AMERICAN ATTITUDES TOWARD WELFARE

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Abstract

This work investigates the past and present attitudes Americans have toward welfare and those who use such programs. The two most significant aid programs are TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) and SNAP (the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program) so these will be discussed in detail. Both of these programs have a long history and have been altered many times. The alterations are mainly due to the negative attitudes many have for government assistance. Such opinions have been maintained over several generations and are still very common today. The two main reasons for such attitudes are the misperception that welfare recipients are undeserving and racial profiling.

Introduction

In the United States today, 46.5 million people are living in poverty, about 15 percent of the entire population, and that number is on the rise. The poverty rate for the United States is the highest among industrialized nations even though we are one of the wealthiest. Poverty is one of the toughest social problems to address because of the complexity of the issue. It is hard to imagine the poverty rate is so high because of a lack of resources and not due to something much more basic. TANF, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, and SNAP, Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program, are two programs used to fight poverty. American attitudes towards these two projects have been mostly negative since the 1930's. Such programs are highly contested and there is much resistance to improving the programs and many who would do away with both completely. TANF and SNAP are just two of the ways in which the government attempts

to help the poor but the level of assistance often is not enough to bring people out of poverty. Much of the problem is politically based and ideologically charged which is why the fight over welfare has continued over decades. Those who have money do not want to give it up and those who don't are left with little recourse on how to help themselves. It is also easier to ignore the plight of others when it doesn't affect us personally. This may never change without a shift in understanding and altruism.

Definitions

"Welfare" covers a variety of programs that can benefit both the private and public sectors. Webster says that welfare is, "financial or other assistance to an individual or family from a city, state, or national government." This is such a broad definition that roads, parks, or even public schools could be considered welfare. The most common public programs, which are never considered "welfare," are for higher education in the form of grants and tax subsidies which benefit those in the middle and upper classes. However, the average person thinks of welfare as programs to help out the poor. Class politics inform peoples' understandings of welfare, and people often focus on their own personal feelings about the subject as opposed to the individuals who are actually the recipients of such programs. Gilens (1991:1)describes how some people see taking welfare as a weakness of character: "Of the many aspects of the welfare state, "welfare" itself – that is, cash benefits paid to the working-age, able-bodied poor – conflicts most flagrantly with Americans' beliefs that individuals should take responsibility for their own betterment and not rely on the government for support" (Gilens 1999:1). In public opinion surveys done between 1986 and 1995, 71 percent of respondents agreed with the statement that spending should be increased to fight poverty. But more than sixty percent

of respondents believe welfare spending should be decreased. These two results are contradictory in that many Americans support helping the poor but do not support the welfare programs designed to help the poor. (Bartel 2004:46) The results from such surveys remind us of the common phenomenon whereby simply rephrasing a question can alter public opinion on a subject. Another example of how the phrasing of a question can change the way some people answer is the Affordable Care Act.

The cartoon above highlights the problem that many people often associate different feelings for different terms even when both terms can be referring to the same thing.

Next I would like to address another term which requires a little more clarification, poverty. The dictionary defines poverty as, “the state or condition of having little or no money, goods or means of support; condition of being poor;” which is a good way to explain it but doesn’t quite get to the heart of the matter. Povertyprogram.com is a nonprofit organization that helps to combat poverty and educate the public about the severe dangers of extreme poverty. They define poverty in this way:

> Poverty is the unrelenting daily task of trying to make ends meet. It is the daily stress and worry about whether the car will break down or someone will get

> ill or your child will need a new pair of shoes. And then having to choose between whether to pay the rent, pay for medicine or pay for food. Which necessity will have to be sacrificed to pay for the added expense of the unexpected bill? Poverty is the exhausting, unending, time-consuming struggle of juggling and just hoping to make ends meet with no end in sight. Poverty robs you of a sense of security and it destroys your self-esteem and your hope for the future. And it has the potential to be hereditary. (Povertyprogram 2014)

Now we are getting somewhere. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the poverty level for a household of four was $22,314 in the year 2010, and the poverty rate was 15.1 percent, the highest it has been since 1993. The United States has the highest poverty rate of all the developed countries, and Texas has a poverty rate of 16.2 percent. The official poverty rate isn't a perfect measure but this does give us an idea of how big of a problem it is.

