

1

SOCIAL WORK

A Value-Based Profession in Historical Context

Vignette: Clinical and Macro Social Workers as Partners in Change

Read the NASW Code of Ethics before you read this vignette. Based on what you know from the media or your personal, work, or volunteer experiences, think about the following questions as you read the vignette. When you finish the vignette, answer the questions below.

1. How do Shellie and Julian's responses differ?
2. How does each response comply with or contradict the NASW Code of Ethics?
3. Propose two examples of how Shellie and Julian might work together in an integrated response.
4. What role might race, class, gender, and other aspects of identity play in this vignette?

Julian is a school-based social worker. He works with Gene, who has been struggling both academically and with his behavior in school. Julian can see that Gene and his family are distressed, and they have sought his assistance in helping Gene acclimate to school. Julian has helped them secure assessments, an Individual Education Plan (IEP), counseling, and home-based resources. Julian's advocacy efforts, even when successful, are often met with resistance and bureaucratic hurdles. Moreover, Gene is one of many children in Julian's school who face similar challenges. Julian does not have enough time to help all the children in need, and also finds the help he can provide under current laws, school district policies, and available resources is not what it should be. Although he does not know the names of all the policies and directives that impact his work with Gene, Julian knows that they include the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Julian also knows that testing in the schools, required by IDEA and state government regulations, have changed teachers' and school administrators' ability and willingness to assist children on his caseload, including whether or not they will work with him to retain students with disabilities.

Julian has begun talking with Shellie, a friend from his BSW program who works for a nonprofit disability rights organization. Shellie told him that her organization has been challenging policies that affect children like Gene. For example, they have been tracking the relationship between school testing scores and disciplinary action for children with behavioral disabilities. For the past few months, Shellie has been expressing her frustration with Julian because she claims that his work focuses too much on helping Gene and his family adapt to what she sees as a broken system. It feels to Julian that Shellie doesn't value the importance of the help that he provides to Gene and his family in a time of need. While he finds her work praiseworthy in the abstract, he thinks it is cruel to leave Gene and his other clients "high and dry" while they await policy changes that may never come.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- 1.1 Summarize social work's values, ethics, and early history
- 1.2 Review social welfare policy throughout the various eras of US history
- 1.3 Discuss the current policy context and its potential effect on social welfare policy

If you are reading this textbook you are probably a BSW or MSW student in a class that discusses social policy, maybe even one that is required. If you are like the majority of your peers around the country, you are probably planning a career that focuses on what many refer to as *clinical* social work practice (Council on Social Work Education, 2022). This means that you intend to focus on enhancing the well-being of individuals, families, and communities through practices and interventions that bring out the best in them or help them cope with difficult circumstances through therapy, counseling, or case management. If you are like the remaining small but mighty group of social work students, you are focused on what many refer to as *macro* practice, which means that you intend to bring about changes in programs, systems, or broader society using methods such as community organizing, policy practice, or administration. You may also be planning a career that incorporates both direct service and macro practice. These different groups of students typically come into policy classes with different hopes, concerns, and expectations. What you and your peers share is the choice to carry out your mission within the framework of social work, a value-based profession that is governed by a Code of Ethics. Your new professional Code of Ethics requires that you attend to the interactions that occur between the individual and society to provide the best possible services for clients and communities. While this may be challenging, we hope that this book helps you embrace this as central to your identity as a social worker and that it will be a source of professional pride.

Policy literacy, analysis, and advocacy have been a part of social work practice from its inception. This chapter examines the roots of social welfare policy, including historical markers such as the English Poor Laws and the New Deal, and how they have influenced social policy in the United States. It describes the debates between early social workers from the Charity Organization Societies and Settlement Houses, the foundational movements of the modern social work profession, to which we can trace tensions in our current professional practices. It highlights the time periods and events that are most critical to US social policy from the post-Civil War period until the Biden administration. All this lays the framework for the policies discussed in this text. For each time period, we briefly describe major political, economic, and social milestones with a

parallel description of the social work profession's status, challenges, and progress. This chapter also highlights significant contributions to social policy and the policy process in the United States that were made by social workers. Last, this chapter introduces the values of the profession, using the National Association of Social Workers' (NASW) Code of Ethics (2021) as a basis,



AP Photo/The Springfield Union News, Don Treeger

with a focus on the six core values of the profession and Ethical Standard 6: *Social workers' ethical responsibilities to the broader society*.

POLICY PRACTICE AND ME: VALUES, ETHICS, AND HISTORY OF SOCIAL WORK

Before you get too deep into this book, it will be helpful to think about the values and ethics of the social work profession and how they relate to your own values and ethics. This is a good time to reflect on the history of the profession you have chosen and some of the trailblazers who founded the profession.

Social Work Values and Ethics¹

The profession of social work is anchored in values. Codes of ethics around the world require social workers to work for individual and societal change, regardless of their practice focus (British Association of Social Workers, 2021; Canadian Association of Social Workers, 2024; International Federation of Social Workers, 2018; NASW, 2021). The preamble to the NASW Code of Ethics (2021, para. 4) states:

Social workers are sensitive to cultural and ethnic diversity and strive to end discrimination, oppression, poverty, and other forms of social injustice. These activities may be in the form of direct practice, community organizing, supervision, consultation, administration, advocacy, social and political action, policy development and implementation, education, and research and evaluation. Social workers seek to enhance the capacity of people to address their own needs. Social workers also seek to promote the responsiveness of organizations, communities, and other social institutions to individuals' needs and social problems.

Likewise, the Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (Council on Social Work Education, 2022) that govern US social work education require that students master core competencies to engage anti-racism, diversity, equity, and inclusion in practice (Competency 3); advance human rights and social, economic, and environmental justice (Competency 2); and engage in policy practice (Competency 5). Most professional social work codes of ethics integrate policy-level and individual change efforts. The NASW Code of Ethics (2021) encourages social workers to assess the need for, and strive to achieve, individual and system-level change (Ethical Standard 6). It does not divvy up this work among different professionals but asks that all social workers, whatever their mode of practice, engage in such activities.

Sarah Banks (2010) argues that integrity, also an obligation explicitly noted in most social work codes of ethics, includes an awareness “of the totality of the aims, values and rules of the profession, ensuring that their actions are consistent with these norms” (p. 2172). This means that social workers who act with the required integrity must address situations and social forces that give rise to practice environments that are in conflict with social work

¹ This section, the sections on social work history, and a portion of the section on social work practice were adapted from Shdaimah & McCoyd, 2012.

values. To the extent that these are systemic, ethical social workers should not be content to find the *least bad* ways to resolve dilemmas but should instead actively engage in public dialogue to change the climate. In their call for **anti-oppressive social work practice**, Roni Strier and Orly Binyamin (2014) note that “[p]overty is a multi-layered situation of oppression. Effective assistance to clients requires an approach that goes beyond individual case-work and uses a multi-approach methodology that combines interventions on micro and macro-practice levels” (p. 7).

In other words, if the problem that social workers address is multilayered, then to practice social work responsibly requires us to use multilayered approaches or risk perpetuating or even enforcing oppression and other forms of injustice.

