensationalist, even disgusting stories of depravity, suffering, and stench stimulated more revulsion than sympathy. At the same time, especially in relation to women of the alleged 'underclass', the language contained strong pornographic undertones. Third, in this way as in others, 'underclass' talk has always contained **subtexts** about gender and often about race. Men, women, and members of different **racial/ethnic** groups gain the 'underclass' label in different ways, as we shall see. And fourth, in producing an 'othering' affect towards the 'underclass', making them appear alien in relation to readers, the rhetoric had the further effect of suggesting a fictive unity among the non-'underclass', among what in the 1990s US is often called the '**mainstream**,'⁶ as if there were no heterogeneity, immorality, and irresponsibility among the 'us'.

'Underclass' talk bears the marks of the specific historical context of its origin. The discourse arose with the growth of commercial and industrial **cities**. 'Underclass' is an urban **concept**.⁷ (For example, while there is a veritable industry of experts studying the urban 'underclass' today in the US, most agree that virtually nothing is known about **rural poverty**.⁸) Poverty and behaviour reprehensible to the hegemonic culture was of course widespread in the countryside. But an 'underclass' was discovered only when great cities, such as London, Paris, and later New **York**, put the very poor and the privileged side by side; and only when these crowded cities transformed certain practices which had been typical and unremarkable in the countryside – such as disposing of garbage by throwing it into heaps – into life-threatening perils. 'The very condensing of their number within a small space, seems to stimulate their bad **tendencies**.'⁹ 'Underclass' arose from a widespread but inadequately recognized historical phenomenon: the tendency of cities to attract more in-migrants than could be supplied with **jobs**.¹⁰ These structural conditions were then partly explained in terms of cultural or psychological attributes of victims.

'Underclass' talk was equally tied to the expansion of **states**. It appeared from groups interested in government reform action. The British 'discovery' of an underclass arose from state reform initiatives and from journalistic sensationalism aimed at provoking state action. Chadwick wrote both of his influential reports (1834 and 1842) for parliamentary inquiries. **Mayhew** intended his 'yellow' series of letters to a daily paper in 1849-50 to encourage public health and welfare provision.

The journalists, reformers, and government experts who initiated an

'**underclass**' alarm began their investigations to reveal the conditions of the entire working class but ended, consciously or not, emphasizing only the most wretched. They hoped thus to shock the powerful into action. In this they had some success, but not only in reformist directions. Their stories were so horrifying that they diverted attention from more average proletarian conditions. The mental and behavioural depravity they found among the 'underclass' was so threatening that the perhaps more common balance between decency and nastiness that characterized the proletariat, as the middle class, went unnoticed. The rhetoric of horror was much louder than that of sympathy, the condemnation of immoral behaviour much more vivid than the analysis of structural **causes**.¹¹

For example, the discussion of the Victorian 'underclass' often prioritized smell over the other **senses**.¹² (This consciousness of smell was equally important in constructing 'refinement' or 'gentility'.) Several commentators wrote of the 'miasma' which emanated from the poor neighbourhoods, of 'putrefaction,' 'vapours . . . that blind and **suffocate**.'¹³ The smells came from open cesspools, garbage and dead rats in the streets, the filth in the river and the 'sewage that passed as drinking water,' not from an 'underclass' **itself**.¹⁴ But the people who lived in such conditions became themselves polluted, literally and figuratively, with the stench. And they became contagious: in mid-19th century medicine, bad air was itself considered to be the source of infection. American warrior against the 'underclass' Charles **Loring** Brace described his Children's Aid Society as 'a moral and physical **disinfectant**.'¹⁵ The largest impact of these **exposés** of a mid-19th-century 'underclass' was to frighten and horrify, to make the objects of these writings appear dangerous, disgusting, and very likely **irredeemable**.¹⁶

The rhetoric about 'underclass' was above all moral, and structural explanations appeared as lame excuses. As Gareth Stedman Jones wrote about 'outcast London,' in the 'residuum the . . . psychological defects of individuals bulked even larger than before . . . The problem was not [perceived as] structural but moral, . . . not poverty but pauperism . . . with its attendant vices, drunkenness, improvidence, mendicancy, bad language, filthy habits, gambling, low amusements, and ignorance.'" We can see, in fact, a tendency of words originating in a variety of descriptive intents to converge in a moral register. For example, the 'miasma' caused by the waste-disposal practices of city dwellers – and the practices of the privileged classes were no better at this time, except that they had more space – soon became a personal characteristic of 'underclass' people, associated with their lack of individual hygiene: Or consider the term 'ragged,' which was first used literally to describe the clothing of the poor. Its usage became more and more metaphorical, and by the early 19th century one had 'ragged homes,' 'ragged Radicals,' and 'ragged schools' for the **poor**.¹⁸

Other words moved in a different, although not exactly opposite, direction: they began as condemnations of specific behaviour, but migrated to refer generically to entire groups whether or not all members of these groups exhibited such bad behaviour. Words such as 'dangerous classes,' 'disreputable,' 'underworld,' 'reckless,' and 'promiscuous' behaved this way.¹⁹ Supporting this expansion of terms to encompass large groups was the biologicistic language of the 19th century. Victorians, both in England and in the US, used 'race' in many absolutely vague senses: it could refer to a bewildering variety of ethnic groups, nations, religions. But it always had physicality in it, and was thus a group in which membership was inescapable, not chosen. In England the 'underclass' 'race' was further primitivized by being frequently called a 'tribe.' Thus the 'underclass' became in this rhetoric pre-civilized, at a lower level of human **development**.²⁰ An 1883 British journalistic series spoke of 'natural curiosities' akin to 'the Zenanas, the Aborigenes, and the South Sea Islanders.'²¹ These 'outcasts' were a 'residuum' 'left behind by the mid-Victorian march of moral and material **progress**.'²² Intermixed with this popular anthropology of the primitive was a discourse of exoticism, in which the titillation of fear and revulsion combined with that of sexual attraction. The depravity of the 'underclass' was formed of licentiousness, permissiveness, and lack of personal modesty. And of course wherever there was a sexual discourse there was a double standard and the complex mixed feelings so often directed by the elites towards the women of subordinated classes: attraction, hatred, and disregard.

'Underclass' depends for its meanings on a contrast with the respectable. All 'othering,' in fact, is produced by comparative, usually binary, assumptions and speech. The structure, membership, and values of the respectable were constructed by the contraposition. What is now in the US called the 'mainstream' (subsuming, as Christopher Jencks points out, both middle and working class) saw itself in the negative of the 'underclass'. Indeed, President Clinton's rhetoric in the US today contrasts welfare recipients with the 'middle class,' now defined as anyone with a job, thus liquidating the working class. This respectable majority became thus represented as homogeneous. This fiction was both self-fulfilling, as it pressured those who wanted to be 'mainstream' towards conformity, and also productive of hypocrisy, since it encouraged dissembling not only about behaviour but about wealth. In other words, the tendency to define an 'underclass' as an 'outcast' group supervises the behaviour of those who would be accepted as respectable; and then the spread of the term to take in more of the poor in **general** makes poverty itself disreputable and compels those who want to defend their respectability to separate themselves, both in public and in private consciousness, from the poor.

