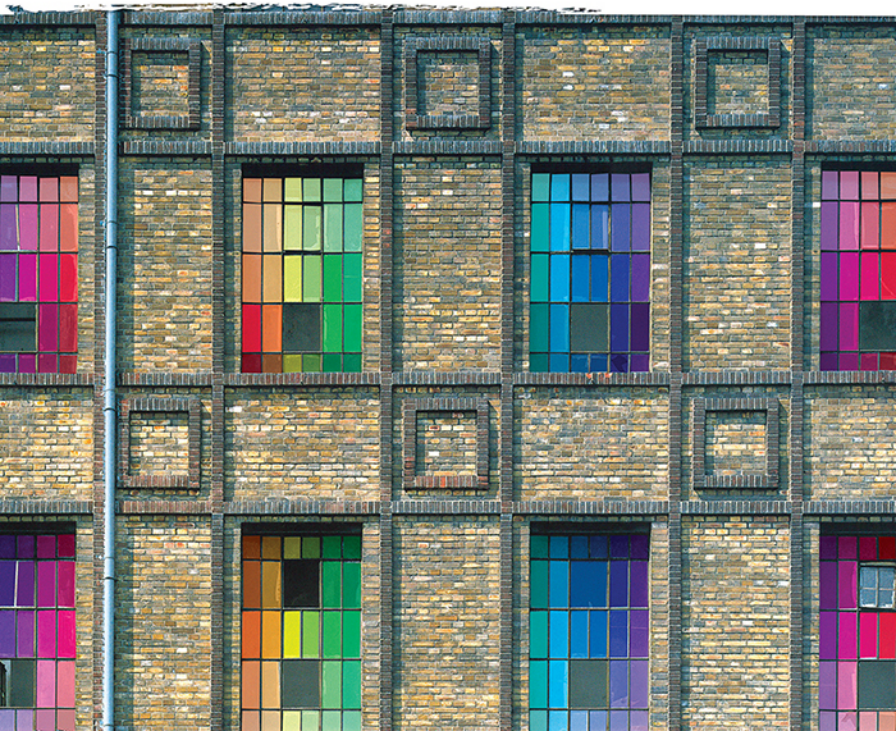


The Merrill Social Work and Human Services Series

9TH EDITION

SOCIAL WELFARE
A History of the American Response to Need

MARK J. STERN | JUNE AXINN



NINTH EDITION

Social Welfare

A History of the American Response to Need

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Preface

This book has gone through many stages. Initially, the volume was planned as a collection of historical documents with brief introductory statements. The documents were to be materials pertinent to an understanding of the development of social welfare policies and programs in the United States. As work progressed, it became clear that the documents did not always support long-established interpretations found in popular secondary sources. The introductory statements became longer and longer as what we found became more intriguing. The core of the book is now the historical narrative. The documents included have been chosen to illuminate the history.

The ninth edition of *Social Welfare: A History of the American Response to Need* examines the most current social welfare issues in historical perspective. Chapter 9 has been revised to cover the period from 1992 to 2016. It examines how the administrations of Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama have influenced social welfare policy. Earlier editions analyzed the beginnings of the “turn to the right” of the 1980s. This edition explores the effects of the drive to reduce federal spending for public programs further and to turn control and responsibility for social welfare over to the states and the private sector.

As in every period treated in the book, from the Colonial era to the present, social welfare policy is put into economic, demographic, and political contexts. The accelerating shift to a postindustrial economy, with its accompanying loss of manufacturing jobs, and the increasing bifurcation of income and wealth set the background for the weakening safety net.


New to This Edition

For this edition, the structure of chapters has been thoroughly revised. Each chapter is organized around three elements: changes in the social and economic conditions of the period, innovations in social welfare, and the role of social movements.

The introduction and the historical chapters have been revised and expanded to include new sections on:

- The history of relationships between American Indians and Europeans during the Colonial era and the treatment and status of Native Americans.
- The impact of immigration on the nation’s demography and the debate over immigration policy.
- Expanded discussions of social movements throughout American history and their impact of social welfare.
- An analysis of the impact of the recession of 2007–2009—the worst in the past 60 years.
- The implementation of the Affordable Care Act passed by Congress in 2010.

In addition, new to this edition is the format of the text.