The social work values of social justice, human worth and dignity, and the centrality of human relationships promote equity and fairness. Individual-level practice is important, but insufficient on its own because individual distress is connected to, and affected by, social forces, such as unemployment, discrimination, famine, and war. To work only at the individual level of change may provide temporary relief, but does not address systemic factors that impact clients and others who are or may be in the future in similar situations (Cloward & Piven, 1971/1993; Dempsey, 2008). The individual focus, in fact, may perpetuate injustice (Becker, 2005) and intensify individual distress through victim blaming (Ryan, 1976). Knowledge of policies and their implications for vulnerable populations is also necessary so that well-intentioned social workers do not unwittingly perpetuate harms, as evidenced by workers in state agencies who have at times stigmatized and punished families living in poverty (Martin, 2012). Similarly, social policy advocacy that remains at the societal level abandons the individual to their circumstances (Shdaimah et al., 2009). Structural change alone can take time and leaving individuals in distress while awaiting social change is callous. Therefore, social workers must be committed to using all the skills and tools at our disposal to work on both.

REFLECTION: CODE OF ETHICS, CLINICAL AND MACRO SOCIAL WORKERS

Pull up the NASW Code of Ethics again. Write a memo to either Shellie or Julian from the vignette above. Your memo to Shellie should outline specific parts of the Code of Ethics that support micro practice related to these issues. Your memo to Julian should outline specific parts of the Code of Ethics that support macro practice related to these issues.

Social Work History

Many trace the beginnings of US social work to the **Charity Organization Societies (COS)**, which are identified with Mary Richmond and “scientific philanthropy” and to the **Settlement House Movement (SHM)**, which is identified with Jane Addams and grassroots social advocacy (Brieland, 1990; Ehrenreich, 1985; Reamer, 1998). It often appears that these two types of practice were in direct opposition, in part due to the polarization that grew as social work developed and professionalized (Ehrenreich, 1985). The COS-grounded perspective viewed individual

misfortune as generally due to character flaws or poor choices. The SHM-grounded perspective viewed human misfortune as a result of social structures and institutions that constrain individuals.

The historic split between clinical practice and policy practice was not nearly as polarized as many have made it out to be. Both Richmond and Addams, despite their different foci, saw interplay between individual choices and the social context (Addams, 1911; Richmond, 1917). Direct contact with her Hull House neighbors led Addams and her Chicago settlement house colleagues to craft integrated clinical and macro responses to poverty, ill health, and child care needs (Knight, 2005). Purposely situated in the community it served, Hull House used research to collect individual experiences to understand them within the broader social system. The settlement house workers used surveys, which later became a basis for sociological research, to convince fellow citizens and policymakers of needed changes in areas as diverse as public sanitation and child labor practices (Zimbalist, 1977). Likewise, Richmond (1901) was committed to “a scientific practice of philanthropy.” She developed schema of concentric circles to show the levels of influence and targets for intervention including individuals, families, communities, policies, and societal contexts. Social work’s scientific investigation led to comprehensive investigation and understanding of problems. Addams, the Hull House residents, and Richmond all acted in individual and policy arenas because they saw the individual and the society as connected and brought both perspectives to problems they tackled.

Social work has continued to respect the influences of both individuals and social structures, seeing them as inextricably connected. A hallmark of social work practice and ethics has been an ongoing thread in the history of social work calling for a need to connect policy to practice (Adams, 2004; Zubrzycki & McArthur, 2004), practice at multiple levels (Breckenridge & James, 2010), and the use of critical ethical reflective practice (Lay & McGuire, 2010). The focus of this text is the United States, but similar conversations about the importance of incorporating macro practice has been heard in other places, such as Israel (Weiss-Gal, 2008), Great Britain (Reamer & Shardlow, 2009; Stepney, 2009), and Australia (Giles et al., 2007; McDonald & Marsten, 2008; Shankar et al., 2009). Calls for integrated practice have been frequent (Hugman, 2009; Johnson, 1999; Specht & Courtney, 1994), but not all that effective. This may reflect the difficulty of implementing integrated practice on the ground rather than a rejection of such arguments. In the next chapter, we provide an in-depth discussion of the key concepts and practices that can help social workers identify and integrate policy into their own practices.

Over the past two decades, growing social work critics from around the world have noted that neoliberal policies (which we discuss below) have greatly impacted social work practice (Garrett, 2019). These focus on the individual as the locus of both responsibility and change, often to the exclusion of systemic forces. Neoliberalism also seeks to reshape state services to mimic business models, regardless of whether or not incentivization through profit or maximization of efficiency is appropriate or whether the state service goals call for a different framing (Weinberg & Banks, 2019). Relevant for social work practice, such changes have been accompanied by an emphasis on measurement and counting which may leave social workers little time or incentives to work with clients or to value processes and interpersonal interactions that may be harder to capture. This practice context has a taming or co-opting influence by making it hard for social workers in government agencies and nonprofits that work with them to engage in integrated practice and by distancing them from their clients (Krumer-Nevo, 2020; González-Portillo &

Jaraíz-Arroyo, 2023). A social work value-based response calls for us to make a concerted effort to recognize and address such a practice context using policy analysis lenses like the ones we provide you with in Chapter 4.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF US SOCIAL WELFARE POLICY

Michael Katz (2013) famously noted that a dominant thread in US social welfare policy is its preoccupation with sorting those categorized as “deserving poor” from people categorized as “undeserving poor.” People seen as undeserving are considered responsible for their plight, often through poor decision-making such as an unwillingness or inability to take advantage of opportunities that are presumed to exist. People seen as deserving are those who have tried and failed, through no fault of their own, to meet their own needs. We purposely use quotation marks here, because the brief history that we provide in the following subsections suggests that groups of people most often fall into these categories as a result of their demographic characteristics (e.g., race, gender, ethnicity) and the source of their need (e.g., poverty, desertion, job loss). We believe that our professional values call on us to see all humans as deserving of respect and dignity which is not found in this categorization of people as either deserving or undeserving of help.

Precolonial (Including Elizabethan Poor Laws)

The roots of US public assistance are in England. The English welfare system is often traced to the 1601 **Elizabethan Poor Laws** (the Statute of 43 Elizabeth), which are the beginnings of public responsibility for people who were unable to meet their own needs. Kurzman (1970) sees these laws as part of a shift that reflected (1) a secular view of assistance rather than (only) a religious obligation, (2) the recognition of unemployment as a condition requiring assistance rather than (only) disapproval, and (3) a role for national government in assistance. Established by Queen Elizabeth in the wake of widespread unemployment and famine, these laws set up a system of local government relief. They required localities to collect taxes to support those deemed worthy of assistance and required the election of two local “overseers of the poor” in each jurisdiction to administer the relief. Some of those requiring assistance, such as older adults and people with disabilities, received what was called **outdoor relief** (i.e., assistance that allowed them to remain in their own homes; Bloy, 2002). Others were provided with **indoor relief**; this included people who were sent to orphanages or hospitals, as well as those considered able to work, sometimes called *sturdy beggars* or *idle beggars* who were forced to live in almshouses and perform labor. Children whose parents were unable to support them were apprenticed out, and their parents lost the right to direct their care and upbringing (Hansan, 2011). Those considered able to work who refused could be fined or jailed.