Separating the respectable from the disreputable is a highly gendered

exercise. Men and women of the 'dangerous classes' were threatening in different ways. The emphasis on tramps and bums, refusal to work, criminality and violence apparently directed attention to men, as did working-class hostility to scabs. Anxieties about sexual promiscuity, prostitution, and reproduction focused on women. Women of 'loose' sexual behaviour were regularly labelled as 'underclass' and, conversely, 'underclass' women were expected to behave immorally and thus to have no claim to protection or sympathy if they were assaulted. Women were dangerous reproducers in several meanings of that term: biologically, because they brought unwanted, delinquent children into the world; socially, because as mothers they passed on a defective culture to the next generation. Moreover, in the Victorian gender system, 'underclass' women were in some senses responsible for men's sins, because they failed at their prescribed task of domesticating men and disciplining them to work.²³

'Underclass' was also a racial term in the US. It soon became illustrated in the popular imagination by the immigrants who crowded the eastern cities after about 1880. Their otherness was in part religious, as **antiCatholicism** and **antiSemitism** characterized professional and upper-class Anglo-Saxon elites. The strange ways of the new immigrants, especially those from southern and eastern Europe and Asia Minor – their cuisines, drinks, dress, methods of child care and housekeeping – combined with their darker complexions to make them seem racially other. At the turn of the century fear of these poor strangers threatened to spread to the entire working class, now mainly immigrant, the disdain and revulsion usually reserved for the uniquely disreputable.

Starting in the mid-19th century there was also a counter-discourse about an 'underclass' that sought to defend the working poor. Marxist hostility to a *lumpenproletariat* expressed a common working-class perspective. 'Lumpen' means ragged too, but Marx and Engels hedged in their term with a more precise definition that did not spill over to stigmatize the poor in general. To the contrary, the heart of the lumpenproletariat in the Marxist view was its propensity to attack the working class, the labouring poor, by prostituting itself to a threatened capitalist class. I use a prostitution metaphor deliberately, for the 19th-century Marxists shared with liberals a sense of the importance of sexual respectability to the proletariat and to a viable working-class consciousness. If there were aspects of 'underclass' behaviour that might be defended as Bohemian, antiauthoritarian, or pleasure-loving, Marx would have none of them." His revolutionary followers were just as moralistic: Bukharin, for example, referred to the lumpenproletariat's 'shiftlessness, lack of discipline, hatred of the old, but impotence to construct or organize anything new, an individualistic declassed 'personality,' whose actions are based only on foolish caprices.'²⁴ His concept of

the vices of the 'underclass' shared with that of liberals and conservatives a vision of a slippery slope to hell, with the first skid being decline in the work ethic; his greatest fear was that the slide led to loss of class solidarity, which liberals and conservatives were, of course, happy to dispense with. Not only Marxists but most unionists saw the 'underclass' as a breeding ground for scabs and, worse, mercenary thugs, goons, infiltrators and provocateurs used by bosses and the state against strikers, demonstrators, and revolutionaries. This was, to them, the rabble, the masses as opposed to the classes, and, later, along with the *petite bourgeoisie*, the storm troopers.

The New Left produced an alternative analysis which led to a marginal defence of an 'underclass.' In criticizing institutions of 'social control,' such as prisons, schools, and asylums, New Leftists often suggested that norms of respectability were imposed on the poor by the upper **and/or** middle **classes**.²⁸ Respectability was sometimes labelled 'bourgeois' by the New Left. In fact, there was a strong set of working-class norms of respectability which included hard work, cleanliness, religion or church attendance, and community or class solidarity, and a disapproval of disreputable behaviour which did not come from 'above.' Recognizing this is not incompatible with recognizing that middle class social control often functioned to change these norms and to divide poor communities by inducing intolerance." But failure to recognize it has led to an opposite, often distinctly male, tendency to romanticize 'underclass' behaviour as rebellious, the opposite of 'uptight.' The attraction to vagabondage, irresponsibility, the street life, violence, was and remains highly gendered.

Marxists tried to integrate the concept into a class analysis by emphasizing its role in supplying a reserve army of labour. But this is not precise enough, for women have also functioned, Marxists argued, as a reserve army of labour without demonstrating the 'underclass' lifestyle that offended observers. Clearly 'underclass'ness always included lifestyle attributes, but for Marxists these were epiphenomena of structural locations. Moreover, a social class, as distinct from a stratum, is a relational concept; classes mutually produced each other through relations of production. By contrast in the common 'underclass' talk of the past or present, the group was defined in contrast to certain respectable classes, to be sure, but without suggestion that the respectable ones have produced the 'underclass' in the way that workers produce capitalists and vice versa.

Throughout the 19th century there was one dimension in which the 'underclass' appeared to arise from social-structural relations rather than individual character: this is the **notion** that public provision created an 'underclass'. Just as today's 'underclass' discussion focuses in part on the role of the welfare system so did that of the 19th century US, using above all the concept of pauperism. In the 16th century the term 'pauper' had

meant simply a poor person. By the late 19th century, it took on a more restricted definition, denoting a new class of persons who chronically subsisted on poor relief, had lost commitment to the work ethic and personal independence; the concept became increasingly derogatory.

In the late 19th century US, the newly professionalizing field of social work developed a theory of 'scientific charity' to which 'pauperism' was central. Foreshadowing the concern of today's conservatives, these social workers criticized earlier and traditional public provision for encouraging 'dependence' and discouraging 'independence' by indiscriminate giving. Not only were some of the poor undeserving of help, but careless help could create pauperism. As geographer David Ward described the hegemonic attitude towards the early 20th century slums, 'in order to limit the presumably damaging effects of relief on able-bodied workers, much attention was given to the size of a morally delinquent *residuum*.' Thus pauperism was sharply distinguished from poverty. Theoretically one could be poor without being a pauper, if one was hard-working and hopeful; indeed, in theory one could be a pauper without being poor, if one related to society as a sponger, although in practice such a usage of 'pauper' – which would have stigmatized many in the upper class – never caught on. Rather what happened, as with the language of 'dangerous classes,' is that the stigma of pauperism spread to include more and more of the poor, making the possibility of an honourable poverty disappear. Perhaps nothing expressed the horrifying stigma of pauperism as much as the possibility of being without a proper burial and ending up in a pauper's grave.

