Samantha Zevanove

Cabrillo College

Bay Area Honors Symposium 2013

"Those People and Their Welfare Culture"

Entitlement programs are historically one of the most divisive topics in United States politics. Programs that provide resources and services to the poor are often met with skepticism and contention, as many view these programs as enabling and perpetuating dependence. This is especially the case with direct cash assistance to low-income families, previously known as AFDC and currently known as TANF (*The Demonization of Poor Women* Sidel). Current attitudes about welfare recipients are rooted in long-standing cultural ideologies and layered political rhetoric. An analysis of the history of welfare in the United States reveals how these cultural attitudes emerged and the ways in which they have impacted the development and efficacy of the welfare system.

In embarking on this discussion, it is useful to understand the various stereotypes about the poor and how these stereotypes reflect on the welfare system. People of contemporary American society harbor widespread prejudices regarding the moral character as well as the personal profile of the poor population. The poor are believed to be dependent on welfare, a dependency that is so poisonous that it proliferates throughout communities and creates a "welfare culture." Conventional wisdom carries with it the ideas that the poor live within a cycle of poverty and pass on their welfare dependency to their children, further solidifying the concept of the welfare culture. The most important feature of this set of beliefs is the notion that welfare recipients are actually content to be on welfare for as long as possible. This notion is rooted in the assumption that poor people do not value work and would prefer to avoid it. It also implies that receiving welfare can supplement a decent income (*Women and Children Last* Sidel). This implication seems more reasonable when the cultural fear of welfare cheats is factored in. Recipients who commit welfare fraud, colloquially known as “welfare queens,” are reported about frequently and easily make headlines. These reports showcase incidents of aggravated fraud in which people manage to cheat the welfare system of thousands of dollars. The sensational journalism surrounding these events has built a popular perception of the welfare system as being ridden with poor people who lack integrity and drain public resources. The portrayal of the welfare queen reinforces a specific profile of the welfare recipient that is based in social perceptions of race, class, and gender. As made clear by the name, the welfare queen is usually depicted as a woman who is not married and has several children. She is generally of African-American or Hispanic descent and an inner-city dweller (Coughlin).

The welfare system has been the subject of a great deal of research. Scholarship and statistics consistently demonstrate the false information and misconceptions that underpin these stereotypes of welfare recipients (Coughlin). People who receive welfare make up only one segment of a much larger population of poor people. In order to qualify for welfare specifically, the applicant must have dependent children. This leaves out poor adults who do not take care of anyone who is underage (Coughlin). Furthermore, there are numerous families that do not receive welfare assistance despite the fact that they live in poverty. The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities estimates that about twenty seven out of one hundred poor families receive welfare benefits. This number has been decreasing significantly in the past couple of decades, descending from a rate of sixty eight for every one hundred families in 1996. Those who are poor, whether they receive welfare or not, do not always remain poor for extended periods of time (*Women and Children Last* Sidel). People are capable of being resourceful and resilient during economically difficult times. It turns out that the majority of poor people will only be poor temporarily, which usually ranges from two to five years. This is not to mitigate the significance of persistent poverty, which is defined as extending beyond 10 years (*Women and Children Last* Sidel). However, it does invalidate the common belief that most poor people are permanently trapped in poverty and will remain dependent on welfare indefinitely.

The fear of intergenerational welfare dependency is also not substantiated by evidence. Research reveals that the majority of children whose families received welfare while they were growing up do not become welfare recipients as adults (Coughlin). Considering the fact that the majority of people manage to pull themselves out of poverty in less than ten years, it would make sense that their children would generally be able to survive without government assistance. Moreover, people do not have an economic incentive to perpetuate a welfare legacy. Welfare recipients usually have a low standard of living, and the cash assistance they receive gets them nowhere close to acquiring a comfortable lifestyle (Coughlin). As it turns out, aggravated fraud of the welfare system is rare, amounting to less than 1 percent of welfare fraud cases. The fraud that occurs more regularly is on a small-scale and does not make up a substantial portion of welfare spending (Coughlin). In other words, the vast majority of welfare recipients are not cheating the system of the amount of money that would be necessary to fund a high standard of living.

