

---

# The Feminization of Poverty: Here to Stay?

---

GERTRUDE GOLDBERG

Professor of Social Policy and Social Administration,  
Adelphi University School of Social Work

**T**he feminization of poverty refers to a troubling trend that was identified in the United States about twenty years ago: women who support themselves and their families were becoming the majority of the poor.<sup>1</sup> Why the emphasis on women who support themselves? Along with their husbands and children, many married women were and are poor. However, the poverty of women who maintain families by themselves is directly related to the economic status of women. Diana Pearce, who coined the term and conceptualized the feminization of poverty, referred to women who are poor in their own right.<sup>2</sup>

In studying the feminization of poverty I concentrate on single mothers, one of the groups of women who support themselves. The reason is that lone mothers are not only burdened by women's disadvantages in the workplace and their disproportionate share of labor in the home but by the related phenomenon of single parenthood, itself overwhelmingly female and much more likely to be associated with poverty than single fatherhood.<sup>3</sup> Despite the emphasis here on women of working age, it is important to bear in mind that the poverty of elderly persons is even more feminized. Indeed, nearly three-fourths of the elderly poor are women.<sup>4</sup> Their inequality in the labor force and in the home is often the cause of their poverty in old age.

About a decade ago, my colleagues and I studied the feminization of poverty in the United States and asked whether this phenomenon also existed in other industrial nations.<sup>5</sup> Among other things, this comparative study helped us

to understand and conceptualize the phenomenon more clearly. In this article, I determine whether the feminization of poverty persists in the United States, nearly a decade later, or whether it has stabilized or reversed itself. I begin by presenting our conceptual framework and identifying the factors that contribute to the feminization of poverty. I also summarize the results of our comparative study. As part of this update on the feminization of poverty in the United States, I point to recent developments in social policy that are likely to influence the future of women's poverty.

### **Conceptualizing the Feminization of Poverty**

Feminization of poverty among families is related to two sets of factors: (1) higher poverty rates among families supported by single women than among married-couple families or those supported by single males, and (2) the proportion of all families that are maintained by single women. In 1960, the first of these factors was present but not the second. About one-fifth (20 percent) of all families with children were poor in 1960, compared to almost three-fifths (56 percent) of single-mother families.<sup>6</sup> Yet the latter were just over one-fourth of all poor families with children. Despite having very high rates of poverty, single-mother families were only a minority of poor families.

U.S. poverty became feminized in the years that followed because more single women were supporting families and because their poverty rates continued to be much higher than those of married-couple families. As a result of demographic changes, more women were subjected to the substantial and persisting risk of poverty that comes from supporting a family by themselves. Rates of divorce, separation, and nonmarriage of parents all rose substantially after 1960. Whereas single-mother families were about 10 percent of all families with children in 1960, they had become twice as numerous (21 percent) in little more than a quarter century (1987).<sup>7</sup> As a result of high rates of poverty and the increase in their numbers, single-mother families were 60 percent of all poor families, compared to less than 30 percent in 1960.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, the poverty of all families maintained by women, with and without children, had become feminized.<sup>9</sup> Historians of women's poverty have written of the tendency of women to predominate among the poor in earlier centuries.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps, then, we might more precisely refer to the refeminization of poverty.

Paradoxically, these findings regarding the feminization of poverty in the United States did not mean that women and their families were worse off than in the recent past. In fact, the resurgence of American feminism and of progress toward women's equality was concurrent with the feminization of American poverty.<sup>11</sup> At the very time when women had been emancipating themselves from unpaid domestic work and fighting once again for equal rights, families main-

tained by women had become the majority of poor families.<sup>12</sup> Although poverty had become feminized, the poverty rates of families supported by single women had actually fallen.<sup>13</sup> By the 1980s, in addition, the gap between men's and women's earnings had begun to narrow.<sup>14</sup> Nonetheless, single-mother families were nearly six times as likely to be poor as married-couple families.<sup>15</sup>

Understanding the feminization of poverty requires an analysis of why women who support families by themselves have high risks of poverty and why the number of women supporting families, particularly those who are single mothers, has increased. With regard to poverty, we need to look at labor market factors—whether or not

women work outside the home, how fully they are employed, and how much they earn. Since two-thirds of poor

---

**In fact, the resurgence of American feminism and of progress toward women's equality was concurrent with the feminization of American poverty.**

---

single-mother families are black or Hispanic, it is important as well to look at the role of racial and ethnic discrimination as well as gender in the poverty of these women. In order to get a better sense of trends and prospects, moreover, we need to give some attention to the status of public policies such as affirmative action which are designed to reduce the inequality of women and minorities in the labor force. Furthermore, attention must be paid to other government policies that are designed to compensate for single parenthood and for low earnings. In addition to analyzing these sources of poverty that are present today as well as a decade ago, I will examine the demographic factor, that is, the great increase in divorce, desertion, and nonmarriage of parents. Particularly in the case of poor women, especially minority women, these are often related to economic conditions.