Politically, 'pauperism' became not only an argument against generosity towards the poor but also an early 'culture of poverty' analysis. Help could create pauperism not only in individuals but in groups and for generations. Charity leaders and social workers feared that social provision could accustom the poor to expect handouts without working and thus create a culture of pauperism which, once developed, could become self-perpetuating. This fear was not exclusive to one side of the political continuum. Although conservatives usually expressed themselves with more animus towards the poor in their characterizations of 'underclass' behaviour, socialists condemned the same behaviours. The 19th-century working-class mutual benefit societies that proliferated among virtually all ethnic groups in the cities also distinguished between the **deserving/undeserving** poor and carefully reviewed claimants of benefits to make sure that they were honest and upright." Right through the Progressive era in the US, social workers and activists continued to express anxiety that a too-good welfare system could pauperize unless accompanied by moral reform of the poor?"

But the 19th and early-20th-century discourse about pauperism did not

create an 'underclass' **alarum** in the US. The poverty, crime, and deviance that reformers saw in the immigrant ghettos of the early-20th-century US cities was integrated into a context of general optimism about these poor newcomers' possibilities of upward mobility. Not even the African-American ghettos resulting from the Great Migration into eastern and midwestern cities produced an 'underclass' discourse because these migrants, too, appeared to be on their way up.

'Underclass' warnings began to appear sporadically in the US between 1930 and 1970, mainly from the political **Left**.²² The Depression, of course, did not tend to provoke these fears because poverty was so widespread that its stigma decreased. Nevertheless, some observers began to observe **long-term**, structural changes within the economic emergency. Rexford **Tugwell**, for example, Franklin Roosevelt's Secretary of Agriculture, aware of the large-scale evictions of sharecroppers (induced by New Deal policies), predicted in 1934 the development of an 'underclass.' Revealingly, it was in the officially prosperous 1950s and 1960s that close observers of economic trends became aware of the problems identified by the label 'underclass' today. In an essay published in 1947 sociologist August Hollingshead discussed the 'scum of the **city**.'²³ By 1966 sociologist David **Matza** wrote about the 'disreputable poor,' astutely concluding that the future development of this stratum depended on the outcome of the 'Negro mobilization,' *i.e.* the civil rights **movement**.²⁴ Socialists Michael **Harrington** and Stanley Aronowitz raised the spectre of a hereditary 'underclass' in 1963.²⁵ The Department of Labor began to report on 'Men in Poverty Neighborhoods' affected by residential segregation, unemployment, low pay, and high rates of marital breakup, although it used no synonym of '**underclass**'.²⁶ The most important of these predecessors of the contemporary debate was, of course, the 'Moynihan Report' of 1965, to be discussed below. The term may have been slow to become common in the US because of lingering notions that it was a classless society; a 1977 **Time** article attributed the concept of an 'underclass' to 'class-ridden **Europe**.'²⁷ **Examining** this semantic history, we see that it was not until after several decades of increasing immiseration and its attendant demoralization that the concept of 'underclass' reached popular usage.

Welfare Constructs an 'Underclass'

The Great Depression of the 1930s and the US version of a Popular Front government – the New Deal – created a more democratic political culture, lessened the stigma on poverty and unemployment, and gave rise to the first major federal government programmes against poverty since Reconstruction and the Freedmen's Bureau. Nevertheless, the 'underclass' that was harvested in the 1980s had been fertilized in the New Deal.

In 1934 and 1935 when the Social Security Act was debated, there was

no fear of long-term labour redundancy or overpopulation. No one considered the massive unemployment rates of the Depression to be permanent. Just a few years previously, southern landowners had been struggling to insulate their sharecroppers from the call of northern industrial jobs. President Franklin **Roosevelt's** social policy-makers focused not on an 'underclass' but on mass unemployment affecting even the previously stable and prosperous working class and lower middle class. Influenced by some Keynesian ideas, Roosevelt wanted to relieve the unemployed (particularly those who were Democratic voters), pump up the economy with new consumer spending power, and erect permanent barriers against another such terrible collapse.

When Roosevelt established a Committee on Economic Security to draft a welfare bill for him in 1934, he opened the door to a small but passionate stream of welfare thought that had been growing in the US since at least 1890. This stream had two tributaries, about which I have written at length elsewhere, but which must be reviewed [here](#).³⁷ One was identified with the notion of 'social insurance,' had been much influenced by European, particularly German, proposals, and focused on programmes to replace wages lost through unemployment, disability, or death. An earlier enthusiasm for health insurance provoked such opposition from the American Medical Association, the physicians' guild, that social-insurance proponents dropped it in favour of proposals more likely to succeed. A second branch of welfare thought had grown from the charity and then social work tradition. It focused on helping the most needy, notably women, children, and the infirm. This group of social workers believed strongly that the injuries of poverty were not only economic, and that the poor needed not only money but also other kinds of help, including medical care, education, counselling, for example.

The class and race standpoint from which these two approaches arose were similar – virtually all the influential welfare proponents were white and from privileged families and most were Protestants. But they differed sharply by sex. The social-insurance group was almost exclusively male and its perspective showed this. At the turn of the century, women alone with children were disproportionately impoverished as they are today, but social-insurance writings almost never mentioned the needs of women or children. Social insurance was designed in part to regulate the labour market and in part to maintain male breadwinners as heads of families and households. The recipient of social-insurance aid was envisaged as a male head of household and a prominent part of this vision was to provide payments in ways that did not reduce his dignity and authority. Thus the social-insurance planners designed programmes in which the receipt of help would be a dignified entitlement, ensuing automatically from a contractual position. In the two major programmes they created in the

Social Security Act (old-age pensions and unemployment insurance), they devised special, earmarked forms of taxation so that the benefits would appear to be independent of traditional government relief.²⁸

Meanwhile, by the turn of the century the strong US women's movement, making its influence felt through the many women active in charity, social work, and social reform, had given rise to a distinctly female approach to welfare.²⁹ The social-work profession and its associated **social-reform** network were feminized, imbued with the **maternalist** views of several generations of social reformers. The greatest lasting victory of this group was in the mothers'-aid laws, programmes passed by most states in the US between **1910** and **1930** providing public aid to some needy single mothers with children, usually widows but sometimes also including deserted wives and unmarried mothers. Indeed, it is a measure of the strength of this women's welfare network that these mothers'-aid laws were the only area of welfare state development in which the US did not lag behind European countries.

By the Depression, the **left** edge of the **women's/social** work coalition was proposing a truly progressive approach to welfare, breaking with both the charity tradition and with the social-insurance model. Leaders such as the social-democratic-leaning Edith Abbott and the Communist-leaning Mary Van **Kleeck** proposed programmes of universal government support for those who were, for whatever reason, un- or under-employed. And, like other New Dealers, they counted on public medical insurance and public jobs when necessary. There was substantial support for these proposals, particularly from unions.

But Roosevelt did not believe that his Democratic Party coalition, resting as it did on conservative southerners as well as the white working class, would support such a turn and instead appointed a far more cautious group to write his welfare legislation, which was to become the Social Security Act. The drafting group rejected the more generous and universal proposals coming from the Left, male and female, and sought participation only from the more mainstream social-insurance and **charity/social** work tendencies. Then, instead of choosing between these two historically different approaches, the group compromised in typical Rooseveltian fashion, giving each tendency several programmes of its own. In fact the social insurance proponents were dominant, but precisely because they believed their programmes to be the wave of the future, and public assistance programmes would become increasingly marginal, they did not see that their compromise would create a lasting stratification.