In regards to the profile of poor people and welfare recipients, raw numbers reveal that stereotypes are not directly reflective of reality. Over half of all poor people in the United States are white (The National Poverty Center), and more than half of poor women do not have any children (Hawthorne). Rural poverty is actually more widespread than poverty in the inner-cities, and poverty in rural areas tends to be more extreme and persistent (*Women and Children Last* Sidel). However, it is important to note that raw numbers do not accurately represent the complex nuances of the reasons why people are poor. Although the majority of poor people are white in terms of gross numbers, there are higher rates of poverty among non-white populations (The National Poverty Center). Families headed by single women are twice as likely to live in poverty as families headed by single men. In addition, women with children experience poverty at a higher rate than women without children (The National Poverty Center). One might be inclined to conclude that the stereotypes, in this case, have achieved accuracy, but this would be misleading. It is vital to recognize that these groups experience poverty at higher rates because of discrimination and inequality that is built into the economic and social institutions of our society (*Women and Children Last* Sidel). Women are still paid less than men for the same level and amount of work, making them more vulnerable to economic hardship. Women and non-white people experience more difficulty in advancing themselves professionally and economically as white men continue to have a competitive edge in the workplace. In every major aspect of self-sufficiency, women and non-white people are disadvantaged by a history of inequality that impacts them on both an economic and psychological level (*Women and Children Last* Sidel). Stereotypes generally overlook these factors, leading to the fallacious conclusion that certain populations are more likely to be poor because of inherent flaws in that group of people.

The American population holds firmly to these inaccurate stereotypes because it is culturally predisposed to do so (Logg). Several ideologies that originated in the beginnings of American society have proven to be particularly influential in the formation of cultural attitudes regarding the welfare system. The first of these ideologies, the Puritan work ethic, laid a foundation of cultural values for a society that would later develop into the United States. This work ethic dictates that work is intrinsically valuable and those who work hard will be rewarded by God. Prosperity, as a result of one's labor, is indicative of God's favor (Foner). The Puritan work ethic coincided beautifully with the economic theory of capitalism, which holds that the government should not interfere with the economic affairs of the citizenry (Mangin). Underlying capitalism is the belief that people should be responsible for their own economic well-being. Capitalism assumes that the citizens of a society can work as a collective unit to regulate the market without government involvement. The Puritan work ethic and capitalism ultimately share the belief that human beings are capable of being self-sufficient and those who are self-sufficient deserve their success (Mangin). This principle of economic and personal independence laid the basis for Social Darwinism, which emerged during the Industrial Revolution (Foner). Social Darwinism was largely a response to social activists who were disturbed by the terrible working and living conditions of the urban poor. Proponents of this theory asserted that the economic hierarchy was justified because poor people were naturally talentless or lazy. It rationalized the adversity of the poor by seizing Darwin's theory of evolution and distorting it into prejudiced social commentary. In this way, Social Darwinism explained the inequality in society in terms of "survival of the fittest," in which the most talented, intelligent, and hardworking of individuals would rise to the top while those who lacked similar qualifications would rightfully remain at the bottom. Despite the academic dishonesty of this ideology, it enjoyed reasonable popularity among an American audience that was trained to think in terms of personal independence and self-sufficiency (Foner). It was far easier in this cultural context to blame the poor for their own plight instead of examining the ways in which economic and social institutions limited people's social mobility and opportunities.

Not everyone agreed with Social Darwinists that the poor were deserving of their hardship. Growing sympathy for the poor, primarily among middle-class women, sparked what would become known as the Progressive Movement (1880-1920). Progressive activists established settlement houses in poor urban centers, where they would live among the poor and give them access to vital resources. These services were mainly aimed at poor women and children, providing childcare, healthcare, and pensions. Progressivists also used the settlement houses as a venue for educating poor women, as they believed that poverty could be partly attributed to a lack of cultural capital. Although the efforts of the Progressivists were forward-thinking for the time, these maternalist reforms were nonetheless rooted in sexism and racism. Unwed mothers were widely discriminated against and were frequently not allowed to benefit from the services of settlement houses. Black mothers were almost completely excluded from assistance. The group that benefited the most from these reforms was white widows with children (Foner).

Discrimination against unwed mothers was the result of a common goal of activists who worked in the settlement houses. Many of these activists were concerned with preserving the woman's traditional role as a person who bore and raised children. It was believed that by providing needy women with support, women would be more likely to look after their children and remain in their conventional role. This emphasis on tradition led to discriminatory attitudes regarding women who had already transgressed societal norms. Woman who had failed to marry and bore children out of wedlock were directly violating a part of the traditional role for women that numerous Progressivists held dear. White widows, on the other hand, were viewed as being unfortunate victims of their husband's death. Widows were regarded as women who had been loyal to their traditional role, and thus they were worthy of community support that would serve to solidify this role. The prejudices of Progressive activists against poor mothers who were either unwed or non-white would set a historical precedent that would influence the later formation of federal welfare policies. The Progressive hypothesis that educating and acculturating the poor would help lift them out of poverty would also re-emerge as the welfare system continued to develop (Foner).