Due to concerns about families migrating to receive assistance, the 1662 Law of Resettlement and Removal allowed localities to expel dependent nonresident individuals or families. The **principle of less eligibility** informed both the original design and subsequent changes to poor relief. According to this principle, any assistance should either be so insufficient or so difficult to get that getting assistance would be the least desirable option for sustenance. This principle is derived from Protestantism and is often referred to as the Protestant Ethic or Calvinism, suggesting that those who work hard will prosper and others should suffer the consequences of their laziness. Such provisions would lead individuals to seek aid only in

the direst of circumstances and would support a capitalist system based on profit made from the exploitation of wage labor.

While the Elizabethan Poor Laws changed over the centuries, its chief features remained the same. These features, many of which continue through history into our current policy, include (1) demonstration of acceptable need, (2) worthiness of recipients, (3) localism, or only providing support for those in the local area leading to local discretion in administration, (4) making assistance contingent on submission to authority or imposition of conditions, and (5) the principle of less eligibility.

Colonial Times Until the Civil War

Before their contact with colonizers, many Native American tribes in what is now the United States shared cultural traits that included consensus governing and focus on community (State Library of North Carolina, 2006). Tribes had their own systems of making decisions, often including democratic principles or consensus decision-making (Bower, 2022). These governmental structures would have included decisions about social welfare, but little knowledge of those systems remains. The structures and cultures were not respected by colonizers from Europe, who treated the Native populations as people who had to be civilized because they “did not really understand the Indians, their love of nature, their communal life and their concept of collective land ownership” (Trattner, 1998, p. 23).

Although some colonists drew on continental religious traditions, most came from England and therefore localities instituted poor laws following the traditions described previously. As with the Elizabethan Poor Laws, the **welfare state** (the helping functions that governments provide individuals and communities for social welfare) was narrowly conceived as helping people from within the community, and only in dire circumstances. Care for older adults and those who were widowed, unemployed, or ill were often combined. Like their British predecessors, early US social welfare policy was intertwined with punishment, rehabilitation, and socialization to community norms. Colonial and early US social welfare policies were administered by local **overseers of the poor**, who viewed assistance through a moral lens and attempted to distinguish between those who deserved aid and those who did not (Day, 2006). Like their English counterparts, they were authorized to levy taxes from the local communities to fund the aid.

Most colonial American assistance was administered in group settings such as workhouses or almshouses, the first of which was established in Boston in 1662 (Huey, 2001). Some shared sites with prisons. Anyone considered able to work performed difficult and unpleasant labor in exchange for aid according to the principle of less eligibility. Indoor relief was designed to inculcate recipients with the dominant Protestant capitalist values of hard work, frugality, and self-sufficiency (Weber, 1930/1992). In rural areas where congregate care was not feasible, care of those in need was contracted out, sometimes through a process of bidding, which often led to abuse (Hansan, 2011). Although early social welfare policy was punitive, stingy, and stigmatizing in many ways, it also met important needs. In the early years of the Republic, social upheaval and change left individuals and families vulnerable to changes in the economy, illness, and injury. Like today, individuals and families relied on assistance temporarily when in need, which is contrary to the image of continuous or inherent *dependence* that is so often depicted. Using a feminist lens, historian Ruth Wallis Herndon (2012) illustrates the ways almshouses served women as a source of community and sustenance for their families as a result of very limited choices (Baylson, 2017).

As the population grew and social institutions developed, different types of welfare functions were separated; for example, designated orphanages would separate children who had lost their parents from other categories of “needy” people. The poor conditions of workhouses and the increasing cost of indoor relief for a growing population also led to shifts in assistance. These combined with forces such as immigration, urbanization, industrialization, changes wrought by the Civil War, and shifting racial dynamics. All of these factors led to changes in social welfare policy in the mid-1800s. In the next section we explore policies that were designed to respond to these changes.

REFLECTION

Women and Poverty Then and Now

Read the following article, which is linked at edge.sagepub.com/laner: Herndon, R. W. (2012). Poor women and the Boston almshouse in the early republic. *Journal of the Early Republic*, 32(3), 349–381. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jer.2012.0064>

Choose one of the four women whom Herndon profiles and put yourself in her place.

1. Write a brief journal entry in which you reflect on
 - a. Your feelings about your situation
 - b. Your hopes for the future
 - c. Your concerns about the future
 - d. The advantages and disadvantages of seeking assistance at the Boston almshouse
2. Thinking as a person living in your own time, how might your situation be different from the woman whom you chose and why?

Civil War and Reconstruction

The US Civil War was waged from 1861 to 1865. The Union army fought against the Confederate army, which represented the eleven states that tried to secede from the United States, thus ending the uneasy compromise that allowed the existence of slavery at the discretion of individual states. By the end of the Civil War, 620,000 lives were lost, the majority by disease (National Park Service, n.d.). In the period immediately following the war, between 1865 and 1870, three significant amendments were made to the US Constitution. The Thirteenth Amendment abolished slavery. The Fourteenth Amendment granted citizenship to all those born in and naturalized in the United States, effectively granting citizenship to formerly enslaved African Americans. The Fifteenth Amendment prohibited states from withholding the right to vote from men due to their race (women, regardless of race, were not afforded the Constitutional right to vote until 1920).

The Civil War resulted in the freedom of four million formerly enslaved people as well as the dislocation of White and Black populations and destruction of many cities in the South. The US Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands (generally called the Freedmen’s Bureau) was established by the federal government to oversee the social and economic rebuilding of the South. This Bureau was operated by the US War Department in multiple arenas to improve the lives, business, and social and economic relations of African Americans and poor White people in the aftermath of the economic destruction of the Civil War (National Archives, 2016).

A review of the Freedmen's Bureau's records shows that African Americans fought hard to realize the new rights accorded to them under federal law. There were many successes, including the election of African Americans to local, state, and federal government, but there were also challenges. This approximately decade-long period following the Civil War was referred to as **Reconstruction**. Formerly enslaved people and advocates wanted to build different social, political, and economic structures, while many White people in the South sought to restore or recreate the relations of power and privilege that existed prior to the war. Local and state legislatures enacted policies known as the **Black Codes** to curtail social, economic, and civil rights of African Americans. Although these were initially reversed by the federal government, once Reconstruction ended in 1877, Southern states and local governments regained and maintained a firm hold on power through segregation, voter suppression, and preferential treatment for White residents. Oppressive economic arrangements such as sharecropping, which replicated conditions of slavery, kept some poor White people and many African Americans working the fields of White landowners for little compensation. Similarly, a practice called "convict leasing" allowed for the forced labor of people arrested as vagrants or convicts (Cohen, 1991). Illegal tactics of intimidation and violence were also widespread. It was not until the civil rights movement a century later that these systems of oppression began to be dismantled. Reconstruction was not only hampered by former supporters of the Confederacy, but also by the federal administrative apparatus of recovery. Reconstruction was run by the federal government, and there was much animosity between these Northern administrators and many of the White citizens of the South. On top of the devastation to the economy and the loss of homes, farms, and livelihoods that made recovery difficult, Southerners accused government administrators of mismanagement and corruption.