In the resultant legislation, "two major new social-insurance programmes, unemployment compensation and old-age insurance, were written by social-insurance men. The social-work women who wrote Aid to Dependent Children did little new conceptualization at all but merely

added federal money to existing state and local mothers'-aid programmes. In fact, the eleven titles of Social Security installed at least five different programme models. But for the sake of my argument here, about the construction of an 'underclass,' one dichotomy looms particularly large – that between social insurance and Aid to Dependent Children (ADC).” Let me enumerate some of these contrasts.

(1) While social insurance coverage was not reserved for the poor but based on employment factors – e.g., employment by employers of a certain size, steady employment for a certain length of time – ADC was exclusively for the very needy. It was means-tested so as to prevent those not in need from collecting, and those with any substantial personal resources, such as home-ownership, were excluded. ADC recipients were often required to divest themselves of resources, such as a house, in order to receive aid.

(2) While social-insurance benefits were paid in such a way as to preserve a claimant's privacy, ADC benefits included supervision. A man receiving unemployment compensation or old age **insurance** could spend his entire benefit on opium, liquor, or gambling and live in a pigsty, with the clerk who administered his payment being none the wiser. A woman receiving ADC would be assigned an individual caseworker who would require her to prepare a weekly or monthly budget to make sure that the stipend was being properly used; she would receive home 'visits' by caseworkers to evaluate her standards of housekeeping, child-care, and domestic morality. To receive benefits, the ADC applicant had to position herself as a supplicant requesting help, one who might be refused, while the social insurance recipient merely claimed his rights.

(3) Social insurance went to the covered person as an individual. Although the justification for these programmes sometimes dwelt on the plight of the worker's dependents should he fail to bring home wages, in collecting his benefit his entitlement was as an individual. He received the same amount regardless of his number of dependents, and they could leave or he could cut them off without losing his benefit. **ADC** by contrast was doled out in differential amounts according to need. ADC was officially not a payment to an adult individual at all but to the support of children in the care of their mother. Since the mother had no individual entitlement, her receipt of a stipend was dependent on her proving that she was spending it on her children and not on herself.

(4) **Social** insurance payments were designed to be big enough that a recipient and his family might live on them, and they soon became indexed to inflation. ADC was never sufficient to support a family, rarely even an individual, and it shrank with inflation.

(5) Social insurance was designed to prevent poverty with money. Its assumptions were that this was what men needed to retain their health,

dignity, citizenship, and family authority, and it self-consciously broke with the charity legacy of suspicion that the poor lacked character. ADC, by contrast, denied that money alone could solve the problems; it rested on the conviction that poor single mothers also needed counselling, rehabilitation, guidance.

(6) Social insurance was based on the workplace – eligibility was defined in terms of certain standards of employment, and some of the money was collected as an employment tax. This was deemed essential by its designers, not technically but politically. Social insurance could have been as easily paid for from taxes, and entitlements attached to citizenship; in practice, for example, old-age insurance funds were used by the US government for other expenditures, and the stipends were not in fact directly connected to employees' contributions. The creation of apparently separate contributions was designed to make social insurance *appear* an entitlement which could not be abrogated and thus to separate it from poor relief. Public assistance, by contrast, appeared as charity, paid for by others, unconnected to work or to any other kind of contribution to society made by its recipient.

All these differences were fundamentally gendered. The supervision inherent in the ADC model assumed a subordination of the client that was culturally acceptable for women but not for men." Its smaller stipends were understood as appropriate because their recipients – single mothers – were not 'real' heads of households but only temporary caretakers during men's absence. Furthermore, even those policy-makers who had observed the considerable numbers of single mothers saw that phenomenon as dangerous and disorderly, and insisted that public provision not function to encourage it. Gender norms of the time did not include imagining women as supporting families. Even women alone were conceived to need less to live on than single men." Citizenship and its entitlements were still conceived primarily as male. After all, most of the mothers'-aid laws on which ADC was based were passed before women could vote, and woman suffrage was still a new innovation in the 1930s. Men had rights, women had needs. And men particularly had a right to personal privacy, while it was acceptable for women to plead for help and to be supervised. All these distinctions were naturalized by the association of social insurance with the workplace, which remained a predominantly male sphere.

The agreement to include two kinds of programmes was in part a political compromise, giving two groups each a plum. It was also a compromise based on a mutually accepted division of labour, between male-style and female-style programmes, and that division in turn was acceptable because it rested on considerable agreement. Both groups considered social insurance the master plan. It was a set of programmes designed to rescue male family heads from undeserved destitution, and to

support these men's dependents indirectly. The women accepted the theory that women and children would be adequately provided for as dependents of male breadwinners. Both groups understood that some individuals would not be covered by a family head's entitlement, such as unmarried mothers, but both expected these groups to be small. One figure may provide a vivid example: the first appropriation asked for by the women who designed ADC, reflecting their sense of the size of the problem, was \$25 million, to provide for an expected 288,000 families. Moreover, they expected the need to *decline* over time, because more women and children could collect benefits as the dependents of social-insurance beneficiaries, and because amelioration of poverty and unemployment would reduce the number of single mothers. They could hardly have been more wrong. In fiscal year 1991 the total spent on ADC was \$20.3 billion, serving 4,362,400 families – and this was after amendments had shifted many of these single-mother families to the social-insurance programmes.

Except for a few radical feminists, both male and female welfare advocates assumed the same gender system. Their joint premise was the family wage, the belief that men should be the sole breadwinners for families. This premise was also the source of the ADC authors' gross mistake in estimating the need for ADC. So strong was their belief in the family-wage *norm* that it blinded many experts to the *reality* about how many single and working mothers there were. (As many children lived with single mothers in 1930 as in 1960 – about 9 percent; the majority of working-class men could not support their families single-handedly but relied also on women's and children's earnings.) So strong was their belief in the family-wage *rule* that many welfare advocates were reluctant to subvert it by making it too easy for single mothers to maintain themselves as heads of families.

Recently feminist scholars have sometimes conceptualized these gender norms and rules as imposed by men on women. On the contrary, the fundamental determinants of the *gender/family* system were widely, almost universally, supported by both men and women welfare reformers. It was not until the 1960s that most feminists began to question the necessity of male-headed families. The *maternalist* feminists who wrote ADC believed that close supervision was important to poor single mothers, whom they believed to be in need of encouragement, education in rational and modern housekeeping and child-care methods, and protection from immoral temptation."