- Each chapter features Learning Outcomes to give you an idea of what will be covered in the chapter. These correspond to the sections that are within the chapters.
- At the end of each section, a quiz is available through clicking the question mark icon. This will help you to assess your knowledge of the information in that section.
- Periodically, you will see video  icons that will lead you to short videos to enhance the information you have received in the text.
- At the end of each chapter after the Documents, you can check your understanding of the chapter content by clicking on the question mark icon and taking a short assessment.

Acknowledgments

Graduate students in the social work program of the University of Pennsylvania have used successive editions of this book. Thanks go to all of them for their thoughtful contributions.

Many colleagues, both in social work and in related fields, have been particularly helpful. It is especially pleasant to acknowledge June's niece, Amy Hirsch, of Community Legal Services of Philadelphia, and June's son, David Axinn, formerly director of Blair County Legal Services of Altoona, Pennsylvania, and now a partner in the firm of Cohen and Axinn, Hollidaysburg, Pennsylvania. They have each made insightful comments and suggestions from their frontline positions. We thank June's daughter, Constance Johnson, who as legal research analyst at the Law Library of Congress provided invaluable bibliographic aid. In addition, I want to acknowledge the following reviewers, who provided suggestions for enhancements for this new edition: David Fauri, Virginia Commonwealth University; Robert Hawkins, New York University; Carol L. Langer, Colorado State University–Pueblo; and William Rowe, Southern Connecticut State University.

Hal Levin, one of our most treasured colleagues, coauthored the first two editions of *Social Welfare*. Although Hal died in 1983, his name appeared as a coauthor of the book for the next 16 years. His contribution to the book—especially its attention to the historical development of social administration—remains considerable. June Axinn, whose name still appears as an author, died in 2006. However, her scholarship remains the foundation, and her incisive approach to social welfare continues to animate this edition.

During the last years of Hal's life, I joined the faculty of the University of Pennsylvania School of Social Work. For a short period, the three of us enjoyed our collaboration, which included developing an understanding of the impact of the rise of conservatism on social welfare, as well as more mundane pursuits like agreeing on a place to eat lunch. After Hal's death, June and I continued this work that appeared in *Dependency and Poverty: Old Problems in a New World* (Lexington Books, 1988) and regular discussions of history and contemporary social welfare.

Sidney Axinn and Susan Seifert, our spouses, made important contributions to this volume. Their wit, humor, and support make all things possible.

Mark Stern



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Introduction: How to Think About Social Welfare's Past (and Present)

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Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.

—George Santayana

History is more or less bunk. It's tradition. We don't want tradition. We want to live in the present, and the only history that is worth a tinker's damn is the history that we make today

—Henry Ford

How important is the history of social welfare and social work? The answer lies somewhere between these two quotations. As Santayana asserts, many of the challenges we face today echo the problems that others have faced in the past. The limitations of resources, the hostility to the poor and dependent, and the ethical issues involved in intervening in the private lives of clients are issues social workers and policy makers have faced in the past. Yet, at the same time that the past can be a guide, it can also be a straitjacket, constraining our actions and preventing us from understanding what is novel about our times.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Summarize the major factors that influence changes in social welfare during a particular historical era.
- Assess the impact of welfare reform and health care reform on the well-being of Americans.
- Summarize the role of social movements in contemporary American social controversies.

DOCUMENT: Introduction 10

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Here's the thing. History can be useful in both of these situations. At the same time, it allows us to understand how current public assistance and child welfare policies echo the misconceptions of past generations, it can allow us to understand the novelty of current patterns of family life. It can't help a practitioner decide on a particular strategy for engaging a client, but it can help the practitioner understand the set of social forces that put them in a room together.

American history is more than the chronology of elections and wars often covered by textbooks. Although often ignored, our history includes the struggles of many individuals and groups to improve the opportunities of ordinary people and to reduce the role of discrimination and exclusion in our society. This book tells this story, the history of American social welfare. It explores the political and economic forces, values and ideas, and social institutions that have influenced the development and reform of social welfare policies and programs over the course of American history.

The goals of social welfare programs derive from the goals of the larger society for itself and from the dominant ways that people make sense of the world around them. In turn, decisions about who is needy and how they are to be helped bear upon economic development, political organization, social stability, and family integrity. Social welfare programs involve a redistribution of resources from one group to another. Our political culture has often resisted using government to redistribute resources, relying instead on the market to carry out this function. Through much of our history, Americans have valued private assets over public goods and individual autonomy over collective choices.

Decisions about who should benefit from public policies often polarize Americans. Should we be more generous with programs for older Americans or children? Does providing aid to a group discourage independence or allow it to flourish? These issues were debated 200 years ago, just as they are today.