The involvement of so many US soldiers and the collateral effect of the Civil War on their families also led to what many historians consider to be one of the most progressive and generous social safety net programs of its time. Federal pensions were provided to veterans and dependents of Union soldiers killed in the war. While federal benefits did not extend to Confederate soldiers and their families, former Confederate states often provided similar assistance. Initially pensions were provided only for veterans who sustained injuries in the Civil War. In 1890, eligibility expanded to include veterans who became unable to perform manual labor regardless of whether the source of their disability was war-related so long as they had served at least ninety days (Skocpol, 1992). Over time, the military pension system began to apply when age itself made veterans and their dependents eligible for disability benefits that were paid well into the twentieth century (Orloff, 1998). Many view the Civil War pension system as groundwork for later US social welfare provision.

Gilded Age

The Gilded Age, as its name suggests, is characterized by a thin patina of wealth covering a much darker reality.² Although a small portion of the US population enjoyed great wealth,

² This moniker is based on the title of a novel by Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Weaver. "Neither writer had a clue that their title would become the brand of an American era that extended from the end of the Civil War into the opening years of the twentieth century. The co-authors adapted *The Gilded Age* from a familiar line in Shakespeare's play *King John*: "To gild refined gold, to paint the lily." . . . Extending the point, the bright shine of gilding can and does hide a base metal that lies beneath" (Martin & Tichi, 2016).

the overwhelming majority of US residents lived with great hardship and uncertainty. There are many parallels to modern US life. The vagaries of a capitalist industrial system where profits were made from the hard labor of the masses or through speculative investments shook the economy that was unchecked by oversight, regulation, or government protections. The great accumulation of wealth from the building of railroads, mining, and industry often relied on a large, low-paid labor force. Many of these low-wage workers were people immigrating to the US to flee violence and famine in their countries of origin who were desperate for work. With few options available to them, they performed dangerous and backbreaking tasks during long hours, often in conditions that led to poor health, disability, and occupational and environmental hazards. Some factory owners and mine operators ran what was called a *company town* so that workers were beholden to their employers for

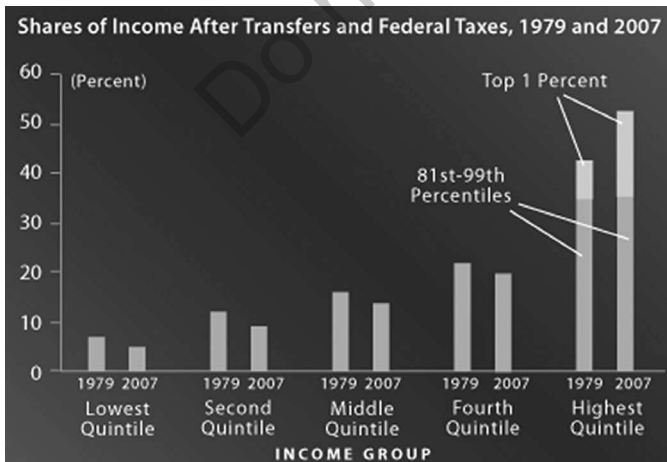
housing, food, public safety, and their children's education.

In many cases, employers held monopolies or near-monopolies. This meant that they faced no competition, leaving workers and the consumers to whom they sold their products and services with no leverage to negotiate wages or prices. The following image depicts the difficulty faced by workers who were squeezed between meager wages and high costs, in this case by the Pullman Company.

Politics were marked by corruption and systems of patronage, whereby politicians garnered votes by using their power to reward supporters. The patronage system itself was legal, and federal, state, and local politicians of the day, including President Andrew Jackson, used it openly (Riordan, 1995). The right to vote was among the few means of leverage and power that members of immigrant groups held. Patronage systems (New York's Tammany Hall was one of the most infamous) were therefore mutually beneficial for many elected officials and the immigrant groups or neighborhoods where they lived. They were one of the few avenues that populations marginalized by discrimination could use to gain access to employment opportunities and services, particularly at the local level. The patronage system was curbed by the Pendleton Act of 1883, which led to the creation of a federal civil service system based on merit rather than favors to supporters; similar state legislation followed. While legislation could not entirely eliminate favoritism, it helped build a civil service system made up of workers who had knowledge and expertise that did not change with political winds.



The Condition of Laboring Man at Pullman



DISCUSSION

The Impact of Growing Inequality

As shown in the previous section, socioeconomic inequality in the United States has grown since the 1970s (Stone et al., 2020). Discuss the following:

1. What are some potential negative and positive consequences of wealth or income inequality?
2. What impact might these have on people's future opportunities in education, jobs, housing, or in other arenas?
3. How do large socioeconomic differences affect relationships between groups in broader society?
4. How might the balance of power evolve and change as inequality grows? As it shrinks?

One concept that came to prominence in this time period, used to justify inequality, oppression, and control, was Social Darwinism. **Social Darwinism** was an adaptation of Charles Darwin's theory of evolution, which states that species evolve over time through a natural process in response to changes in climate, predators, disasters, food supply, and so on (Darwin, 1869). According to Darwin, organisms and species that are best suited to environmental conditions become dominant through survival and reproduction. Although there is no evidence that Darwin intended for his theory to be used for social purposes and many important flaws exist in such application, Social Darwinists such as Herbert Spencer sought to use evolutionary principles to manipulate the social environment (Degler, 1991). Social Darwinism led to state-sanctioned sterilization and justification of now—scientifically discredited racist and classist policies. Social Darwinism was embraced by many different groups for different reasons, including xenophobia, self-interested greed, and misguided desire to improve the population. The eugenics movement was supported by so-called social progressives and the conservatives of the day.

Progressive Era

The Progressive Era, from approximately 1890 to 1920, was a time of increased political activism. The United States was changing rapidly with industrialization, which led to social and economic transformation. Progressives were unified in their concern for problems associated with industrialization, including urbanization, political corruption, alcoholism, and immigration, and they sought government-based remedies. They advocated for prohibition, women's voting rights, worker protections, and child labor laws. This is the period also associated with the birth of social work as a profession.

Urbanization describes a shift in the United States from a primarily rural, farming society to one in which most of the population resided in cities (Boyer, 1992). Two streams of population fed the growing cities. The first came from within the country. The other was people immigrating from other countries, many who also came from rural areas in their countries of origin. Seeking a better life through the promise of employment and opportunity, both groups left behind the ability to sustain themselves in times of need with food from family farms and stable social networks. Urban life was characterized by close quarters, poor sanitation, and overcrowding. The dire conditions in the tenements of New York were documented by Jacob Riis (1890/1967) in his famous photojournalistic series *How the Other Half Lives*. Riis described multiple families cramped into poorly ventilated and structurally unsound tenements with little access to light or water. Riis was a **muckraker**, a term used to describe Progressive Era journalists who exposed poor conditions and corruption, often through shocking description, to

inspire reform. Another muckraker was Upton Sinclair (1906/2012), whose popular book *The Jungle* graphically depicted the dangerous working conditions in Chicago meatpacking plants and the plight of those who worked in them. This book was the impetus for the United States to create federal food safety legislation, including the creation of the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) through the 1906 Pure Food and Drugs Act (Food and Drug Administration, 2018).