If the first reason for the two-track welfare system was the intersection of economic need with the gender system, the system was soon influenced even more powerfully by the racial system. Let us recall the racial construction of citizenship in the US in the 1930s. Blacks remained concentrated in the South where they were almost entirely disfranchised

and deprived of most rights pertaining to citizenship; white southerners and many northerners simply did not perceive Blacks as full citizens. The South was a one-party Democratic region and it was an essential part of **FDR's** electoral coalition. Because southern politicians were uncontested in elections, they acquired seniority in the Congress, and seniority within the majority party was at the time the only principle determining Congressional leadership. Southern Democrats thus controlled powerful Congressional committees which had to approve legislation before it could reach the floor, and they knew that a federal government welfare programme would loosen the stranglehold that southern landowners maintained on their low-wage agricultural labour force, notably sharecroppers but also urban workers and domestic servants.

So key Southern Congressmen and Senators insisted on crucial amendments to the Social Security Act, and Franklin Roosevelt and his advisers believed that surrender on these amendments was the price of getting Social Security passed. First, they eliminated agricultural and domestic workers – most Blacks, Latinos, Asians and American Indians – from the social insurance programmes. More minority and white women workers – usually employed by small businesses, often dropping in and out of the labour force – were also excluded. Second, amendments to the public assistance programmes, which were operated on the basis of joint **federal-state** funding, eliminated federal controls which might have prevented southern states from discriminating. State and local authorities were thus left free to determine eligibility for public assistance, and they systematically excluded most minorities.

The groups left out – Blacks and other poor minorities, white women, single mothers especially – are precisely the core of the 'underclass' today. Since then, most readjustments of the US welfare system have given more to those in its upper strata programmes and reduced the value of benefits to those served by the inferior programmes.

The terms of social citizenship installed or confirmed by Social Security had consequences for civil and political citizenship. **ADC** recipients often found their civil rights curtailed – denied the right to interstate travel (by state residency requirements), to due process (by administrative procedures allowing for termination of benefits before a hearing and long delays in holding hearings), to privacy (by constant means- and 'morals'-testing), to protection from unreasonable search and seizure (by unannounced home inspections, the famous 'midnight searches')."

But perhaps most consequential among these restrictions on citizenship was the message that receipt of **ADC** constituted a type of 'dependency,' a parasitism, that was incompatible with the honourable status of citizen. The issue is not just unequal stratification. It is that these programmes solidified a distinction already present embryonically – that some

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government provision is an entitlement while some is charity; that some is earned and deserved, while some is not. We see this in American usage today: the good programmes are called by specific names – Social Security or Unemployment Compensation; the main second-class programme, ADC, is called 'welfare,' a last resort and mark of shame. The nature of the second-class programmes steadily escalates resentment: the supervision is costly to taxpayers, the means-testing keeps alive a fear that recipients are cheating, the morals-testing stimulates a sense of widespread immorality at government expense. Small wonder that the recipients hate the programme as much as do wealthier taxpayers. While recipients of Social Security old age insurance feel as entitled as veterans, accepting their payments almost as a symbol of citizenship, ADC recipients are likely to experience their payments virtually as proof of noncitizenship. They receive so many messages in which they are described as parasitical, dependent, disreputable, immoral, and greedy that it is a wonder that any are able to value themselves and their parenting work. It is not surprising that so many studies show that the poor share some of the same hostility to 'welfare' that the middle class do. Today to most Americans the 'underclass' *is* the welfare class.

Contemporary 'Underclass' Talk

'Underclass' rhetoric in the US today **carries** some of the same charge as that of Victorian England. The discourse is almost entirely urban and **state-centred**, dwelling on state responsibility in the past or future. It often appears in the most liberal discourse, aimed at securing more resources for social benefits. Thus a liberal child-welfare scholar refers to a 'new class of 'untouchables' . . . emerging in our inner cities . . . young people who are functionally illiterate, disconnected from school, depressed, prone to drug abuse and early criminal activity, and eventually, parents of unplanned and unwanted **babies**.'⁴⁵ A lawyer in a 1982 Saul Bellow novel, well-meaning but despairing, explains:

Your defendant belongs to that black underclass everybody is openly talking about, . . . economically 'redundant,' . . . falling farther and farther behind the rest of society, locked into a culture of despair and crime – I wouldn't say a culture, that's a specialist's word. There is no culture there, it's only a wilderness, and damn monstrous, too . . . a people denuded. And what's the effect of denudation, atomization? . . . just a lumpen population . . . nothing but death before it . . . They kill some of us. Mostly they kill themselves.⁴⁶

Metaphors of primitivism, ugliness, redundancy, and sexual license proliferate. As in the last century, the word attempts to distinguish the respectable from the disreputable poor but in practice stigmatizes all the urban and especially the minority poor. Print, broadcast, and movie **exposés** of ghetto life, drugs, and drive-by shootings evoke and escalate the combined pity/revulsion/titillation effect, as in the 19th century. The

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'underclass' concept remains fundamentally moral despite the continued attempts of experts to define it objectively. Indeed, working-class and poor people often use the 'underclass' concept to place themselves in the 'mainstream' by distinguishing themselves from the disreputable. And the 'underclass'/'mainstream' dichotomy offers a binary taxonomy of 'class' which substitutes for a more complex analysis and deflects attention from the actual distribution of resources and power.

The gender, racial and familial meanings are abundantly clear, in the professional as in the popular discourse. Today in the US the dominant scholarly definition of 'underclass' employs four indicators: chronic joblessness or 'weak labour-force attachment', welfare 'dependence,' social isolation in ghettos, and several kinds of social deviance. Experts argue that these are objective and sex- and race-neutral. Let us consider these claims. For example, what does chronic joblessness, or 'weak labour-force attachment' as it is often called, mean for women? 'Weak labour-force attachment' was the preferred normative behaviour for the majority of US women until a generation ago, and labour-force discrimination along with responsibility for children combine to concentrate women in unstable jobs. Moreover, women's responsibility for raising children makes it difficult for many women to hold jobs that do not allow them to meet children's needs (such as medical insurance, sick leave, parental leave, flexible hours, ready access to telephone for personal conversations). Defining 'underclass' in terms of welfare 'dependence' is equally problematic. Women's responsibility for raising children is the main reason most of them collect 'welfare;' caring for dependents makes them 'dependent.' Moreover, 'dependence,' too, has been part of the female norm; what is different, in terms of 'dependence,' between a woman raising small children on a husband's allowance and a woman raising small children on a government allowance? Behavioural definitions are equally problematic in the absence of gender analysis. Women are less often active in crime and drug-selling, and when they are they are often tools, frequently involuntary, of men. Many women could be said to become 'underclass' because of their dependence on 'underclass' men, just as many women enter the middle class because of their dependence on men. Indeed, many husbands and boyfriends react aggressively, even abusively, precisely when women show signs of gaining independence. Women who seek escape from their dependence on unreliable men, thus becoming single mothers, end up in the same 'underclass' by a different route. A central 'deviance' which defines the 'underclass' today is by definition female – teenage pregnancy and out-of-wedlock childbirth. In the standard discussion of these censured behaviours, men are so absent that one might assume the conceptions were immaculate. Thus we read that 'women who start their families before marriage and before the end of

adolescence [are] the main engine propelling the underclass disaster.'" Out-of-wedlock fatherhood is out of sight. So inadequate parenting is an exclusively female deviance; fathers are virtually never charged with child neglect.⁴⁹