Many critics of welfare would say that $22,000 a year isn't that poor. Some have even suggested that having a refrigerator and air conditioning are luxury items and so a person with one or both of those is not "poor." Such a position seems to suggest that if a person were to be so poor as to not have a refrigerator or air conditioning then he or she would be poor enough to require aid from society. This is illogical because there are plenty of people who don't have those "luxury" items, such as the homeless, and few critics of welfare are big supporters of helping the homeless. Also, from a purely economic viewpoint, a person who has at least a refrigerator is going to require less financial assistance than someone who is homeless.

TANF

The program TANF (Temporary Aid for Needy Families) is a fairly recent construct but it has roots which extend back to the Great Depression Era. The Social Security Act of 1935 was the beginning of what we call welfare today. There are three main parts of this act. The first set up health and welfare services which included, foster care, adoption, protective services, activities for older adults… and a range of other public programs (Kirst-Ashman 2013:247). The second was to provide social insurance such as social security and unemployment benefits. The third was public assistance which provided financial help and goods or services for those who could not support themselves. The AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children) was one of these programs as well. Since the social insurance programs had been linked to being part of the workforce, it was much less controversial than the other two.

In 1996, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWOA) was written to reform the welfare laws. Specifically, it replaced the AFDC with TANF, a block grant which is given to the states who then distribute it amongst the individual disadvantaged families with children. This program is mostly known for providing cash but, much of the funding goes to other programs. In 2012, only 28.6% of TANF money was for direct cash welfare. The block grant is also used to fund programs for children who suffer from abuse and neglect, early education, pregnancy prevention, responsible fatherhood programs, and initiatives to encourage healthy marriages. All of these are considered to have a positive correlation with poverty. (Falk 2013:ii)

Non-welfare programs make up a sizeable portion of the total federal and state money that is set aside for TANF. These projects cover tax subsidies such as the Earned

Income Tax Credit (EITC), employment programs, helping victims of child abuse, and early childhood development. In FY2012, 57.3 percent, or $18 billion, of the total TANF grant went to the "non-welfare" side. It may seem that TANF has a wide area to cover, and it does, but there are four specific points it focuses on.

"The Four Goals of TANF:

i. Provide assistance to needy families so that children may be cared for in their own homes or in the homes of relatives
ii. End the dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage
iii. Prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies and establish annual numerical goals for preventing and reducing the incidence of these pregnancies
iv. Encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families" (PRWORA 1996)

Those are the main goals of the program. The federal government spends $16.5 billion a year on TANF and the states are to match a minimum of $10.4 billion to the fund. To put that in perspective, the federal budget has been about $3.7 trillion a year which means the amount spent on TANF is .004 percent of the budget. The amount the states contribute is $10.4 billion total for all of the states plus the District of Columbia. These amounts were set in 1997 and have not been raised since. Nor does it adjust for inflation which has caused the value to drop 30 percent by 2012. The states can choose their own cash benefits and in all of the states the amount is only a small fraction of the poverty level. In Texas, the maximum monthly benefit for a family of three is $260

which is 16.8 percent of the federal poverty level in 2011. This assistance has a requirement for the adult(s) in the family and also has a time limit. Texas receives $486.3 million from the TANF block grant which is 2.9 percent of the $16.5 billion. The state spends $428.2 million of its own money to match that bringing the total to $914.5 million per year.

The types of families are diverse and most do not conform to the "traditional" stereotype of cash benefit recipients. 1.95 million families received TANF in 2010 but only 46 percent with families with an adult not employed. The family types receiving TANF in March 2013 breaks down like this: Single parent: 10,861(27.5 percent); Two parent: 0; No parent: 28,694(72.5 percent) which is a total of 39,555 families. This is a big change from when the program was first started. The number of families receiving assistance in March of 1994 was 286,613. That is 86.2 percent lower than the number in 2013. Even the year just before the recession still had more families who received benefits, in 2007 61,566 families which is 35.8 percent less than 2013. We can break down those 39,555 families even further. There are 10,865 adults and 77,575 children which make up the 88,440 individuals who receive TANF. The total population for the state is a little over 26 million which means those 88,440 individuals are only .003 percent of the total.