When the stock market crashed in 1929, thousands of businesses and millions of Americans were completely devastated by the economic crisis that would later become known as the Great Depression. Countless families lost their life savings and found themselves without stable income, as companies were no longer financially capable of paying the same amount of workers. This resulted in more than 11 million Americans, a full 25% of the labor force, being unable to find work. Although every industrial economy suffered from the Great Depression, the United States was hit the hardest, experiencing a one-third drop in the gross national product and a 40% decline in prices (Foner).

While many Americans blamed themselves for their economic misfortune, others reacted by demonstrating for jobs and public relief. They demanded that the federal government actively participate in alleviating the economic suffering of its citizenry. President Hoover, however, was staunchly opposed to direct federal assistance to the poor. He quoted former president Grover Cleveland, arguing that “The Government should not support the people…Federal aid…weakens the sturdiness of our national character.” Leading advisers admonished Hoover to not interfere with the free market, claiming that the downturns of capitalism eliminated unproductive firms and strengthened the work ethic and virtue of the poor. The reluctance of Hoover and his advisers to help the American public reflected a complex interaction between the Puritan work ethic, the capitalist ethos, and Social Darwinism. Hoover clearly agreed with Cleveland that hard work was reflective of one's moral character and the collective work of the American population made up the national character. This perspective, which views tireless work as inherently valuable despite extenuating circumstances, is strongly reminiscent of the Puritan work ethic. It assumes that hard work will pay off in the long run while ignoring the fact that people were unable to either gain employment or employment that was worthwhile. This line of thinking allowed Hoover and his advisers to maintain confidence in the capitalist system, believing that the Great Depression would benefit society in the long-term. Hoover's advisers reinforced the government's passive approach to the crisis by viewing unemployment and financial hardship as a way of fostering integrity among the poor. Such a worldview is influenced by Social Darwinism, in which people's misfortune is seen as justified and as an opportunity that they should take advantage of. Within this perspective, if people fail to climb out of the hardship on their own, then it's clear that they did not deserve economic stability to begin with. Needless to say, protesters were infuriated with Hoover's ineffective response to their needs, leading to the election of Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1932 (Foner).

President Roosevelt guaranteed that the citizens of the United States would be provided with the proper opportunities to achieve economic security. Roosevelt addressed the economic crisis by passing two major packages of legislation, the First New Deal in 1933 and the Second New Deal in 1935. The First New Deal dealt with aiding the recovery of the marketplace, such as banking, railroads, industry, and farming. The Second New Deal more intimately addressed the needs of common American citizens who had been devastated by unemployment, underemployment, and major financial loss. This legislation, which sought to reconcile economic planning with the capitalist ethos, ultimately aimed to redistribute the national income as a way of restoring mass purchasing power that was crucial to the health of the consumer economy.

Drawing on the Progressive tradition, Roosevelt recruited intellectuals and social workers to advise the creation of legislation and assume important positions in his administration. The specific programs of the Second New Deal, which created a system of unemployment insurance, old age pensions, and aid to the poor, were also derived from the Progressive Movement. Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), which was the first welfare program on a federal scale, was modeled after the maternalist reforms of the late 1800's. Aid to Families with Dependent Children further perpetuated the Progressive legacy by mainly benefiting white widows and largely discriminating against unwed mothers. Families with two parents were also largely exempt from the program, even if neither parents had sustainable income. The exclusion of these groups was the result of social prejudices as well as the strict eligibility that was initially built into the welfare program. States were allowed to determine eligibility standards, which led to many states barring people from assistance when caseworkers determined that certain applicants lacked moral character. This could explain the widespread difficulty that unwed mothers faced in getting access to cash assistance. Those who were fortunate enough to not be discriminated against received benefits that were set at extremely low levels. To make matters worse, welfare recipients were not financially able to pay Social Security taxes, leading to the stigmatization of welfare recipients as dependents who failed to contribute to society. The group harmed the most by the stigma of welfare was probably African-Americans, who made up a disproportionate amount of the welfare population on account of the fact that they were excluded from other aid programs. This gradually resulted in a cultural perception of blacks as being dependent on unearned government aid and welfare as a program for those who are not white. These prejudicial views of unwed women and non-white people who received government assistance would remain in the collective conscious and underpin the controversy concerning welfare thereafter (Foner).