Racial structures, equally, underlie 'underclass' talk. What does 'weak labour-force attachment' mean for minorities? Discrimination always created disproportionate levels of unemployment and underemployment among them. As late entrants into the industrial economy many migrated from the agricultural South or Southwest, or into the US from Mexico, just as the long expansionist phase of US industrial production ended. In shop closings, labour-force reductions and other manifestations of **deindustrialization**, minorities were often the last hired and thus the first fired. Forced onto reservations, American Indians were often far from available jobs. Measuring weak or strong labour-force attachment does not make useful distinctions between the ordinary poor and the 'underclass' poor among young minorities who are chronically jobless. Nor is 'social isolation in ghettos' a sharp discriminating measure given patterns of residential segregation which affect many employed and even middle-class as well as poor minority people. Out-of-wedlock childbearing has considerably different meanings for poor Blacks and middle-class whites. Not only is disapproval of out-of-wedlock childbirth and female-headed households less in African American than in European American family culture. In addition, Black female-headed households are often extended, taking non-nuclear family members and non-kin as an antipoverty strategy. (From the 1940s through 1980, female-headed households were twice as likely to be extended as male-headed **households**.)⁵⁰ Furthermore, teenage childbearing is less costly to poor women, whose chances of escaping poverty are not significantly reduced by early motherhood.

Welfare 'dependence' among minorities also has had historically different meanings. We have seen that racial minorities were originally excluded from most programmes of government provision. In the 1950s and 1960s, poor minority mothers took the lead in asserting their rights to receive welfare aid. Claiming welfare was an economic strategy developed in adaptation to a severely discriminatory labour market; using it as a criterion for 'underclass' membership ignores the ways in which it was precisely part of an effort not to be '**underclass**.'⁵¹ The welfare-rights movement that grew in the late 1960s was at once a part of the civil-rights and women's movements. Its members saw 'welfare' as a citizenship entitlement not unlike education and suffrage for which they were simultaneously struggling. Equally **important**, they enunciated a more dignified image of the work of poor single mothers; their rhetoric prefigured '**wages-for-housework**' analyses of domestic labour. In the late 1960s they mobilized progressive lawyers who helped force the courts to restrict some

of the infringements of their constitutional rights that **ADC** had created: they stopped unwarranted searches of their homes, won the right to prior hearings before termination of benefits, and stopped residence requirement~: Seen historically, rising welfare claims were in some ways a sign of increasing resourcefulness and self-esteem among poor and especially minority single mothers, a step towards first-class citizenship, and not necessarily a sign of impoverishment or character flaw.

That 'underclass' definitions are not sex- or race-neutral is not marginal but central to the problem, because minority men and women and white women are so disproportionately represented in the 'underclass.' Current estimates calculate that the 'underclass' is 60 percent Black, 20 percent other minority, and 20 percent white. At least 60 percent of 'underclass' families are headed by single **mothers**.⁵³ These groups are prominent among those excluded from the better Social Security programmes.

Moreover, US welfare programmes constructed social citizenship from two sides – that of the poor and that of the non-poor, those excluded and those included. Social Security built entitlements and a sense of membership in the polity for some even as it denied citizenship to others." Its benefits to middle-class and upper-working-class men and their dependents were greater, absolutely and proportionately, than its contributions to the poor. In the **1980s**, eighty percent of the US social welfare budget flowed to the **non-poor**.⁵⁵ These welfare benefits accounted for a larger share of the economic advancement of the middle class over time than income. That is, more employed people would have been poor had it not been for government provision. Even the War on Poverty contributed more to the non-poor than to the **poor**.⁵⁶ In the last fifty years, the 'good' Social Security programmes got steadily better. Old Age Insurance benefits were increased, protected against inflation, and extended to more beneficiaries, especially dependents. By contrast, the real value of AFDC and other public assistance programmes fell and through 1970s eligibility criteria began to exclude more of the **poor**.⁵⁷ And these benefits, unlike those of social insurance, were unreliable: millions of recipients were at times cut off because of administrative errors, caseworkers' judgements, or client errors in filling out paperwork. Moreover, AFDC regulations created disincentives to upward mobility: for example, extended family strategies, so common among the poor and especially the Black poor, conflicted with welfare requirements and often led to suspension of benefits.

Unequal citizenship was reinforced by the social and cultural meanings constructed around Social Security's tracking system. The dynamic in which the well-off got more and the poor got less accelerated over time within the Social Security system. For example, the fact that recipients of old-age insurance were labelled as entitled by Social Security strengthened their lobbying power, which in turn strengthened their identity as entitled

still further. Public assistance claimants, meanwhile, identified as parasites, grew poorer and more stigmatized, which in turn undercut their ability to organize to create political pressure, and their lack of organizational strength then further weakened their ability to offer a counter-discourse. Nothing illustrates this better than the substantial gains welfare claimants made during the period in which they built the National Welfare Rights Organization, and their losses since the decline of that organization in the 1970s.

As a result, even during periods defined as prosperous, the 1950s and 1960s, relative indicators for stigmatized groups moved downward. For example, even while Black employment and income was growing, Blacks' share of unemployment steadily increased. And the numbers of the poor who were marginally employed also increased, notably those who could not get into full-time major industry jobs but depended on service-sector, seasonal, temporary employment.

Some qualifications must be reemphasized: of course the Social Security Act was not the only social policy that contributed to creating an 'underclass.'³⁸ Nor was Social Security's influence all in the direction of inequality. But opposite trends were developing even in these decades usually labelled prosperous. For these the state must share responsibility with the society. Still, understanding the contribution of the welfare system to the politics of resentment of the poor, and resultant hatred of 'welfare,' is an important historical lesson in the context of today's backlash against social citizenship.

Indeed, because that backlash is by no means confined to the US, it would seem useful to internationalize scrutiny of the negative effects of the design of welfare programmes. The US experience suggests that welfare structures themselves have been important components in the erosion of popular support for the welfare state and for the possibility of ending poverty and reducing inequality. Words and meanings are very important here: a New York Times poll recently showed that almost half of Americans support cutbacks in 'welfare' but oppose cutbacks in support for poor children! Since the New Deal, polls have suggested that the public strongly supports those welfare programmes it benefits from, while welfare that is 'targetted' (a revealing metaphor) on the poor quickly loses popularity among the nonpoor. Moreover, the public supports government programmes that produce visible, tangible goods, such as good schools, safe and clean neighbourhoods and parks. By **contrast, welfare** that is so stingy and underfunded that it cannot reduce poverty, crime and filth loses popularity. Thus stigmatization, fragmentation, stratification and stinginess of welfare provision erodes support for welfare.

