I. A DEFINITION OF SOCIAL WELFARE AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO SOCIAL WORK

This chapter provides a definition of social welfare and discusses the values perspectives that have shaped the development of U.S. social welfare policy. Social welfare is seen as a broad system intended to maintain the well-being of individuals within a society. U.S. social welfare policy is put in historical context from its roots in England to the policies of the present time. The student should understand the progression from the feudal system and church provisions for the poor prior to the Elizabethan Poor Law to the gradual assumption of responsibility for the poor by government. This responsibility was assumed not out of altruism and concern for the poor, but rather as a process of standardizing the ways in which the poor were to be managed.

II. THE VALUE BASE OF SOCIAL WELFARE

Values are assumptions, convictions, or beliefs about the ways people should behave and the principles that should govern behavior; they may vary with socialization experiences. The history of the development of social welfare reflects differences in values as they relate to social responsibility for making provisions for the needy.

Our society has been influenced by such values as Judeo-Christian humanitarianism, the economic doctrine of laissez faire, and community values that maintain that we are all members of society and therefore entitled to share in its productive effort. These values all influence our present social welfare structure.

III. OUR ENGLISH HERITAGE

Some of the precedents set in England include a national policy for the poor; indoor relief, or the provision of serving the poor by placing them in institutions; and the categorization of the poor into two basic groups, the worthy poor and the able-bodied (or unworthy) poor. Other precedents set by the Elizabethan Poor Law include:
1) clear government responsibility for those in need
2) government authority to force people to work
3) government enforcement of family responsibility
4) responsibility for carrying out programs at the local level
5) strict residence requirements

IV. SOCIAL WELFARE IN COLONIAL AMERICA

In Colonial America, there was no government policy providing for the poor and so charity was relied upon. The provision of indoor relief by establishing almshouses or workhouses was a carry over from England and fit well with the Puritan work ethic of the colonists.

V. CHANGING PATTERNS AFTER THE REVOLUTION

Between the time of the Revolution and the Civil War a shift to outdoor relief occurred: aid was provided in the form of work relief projects and in-kind benefits. Also, this time period saw the rise of the voluntary sector with its emphasis on charitable institutions.

VI. CARING FOR THE URBAN POOR

The voluntary sector flourished in the big cities of the 19th century with various organizations established to alleviate the suffering of the poor. The New York Society for the Prevention of Pauperism (1817) used friendly visitors to assess and respond to the needs of the poor. The Association for Improving the Conditions of the Poor (1843) required an assessment of individuals' needs so that relief agencies could be more effective. Buffalo's Charity Organization Society (COS) sought to organize charities in an effort to prevent duplication of services and reduce dependency on charitable efforts and also incorporated the use of friendly visitors.

VII. CARING FOR SPECIFIC POPULATIONS

In addition to Charity Organization Societies, many other private charities emerged to address special problem areas, such as the Orphan's Home Movement that established institutions for children with deceased parents. Other special populations for whom institutions were established included the blind, deaf, and mentally ill.
Toward the end of the 19th century, many states developed centralized agencies seeking to ensure a better quality of care for institutional inmates. Dorothea Dix advocated for the establishment of federal institutions for the mentally ill, but that responsibility was left to the states with the federal government providing assistance for selected groups such as veterans. The settlement house movement, sparked by the initiative of social worker Jane Addams at Hull House in Chicago, addressed the needs of the wave of immigrants from southern Europe entering the country in the late 1800s and early 1900s.

VIII. THE NEW DEAL

Greater federal involvement in the provision of social welfare services began with the New Deal legislation. Because of the widespread effects of the Great Depression, the pattern of blaming the poor for their condition was temporarily put aside. Government employment programs, such as the Works Progress Administration and the Civilian Conservation Corps, created work activities designed to be temporary in nature and to allow some individuals to earn income rather than rely on charity.

IX. THE SOCIAL SECURITY ACT

The Social Security Act is explained as the most significant piece of legislation enacted in the U.S. because it recognized that unemployment is the result of an ever-shifting market-place and because it was designed to be a permanent resource system administered by the federal government. The provisions of the Act, social insurance, and public assistance are explained briefly in this chapter, although they are elaborated on in Chapter 7.

A. Social Insurance

Social Insurance, commonly referred to as Social Security, consisted of two important benefit programs: Old Age, Survivors and Disability Insurance (OASDI) and unemployment insurance.

B. Public Assistance

Public Assistance was based on “need” and was not established as a right earned through employment. This program was administered by states with state funding and matched by the federal government. There were three categories: Old Age Assistance, Aid to Dependent Children, and Aid to the Blind. Public Assistance generally is referred to as welfare by the public.