Next we can look at the work requirements in order to receive benefits from this program. Fifty percent of all single parent families and ninety percent of dual parent families must be in a work program. Though there are some stipulations that can lower the percentage of families participating in such programs. The length of time a person can receive TANF can vary. Adults can get help for twelve up to thirty-six months and are

approved for six months at a time. The federal limit for the number of months an adult can receive these benefits is sixty in his or her lifetime. The state can use its own money to allow adults to continue getting help after the federal limit is up but this happens only in rare cases. In addition, any child support paid by a noncustodial parent "must be used to reimburse the state and federal government for the welfare paid to the family." (Falk 2013:6) Most recipients of TANF are single mother families which has led to the feminization of poverty. It is hard for single mothers to find work while still being able to care for their children. It is a problem with no easy solution because so little is done to help out single parents.

SNAP

The other welfare program I would like to discuss is popularly referred to as "food stamps." This too has changed over time though the concept has stayed relatively the same. The first food assistance program was called the Food Stamp Program or FSP. FSP was started in 1939 and ran until the spring of 1943. During those four years, the program helped out about 20 million people and the cost was only $262 million (U.S. Department of Agriculture). The second program ran from May 1961 until August 1964. During that year, President Johnson asked for the program to be permanent and so the Food Stamp Act of 1964 was passed. Some of the main provisions of the Act were to allow the states to set eligibility standards, excluding alcoholic beverages and imported food, and allowed access to the program regardless of race, gender, religion, or national origin. At first, there were only a relative few (about 500,000) who received the benefits but that number quickly grew (15 million in October of 1974). There were many major changes which expanded the program through the 1970s but then cuts were made during the early 1980s.

"Recognition of the severe domestic hunger problem in the latter half of the 1980s led to incremental improvements in the FSP in 1985 and 1987, such as the elimination of the sales tax on food stamp purchases, reinstitution of categorical eligibility, increased resource limit for most households ($2,000), eligibility for the homeless, and expanded nutrition education" (U.S. Department of Agriculture: A Short History of SNAP).

More changes were made in the mid-1990s, especially the 1996 Farm Bill which eliminated the eligibility of most legal immigrants and placed a limit on the amount of time a person can receive food stamps. Able-bodied adults without dependents who are not working at least 20 hours a week or participating in a work program can receive for only three total months out of a three year period. (U.S. Department of Agriculture: A Short History of SNAP)

There continue to be changes made every few years, including the name of the program in 2008 to SNAP. The Food Stamp Program involves vouchers distributed through a federal program to be used like cash to purchase primarily food, plants, and seeds. The vouchers could not be used for several products such as alcoholic beverages, tobacco, paper products, diapers, personal care products, or ready-to-feat food. The program's purpose is to be only a supplemental aid, hence the name change, to all of what a family requires. Originally created in 1964, the Food Stamp Program, now SNAP, is administered through the U.S. Department of Agriculture and is paid for completely by the federal government, except for administrative costs, which are shared with the states (U.S. Department of Agriculture: A Short History of SNAP).

Although originally benefits were distributed in the form of coupons, now states have replaced this system with an electronic benefit transfer that resembles a credit card. The

card's maximum monthly benefit is 2009 was $463 for a household of three people (although the average payment each month per household was only $226.60) and $588 for a household of four (Blau 2010). To be eligible, people must satisfy a means test, and benefits are determined by a formula involving income and assets. People who receive TANF, SSI, or general assistance routinely receive SNAP (Blau 2010).

It has also become more and more difficult to get food stamps because of increasingly more complex and limiting eligibility requirements and confusing, tedious application processes (Barusch 2012). Individual states make it progressively more difficult for people to negotiate the food stamp maze (Blau 2010). Six billion dollars were spent on the program in Texas for 2012. The number of households, for that year, were1.6 million which consisted of 4 million people. The average aid received per household per month was $300.39 and the average per person was $123.95.