Immigrant communities were the target of much controversy during this time, with much stigma focused on non-White groups, particularly those from Asia. After 1870, nearly twenty-five million people emigrated primarily from Europe, with smaller waves from China. The influx of immigrants with different languages and cultural practices were seen by many as a threat to “American” identity and unity; others saw immigrant populations as a resource for growth and a social asset (Addams, 1909; Foner, 2002). Reformers of this era sought to Americanize immigrants, often in ways that disparaged existing cultural and religious practices, diet, and language. These reformers set about “teaching” recent arrivals how to cook and keep house, and provided children with care and education with the explicit goal of acculturating their families. The first federal law passed to regulate immigration was the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1875. While all immigrant populations faced discrimination and prejudice, xenophobia was particularly virulent toward Asian immigrants, particularly those from China (Kristofer, 2003).

As briefly described earlier, the Gilded Age and Progressive Era were important times for the profession of social work. Originating in England in the mid-nineteenth century, the COS systematized and coordinated the provision of assistance. This was in part a result of the rise of a growing faith in science as an objective way to discover truth to solve problems. It also coincided with professionalization. The COS developed principles designed to identify those deserving of aid and provide relief together with moral instruction (Waugh, 2001). In this manner, the COS tried to control the behavior of both the givers and receivers of aid (McFadden, 2014). The COS was contested by some contemporaries as harsh and judgmental. Others argued that it represented not elitist and moralistic views of poor people, but rather recognition of the complex nature of poverty that required concerted, thoughtful, and informed effort (Waugh, 2001). Certainly by today’s standards, many of the criteria they used to determine fault and deservingness were clearly rooted in racist, chauvinist, and anti-immigrant prejudice. Aspects of the COS and its scientific case management system that have been a precursor to modern social work include its attention to documenting client needs and progress, home visiting, and coordination among agencies to make the best use of resources. While the COS focused on the idea of scientific charity (Lane & Jacob, 1973), members of the SHM lived among the people they served, purposely forming bonds of community (Chen, 2013). Working with local community members, settlement house workers promoted health, education, and child care. Settlement house workers were engaged in broader political advocacy, particularly around child work regulations and public health.

The foremothers of the social work profession who were largely a philanthropic, female workforce were not always respected. Research, political activism, and commitment to promote human flourishing began largely as charitable efforts. As this work was systemized, early social workers sought recognition as professionals. In 1915, Abraham Flexner, who had recently published an influential report on medicine as a profession, told the National Conference of Charities and Correction that social work did not meet the criteria of professionalism (although he admitted at the outset of his speech that he knew little about social work and could be convinced otherwise). This was a blow to the young profession that led to self-reflection and pursuit of professionalism along criteria laid out by Flexner. These included establishing educational requirements and efforts to develop a distinct body of knowledge. These efforts were contested, and many saw the pursuit of professional recognition as a distraction from the value base of the

profession (Specht & Courtney, 1994). Others claimed that to accomplish our value-based mission, social work must enjoy recognition and respect. Similar debates continue today.

Great Depression

In 1929, the United States was in the throes of the **Great Depression**, the seeds of which had been sown by economic and trade policies, and increases in the availability of credit to consumers and companies. The increase in industrialization led to environmental effects that decimated agriculture (Jansson, 2012). In response to the losses of thirteen million to fifteen million jobs and countless homes and the closures of banks, factories, and businesses, nonprofit agencies attempted to meet the need. Overwhelmed by the enormity of need, by 1932, about one-third of the nonprofit agencies had closed (Trattner, 1999). Governmental response was slow and insufficient under the administration of President Herbert Hoover. In 1930, he approved \$45 million to feed livestock, but refused to allow any money to go to starving farmers. He also vetoed a public works program that would spend \$2.9 billion to put people back to work and kick-start the economy. Social workers played a role during this time in organizing and testifying at legislative hearings about unemployment, poverty, and hunger.

The election of Franklin Roosevelt to the presidency in 1932 provided an opportunity for the enactment of federal relief programs collectively known as the **New Deal**. It also brought social workers to positions of national power, including Frances Perkins, the first female Cabinet secretary, who served as Secretary of Labor throughout Roosevelt's three-term presidency. Collectively, New Deal programs provided relief to some twenty million people at a price tag of approximately \$4 billion, but left substantial numbers of people without jobs or in jobs paying substandard wages. These programs were also discriminatory—Black people and women were ineligible for many benefits or considered only after White men were provided assistance.

Many of the New Deal programs ended by 1934, but they paved the way for the creation of the Social Security Act, passed by Congress in 1935 with significant input from social workers such as Perkins, Harry Hopkins, and Wilbur J. Cohen (profiled in Chapter 9). The Social Security Act was one of the few permanent results of this time period, and provided assistance for older adults (through the Old Age Insurance program—what most people think of when they think of Social Security) and people with disabilities (Social Security Disability Insurance). As with other programs of the era, Black Americans were subject to discrimination as a result of the program design. The Social Security Act deliberately excluded domestic and agricultural workers, the majority of whom were Black, from Old Age Insurance (Brown, 1999). You can read more about components of the Social Security Act in Chapters 12 and 14.

The onset of World War II in 1941 ushered in economic benefits for many, bringing the country close to full employment (Trattner, 1999). The need for an expanded labor force resulted in greater employment of women and Black people, but led to race riots and overt discrimination



San Francisco, California. With Baggage Stacked, Residents of Japanese Ancestry Await Bus

Department of the Interior War Relocation Authority

(Trattner, 1999). This time period also brought Executive Order 8802 (1941), which was designed to eliminate discrimination based on race, creed, or national origin in government or defense industries. World War II was also the impetus for two racist decisions by the US government. First, President Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066 (Park, 2008), which resulted in the incarceration of 120,000 Japanese people, two-thirds of whom were US citizens born in the United States, by the time the program ended in 1946. Social workers were an integral part of this process.

Social workers vetted, registered, counseled, and tagged all Nikkei [Japanese] families, along with their accompanying luggage, at the many Wartime Civilian Control Administration (WCCA) stations . . . Social workers also staffed administrative offices within the relocation camps and the regional War Relocation Authority (WRA) resettlement centers . . . in various parts of the nation. (Park, 2008, p. 448)

The Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of this order in *Korematsu v. United States* (1944).

The second public issue about which social workers have been relatively silent was President Harry Truman's 1945 decision to use the atomic bomb against Japan. This resulted in killing more than 200,000 people in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, with lifelong effects on the survivors such as miscarriages, stillbirths, and various types of cancer (Southard, 2015). The use of the atomic bomb was followed quickly by the end of World War II, the return of soldiers, and a renewed focus at home on the economy. Government funding for the war efforts is generally credited with improving the US economy and the boom period that followed helped keep attention away from the consequences of internment camps and the atomic bomb.

Post-World War II Boom

Throughout the New Deal era and after World War II, social workers such as Bertha Capen Reynolds and Mary Van Kleeck were viewed as threatening because they espoused radical views (Reisch & Andrews, 2001). Addams was labeled "subversive" by Illinois and New York State legislative committees. Reynolds lost her position as dean of the Smith College School of Social Work in 1938 because of her radical political beliefs. Van Kleeck was targeted for her support of unions and candidacy for the New York state senate as a candidate of the American Labor Party. These were the most well-known of countless individuals, social workers, union members, faculty, students, and more who were targeted by state legislatures, Congress, and other groups. Their membership in unions or other political organizations was seen as disloyal to the United States or as unpatriotic during the buildup to what would become the Cold War.