### **The U.S.: First in Feminization of Poverty**

Examining labor market, social welfare, and demographic data in six other industrialized countries helped to sharpen and confirm this conceptualization of the feminization of poverty. In addition to the United States, the countries in the comparative study were Canada, France, Japan, Poland, Sweden, and the former Soviet Union. Although we found that women were at risk of poverty in all these countries, the trend was most advanced in the United States. Compared to the other countries, all of which had fewer economic resources, U.S. poverty rates were high.<sup>16</sup> So, too, were rates of divorce, separation, nonmarriage of parents, and single parenthood.

Using standardized poverty measures, researchers at the Center for Policy Research at Syracuse University found that in the mid-eighties, single-parent households had poverty rates of 53.3 percent in the United States, compared to 48.4

percent in Canada, 15.8 percent in France, and 5.5 percent in Sweden.<sup>17</sup>

Two of the countries in the comparative study, Sweden and Japan, escaped the feminization of poverty but for very different reasons. Because Sweden had low rates of poverty for both single-parent and married-couple families (5.5 percent and 4.5 percent), it seemed meaningless to speak about feminization of poverty. Sweden, it should be emphasized, had relatively high rates of single motherhood (about 20 percent) but had broken the link between this family composition and poverty that we in the United States tend to take for granted.<sup>18</sup> Japan, on the other hand, avoided the trend not by low rates of poverty, but by very low rates of divorce and single parenthood. The few Japanese women who supported their families alone were quite disadvantaged economically, indeed more than their U.S. counterparts, but there were very few Japanese women in that economically vulnerable position. Indeed, few Japanese women with families were willing to risk economic independence.<sup>19</sup>

Since we considered it preferable to reduce poverty rather than to preserve marriage at the cost of women's continuing inequality, perhaps even abuse, we focused on the Swedish model. For Sweden demography was not destiny. What policies, we inquired, had enabled Sweden to break the link between single parenthood and poverty?

Together, Swedish labor market and social welfare policies had kept poverty rates low. For many years Sweden had pursued full employment and wage solidarity policies that placed women in a more favorable market position than their counterparts in other countries. The labor market position of Swedish women itself is not only the result of economic but of social welfare policies as well. The Swedish welfare state provided many employment opportunities for women and the near-universal, subsidized child care that made it possible for so many Swedish women, including the mothers of very young children, to enter the labor market.<sup>20</sup> The labor force participation rates of Swedish women were among the highest in the world. Solidarity wage policies contributed to another advantage of Swedish women, one of the narrowest male-female wage gaps in the world.<sup>21</sup> Nonetheless, despite these favorable labor market conditions, 29 percent of Swedish single parents would have been poor without government income transfers or the benefits of the Swedish welfare state.<sup>22</sup> Jobs for all at decent wages clearly made it easier to finance the Swedish welfare state since more people were working and paying taxes and fewer needed compensation for unemployment or low pay. Swedish single parents were in a much more favorable market position than their counterparts in other wealthy Western nations who, on average, would have had poverty rates of over 50 percent had they lacked government income support.<sup>23</sup> The exit from poverty—and the way to modest comfort, as well—was, for many women, generous government income support, notably government-guaranteed child support, family allowances, universal health benefits and, as we have already

mentioned, subsidized child care. The Swedish system is characterized by a large proportion of universal benefits or non-income-tested benefits and is much less dependent on what Americans call welfare and Europeans refer to as social assistance. Yet, at the time of our study, about 40 percent of Swedish single mothers were acquiring at least part of their incomes from social assistance provided by municipal governments.<sup>24</sup> Government income transfers from both federal and municipal levels of government reduced the poverty of Swedish single-parent families by 81 percent. The comparable figure for the United States, which also did much less well by women in the labor market than Sweden, was about 5 percent.<sup>25</sup> Sweden was not alone in high rates of poverty reduction through social welfare: the figure for the Netherlands was 90 percent; for the UK, 75 percent; for France, 59 percent; and for Germany, 34 percent.