SNAP benefits are usually given in six month increments. A family can receive SNAP for as little as one month and up to three years. Single adults can only get it for a total of three months within a three year period. Seventy-six percent of SNAP households include a child, an elderly person, or a disabled person. These vulnerable households receive 83 percent of all SNAP benefits. "SNAP benefits don't last most participants the whole month. Ninety percent of SNAP benefits are redeemed by the third week of the month, and 58 percent of food bank clients currently receiving SNAP benefits turn to food banks for assistance at least 6 months out of the year." (FeedingAmerica)

SNAP eligibility is limited to households with gross income of no more than 130 percent of the federal poverty guideline but the majority of households have income well below the maximum. Eighty-three percent of SNAP households have gross income at or

below 100 percent of the poverty guideline ($19,530 for a family of 3 in 2013), and these households receive about 91 percent of all benefits. Sixty-one percent of SNAP households have gross income at or below 75 percent of the poverty guideline ($14,648 for a family of 3 in 2013).

Attitudes about Welfare Recipients

Much of what I have discussed so far has been about the data on the programs in question but not on the perceptions people have of those programs, which is really the heart of this matter. A common stereotype is that those who receive public assistance are underserving and/or lazy. This attitude is often based more on a personal opinion than on any specific or well-defined attribute. Such negativity has continued to perpetuate over decades even though there is little evidence to support it. Public attitudes are important because it tells us something about the nature of our society and the political views of Americans (Gilens 1999:46). Gilens (1999) research concludes that negative feelings about welfare are related to the perception of welfare as a program for African Americans and the misrepresentation in the media of most welfare recipients as black and the undeserving poor. Gilens (1999) found that African Americans were represented in 70 percent of stories indexed under poverty and 75 percent of those under welfare abuse. However, the "deserving poor," the elderly and the working poor, are portrayed as white. In the media, the poor were predominantly portrayed as white from 1950-1964. But from 1967 through 1992, blacks were 57 percent of the poor shown in the media which is almost double the proportion of blacks among the poor in the United States.

The American Dream

"The American Dream" is a common concept which many people make reference to when they which to talk about how great the United States and capitalism are. "At its core, the general public's aversion to anything that smacks of some form of unlimited public assistance that is not tied to work is and has always been rooted in the American Dream" (Schneiderman 2008). The American Dream is the belief that those who work hard can, and will, get ahead. So if hard work will bring success then those who don't succeed must not be trying. The irony is that in a system which doesn't have strong economic ladders the path to get ahead can be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to get ahead. Most people believe government assistance should be temporary and limited but a reliable source of support during hard times, i.e. a safety net. Problems arise when the assistance is too little to do much to help those who need it. It would be like using a twig to try and stay afloat in the middle of rolling waves.

The 1960s were a time of social turmoil that included many changes to welfare. Women and children became the majority to receive it, the rise of the idea that people have a *right* to public assistance, increases in the number of single parents (mostly due to more babies born out of wedlock and a rise in the divorce rate) and large numbers of African Americans migrated to the North. PRWORA 1996 helped by linking aid to work programs and ended indefinite public assistance but the negative perception about welfare remains partially due to a lack of information. A 2001 poll by the NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School, a survey about poverty in America, showed half of Americans didn't know the law had been changed in '96. "About half the public says the poor are not doing enough to help themselves out of poverty, and the other half says that circumstances beyond their control cause them to be poor" (Rosenbaum 2001).