C. Health and Welfare Services

Programs authorized as health and welfare services under the Act include child welfare, vocational rehabilitation, public health services, and services for children with physical disabilities. These services are elaborated on in Chapters 8-11.

X. SOCIAL WELFARE: THE POST-SOCIAL SECURITY ERA

The period since passage of the Social Security Act has been tumultuous, including three wars, a long-standing cold war, and periods of economic upswings as well as recessions and depressions.

A. The Great Society Programs

The Lyndon Baines Johnson years were the next period of broadening government involvement in social welfare. The Great Society and the War on Poverty expanded benefits to the poor. The Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 specifically sought to go beyond the traditional definition of the individual nature of poverty by changing institutional structures that had failed to provide opportunities for all citizens. The shift in focus from the War on Poverty to the war in Vietnam resulted in a lack of attention to these new programs, and the new administration of Richard Nixon saw the demise of many of them.

B. Conservatism in the Mid-1960s and Early 1970s

During the Nixon and Reagan administrations, many New Deal and Great Society programs were dismantled or reduced in size. In reaction to the Vietnam War, the “anti-establishment” movement, inner city rioting, and inflation, many middle class Americans shifted to a wave of conservatism. Many welfare reform measures were introduced but not
passed. Nixon's Family Assistance Plan (FAP) would have eliminated public assistance programs.

C. Welfare Reform and the Late 70s

Problems relating to addressing the needs of the poor continued and social welfare costs increased. Welfare reforms continued to be debated but no substantial changes were made in the welfare system. President Carter proposed a welfare reform program that increased public service jobs and established earned income tax credit programs for the poor, but it was not adopted.

D. Cutbacks in the Reagan-G.H.W.Bush Years

President Reagan's primary response to social welfare was to drastically cut many programs. His attempt to shift the financial and administrative responsibility for the Food Stamp and AFDC programs to the states failed to gain congressional support. In 1988, Congress passed the Family Support Act that mandated that states provide job training and support for most AFDC recipients in an effort to reduce the welfare rolls. Those who were able to find jobs also received childcare assistance and health insurance for up to one year after employment was obtained. Parts of the act were not implemented until 1992.

E. The Clinton Years

Supporters and opponents alike of government's role in the provision of services to the poor agreed that “welfare as we know it” had not been effective. In his first term of office, President Clinton pushed unsuccessfully for health care reform, reasoning that health problems and lack of affordable health care were major barriers for many AFDC recipients to leave the welfare roles. Clinton also sought a wider role for states in the design of federal welfare programs. Pressed by a Republican-dominated Congress and now mainstream view that welfare had created a system of dependence, the federal Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act was passed in 1996, charging each state with administering various public assistance programs, including AFDC. This legislation changed AFDC to Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), moving it from an entitlement program to one of time-limited stays on assistance and stringent work requirements. Many states implemented “work first” programs, and while the economy remained, strong many recipients moved off the welfare rolls. However, most recipients moved into “dead-end,” minimum wage jobs without healthcare or other benefits.

F. The George W. Bush Years

George W. Bush ushered in a new era of social welfare policy when he became president in 2000. Bush argued that government cannot solve every problem but can encourage people and communities to help themselves and one another. He asserted that the truest kind of compassion is to help citizens build lives of their own. He termed his philosophy and approach “compassionate conservatism”. Bush’s campaign of compassionate conservatism resonated well with a broad range of Americans who were strongly influenced by the anti-welfare rhetoric of the late 1990s but who also believed in the need to reach out and help those who were less fortunate. In many ways the principle of compassionate conservatism reflected the social welfare principles of colonial America: limited government intervention, personal responsibility, the importance of family values, and the role of the faith community and the private sector in addressing the social welfare needs of the citizenry.

G. A Not So Rosy Picture

Both the Clinton and G. W. Bush administrations concluded that the welfare reform legislation was a resounding success because it achieved the intended outcome: a reduction in the welfare rolls and expenditures for welfare programs. But there is another side to this story. There is a rapidly growing underclass of individuals in the United States who, even though they work at one and often two jobs, are unable to lift themselves and their families out of poverty. These families no longer qualify for government assistance, yet they are unable to move out of poverty. The children born into these families are at high risk of repeating the pattern for themselves and their families. The long-term impacts of the latest round of welfare reform have yet to be fully understood.

XI. SUMMARY
Social welfare development in America has been fragmented and lacks a comprehensive conceptual framework for its development. It continues to be in a constant state of evolution as the U.S. struggles with mitigating the effects of a market-based economy on certain segments of the population.