Sweden was a full-employment state and a welfare state, and the benefits of both contributed to women's escape from poverty. From these data we may infer that if women are to be free of the control of individual men and of poverty, they need the state. U.S. writers have thought in terms of a trend from individual to state patriarchy, but those reflecting on a more generous and benign treatment of women by government have referred to a partnership between women and the state.<sup>26</sup>

Perhaps owing to the demise of a socialist challenge or viable alternatives to capitalism, some Europeans have, in recent years, been attracted to an American model that promises lower taxes and leaner government budgets. Even though the failure of governments to buffer their citizens against the insecurities of the world economy may tear at the social fabric, some Europeans speak enviously of the American approach. However, countries like Sweden, France, and Germany would have to make very substantial reductions in social welfare to sink to the American level, and there is some indication that popular resistance in some of these countries will not permit them to cut programs with strong constituent support.<sup>27</sup>

Scholars disagree about the extent to which European welfare states are being cut back. Paul Pierson, for example, holds that welfare-state reduction is a problematic process, even if some of the groups that advocated it, such as labor parties and working-class movements, have lost strength.<sup>28</sup> One reason is that beneficiaries form strong interest groups that resist the dismantling of the programs on which they depend. Pierson's case for welfare-state resilience rests heavily on his claims that even in Britain, with a strong, Conservative regime that was no friend of the welfare state, program reduction was minimal. There are other scholars who report substantial declines over time in the United Kingdom as well as in other European countries, though changes still fall far short of dismantling the welfare state.<sup>29</sup> In any case, the dismantling process could be ongoing and cumulative. It took nearly thirty years, from the relatively repressive but largely

unimplemented measures to cut back Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) in 1967 to the 1996 passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, which repealed AFDC and replaced it with a program significantly named Temporary Assistance to Needy Families. In nineteenth-century England, several decades of debate and ideological realignment preceded the passage of legislation that was also labeled “reform” and that denied all aid outside the workhouse to the able-bodied poor. In short, it is difficult to predict the future of the welfare state in either Europe or the United States.

### **U.S. Poverty Remains Feminized**

There has been little change in the poverty level of single-mother families in the United States during the last decade. Poverty rates for single-mother families were about the same in 1993 as they were in 1987 (46 percent), but in the last three years, which were unusually good ones from the perspective of unemployment, their poverty rates have fallen (to 42 percent in 1996, the last year for which figures are available).<sup>30</sup> This is a drop in poverty rates of about 8 percent, but the fact remains that over two-fifths of all single-mother families are poor. The poverty rates of black single-mother families have decreased by 14 percent since 1987 but are still over 50 percent. While the situation for black women and their families has improved, the poverty of Hispanic single mothers has risen, and in 1996, 60 percent of these women and their children were poor. The poverty rates of married-couple families are about the same as a decade ago (in the 8 percent range), although they climbed somewhat higher in the recession years of the early 1990s.

Whereas poverty rates of single mothers fell somewhat in recent years, their numbers increased. While families headed by a single female with offspring under eighteen years of age were just over one-fifth of all families with children in 1987 (21 percent) by 1996 they had become nearly one-fourth (24 percent). Thus, although the poverty rates of lone mothers fell absolutely and in relation to the poverty of married-couple families, family poverty is at least as feminized now as it was a decade earlier. Three-fifths of poor households with children (60 percent) were single-mother families in 1987, compared to 61 percent in 1996. Poverty rates were also constant for all families, with and without children (54 percent in 1996 and 52 percent in 1987). To conclude, poverty remains feminized as we near the millennium, just as it was in the 1980s. The trend has more or less stabilized, neither increasing nor decreasing. Thus while poverty continues to be feminized in the United States, its feminization appears to have slowed and perhaps even ceased.

### **Sources of Women's Poverty**

Women who support themselves and their families face disadvantages related to

both family composition and gender. First, let us examine deficiencies related to single parenthood, which is largely a female status. Since income rises with the number of wage earners, families maintained by a single adult are at a disadvantage compared to married-couple families. To illustrate, the median income for families with no wage earners was \$13,320 in 1996 (below the four-person poverty standard of \$16,036), compared to \$27,895 for one-earner families, and almost double that, \$55,547, for families with two or more earners.<sup>31</sup> Clearly, two-parent families have the advantage; both parents are employed in more than three-fifths (64 percent) of them, and only 3 percent are without an employed parent.<sup>32</sup> Poverty rates for families with just one member in the labor force were over seven times more than that of families with two or more members in the workforce (15 percent versus 2 percent).<sup>33</sup> It should also be noted that having more than one adult earner in a family is an excellent form of unemployment insurance, and it is a form of protection in which families maintained by single persons are deficient.