One way we must look at the issue of poverty is to ask whether it is a personal or social problem. Let us examine this thought for a moment. If the poor are not doing enough to help themselves then this is a personal issue and most likely psychological in nature. Poverty as a personal issue seems plausible at first glance. Most of us have known a person or two who tried to get by with the least amount of effort possible. It could have been a partner in a group project who just "happened" to get sick on the day the project was due or a coworker who slacked off when the boss wasn't around. Such laziness would certainly foster a feeling of resentment because no one likes a free loader. The difference between doing as little work as possible and being perpetually poor is that being lazy at school or work will still get you a minimum grade or minimum wage. Living off of welfare does *not* get you the bare minimum. The amount of government assistance is so far below the minimum standard of living that the majority are still unable to make ends meet with what they receive. Remember that the amount the recipients can get was set back in 1996 and has not been increased since. In Texas, the most a family of three can get per month from TANF is $260 and for SNAP its $463 (Blau 2010). That is a total of $723 a month and $8676 a year. Just to reach the federal poverty level of $22,314, the family would need to earn $13,638 more. The current minimum wage is $7.25 an hour which comes to $1,160 a month and $13,920 a year, just barely over what is needed to reach the poverty line (U.S Census Bureau). It would be very hard to argue that a single parent working forty hours a week is lazy. If a welfare recipient could afford a decent car and an apartment in a nice area then it would be a plausible excuse to think they are just being lazy. Instead welfare gets you an apartment in a rough neighborhood and most likely on the bus route.

On the other hand, if poverty is not simply a function of individual laziness but can be determined by outside circumstances, then it is a social problem that is sociological and social remedies are called for. Poverty as a social problem paints the world in a whole different color and also requires very different solutions in order to address it. For starters, if the problem is at the societal level then it cannot be addressed only at the individual level. Poverty as a social problem is a hard concept to grasp for many Americans in our individualistic culture. Many people have a hard time asking for help from others, even friends and family. The prevailing American attitude is, "I can make it on my own." The whole concept of the American Dream is based on the ability of an individual to achieve high status/success by himself or herself. If poverty is a social problem, then a person can't make it on his or her ingenuity alone and therefore the "Dream" is a lie. That would definitely be a hard pill to swallow. Another reason that poverty as a social problem is hard for many to believe is because there is an underlying sense of fear with that thought. The idea of individual success and failure has one great draw, the sense of control over one's life. If poverty is not an individual choice then it can happen to anyone, presumably at any time, and there is nothing you can do about it. That is a scary thought and it is not hard to see why most would prefer not to believe it.

Haters Gonna Hate, Welfare Bashing gets Trendy

In this section, I will highlight a few illustrative examples of the welfare argument on the web. It has often been the case that abusing minority groups has been something that many majority groups have practiced throughout the ages. Whether such in-group/out-group conflict has been based on religion, immigration, sexual orientation, ethnicity, or many other factors, the results end up being the same. It is much the same as

the bully who beats on the smaller kids on a playground. Those who are on the lower rungs of the socioeconomic ladder also tend to be the most abused. Even in the 21st century we still see many conflicts between social groups. The invention of the Internet has allowed the group conflicts to increase in part due to the anonymous nature of the net. A person can say whatever they like with little to no fear of being retaliated against personally. It also allows for a digital form of groupthink in that we often look for others who already agree with our viewpoints and avoid those who disagree. The Internet can connect people almost instantly all over the world which means no matter how small a subgroup is, it is possible to find others who think the same way.

Facebook allows like-minded individuals to share thoughts and ideas. The "I Hate Welfare Bums" Facebook created October 10th, 2012, has 561 likes, which is quite small by Facebook standards, as of February 23, 2014. This is the statement which displays the "purpose" of the page, "No one likes working hard for money then having to giving it to bums who dont want to get jobs! those lazy people are what ruins america! [sic]" (I Hate Welfare Bums). Such inflammatory remarks do little to improve the public debate of proper government funding. It would seem that those who like this page prefer to seek out the few examples of "welfare abuse" rather than noticing how many people such programs help.

The "I Hate Welfare Bums" says, "This page isn't here to offend anyone who truely [sic] needs help and is on welfare. This is to hate on the lazy ass people who use welfare as a way of living and choose to not find a job and support their own family. There is a big difference between getting help and being lazy. Feel free to get mad and prove my point" (I Hate Welfare Bums). Even with this supposed distinction between

those who need help and those who are lazy, the page still focuses only on the negative examples. One interesting thing I noticed is the person who started the page is allowed to make posts with the I Hate Welfare Bums tag as opposed to his or her actual name. Perhaps this gives the person a level of anonymity which lets him or her say whatever he or she likes without retribution.