Yet, despite these value conflicts, social realities—economic crises, wars, and civil disorder—have led us to embrace many active social policies. Although it sounds like a contradiction, very often Americans are ideological conservatives and pragmatic liberals.

Decisions about benefit levels and eligibility often communicate whether a program is intended to invite or discourage participation. The extent to which needy individuals are viewed as beneficiaries, recipients, clients, or consumers suggests the intent of the program. Welfare *recipients*, for example, are subject to behavioral requirements that would be unthinkable for Social Security *beneficiaries*.

The geographical and demographic scope of the United States—the size and diversity of its population—as well as legal and social traditions related to volunteerism, to separation of church and state, to states' rights, and to local responsibility—all complicate legislative and administrative decisions in social welfare matters. Throughout American history we have debated the proper role of the federal, state, and local governments in funding and administering programs. Some have argued that federal programs can assure equal treatment across the country, while others have argued the local governments are more likely to understand the needs of their residents. Although private nonprofit organizations have often played an important role in *administering* social programs, government has more often than not provided the funding. Since the 1990s, for-profit corporations and professionals in private practice have assumed a more central role in providing services, but again, government has usually provided the funding. The number and complexity of these decisions result in bills—like the 2010 health care reform law—that are thousands of pages long.

The history of social welfare is also a story of the growing professionalism of those who administer social services—that is, with the history of the social work profession.

Although often ignored, our history includes the struggles of many individuals and groups to improve the opportunities of ordinary people and to reduce the role of discrimination and exclusion in our society.

The early development of the public and voluntary sectors of social welfare was accompanied by the development of service providers appropriate to their purposes: both the overseer of the poor and the lady bountiful. Yet, as social welfare programs and services have become more institutionalized, service providers have been required to acquire and demonstrate their skills and capacities. Social workers originally drew their inspiration from the struggle against poverty and want, but as they became more professional, they often sought to define their unique skills as associated with psychology and individual adjustment. The tension between social work as a *social change* profession and social work as an *individual adjustment* profession has gone on for a century and will likely continue in the future. At the end of the day, however, social work practitioners have no choice but to address both social injustice and the immediate needs of their clients. Thus, the philosophical tension between individual and social change surfaces in one's professional practice as one decides how *both* to address the everyday problems faced by one's clients and to assess one's professional responsibility to pursue social justice in imperfect systems.

When this book was originally conceived four decades ago, it argued that social welfare policy and pro-family policy were essentially the same. Yet, as the authors made this claim, the politics of domestic life were in the process of exploding. The gender question—whether men and women should be treated the same—had been simmering in politics since at least the years before the Civil War, when many questioned the propriety of female abolitionists addressing “mixed” crowds of men and women. However, during the 1970s, the legalization of abortion and the failed attempt to add the Equal Rights Amendment to the Constitution provoked schisms that have yet to be overcome. If anything, the battle over gender has become more contested in recent years as struggles over marriage equality and questions (often raised by transgender commentators) about whether using the categories *male* and *female* themselves as exhaustive categories has reinforced the divide.

From the beginning, a separate channeling of family welfare and child welfare, originating with English Poor Laws, and, therefore, at one with the fabric of an English colonial milieu, divided social welfare responses for the worthy poor—the disabled and children—from those for the unworthy—the able-bodied poor. The incorporation of the English Poor Laws into the legislative framework of American colonial governments differentiated those who were unable to work from those who were potentially employable. Poor Law programs were vitally concerned with those who were employed and who might be in danger of falling into pauperism. The family was effective to the degree that it maintained the social order and the economic viability of its individual members. To a considerable extent, social welfare programs for poor people in the 20th century retain this orientation.

The essential worthiness of children and the importance of nurturing their potential for social and economic contribution led to stated, public concern for their well-being as members of families and eventually to grudging recognition of the needs of families. The 20th century was proclaimed the Century of the Child, and pressures to make the label stick resulted in the calling of the first White House Conference on Children in 1909 and to a positive statement of public policy in regard to child care. Home and family life were declared to be society's goal for children, an enunciation of the rights of children. Economic necessity, many felt, should not require that a mother leave her child care responsibilities for work outside the home. Time and reality have demonstrated more and more ambivalence of policy and practice in child welfare. The 21st century began with one-fifth of U.S. children living in poverty.