Among single-parent families, those maintained by women are not only much more numerous but at greater economic disadvantage. One reason is the difference in labor force participation rates of the two sexes. Although women, especially those with young children, are much more likely to be in the labor force today than twenty years ago, the fact remains that in all age groups between twenty and sixty-four, men have higher rates of participation than women, and these differences are larger during the peak child-rearing ages of twenty-five through forty-four.<sup>34</sup> These differences are reflected in the labor force activity of single mothers and fathers. Whereas nearly one-third of single mothers are not in the labor force, the figure for male single parents is less than half that or 12 percent.<sup>35</sup>

Among single mothers, those who have never married have lower rates of labor force participation (53 percent in 1992) than those who are married with spouses absent (64 percent), widowed (61 percent), or divorced (80 percent).<sup>36</sup> Not working can be related to child care responsibilities, lack of adequate, affordable child care or other family care responsibilities. Poor mothers, in particular, are handicapped by child care expenses; they pay 25 percent of family income for child care, compared to 6 percent for the non-poor.<sup>37</sup> The high costs of child care may be a reason for the lower employment of never-married single mothers who tend to be younger and to have younger children than other single mothers.<sup>38</sup> Being less well-educated than formerly married single mothers, they may be less able to command wages that would offset child care costs or provide an escape from poverty.<sup>39</sup> Black and Hispanic single mothers are much more likely never to have married than their white counterparts—49 percent and 39 percent respectively, compared to 23 percent.<sup>40</sup> That is one reason why the poverty risk is greater for black and Hispanic single mothers than for white.<sup>41</sup>

The need to perform work in the home, personal characteristics such as educational credentials and gender norms regarding employment may all influ-

ence labor force participation, but there is another factor that affects both men and women: the chronic lack of jobs, particularly in ghetto areas, even in times of relatively low unemployment. The chronic unemployment and underemployment of both men and women, particularly in the areas where African Americans remain heavily concentrated, are, we will show, important factors in the great increase of single parents as well as their poverty.<sup>42</sup>

Differences in labor force participation are not the only reasons why the poverty of single mothers is more than twice that of single fathers. A look at the median earnings of women and men suggests another. In 1996, the median income of female, year-round, full-time workers was \$24,935, compared to \$33,538 for men or about 74 percent.<sup>43</sup> Black and Hispanic women earn 66 percent and 57 percent, respectively, of the wages of white men.<sup>44</sup> Since 1979, the male-female wage gap has narrowed, partly because women's education and tenure in the labor market increased, but the closing of this gap has slowed considerably in the 1990s. Moreover, women have gained very little in real earnings while men's earnings have continued to decline. Indeed, the narrowing of the gap in recent years has been due more to the fall in men's wages than to the rise in women's.<sup>45</sup> To cite only the full-time earnings gap, moreover, is to underestimate gender differences in earnings. Seventy-one percent of men who worked in 1996 were year-round, full-time workers, but, owing to the factors that women's full-time participation in the labor force, that was the case for only 55 percent of women workers. If the earnings of all male and female workers are compared, the differences are much greater. In 1996, all women workers had only 62 percent the earnings of male workers.<sup>46</sup> Single-mother families with one member in the labor force have nearly twice the poverty rate of comparable single-father families (27 percent compared to 14 percent in 1996).<sup>47</sup>

There are other important reasons why women's earnings are lower than men's. Many women work in occupations that are largely female and are compensated at lower rates of pay than occupations that are predominantly male. Women have made advances in the high-paying professions but account for only about one-fourth of physicians and lawyers, compared to two-thirds of social workers and nearly all registered nurses.<sup>48</sup> Occupational segregation declined substantially over the past two decades, although the decrease slowed between 1985 and 1995.<sup>49</sup> In the mid-nineties, 57 percent of employed women were in administrative support (stenographers, clerks, payroll clerks, etc.), sales, and service occupations, compared to 28 percent of men.<sup>50</sup> Service, technical, sales, and administrative support were occupations that employed over half the working poor in 1996.<sup>51</sup> In 1997, median weekly pay was \$313 for service occupations and \$419 for administrative support, both occupations in which women were about three-fourths of the workers. By contrast, workers in transportation and material moving occupations earned \$498, and precision production, draft, and repair workers earned

\$548 weekly; men were over 90 percent of the workers in these occupations.<sup>52</sup> In all occupations, whether male-or female-dominated, women's median weekly earnings were less than those of men.