The page allows people to post pictures and descriptions of supposed welfare abuses, most of which are rendered images and not actual photos. The personal descriptions are vague on details and tend to be generic such as:

"Omg we went into Papa Murphys awhile back (of course we just had to go close to the first of the month) and no joke there were so many people paying for it with there [sic] food stamps!!" (I Hate Welfare Bums).

Another website that allows people to post their feelings about various topics is Debate.org. This site allows users to put up something for debate and others can vote yes or no and leave comments if they wish. The particular debate of interest for this paper is titled, "Should all forms of government welfare be abolished?" Fifty-eight percent of the respondents say yes and 42 percent say no. Unfortunately there is no indication of the number of people who voted, and there aren't very many who posted replies.

Those who said "Yes" tend to be willing to sacrifice the many that do need government welfare just because there are a few who abuse it. The impression I get from the Yes responders is, "If I can live without welfare, so can you." Those who say "No" recommend reform of the program but not abolishment. Some point out how most government "welfare" programs are things that benefit the middle class such as FAFSA;

helping the disabled, the elderly, and children; and they point out that assistance does have work requirements.

In addition to the ones I have mentioned above, there are plenty of other articles with information about welfare abusers and how they are all a detriment to society. One website, Americanthinker.com, is a daily conservative online magazine which publishes many articles about American politics, culture, and foreign policy. The magazine has several writers, one of which is Nicholas Cheong. He wrote an article, "Why the Welfare State is Doomed to Fail," in which he talks about a supposed welfare abuser who is a mother of six children. According to the article, this mother is homeless and yet, "gets more than $2,000 each month -- that's more than $24,000 a year -- from the government in various forms of aid" (Cheong 2012). He talks about how terrible this mother is getting government funds of $24,000 while so many hardworking Americans struggle to get by on the same amount of money. He suggests the government is taking money from the working class to give it to the undeserving poor. This would be an understandably infuriating situation that would upset most people to hear.

Here is the problem with this article, Mr. Cheong has a link to the source of where he learned about the mother of six children. I followed the link and it didn't lead me to an article of welfare abuse but rather one about welfare neglect. The link goes to the article, "Homeless Families in Illinois Walking a Hard Road." The article does tell a story of a homeless mother with six children but she is constantly struggling to get by. The mother is Ms. Caballero and of Mexican descent. I found it interesting that Mr. Cheong did not refer to her by name, which is understandable because it is easier to demonize a person or persons if they are nameless. Ms. Caballero struggles on a daily basis to find food and a

place to sleep for her family. The assistance which she is unable to receive regularly is not enough for her to afford a deposit for an apartment so she moves around sleeping in her brother's car, a friend's guest bed, and even a few nights in a storage container. The real travesty is where Mr. Cheong gets his data about how much government assistance she is receiving which he claims is about $2,000 a month. The article actually says, "When her public aid arrives without snags — a rarity, she said — she receives $674 in Social Security, $623 in cash assistance and $723 in food stamps each month" (Knight 2011). True this is about $2,000 but the beginning of the sentence stating the public aid arriving regularly is a rarity paints a very different picture than the one Mr. Cheong would like his readers to believe. It is hard to imagine Cheong missed that little detail but even if he did, the rest of the article talks about how Ms. Caballero constantly struggles with her situation and to get what little assistance she receives requires a lot more time and effort than working a regular job for that same amount would be. "Recently, it took Ms. Caballero five hours and eight bus rides, her children in tow, to make a court-mandated meeting with her parole officer and a food run to W.I.C." (Knight 2011).

A recent clip of *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* poked fun at the Fox News network for making outrageous allegations about food stamp recipients. In the clip, Stewart emphasizes the point that many of us hear examples of welfare abuse or fraud, but most of such examples are just stories. The facts are often left out, if there were any to begin with, for the sole purpose of inciting a reaction from anyone who will listen. Andrea Tantaros of Fox News Channel's, The Five, speaks of people using food stamps to purchase seafood and one person who supposedly bought organic salmon. Again there seems to be no effort to check the accuracy of these "examples," but even if they were

true is the point Fox News is trying to make that the poor should only be able to buy certain types of food or only low quality food? If that is the case then it would seems Fox News feels it is not bad enough for the poor to be suffering financially but they should also feel shame about it too.