The post-World War II time period, roughly 1945 to 1960, is often characterized by **McCarthyism**, a term that describes both the anti-communism panic stoked by Wisconsin senator Joseph McCarthy and a general "atmosphere of personal recrimination and political oppression" (Reisch & Andrews, 2001, p. 90). The driving forces behind McCarthyism were fear of change, fear of the Soviet government and Soviet allies and the related push for military spending, as well as concerns with labor and civil rights activism. In 1947, President Truman formally banned members of the Communist Party or anyone sympathizing with them from serving in government positions. This ban resulted in thousands of anonymous reports attacking those who were seen as members of the Communist Party or in any way questioning the US government or those in power.

During this period, the social work profession turned to focus on techniques and work with individuals rather than social action or social justice (Specht & Courtney, 1994). The profession also held back from activism in the civil rights movement, which was expanding after the 1954

Brown v. Board of Education decision by the Supreme Court and the Montgomery Bus Boycott, despite criticism by Whitney Young and others (Trattner, 1999). During the next era, referred to as the Great Society, many social workers began to re-engage with social action.

Great Society

The Great Society lasted from 1960, when John F. Kennedy was elected president, through the end of Lyndon Johnson's presidency in 1968. Kennedy had many ideas for addressing poverty and improving the lives of US citizens. During his administration, the federal government gave money to state welfare departments to encourage them to hire social workers in an effort to reduce the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) rolls (O'Connor, 2004). He also worked to get the Community Mental Health Act of 1963 passed to provide federal money toward the construction of outpatient and preventive mental health centers, although the implementation of this after his death was flawed (Jansson, 2012). After Kennedy's assassination in 1963, Vice President Johnson assumed the presidency, and shepherded many significant pieces of legislation originally conceived by Kennedy through Congress. This period is called the Great Society Era because it expanded the federal government's role in addressing social issues, such as poverty, civil rights, hunger, health care, public school aid, and tax reform.

The civil rights movement was well underway when President Johnson entered office. Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. attracted worldwide media attention in 1955 with his peaceful protest in Birmingham, Alabama. The protest and violent police response were widely televised. It captured the public's attention because it graphically exposed unjust treatment of Black people in the United States. Frustrated by economic desperation, millions of Black citizens united to express disapproval of the institutions that oppressed them. Riots broke out in the streets of every major city across the United States. Many social workers who had previously shied away from social reform were forced to face the unpleasant reality that reform was necessary (Trattner, 1999). Social workers such as Dorothy Height and Whitney Young Jr. were key leaders in the civil rights movement.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 provided equal access to public accommodations, withheld federal funding from segregated schools, and prevented federal contractors from discriminating in employment decisions. In response to massive protests, President Johnson supported the Civil Rights Act of 1965, which was designed to eliminate discrimination related to voting rights, such as literacy or other screening tests that had been used in the South to disenfranchise Black voters (Jansson, 2012).

Despite concerns raised by opponents who believed that welfare created dependency, Johnson declared a War on Poverty, and supported several programs designed during the Kennedy administration including the Economic Opportunity Act and the Food Stamps Act of 1964. The Economic Opportunity Act provided funding for Job Corps to train conservation workers, provided loans for small businesses and farmers, and created a domestic Peace Corps (O'Connor, 2004). While Kennedy's vision of national health insurance failed, Johnson, working with House Ways and Means Committee Chair Wilbur Mills, helped create



Hal Mathewson/NY Daily News Archive via Getty Images

Medicare to help older adults pay for health care and Medicaid to address the medical needs of those living in poverty (Jansson, 2012; Trattner, 1999). You can read more about these programs in Chapters 12 and 13. Another major legislative accomplishment of the Johnson administration that had been sought by Kennedy was the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), a law designed to equalize educational funding by providing federal assistance to public schools with high percentages of low-income children (this law was most recently reauthorized as the Every Student Succeeds Act in 2015). Though it was clear that many changes were still necessary, the Vietnam War squandered whatever funds would have been available to make those changes. Johnson refused to increase taxes to cover both the Great Society programs and war expenses and chose to support the war. The United States spent twenty-five times more on the war in Vietnam than it spent trying to eliminate poverty (Chafe, 1986).

Much of the social work literature during this turbulent period examined the profession's core values and explored the relationship between social workers' personal values and their professional practice (Reamer, 1998). The exploration of these topics eventually led the NASW to adopt its first Code of Ethics in 1960. Because of the expansion of social welfare programs, more social workers were needed to fill positions created by these programs. To increase the number of social workers in the field, the NASW opened full membership to individuals with baccalaureate degrees, although some believed that recognition of the BSW deprofessionalized social work (Stuart, 2013). Similarly, the popularity of the doctorate in social work (DSW) increased and many social workers opted for DSW degrees over traditional PhDs. The number of social work doctoral programs grew significantly, with twenty new programs beginning from 1965 to 1975 (Crow & Kindelsperger, 1975). Schools of social work recruited students from disadvantaged areas and revised curricula to include more content on group work, community organization, public administration, and social policy. Social workers began to view casework as ineffective during this period, moving away from individual therapy and toward advocacy and reform. The NASW changed its bylaws to declare social workers' dual obligation to use individual social work methods and social action to prevent and alleviate distress (Trattner, 2009). Politically oriented community action reemerged along with social workers' increased involvement in the political process. The Great Society Era served as a call to action for social workers and shattered the complacency of precious decades. Many changes made during this time continue to have a significant impact on the social work profession today.

Reagan Era

The Great Society is often characterized by a wider understanding of social problems, such as poverty and racism, and efforts to address them using government resources. In contrast, the Reagan Era can be viewed as a rejection of such efforts (Slessarev, 1988). Some people attribute this shift to the economic recession that began with the oil crises of 1973 and 1974, ending a sense of optimism engendered by an extended period of economic growth (Krieger, 1987). Named for Ronald Reagan, who served as US president from 1981 to 1989, this historical period is often seen as an important turning point in the ideas about the proper role of government, (re) distribution of wealth, and social responsibility.

According to Krieger (1987), efforts to use economic policy to harmonize class interests were replaced by a desire to use government policy to support business interests. Often referred to as **Reaganomics**, this was characterized by a belief that regulatory and tax policies favorable to businesses stimulate economic growth, also known as *supply-side* economics. A second feature of Reaganomics is a lack of business regulation characteristic of *laissez-faire* capitalism that leaves the market to its own devices. Proponents of Reaganomics believed that

benefits that accrue to people in higher income brackets would ultimately benefit society by creating more economic opportunities, jobs, and wealth among those who would spend it. Critics of such policies often refer to them as *trickle-down* economics, suggesting that they create a windfall for the wealthy and very few benefits actually reach those at the bottom of the economic ladder.