Women also predominate in a type of employment arrangement that often leaves workers with less pay, less job security, and fewer fringe benefits. Contingent employment is a term that refers to jobs that are other than a standard eight-hour day, five-day week arrangement, that are expected to last for limited periods, or that have no explicit or implicit commitment for long-term employment.<sup>53</sup> Women are two-thirds of part-time workers, and they are more likely than men to be contingent workers.<sup>54</sup>

Although differences in education, training, and experience—themselves related to racism and sexism—contribute to differences in labor-market outcomes, discrimination continues to be a factor. According to one study, 56 percent of the difference in earnings between white males and females cannot be explained by differences in qualifications, and is therefore attributed to discrimination.<sup>55</sup> A study conducted by the Urban Institute found that when white and black applicants who were carefully matched for qualifications applied for entry-level jobs in manufacturing, hotels, restaurants, retail sales, and office work, young white men were offered jobs 45 percent more often than their black counterparts, and young Hispanics fluent in English were even less likely than blacks to be hired.<sup>56</sup> In reviewing its civil service positions, the State of Minnesota found that female-dominated jobs were consistently paid less than comparable male-dominated jobs. For example, radio communications supervisors (likely to be male) and typing pool supervisors (likely to be female) were judged to have comparable skills and responsibilities, yet the communications supervisors got \$460 a month, or \$5,500 a year, more in pay.<sup>57</sup>

Within sex and racial groups, education raises income and reduces the risk of poverty, but women and minorities have lower incomes and higher risks of poverty than men or whites, even when educational attainment is held constant. For example, among full-time, year-round workers in 1996, males had median incomes substantially higher than females in all educational categories—for example, \$20,153 versus \$15,156 for persons with less than a ninth grade education and \$32,521 versus \$21,893 for high school graduates.<sup>58</sup> In 1992, black women with high school diplomas had poverty rates higher than whites of both sexes with less than a high school education, and among college graduates, black and Hispanic men and women had poverty rates at least twice those of white men and women.<sup>59</sup>

## **Equalization Measures**

Three types of policies serve to equalize the treatment of men, women, and mi-

norities in the labor market. First, there are anti-discrimination measures, such as the Equal Pay Act of 1963 and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which bans racial, sexual, and other forms of discrimination in training, hiring, compensation, and promotion. Proving discrimination and gaining redress is a long and difficult process that seldom leads to penalties sufficient to discourage the offenders, much less other employers who also discriminate. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), which was established to enforce Title VII, lacks the resources to bring to court any more than a fraction of the thousands of complaints that are filed with it every year, and its influence was curtailed during the Reagan/Bush Administrations when its policy was to concentrate on individual suits rather than on class action, that has the potential for inflicting substantial financial losses on offenders and for discouraging racism and sexism in other employers. Individuals who claim to be the victims of discrimination can sue in federal court, but there are many barriers to redress.<sup>60</sup> The fact that so much occupational segregation and wage discrimination exists more than thirty years after the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 strongly suggests that anti-discrimination laws are not equal to the problem. Indeed, the Office of Federal Contract Compliance (OFCCP), the federal agency that visits government contractors to inquire about their compliance with nondiscrimination requirements, found that 75 percent of the employers it checked were in substantial non-compliance with these laws.<sup>61</sup>

Affirmative action or special efforts to move women and minorities into occupations traditionally monopolized by men and to positions of authority within all occupations is a second equalization policy. Affirmative action has come under serious attack since the 1980s. Intended as a temporary expedient to overcome centuries of exclusion and their lingering consequences, early termination of affirmative action was one form of abortion championed by conservatives. Historian Eric Foner has compared the present post-Civil Rights period to the post-Reconstruction era, when initiatives to overcome the oppression of blacks were also seen as favoritism.<sup>62</sup> Since the early 1980s, the Supreme Court has interpreted affirmative action suits in the narrowest terms. In 1996, voters in the State of California approved Governor Pete Wilson's executive order dismantling affirmative action programs under his authority. Some black intellectuals have opposed the strategy by claiming that it benefits the more advantaged members of minority groups and that it harms those who are helped by implying they could not have achieved their positions without favoritism,<sup>63</sup> despite the fact that very few reverse-discrimination cases have been brought and a high proportion of those brought have lacked merit.<sup>64</sup> Moreover, I am aware of no studies that have shown that workplace efficiency or effectiveness suffered as a result of affirmative action. Nonetheless, public opinion is not supportive of preferences for women and minorities in hiring and promotion, even where there has been job discrimination