The changing status of women was a pivotal event in social welfare history. Until the middle of the 20th century, married women rarely worked in the formal economy, yet they provided the vast majority of care, typically to members of their family. By the 1970s, a majority of married women were working for wages or salaries. Although women's entry into the labor force allowed many of them to take advantage of their skills and education and helped many family budgets that were strained by inflation and economic stagnation, it created a "caring gap" because women had less time to care for sick or dependent members of society. Today, much of this work is still done by women, but now they are more often poorly paid aides rather than family members.

Government financial capacity often has more influence than the needs of clients on social welfare policy. During the 18th and 19th centuries, state and local governments collected few taxes and provided few services, whereas the federal government's role in social welfare was usually limited to the well-being of veterans. The entry of the federal government into social welfare policy greatly expanded the social welfare budget (Figure 1.1). However, attacks on "tax-and-spend" policies during the late 20th century reversed the growth of direct public spending on social welfare. The economic crisis that began in 2007 challenged policy makers, regardless of their political ideology. Should the government increase spending to stimulate the economy and increase the budget deficit, or should the government cut spending to balance government budgets even if it served to prolong and deepen the crisis?

The needs of the aging now receive great attention in the United States. But concern for the welfare of our older citizens was not consistent before the Great Depression. In the late 19th century, special attention was paid to the needs of older white men who were veterans, but by the time of the Great Depression, the aging were one of the poorest groups in American society. The chapters that follow will trace the evolution of the policy that has given older Americans some relative advantage within the social welfare system.

The chapters that follow will also give the social welfare needs of two groups, veterans and blacks, special attention to demonstrate two extremes in social policy in the United States. Veterans have usually enjoyed better social welfare benefits than the rest of the population because of their service in the armed forces. They have played an important role in the expansion of public welfare programs because veterans' programs have often set precedents for benefits later extended to others. For example, in recent years, the federal government has committed increased funding to reduce homelessness among veterans, which has inspired homelessness advocates to call for an expanded effort to end homelessness generally.

For people of color—blacks, Hispanics, Native Americans, Asian Americans, and those who identify as multiracial—a very different picture emerges. From the beginning of European colonization, white invaders oppressed Native Americans. Genocide remains an essential part of American history. Although all people of color have faced discrimination and marginalization, African Americans' historical experience—slavery, segregation, and disenfranchisement—merits particular attention. Black Americans, the largest of these groups until the early 21st century, suffered the dual oppressions of color and class, of racial discrimination and poverty. Like other people of color, they have been relegated to a social and economic role that has left them more vulnerable to the risks of the market economy. Simultaneously, whites have often seen black Americans' economic marginalization not as a product of racism, but as proof of their genetic inferiority and cultural deficiencies. Even when the government adopted policies to address past discrimination—as it did after the Civil War and again during the 1960s—it has typically lacked the political will and financial resources to accomplish their goals.

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Figure 1.1 The expansion of government responsibility for the economic welfare of older Americans represented a break with past approaches to social welfare.

America—it is often said—is a nation of immigrants. As the number of immigrants has surged during periods of economic prosperity, anti-immigrant sentiment has often led to efforts to restrict their flow, setting off some of the nastiest episodes in the history of American racism. The expansion of the foreign-born population has had a complicated relationship to overall race relations. Within a few decades, America may well become a *minority majority* nation in which nonwhites make up a majority. At the same time, the expansion of immigration sometimes has diverted the nation's attention from the long-term marginalization of African Americans.

Anti-immigrant attitudes or nativism existed in the United States from the very first days. The treatment of Native Americans is one example. In the Colonial period,

Benjamin Franklin expressed concern about the German language and culture spreading in Pennsylvania, and the Federalists worried about the Irish and French. In the years before the Civil War, fears about immigrants gave rise to a short-lived political party, the Know-Nothings, while during the depression of the 1870s, anti-Chinese agitation—often tied to labor unions—led to the exclusion of the Chinese from entering the United States, legislation that was not repealed until the Second World War. Nativism triumphed in the 20th century, as Congress passed laws in 1921 and 1924 that virtually cut off European immigration for four decades. The entry of millions of new immigrants since the 1970s has again provoked two persistent reactions: a cosmopolitan belief that immigrants enrich American society and a defensive fear that they will steal jobs and dilute the “national character” (itself a product of generations of immigration).

Economic growth is intimately connected to trends in social welfare. As the country became richer, social welfare programs usually expanded, regardless of which political party was in power. The disparate treatment of different groups persisted, but policies became more generous for all.