Reagan ran for president as an outsider during a time of economic crisis. He took a strong position that “government is not the solution to our problem, government is the problem” (CBS News, 2017). Reagan and other neoconservatives famously used language and framing tactics to distinguish between types of government benefits. As Mimi Abramovitz (1983) explains, while government benefits come in many forms, all are the product of rules and regulations that can advantage and disadvantage different groups. US benefits to lower-income and middle-income populations were (and continue to be) largely in the form of cash or in-kind benefits. Because of this, they are often visible as budget expenditures. Reagan targeted such benefits, framing them as handouts and a drag on the economy. He used now-disproven racist images to depict low-income beneficiaries as undeserving recipients of society’s largesse (Schram, 1995). At the same time, many of the government benefits received by the wealthy were *increased*, although these benefits remained invisible because they occurred in the form of tax expenditures or credits, so the money for them was never collected by the government. These include reduced taxes on various forms of income that do not come from wages (e.g., investment income such as interest and capital gains). Rhetorical devices that framed the restructuring of US fiscal policy played on class-based conflicts of interest. Differentiation between welfare for individuals in lower income brackets in contrast to welfare for individuals in higher income brackets reflected the belief in the wealthy as primary drivers of the economy as compared to workers and consumers. These policies are largely seen as the beginning of the US economic divide that has continued to grow.

Another trend that traces its beginnings to the mid-1980s was the use of legislative and administrative strategies for what is called **devolution**, shifting the source and responsibility for funding from higher to lower levels of government (e.g., from federal to state or state to local) (Demone & Gibelman, 1984). Proponents of such shifts pointed to the ability of localities to better identify and tailor responses to the needs and desires of their citizens. Opponents pointed to a lack of oversight and greater inequality when states and counties with different economic capacity relied solely on local resources of funding. According to Harold Demone and Margaret Gibelman (1984), many state and private agencies that relied on public funding for social welfare services responded by cutting staff and programs, increasing caseloads, and increasing the use of volunteers.

In response to shrinking social services, some private sector individuals, companies, non-profit organizations, and state and local governments helped fill budget gaps. It is important to note that the call to end so-called big government was not uniform across sectors. In contrast to the shrinking role of the federal government in providing social benefits such as income support and education, defense spending during this time increased, including funding for the Strategic Defense Initiative, popularly known as **Star Wars** (Piven & Cloward, 1982).

George H. W. Bush held similar economic positions to his predecessor, Reagan. However, he espoused some socially liberal policies. His greatest accomplishments were signing the Americans with Disabilities Act into law in 1990 and shepherding significant amendments to the Clean Air Act in 1990. In addition to economic changes, prominent social concerns in the 1980s and 1990s included the beginning of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. HIV/AIDS was incredibly stigmatized, particularly when it was thought to only affect gay

men. This stigmatization of those with the disease and the ascription of moral failing led to huge public protests by groups such as ACT UP and the creation of the AIDS quilt as seen in Photo 1.6 (Madson, 2012; The Names Project Foundation, 2018). Such activism ultimately resulted in government recognition of HIV/AIDS as a health crisis worthy of government attention. Public investment turned what had been a leading cause of death among young men in the early 1990s into a disease that today can be controlled and suppressed with medication (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1998). The organizing that occurred within communities affected by this disease helped fuel and strengthen the civil rights movement for people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and with other sexual orientations or gender identities (LGBTQ+). During Bush's presidency, initiatives by religious nonprofit organizations were encouraged under the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives (US Department of Justice Archive, n.d.). Such efforts raised concerns regarding the separation of religion and state.



Kris Connor/FilmMagic/Getty Images

The AIDS Memorial Quilt was created with the goals of memorializing those who have died of AIDS-related causes and helping people understand the impact of the disease.

The 1980s social welfare retrenchment also marked a growing rift within the social work profession between advocacy and direct practice, sometimes called the micro-macro divide. This was, in part, due to growing conservatism in government and a push toward social work professional recognition through licensure and federal funding mechanisms that focused on individual behavioral health (Stuart, 2013). The pendulum swing toward activism during the 1960s and 1970s had now swung back, and social work practice again primarily focused on addressing individual suffering. This is reflected in current educational and practice trends. One prominent example of successful social work policy practice that is also grounded in a focus on changing individual behavior with the goal of policy change is the Human

Service Employees Registration and Voter Education Fund (Human SERVE), founded in 1983 by Richard Cloward and Frances Fox Piven (Columbia University Archives, n.d.). The movement to register voters when they interact with human services agencies engaged thousands of social workers and social work students in voter registration and was considered to be a prominent driver of the National Voter Registration Act of 1993 (also called the Motor Voter law) (Abramovitz et al., 2019; Lane et al., 2007). In fact, social worker Steven Rivelis led the charge to write and push for passage of the first Motor Voter law in Maryland through a combination of community organization and legislative advocacy (Piven & Cloward, 1989; Rivelis, personal communication, 2020). This law requires that states offer opportunities for eligible voters to register when they obtain or renew driver's licenses and when they apply for public benefits such as food assistance or disability benefits. Human SERVE engaged social workers who used organizing and legislative advocacy tools as well as social workers who served individual clients through case management and service provision. This work continues today with the efforts by both direct practitioners and macro practitioners through the National Social Work Voter Mobilization Campaign (sometimes called Voting is Social Work) (Abramovitz et al., 2019). This is an example of how individual and policy-focused social work can interact.

ADVOCACY

Social Workers and Policy Action

Pick from the list that follows of influential social workers or select another social worker whom you have identified. Conduct your own research to answer the following questions.

1. During which time period was this person influential?
2. What are they known for?
3. Did this person have a BSW, MSW, DSW, or PhD in social work? If not, why are they identified with social work?
4. How was this person able to influence policy?
5. What can you as a future social worker learn from this person to help inform your practice?

Edith Abbott

Jane Addams

Lucy Burns

Susan Davis

Ron Dellums

Dorothy Height

Harry Hopkins

Nancy A. Humphreys

Barbara Lee

Josephine Shaw Lowell

Barbara Mikulski

Alice Paul

Frances Perkins

Jeanette Rankin

Mary Ellen Richmond

Eunice Kennedy Shriver

Ed Towns

Whitney Young Jr.

Neoliberal Era

Bill Clinton followed Bush as president from 1993 to 2001. Clinton is largely remembered for co-opting Reagan's ideas of individualism, welfare reform, a strong focus on law and order, and bringing the Democratic Party toward the center of the ideological spectrum (Riley, 2017). President Richard Nixon had coined the term **War on Drugs** and began the process of federalizing drug crimes (which had until that point been considered state criminal policy) to gain the support of southern states by adding a new federal method to control Black people and communities (Vitale, 2017). Reagan is often given credit for tough on crime policies because he supported congressional action to expand federal control over drug crimes with mandatory minimum sentencing and the forfeiture of cash and real estate for drug offenses (Alexander, 2010/2012). Clinton was instrumental in further expanding the

War on Drugs by calling for increased funding for federal and state prisons, providing federal funds to expand police departments, and creating federal three strikes provisions (Vitale, 2017). He took this position to show that being tough on crime was not a Republican issue. Alex Vitale (2017) and Michelle Alexander (2010/2012) document continued disproportionate use of drug policing in poor non-White communities, noting that, even today, “most street-level drug policing is discriminatory and ineffective” (Vitale, 2017, p. 139).