The 1960's was a period of great economic growth and social change in American society. The Civil Rights Movement mobilized the fight for racial equality and inspired other political movements to rally behind a variety of marginalized groups (Foner). This created the perfect cultural and political environment for President Lyndon B. Johnson to pass his Great Society Legislation (1965-1967). These initiatives established Medicare and Medicaid, health services to the poor and elderly that became automatically available to AFDC recipients (Moffit). It also established the Food Stamps program, which offered direct aid to the poor and enjoyed widespread success (Foner). Accompanying these initiatives was the development of job training and education programs for welfare recipients (Moffit). Such programs were based on President Johnson's human capital strategy (Moffit), which he describes in his 1964 presidential campaign ad regarding poverty. Johnson portrays poverty as a condition that is "not a trait of character…it is created in circumstances" and that the poor deserve "a chance at education, a chance at training, a chance at a fruitful life" (Goodman). Building upon the objectives of Progressive reformers to educate and acculturate the poor as a solution to their poverty (Foner), Johnson's human capital strategy emphasized the long-term benefit of training and education programs that would make the poor more employable and increase their likelihood of social mobility (Moffit). While the policymakers of the New Deal pointed to flawed economic institutions as the source of people's poverty, the underlying implication of Johnson's Great Society legislation was that poverty was the product of an absence of skills and proper work habits (Foner). Johnson's assumption was that if these shortcomings were addressed, poverty could be alleviated and an overhaul of the capitalist system would be unnecessary. Along with introducing a new approach to poverty, this legislation also dramatically expanded the federal government's role in the welfare system (Foner). Originally, the states had assumed primary control over the management of AFDC and were allowed to alter eligibility standards according to their own judgment (Moffit). After the Great Society legislation, the federal government was much more involved in regulating eligibility requirements and ensuring that states served those who qualified for assistance. This led to a relaxation of eligibility and work requirements, significantly increasing the welfare caseloads nationwide (Foner).

The 1970's witnessed a major recession as a result of deindustrialization and declining wages. Liberal policymakers were not able to come up with effective solutions to the recession, providing an opportunity for conservative politicians to expand their constituency (Foner). In his 1972 presidential campaign ad, Richard Nixon addresses working-class Americans, arguing that those who are not on welfare pay to support the ones who receive unearned assistance (Goodman). This message resonated with the working-class, who were becoming increasingly frustrated with their economic hardship and despised the idea that people were receiving aid from the government while they were struggling to stay afloat. Proposed cuts in social spending heightened in appeal, as the American public hoped that spending cut from social programs could be used to bolster the economy. This shifting political consensus set the stage for Ronal Reagan's election in 1980. Reagan, who promised to return to a non-liberal economic remedy of bolstering private investment, gave the American public the conservative perspective that they were now demanding (Foner).

Before Reagan was elected, however, he already had made a profound impact on American politics and the public psyche by popularizing the concept of the welfare queen during his 1976 presidential campaign (Logg). Reagan, a gifted storyteller, would speak about a woman from Chicago who was arrested for welfare fraud:

> She has eighty names, thirty addresses, twelve Social Security cards and is collecting veteran's benefits on four non-existing deceased husbands. And she is collecting Social Security on her cards. She's got Medicaid, getting food stamps, and she is collecting welfare under each of her names. Her tax-free cash income is over $150,000. (Naughton)

Scholars generally agree that this story is an extreme and unsubstantiated exaggeration, taking incidents of small-scale welfare fraud and blowing them up into imaginary proportions (Coughlin). The welfare queen, who was almost always portrayed as an unwed black woman, was met with great reception because it was established upon existing stereotypes of race and gender. The stigmatization of non-white welfare recipients that had originated in the 1930's, along with the historically entrenched discrimination of single unwed mothers who were in need of government assistance, crystallized into a single image of the "welfare queen" that was bound to be culturally despicable (Foner). The idea of the welfare queen molded American discourse and solidified the public's fear of welfare dependency. People were increasingly concerned that communities that fostered a welfare culture were draining public resources and contributing to the breakdown of the social fabric. The poor, particularly poor mothers, began to be accused for a range of social problems, such as crime, illiteracy, and homelessness (*Demonization of Poor Women* Sidel). By the time that Reagan left office in 1989, an overwhelming push for welfare reform had emerged (Foner).