For those living today, it is hard to imagine the plight of 18th-century Americans who barely produced enough to survive. The well-being, the very existence, of the colonies depended upon the maximum contribution of each of the colonists. The dominant ideologies of the Colonial period focused on human’s “original sin” and the necessity of stern treatment for the unproductive. These beliefs, in turn, justified coercive alternatives to relief—the workhouse, indenture, apprenticeship, contracting out, and so on.

In contrast, the contemporary economy has an unprecedented capacity to produce consumer goods. Where a majority of Americans needed to work in agriculture to feed the nation, now 3 per cent of the labor force can produce enough food to feed all Americans and a large share of the rest of the world. As a result, as a society we have more flexibility in allocating resources to different social groups. The growth of social welfare expenditures in the 20th century reflected, in part, the increased ability of society to meet the social welfare needs created by industrial society and its impact on family structure. Yet, this development was hardly linear. The decline of manufacturing after the 1970s undermined many of the social arrangements that supported an ever-expanding welfare system.

An examination of the history of the American response to dependency gives evidence that ideology often followed from the dynamics of the economy. The colonial perception of work as moral and idleness as immoral makes little sense, in an affluent society, in which individual well-being is so dependent on social conditions. Ironically, the unrivaled expansion of America’s productive capacity has occurred as older ideas of personal responsibility and punitive work-oriented policies have gained new legitimacy. The renewed war on dependency and idleness comes at a time when low-paying, unstable service jobs have replaced the more permanent manufacturing employment of a previous era.

For several decades, many Americans were able to maintain their standard of living in the face of stagnant wages by increasing their use of credit. During the recession of 2007–09, we discovered that this consumer debt, including college loans and risky mortgages, had created an illusion, a bubble that suddenly burst. In the wake of the recession, we’ve witnessed renewed demands for a living wage, including universal affordable health care and an increased minimum wage.

History is no elegant machine that turns out the same results over and over again. But it makes sense to pay attention to these four factors to try to make sense of the past:

- Economic productivity
- Perceptions of social institution’s effectiveness

- Views of human nature
- Past decisions about social welfare

The society's level of productivity at a particular historical moment places obvious constraints on how generous social welfare programs can be. High levels of output and affluence increase the possibilities for choice; and the degree of equality in a society can, and indeed often does, increase as national income rises. At the same time that wealth makes some redistribution possible, it also makes redistribution psychologically necessary; our concept of what might be a tolerable level of poverty varies with gross domestic product. American history, however, suggests that affluence does not automatically translate into generosity.

Perceptions of social institution's effectiveness strongly influence the initiation and development of social welfare programs. We often draw a distinction between a *residual* and an *institutional* philosophy of social welfare. The residual approach assumes that the array of other social institutions, including the market economy, families, and other social organizations, are capable of meeting the needs of most people. Social welfare should be seen as a stopgap system that is relevant only when the other institutions fail.

In contrast, institutional approaches to social welfare are premised on the belief that we live in an interdependent society. We are all subject to the risks of modern life—aging, illness, unemployment, and disability, to name some of the most important. Therefore, it makes sense—in the name of social solidarity—for us to make provisions for those of us who will fall victim to these risks.

Ironically, when a society is functioning well, it's easy to see the consumers of social welfare benefits and services as individual failures, while when the economy fails or social order is disrupted, we're likely to look for collective solutions to life's problems. In a way, this turns reality on its head, because it is precisely the provision of collective solutions that allows society to function most effectively.

Views of human nature unquestionably influence the response to human need. A belief in the superiority of any group in the population—indeed, any racial, ethnic, religious, or sexual elite—becomes a basis for discrimination and exploitation. Our original creed was that “all men are created equal,” but we've often acted as if some Americans are “more equal” than others. From the earliest interactions between Europeans and American Indians through the welfare reform debates of the 1990s, people have used nonhuman metaphors—wolves, dogs, and alligators—to justify the exclusion of some people from the dignity and support they deserved.

If people are seen as basically lazy, social welfare programs are devised to deter their use. A 19th-century listing of the causes of dependency highlighted individual character flaws and argued that the help given to the poor aggravated the problem. The dominant 19th-century response to dependency was the organization of “friendly visitors” to uncover the dishonesty and deviant behaviors of the poor. Alternatively, if people are considered essentially good, the response to need is more likely to be guided by the offer of incentives and the development of programs that provide opportunity for self-advancement.