In 1993, one of Clinton’s first acts as president was to sign the Family and Medical Leave Act into law. While a landmark in providing family leave at the federal level, it guarantees only unpaid leave for twelve weeks for parents to care for newborns and sick parents, spouses, or children, and it covers less than 60 percent of US workers (US Department of Labor, 2020). In comparison to policies of other industrialized countries it is meager (Palley & Shdaimah, 2014). In 1993, Clinton signed the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), designed to eliminate tariffs between the United States, Mexico, and Canada (Office of the United States Trade Representative, n.d.). NAFTA critics claim that it caused many manufacturing jobs to relocate to Mexico. Clinton also unsuccessfully tried to create a single-payer health care system, which had been a goal of several presidents before him, but his administration was unable to get the support of potential allies such as the American Medical Association, which feared that it would lead to lower salaries for doctors or the pharmaceutical industry. In 1994, Republicans gained both houses of Congress based in part on House Speaker Newt Gingrich’s **Contract with America**, the goal of which was to further reduce taxes and limit access to public assistance, particularly to single mothers receiving AFDC (Jansson, 2009).

Clinton also oversaw the passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Reconciliation Act (PRWORA, 1996), sometimes called *welfare reform*. PRWORA amended the Social Security Act to shift federal income assistance (at the time under the program called Aid to Families with Dependent Children) from a federal right for all eligible parents with children under eighteen years old to Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). This block grant program gave money to states to create programs that require parents to work to receive benefits. Benefits were capped at five years (with some states offering as little as twelve months of benefits over an individual’s lifetime). The ideology behind PRWORA suggests that poor parents, particularly mothers, needed to be forced to increase their personal responsibility by working for benefits. This contrasts with earlier Democratic ideas that government had a responsibility to ensure that basic needs of children were met and that children needed the supervision of their mothers. It was in line with Reagan’s portrayal that beneficiaries were getting rich from government benefits even though this was not possible (Khazan, 2014). Clinton strongly supported this ideologically conservative bill, although he vetoed two earlier versions, at least in part, to force Congress to include child care support along with work requirements (Palley & Shdaimah, 2014). In response to the debates around PRWORA, social work educators came together in 1997 to create the organization Influencing State Policy, now called Influencing Social Policy (ISP), to increase social work’s impact on policy (Influencing Social Policy, n.d.).

President Clinton was also responsible for signing the repeal of the Glass-Steagall Act, a Depression-era law that had separated commercial and investment banking. This repeal has been blamed for the 2008 financial crisis (Cirilli, 2014).

Post-9/11 America

George W. Bush, son of George H. W. Bush, served as president for two terms after Clinton (2001–2009). He was president during the domestic terror acts in New York City and Washington, DC, on September 11, 2001. His response to that, including the authorization to use military force in the Middle East, is a significant part of his legacy. He oversaw the beginning of both the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Bush’s domestic policy is notable for the PATRIOT Act, which gave the federal government expanded powers to spy on citizens and residents of the United States, and No Child Left

Behind, which led to an increased focus on testing and standardization in US education. He also supported and signed a \$400 billion tax cut into law, which some have suggested was responsible for turning the Clinton-era budget surplus into a deficit. He unsuccessfully tried to privatize Social Security, but his efforts were defeated, in part as a result of a downturn in the stock market (Gregg, 2017). At the end of his term, Congress passed the Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP), which was designed to stabilize the national economy by providing federal money to ensure that stock brokerage firms and banks did not go under (Nelson, 2017). Despite NAFTA and other free trade agreements, Congress enacted and the president supported and signed a bill providing \$190 billion in subsidies to farmers in 2002 (CNN.com, 2002).

When Barack Obama, the first Black president in US history, was inaugurated in 2009, the US economy was facing another potential major depression. Housing prices were falling rapidly, and the official unemployment rate was near 10 percent. The Obama administration supported and expanded TARP, which had some continued effect to stabilize the economy but was perceived by many as a bailout for wealthy bankers and corporate executives (Nelson, 2017). Obama's biggest actions and policy initiatives include the Paris Agreement, a treaty ratified by 173 countries in the United Nations agreeing to take steps to significantly reduce carbon emissions (United Nations, 2017), the passage of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (2010) which is sometimes referred to as Obamacare, the development of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (2012) program for children who immigrated to the United States, and the continuation and expansion of military involvement in the Middle East. During the Obama presidency, No Child Left Behind was repealed and replaced with Race to the Top, an initiative that provided competitive grant funding, initially as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. Race to the Top requires states to develop policies linking student performance to teacher tenure and promotion, to get rid of state caps on the number of charter schools, to use national rather than state tests to assess student performance, and to provide additional financing to schools that need to improve (White House, 2009).

President Donald Trump's administration made sweeping changes to many of Obama's initiatives, just as Obama had done to the initiatives that were in place when he became president. These included the withdrawal of the United States from the Paris Agreement and termination of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, along with several other policies that restricted immigration, particularly from majority non-White countries. Several efforts were made to eliminate or substantially change the Affordable Care Act, including a provision in the 2017 tax bill that eliminated the requirement that all people buy health insurance or be fined. The 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act was the biggest tax overhaul in thirty years, and affected both individual and corporate taxpayers, reducing overall money paid into the US tax system significantly. Initial analysis suggested it could increase the deficit \$1.4 trillion over the next decade (Carney, 2017).

CURRENT CONTEXT

The end of the Trump administration and the beginning of the Biden administration saw continuations of budget fights between the White House and Congress, with the standoff resulting in a full or partial government shutdown from late 2018 to early 2019. Previous government shutdowns had occurred in 1995–1996 and 2013 (Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget, 2023). At this time,



Alexandra Wimley/Pittsburgh Post-Gazette via AP

the world was also reckoning with COVID-19, the most significant pandemic in one hundred years. The positions of the two presidents on issues such as access to abortion, LGBTQ+ rights, and environmental policy differed widely, and continue to be changed throughout the current administration by legislation, executive orders, and judicial decisions. In 2023, there were renewed threats of a government shutdown and several weeks where the House of Representatives was at a deadlock to elect a Speaker, which held up foreign aid related to ongoing wars in Israel and Ukraine as well as domestic spending (Hayes et al., 2023). In 2024, Donald Trump was elected to a second term as president.

Despite the fact that the majority of social work students and professionals focus on individual practice, the profession continues to show its presence in the policy arena through organizations such as ISP, mentioned earlier, as well the Congressional Research Institute for Social Policy (CRISP) and the Association for Community Organizing and Social Action (ACOSA). The profession also continues to explicitly embrace policy through new educational standards for all social work programs that require students to learn about and demonstrate proficiency in policy practice skills.

FINAL DISCUSSION

Now that you have finished reading this chapter, reread the vignette at the beginning. Based on what you have learned, answer the following questions. Point to specific references in the chapter that helped you answer them.

1. How do Shellie and Julian's responses differ?
2. How does each response comply with or contradict the NASW Code of Ethics?
3. Propose two examples of how Shellie and Julian might work together in an integrated response.
4. What role might race, class, gender, and other aspects of identity play in this vignette?

KEY TERMS

anti-oppressive social work practice
 Black Codes
 Contract with America
 Charity Organization Societies (COS)
 devolution
 Elizabethan Poor Laws
 Great Depression
 indoor relief/outdoor relief
 McCarthyism
 muckraker
 New Deal

outdoor relief/indoor relief
 overseers of the poor
 principle of less eligibility
 Reaganomics
 Reconstruction
 Settlement House Movement (SHM)
 Social Darwinism
 Star Wars
 urbanization
 welfare state
 War on Drugs