The growing anti-welfare sentiment culminated into the Family Support Act of 1988, which shifted the emphasis of the welfare program from the human capital strategy of Lyndon B. Johnson to a pure work strategy (Moffit). While the human capital strategy focused on improving the employability of welfare recipients, the pure work strategy stressed the importance of getting welfare recipients to work as soon as possible. These jobs were generally minimum-wage with little opportunity for advancement, but such a strategy was less expensive and it eased public concerns about the deteriorating work ethic of welfare recipients (Moffit). When Democrat Bill Clinton is elected as president in 1993, he attracts conservative voters by conceding to the Republican stance on welfare. By coming out strongly against the welfare system, Clinton was able to successfully gain the favor of the increasing number of Americans who had adopted a hostile view of welfare recipients (Foner). During his presidential campaign, Clinton made a powerful statement that closely interacted with the escalating unrest among an American populace that was repulsed by the perception of the welfare queen:

> For so long the government has failed us, and one of its worst failures has been welfare. I have a plan to end welfare as we know it, to break the cycle of welfare dependency. We will provide education, job training, and child care, but then those who are able must go to work either in the private sector or in public service...it's time to make welfare what it should be--a second chance, not a way of life. (Goodman)

Clinton's statement connected with people who feared that welfare dependency was leading to the breakdown of society. It also evoked cultural ideas regarding the individual's responsibility to work and maintain self-sufficiency. This was the final push needed to convince lawmakers and the electorate alike that the preservation of American values necessitated welfare reform (Goodman).

Unfortunately, the legislation that resulted from this political rhetoric only delivered a part of Clinton's supposed goals for welfare reform. The Personal Responsibility and Work Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA), which abolished AFDC and initiated the current Temporary Assistance to Needy Families program (TANF), did little to expand job training and education programs. Instead, the legislation capitalized on implementing stringent work requirements and instituting harsher punishments for any noncompliance detected among welfare recipients. Under these new regulations, welfare recipients who do not fulfill work requirements might be permanently barred from public assistance. A much larger fraction of the caseload was required to work in order to receive assistance, amounting to 90% of two-parent families and 50% of single-parent families. The hours of work required also increased significantly, with single parents having to work at least 30 hours per week and two-parent households having to work full time. There are far less work exemptions under the TANF system as well. Under AFDC, parents would be exempt from work if their child was under six years of age. In contrast, TANF does not allow parents of young children to be exempt from work unless the child is below six months to one year of age. These stringent work requirements reinforced the pure work strategy that had emerged in the late 80's. This strategy was intended to undermine the cycle of welfare dependency that Clinton had advocated against during his campaign. TANF further limited welfare by setting term limits that allowed people to receive welfare for a maximum of five years. TANF also prevented families from receiving more assistance if they continued to have children after getting on the welfare rolls (Moffit).

One of the most striking features of TANF is its distribution of regulatory power between the federal government and state governments. At its height, AFDC was largely regulated by the federal government, which created uniformity in terms of eligibility standards, work requirements, and circumstantial exemptions. Such uniformity allowed for people to more easily access assistance because they were no longer subjected to the kind of discriminatory rules that took place on the state level when welfare was implemented in the 30's. TANF returned to the policy of investing the majority of the regulatory power into the states. States were given an abundance of freedom in terms of how much they could limit the welfare apparatus. Federal funds given to the states for the TANF program were not required to be used merely for welfare

(Moffit). The states were given autonomy in using the TANF money to fund a broad array of services that deviate from “the core reform areas of providing a safety net and connecting families to work” (Schott). These services include transportation, aid to children at risk of abuse and neglect, and other resources that help low-income families but are not directly related to providing a robust cash assistance program. Childcare, which is in high demand because parents of very young children are expected to work 30-40 hours of week, makes up nearly 17% of TANF spending alone (Schott).

Furthermore, states have worked vigorously to make their respective TANF programs as different from AFDC as possible by adopting term limits that are stricter than the limit established by the federal government. Numerous states have installed term limits that are half as long as the 60 months set forth by the federal government, the strictest term limit being less than two years. Due to the nature of PRWORA legislation, states have every financial incentive to do this. In this legislation, the federal government stipulated that financial bonuses would be rewarded to the top five states that were able to reduce their out-of-wedlock birth rates and abortion rates (Moffit). The fact that this was included specifically in welfare reform policy is reflective of the association Americans had made between a range of social issues and welfare dependency. It is clear that, while crafting this legislation, policymakers believed that states that limited the scope of the welfare system would also be more likely to resolve the other social problems which were presumably related to the proliferation of a welfare culture.