Throughout American history, the poor have been considered both blessed and condemned by God, both virtuous and sinful, and both lazy and ambitious. And these contrasting views have often been held simultaneously. In connection with the family, for example, the prevailing 19th-century view of Charity Organization Society leaders that family members had to be deterred from a base, inherited instinct for pauperism was countered by



Watch this video on “Who Sees Poverty”

What connections can we draw between the global poverty debate and US social welfare policy?

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xg0MgrF_DLs



Watch “Are We Becoming More Unequal?”

What assumptions about human nature are behind the different speakers' answer to the question?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=371ySKWZ9mU>

Settlement House movement leaders' conviction about the constructive force of human aspiration. To the former, pauperism—its effects upon the individual, the family, and society—was a disease to be eradicated. Settlement house workers' belief that poverty resulted from the denial of opportunity led them to advocate for legislative reform designed to affirm and expand human dignity.

The trajectory of welfare reform from the 1960s to the 1990s underlines the value conflicts that run through social welfare policy. The rejection of work-based welfare reform proposals in the 1970s was significant. Although the proposals were steeped in the work ethic, this did not dispel opponents' fears that adding the working poor to the welfare rolls would lead to widespread moral decline and increased costs. The link between work and the receipt of income security benefits was not strong enough to dispel the threat to our economic system that Congress saw in a guaranteed annual income—no matter how low that income was. The success of conservative welfare reform during the 1980s and 1990s ended efforts to balance support for the work ethic and a decent standard of living to even our poorest citizens. Rather, by 1996, government used punitive regulations to prevent millions of eligible families from even applying for aid.

The impact of cultural bias is clear throughout our history. The Poor Laws, as they developed in England during the shift from agriculture to factory production, were an effort to deal with disjuncture and the conflict in that society between feudal lords and emerging industrialists. The adoption of the Poor Laws by the American colonies represented the imposition of laws that were inappropriate to American realities. The renewed vigor with which the Poor Laws were administered during the post-Civil War period demonstrated again the significance of historical heritage. The reliance upon family responsibility and local settlement as requirements for financial relief was detrimental not only to industrial expansion, but also to family welfare. The importance of mobility and of the nuclear family to successful urbanization and industrialization went unheeded. The racially discriminatory application of the Poor Law principles to the freed slaves, its advocates claims, would help African Americans achieve the independent status of other American citizens.

Previous policy decisions cast a long shadow on contemporary social welfare policy debates. The creation of the Social Security system during the 1930s influenced almost all decisions about policy for the aged that followed. By the same token, the failure to include health care in the original Social Security system allowed the health care field to be dominated by private, often for-profit hospitals, insurance companies, and providers. By the time Congress passed comprehensive health care legislation in 2010, past decisions assured that public policy would have to accommodate these private interests. A public option became the flashpoint for debate and was ultimately abandoned in favor of subsidies for private insurance.

In summary, the congruence of technology and the level of output, the view of society, the view of human nature, and the historical heritage will influence policy choices. This does not mean that these four factors contribute equally at any given moment. The very fact that the family, from the point of view of public policy, has been considered primarily an economic unit suggests that the degree to which each factor will exert influence on policy will depend upon existing economic conditions. The response to human need during the 1930s was remarkably different from that during the high-employment era of the 1970s. Yet both were periods during which need *per se* was widely recognized and civil disorder was threatened.

This volume is organized around historical eras and gives a description of the economic, political, and cultural context for each. The chapters are organized around three sections: changing social conditions, innovations in social welfare, and the emergence of social movements. Underlying this organization is a theory of policy change. At any given time, the existing social welfare system is confronted by two challenges. On the one hand, the foundations of the social order change as the population grows and its composition changes, different sectors of the economy grow or shrink, and people experience the traumas of war, drought, or dislocation. On the other hand, people join together in social movements that propose different ways of making sense of the changes around them and of influencing them. Sometimes these movements are reactive—harkening back to “the ways things used to be.” At other times, they seek new untried ways of coping with new difficulties. In time, some movements often succeed and become the new conventional wisdom, while others drop by the wayside.

One way to make history real is to examine the actual documents that changed policy. This book examines social welfare programs and institutions through the use of legislative documents, judicial decisions, administrative rulings, and statements of public and voluntary social welfare leaders. These documents give the reader the opportunity to put himself/herself back into history and consider the past not as a given, but rather as a set of choices made by earlier generations of Americans. We, like they, make history and live with the consequences of their and our choices.