Such stratification also undermines possibilities for unity or even solidarity among the working class. Historical inquiry into the roots of an

'underclass' demonstrates the severe and lasting costs of sex and race inequalities within the working class. We face today a bitter contradiction: although women's and civil rights movements of the last thirty years have had some success in delegitimizing sex and race prejudice, the welfare state has institutionalized **and perpetuated** discriminations based on the prejudices of sixty years ago. **New Deal** welfare programmes took differences then widely perceived as natural and gave them materiality and endurance by institutionalizing them in the state. Welfare stratification created by **past** forms of domination increases the obstacles to challenging other forms of domination today. Welfare structures not only carry the dead weight of the past into the present but provide rallying points for dangerous hate-mongering along new lines, demonizing single mothers, gays, the poor. While prosperous women and minority men have improved their positions considerably, the poor are harvesting rather a **renewed** stigma. Resentments against women and minority men sowed by the structures that consigned so many to second- or third-class citizenship are pushing many constituencies formerly central to the socialist or social-democratic projects far to the Right.

If we are to struggle against this new 'class' ideology that pits the 'middle class' or 'mainstream' against the poor, it is important to take careful note of how much of this ideology arises from definitions of welfare state activity. The questions of what counts as 'welfare,' as 'dependency,' as 'entitlement,' and as 'work' need to be contested. The **decisions** taken by the Democratic Party in the US and the Labour Party in Britain to pander to reactionary definitions of these concepts, and to join in the **scape-**goating of single mothers and the very poor, can only further erode the political possibilities of the Left.

NOTES

1. Nancy **Fraser** and Linda Gordon, 'Contract Versus Charity: Why Is There No Social Citizenship in the United States?' *Socialist Review* 22 #3, July-September 1992, pp. 45-67; idem, 'Civil Citizenship against Social Citizenship?' in *The Condition of Citizenship* ed. Bart van Steenberg (London: Sage, 1994), pp. 90-107.
2. In fact the word 'underclass' was more common in the US ten years ago – even in 1991 when I began this research – than it is today. Nevertheless, the numbers of people included by the concept, and the pejorative discussions of them, have continually grown.
3. Ralf **Dahrendorf**, *Law and Order* (London: Stevens & Sons, 1985), p. 98.
4. See my *Pitied But Not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare* (New York: Free Press, 1994).
5. Published as Ken Auletta, *The Underclass* (New York: Vintage, 1983).
6. E.g., Ricketts, Erol R. and Isabel V. **Sawhill**, 'Defining and Measuring the Underclass,' *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* vol. 7, No. 2 (1988), pp. 316-325; Barbara Schmitter **Heisler**, 'A Comparative Perspective on the Underclass: Questions of Urban Poverty, Race, and Citizenship,' *Theory and Society* 20, 1991, pp. 455-483; 'Defining Help for the Underclass,' *America*, vol. 155, Oct. 11, 1986, pp. 177-178; William Julius Wilson, 'Cycles of Deprivation and the Underclass Debate,' *Social Service Review*, Vol.

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59, No. 4, (December 1985), pp. 541–559.

7. L. Chevalier, *Classes laborieuses et classes dangereuses a Paris, pendant la premiere moitié du XIX siècle*, Paris 1978.
8. Rural Sociological Society Task Force on Persistent Rural Poverty, *Persistent Poverty in Rural America* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1993).
9. New York Children's Aid Society, *2nd Annual Report* (NY, 1855), p. 3.
10. Stanley Aronowitz, *False Promises: The Shaping of American Working Class Consciousness* (NY: McGraw Hill, 1973), considers the underclass a 'result of the disparity between the historical tendency of capitalist production to require less labor for the production of commodities and the urbanization of the whole population,' p. 11.
11. Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The Idea of Poverty: England in the Early Industrial Age* (New York: Knopf, 1984), pp. 328–29; Himmelfarb, *Poverty and Compassion: The Moral Imagination of the Late Victorians* (New York: Knopf, 1991), p. 11.
12. E.g., Ladies of the Mission, *The Old Brewery and the New Mission House at the Five Points* (NY: Stringer & Townsend, 1854). There is a brilliant description of the stench of the cities in Patrick Suskind's novel *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer*, trans. John E. Woods (NY: Pocket Books, 1987).
13. *The Old Brewery*, p. 20; Children's Aid Society, *2nd Annual Report*, p.5.
14. Himmelfarb, *The Idea of Poverty*, pp. 356–57.
15. Quoted in Robert H. Bremner, *American Philanthropy* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1960), p. 60.
16. I do not mean to imply that sensationalist writing inevitably produces such moralistic responses. Some socialist writers, such as Upton Sinclair, sensationalized the depravities of the capitalist class, thus positioning poor workers as victims.
17. Gareth Stedman Jones, *Outcast London: A Study of the Relationship between Classes in Victorian Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 11.
18. Jones, pp. 371–2.
19. Jennifer Davis, 'Jennings' Buildings and the Royal Borough: The Construction of the Underclass in mid-Victorian England,' in *Metropolis-London: Histories and Representations Since 1800*, ed. by David Feldman and Gareth Stedman Jones (London and New York: Routledge, 1989).
20. Linda Gordon, *Woman's Body, Woman's Right: Birth Control in America* (New York: Viking/Penguin, 2nd. ed., 1990); Himmelfarb, *The Idea of Poverty*, p. 324.
21. George Sims quoted in Himmelfarb, *Poverty and Compassion*, p. 58.
22. Davis, 'Jennings' Buildings,' p. 11.
23. Thanks to John Clarke for explaining this important point.
24. Indeed, Marx did contest with a more positive and romantic view of the underclass, that enunciated by Max Stimer in the 1840s, against which Marx and Engels wrote their *German Ideology*.
25. Nikolai Bukharin, *Historical Materialism* (New York: International Publishers, 1925), p. 284 and p. 290, quoted Matza p. 291.
26. See my introduction to *Women, the State, and Welfare*, ed. Linda Gordon (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990).
27. E.g., Judith Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class, and the State* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980).
28. David Ward, *Poverty, Ethnicity, and the American City, 1840–1925: Changing Conceptions of the Slum and the Ghetto* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 97.
29. David T. Beito, 'Mutual Aid, State Welfare, and Organized Charity: Fraternal Societies and the 'Deserving' and 'Undeserving' Poor, 1890–1930,' *Journal of Policy History* 5 #4, 1993, pp. 419–434..
30. Linda Gordon, 'Social Insurance and Public Assistance: The Influence of Gender in Welfare Thought in the United States, 1890–1935,' *American Historical Review* 97 #1,