Despite the fundamentally different philosophies that underpin AFDC and TANF, the two programs share an important similarity. They each aimed at reconciling the welfare program with the capitalist system. Both systems served to superimpose the welfare apparatus on a capitalist economic structure. Rather than overhauling or re-structuring the capitalist framework altogether, AFDC and TANF were designed to advance the over-arching goals of a capitalist society. AFDC was originally created to restore the purchasing power of Americans in order to stimulate the consumer economy (Foner). Later, under President Johnson, AFDC became a way of ameliorating the work habits and skills of the poor so that they would be more successful in the corporate world. Now, under TANF, the program focuses on bringing welfare recipients back into the workforce as soon as possible so that they will continue to participate in the capitalist economy (Moffit). The underlying goal of the U.S. welfare program has never been to question or undermine capitalism. To do so would violate the highly cherished notion of the capitalist ethos that is both culturally and historically enmeshed into the American consciousness.

The transition from AFDC to TANF has dramatically affected the efficacy of the welfare system. A study conducted in 2002 found that the income of AFDC recipients raised substantially after leaving assistance rolls while the income of TANF recipients actually declined after they stopped receiving assistance. The authors of the study argue that this disparity in post-welfare income between AFDC and TANF recipients is a result of TANF recipients having less flexibility in charting out their lives. TANF recipients are subjected to stricter work requirements, less work exemptions, and considerably limited term limits. People receiving TANF are often forced to leave assistance rolls before they are financially equipped to support themselves. TANF recipients also do not have the same access to the level of job training and education programs that AFDC recipients did, making them less likely to advance into higher-paying jobs (Ozawa and Sik-Yoon).

Moreover, sanctions that disqualify people from TANF for failing to comply with work requirements often disregard personal circumstances that are worthy of special consideration. Research demonstrates that families who fail to meet work requirements face various barriers to employment, such as mental and physical disabilities, substance abuse, domestic violence, having a child with a disability, and problems with housing and transportation. Preventing these families from accessing services exacerbates their compromised situation and makes it likely for them to experience continuous declines in income and economic security (Schott).

Attitudes of the poor wield societal influence that extends far beyond the specific provisions of the welfare program. Rather, these attitudes play a major role in shaping the entitlement system in general. Contrary to popular belief, 96% of Americans are on some kind of entitlement program. It turns out that entitlements, which are defined as benefits that are guaranteed under a certain government program, are not mainly catered towards the lower-class. Although it may sound counterintuitive, 58% of entitlements benefit the middle-class and 20% of entitlements support those in the top-income bracket. Meanwhile, only 32% of entitlement spending go to households in the bottom 20% income bracket. The U.S. provides the most tax breaks for social purposes than any other industrialized nation, and these breaks primarily benefit people with large liabilities. Major U.S. tax breaks, such as the home mortgage interest deduction and the tax break for charitable contributions, help those who make the high level of income necessary to take out a large mortgage or make significant charitable contributions. Economists argue that tax breaks function like direct spending programs by allowing people to keep money that they would otherwise lose, which maximizes their net income. Because the U.S. entitlement system primarily benefits the middle and upper-class, it fails to redistribute the nation’s wealth. This makes it extremely difficult to reduce poverty and inequality (Morgan).

Ultimately, the structure of the U.S. entitlement system is a reflection of American bias (Morgan). Entitlements for those in the middle to upper-class are not viewed as such because these classes enjoy high cultural and social status. At the same time, the U.S. has made it a goal to limit entitlement spending for the poor as much as possible because of cultural attitudes that blame the lower-class for their economic plight. Recognizing that poverty may be the result of flawed economic institutions and limited opportunities rather than the personal failings of individuals is ideologically dangerous. Accompanied by such recognition is the possibility that the capitalist system is not serving the needs of many Americans and is unjustly forcing large groups of people into economic instability. In order to deconstruct and rebuild the public perception of welfare, Americans also have to deconstruct the capitalist system. As long as capitalism and the ideologies associated with it continue to be revered, this will prove to be a difficult exercise for American citizens and policymakers alike.

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