In a follow up clip about a week later, Jon Stewart again aired segments of Fox News where Eric Bolling of The Five replied to Stewart's comments from the previous episode. Bolling feels that the Fox News show is only highlighting the examples of welfare abuse. To back this claim up he references a single individual, a man named Jason Greenslate, who has managed to live off of welfare even though he doesn't need it. Bolling uses this one example of welfare abuse to imply that, "he is the representative of literally millions of Americans." How can anyone make the claim that just because one person is found to abuse the system means that all of the others are doing the same thing? Interestingly enough, Mr. Greenslate says that it is not himself but the government who is to blame for allowing him to receive welfare assistance even though he doesn't need it. Eric Bolling then goes on to talk about how large corporations are able to use loopholes in the tax system to get away with billions each year. According to him, this is not "cheating the system" but just taking advantage of the legal programs that are in place. To summarize, when a single individual takes government assistance when he doesn't need it is a bad thing, but when a corporation takes government assistance it is good. I noted how both the individual and the corporation were using legal means to earn government assistance. The argument about the two has become a moral judgment call in that the individual is bad but the corporation is good even though both are doing the same thing.

Conclusion

In this paper I have discussed two different welfare programs and the negative attitudes which are, unfortunately, very common towards those who depend on such assistance for survival. The negative attitude has persisted through several decades and several changes in the programs designed to help the poor. It has been used as a political rallying point for those on the left and the right. The fact that this attitude has continued means that it is a sociological construct which is redefined constantly by each generation. It also means that it is based more on ideology than on empirical data. So how can we address the situation or are we doomed to debate forever while those whose very livelihood depends on such assistance hangs in the balance?

Due to the negative attitudes towards welfare programs, many Americans support cutting or even ending any form of government assistance. One reason being is that many feel the programs are not effective at fighting poverty. While it may be true that some, if not all, of the programs can be improved, this is a case of self-fulfilling prophecy. In other words, the programs might seem to be ineffective but that is because they lack the proper funding. The amount of money spent is barely enough to keep those who rely on it from starving but not enough for them to get to a position of self-support.

It is also impossible to ignore that the negative attitudes many Americans have is racially based as well. Our country has become supersaturated with the mass media which continuously shows us the way we want to see the world as opposed to the way the world really is. The news shows us the small example of people who are abusing the system and tell us that such events are commonplace. If the news shows welfare recipients as mostly minorities then we that too becomes what we think is the norm. A

recent study has shown that whites tend to become more conservative when faced with the prospect of becoming the new minority due to the changes in demographics. According to Craig and Richeson (2014), "participants who had read that California is a majority-minority state tended to lean more towards the Republican Party and rate their ideological attitudes as more conservative than participants who simply read that the Hispanic population had become equal in size to the Black population in the United States." The result of this particular study is quite interesting considering the Hispanic population is higher than the African American population by 3.7% nationally and 31.6% in California (U.S. Census Bureau)

I feel that more data may help but it is often the case that we see the world the way we want to and not the way it truly is. What that means is no matter how much data is presented there will always be some who will not be persuaded on the subject. It is far too easy to block out any sort of disagreeing opinions and hold fast to the ones we already believe in. A good example of this is those who deny the theory of evolution or climate change. Even when given more facts about climate change, many people stick to their views against it even more. A better tactic may be to reframe the debate similar to how people are for the Affordable Health Care Act but against Obamacare.

Welfare programs are a way of helping each other out and that is something which benefits everyone. How can we call ourselves the "greatest country on earth" while mistreating the most unfortunate of us? It is easy to turn away from those who need help when we don't see them every day. Also we like to make things simple which are usually more complicated. The words we use to describe the problem is a factor. "Welfare" is a loaded word which covers so many different things. The term "poor" is also something

that is hard to define and to think of the thousands of people who make up that group as all being the same is just naïve. I feel addressing the negative attitude towards welfare programs and welfare recipients is just as complicated as the programs themselves. That being said, if we can help others to understand the problem of poverty better and to change, not just their minds but also their hearts about it then we are that much closer to a permanent solution.

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