- February 1992. David Matza speaks mistakenly of fear of pauperization as exclusive to conservatives; see David Matza, 'The Disreputable Poor,' in Bendix and **Lipset**, eds., *Class, Status, and Power: A Reader in Social Stratification* 1966, p. 296.
31. June **Axinn** and Mark J. Stem, *Dependency and Poverty: Old Problems in a New World* (Lexington: Lexington Books, 1988), pp. 97–99.
 32. August B. **Hollingshead**, 'Selected Characteristics of Classes in a Middle Western Community,' *American Sociological Review* 12 (1947), pp. 385–95, reprinted in **Reinhard** Bendix and Seymour Martin **Lipset**, eds., *Class, Status, and Power: A Reader in Social Stratification* (Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press, 1953), p. 222.
 33. Matza, 'The Disreputable Poor,' p. 302.
 34. Michael Harrington, *The Other America: Poverty in the United States* (NY: Macmillan, 1963); Stanley Aronowitz, *False Promises*, p. 11. Aronowitz discussed the development of 'a substantial underclass . . . [unlike] a reserve army of labor since it is characteristically not employed in the expansion of capital but enters the labor market only in the most marginal service occupations or as seasonal agricultural laborers.'
 35. Hazel M. **Willacy**, 'Men in Poverty Neighborhoods: a status report,' *Monthly Labor Review*, Feb. 1969, pp. 23–27.
 36. 'The American Underclass,' *Time* Aug. 29, 1977, pp. 14–27, this usage from William J. Wilson, 'Introduction to the Wesleyan Edition' in Kenneth B. Clark, *Dark Ghetto: Dilemmas of Social Power*, 2nd. ed. (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press) xix.
 37. Gordon, *Pitied But Not Entitled*.
 38. Jeny R **Cates**, *Insuring Inequality: Administrative Leadership in Social Security, 1935–54* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1983).
 39. A divide between women primarily oriented towards social work and those committed to societal reform did not materialize in the US as it had in England.
 40. The programme was later amended and renamed Aid to Families with Dependent Children, and is thus called AFDC today. I have retained the earlier historical name. To name just a few of the other distinctions of note: that between the long-term old-age insurance and time-limited unemployment insurance; that between **ADC** and the very worst programmes of general assistance for childless adults; the somewhat better terms of public assistance for the disabled.
 41. Although there are today welfare programmes that provide counselling for men, such as **drug** addicts or the homeless, these have developed in the context of several decades of the legitimization of psychotherapy and psychological modes of thought. In the 1930s prescribing counselling for poor men would have been perceived as undercutting their manliness and politically unacceptable.
 42. Alice Kessler-Harris, *A Woman's Wage: Historical Meanings and Social Consequences* (Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1990).
 43. Moreover it was significant that Social Security was written during a relative lull in the women's-rights movement. The mothers'-aid model, which was relatively progressive in 1910, was rather conservative by 1935, given how much had changed for so many women. Still, the social-work network of the 1930s did retain some of their **maternalist-feminist** heritage in their commitment to helping those women and children left out of family-wagesupport. Their programme expressed both their residual feminism and their own agenda for power in an expanded federal government. Like British women reformers of the early 20th century, they were concerned to get some help directly to women as mothers, and thereby to protect their custody rights and their authority as mothers. By working in a public-assistance framework they resisted making the workplace the only source of welfare entitlements (as unemployment compensation and old-age insurance did). At the same time the public-assistance framework provided, they hoped, an institutional need for trained welfare caseworkers. By focusing on single mothers they kept alive the awareness that not all women and children were supported by men. And by focusing on single mothers rather than a universal children's allowance they could do so

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without challenging male economic dominance.

44. **Fraser** and Gordon, 'Contract versus Charity!'
45. Joy **Dryfoos**, *Adolescents At Risk: Prevalence and Prevention* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 3.
46. Quoted by Michael Katz in his introduction to *The 'Underclass' Debate* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 3.
47. Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon, 'A Genealogy of 'Dependency': A Keyword of the US Welfare State,' *Signs* winter 1993.
48. John **Leo**, 'The High Cost of Playing Victim,' *US News and World Report* Oct. 1, 1990, p. 23.
49. Linda Gordon, *Heroes of Their Own Lives: The Politics and History of Family Violence* (New York: Viking/Penguin, 1988).
50. 'Underclass' definitions tailored, albeit perhaps unconsciously, to describe Black poverty may not fit other racial minorities. A recent study of **poor** Mexican Americans in California is instructive. High proportions are indeed extremely poor, educationally deprived, and their young men display some of the gang and criminal behaviour associated with an 'underclass.' But these Latinos have fewer health problems than the Black **or Anglo** poor, are nearly twice as likely to live in two-parent nuclear families, and less likely to collect welfare. California Latinos have higher life expectancies and lower infant mortality rates than Blacks or **Anglos**; **Latina** women are less **likely** to be **smokers** or alcohol and other **drug** abusers. That so many of them remain extremely poor suggests what's wrong with **behavioural** theories of the 'underclass'; as one scholar **put** it, they do everything '**right**' but remain poor. Karen J. **Winkler**, 'Researcher's **Examination** of California's Poor Latin Population Prompts Debate over the Traditional Definitions of the Underclass,' *Chronicle of Higher Education* Oct. 10, 1990, pp. A5-A8.
51. Kathryn M. Neckerman, 'The Emergence of 'Underclass' Family Patterns, 1900-1940,' in Katz, *The 'Underclass' Debate*, pp. 194-219.
52. Martha F. Davis, *Brutal Need: Lawyers and the Welfare Rights movement, 1960-1973* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).
53. **Ricketts** and **Sawhill**, p. 322.
54. During the Depression, emergency government relief and public works had a bigger impact than long-term welfare programmes. New poor - those only temporarily disadvantaged - and old poor often collected from the same programmes; but after World War III brought back prosperity, the differential effects of the Social Security Act were felt keenly.
55. James T. Patterson, *America's Struggle Against Poverty* (Cambridge: **Harvard** University Press, 1981), pp. 76, 92-4; Sheldon Danziger, Robert **Haveman** and Robert D. Plotnick, 'Antipoverty Policy: Effects on the Poor and the Nonpoor,' in Sheldon H. Danziger and Daniel H. Weinberg, eds., *Fighting Poverty: What Works and What Doesn't* (Cambridge: **Harvard** University Press, 1986), pp. 66-7. The US spends, for example, approximately \$25 billion on the major public-assistance programme for the poor, AFDC, and \$200 billion on old-age insurance, which goes mainly to the nonpoor.
56. Thomas F. Jackson, 'The State, the Movement, and the Urban Poor: The War on Poverty and Political Mobilisation in the 1960s,' in Katz, *The 'Underclass' Debate*, pp. 403-439.
57. Michael R. **Sosin**, 'Legal Rights and Welfare Change,' in Sheldon Danziger and Weinberg, eds., *Fight Poverty: What Works and What Doesn't*, p. 276.
58. For example, housing policy, public and private, raised walls around ghettos which concentrated the minority **poor**. Transportation policy, public and private, increased the difficulty the poor faced in commuting to jobs. Police policy, from discriminatory harassment to gross brutality, added to the despair and bitterness of racial minorities. Education policy, public and private, deepened existing inequality. Economic policy which made capital flight easier contributed.