in the past.<sup>65</sup> Interestingly, the idea of affirmative action in favor of persons who are economically disadvantaged seems to be more acceptable, and since women and minorities are disproportionately represented among the poor, they would benefit from such an approach.<sup>66</sup> Economist Barbara Bergmann, who has cogently summarized the case for affirmative action, believes that a program for the disadvantaged would be “a poor and inadequate substitute for affirmative action, which acts specifically to end segregation by race and sex;” it could allow businesses that have never hired a woman or a black person for a higher-status position to fulfill their obligations by hiring some white men who have grown up in poverty.<sup>67</sup>

Whereas affirmative action is an effort to desegregate the work force, comparable worth or pay equity attempts to alter the reward structure of a segregated work force, that is, to raise pay in female-dominated occupations. The approach is to use comparable standards, such as education, experience, and responsibility to determine pay for men’s and women’s different occupations in the same workplace. By 1989, twenty states had implemented some reforms aimed at increasing the wages of employees in female-dominated job classes, although not all these states considered their adjustments to have been motivated by pay equity concerns.<sup>68</sup> For the sixteen states from which it was able to collect data, the Institute for Women’s Policy Research found that the total spent on pay equity adjustments was more than \$527 million (1990 dollars) through 1992, and that 335,000 workers received pay increases averaging \$1,400. The progress in pay equity has been attributed to the growing political power of women, and the rise of public-sector unions which have recruited more women and blacks and played an important role in the efforts to gain compensation for unequal pay.<sup>69</sup> The National Committee on Pay Equity reports several recent initiatives at the state and federal levels.<sup>70</sup>

### **Compensating for Labor Market Disadvantages**

For many women, income from employment is too small to support a family. Indeed, the same low income that keeps a married-couple family from want or that contributes to its modest comfort becomes a path to poverty when a woman supports a family. Current trends in both the labor market and equalization policies give no reason to believe that the earnings of many single women will be sufficient to keep their families above the poverty line. Two types of government policies, one to facilitate child support collection and the other to provide income support directly, compensate for the economic disadvantages of gender and single parenthood.

#### *Child Support*

In theory, child support compensates for a formidable risk to income security—

the loss of a major family breadwinner.<sup>71</sup> One assertion that I need not back up with figures—although I will do so anyway—is that many single parents get little or no money from noncustodial parents to make up for this loss. Of the 9.9 million families eligible for support in 1991, only 56 percent even had a support award, and of these families, only half or 28 percent of the total received everything that was due to them.<sup>72</sup> There are large differences among single-parent families with respect to child support. For example, only 17 percent of children in families of never-married parents receive child-support payments, compared to 52 percent with divorced parents.<sup>73</sup> Much less likely to have married than their white counterparts, black and Hispanic single mothers are also less likely to get child support.<sup>74</sup>

After reviewing statistics on child support, the Ways and Means Committee of the U.S. House of Representatives, which has jurisdiction over the federal child support program, concluded: "...the performance of the Nation's child support system is modest and ...few if any of the measures of national performance have improved in nearly two decades.... Both the likelihood of having an award and of being legally entitled to a payment have actually declined slightly."<sup>75</sup>

Jointly funded federal-state child support agencies are supposed to help collect child support, both for families on public assistance and others who ask for help. However, some child support was collected in only 19 percent of all state agency cases in 1995, the last fiscal year for which there are nationally reported data.<sup>76</sup> The Children's Defense Fund, which finds the present record of child-support collection "disheartening," is hopeful that changes in the 1996 welfare law which required states to change their procedures (e.g., streamline the process for establishing paternity, and set up registries of newly-hired employees to track down missing noncustodial parents and begin wage withholding quickly) will increase child support.<sup>77</sup>

While many fathers at all income levels default on child support, some of these men are hard pressed. Indeed, as I will point out below, their poor economic prospects have something to do with their absence from the home. For example, the Committee on Ways and Means points out that AFDC benefit payments, themselves low, usually exceed child support awards or the amount that noncustodial parents are considered able to pay.<sup>78</sup> Support for the view that some noncustodial fathers are unable to pay or able to pay very little comes from the record of Sweden's program of "advance maintenance." This is a policy of paying through government funds an amount thought necessary for a child's support and collecting the amount of child support from noncustodial parents that they are considered able to pay. The program is available in France, Germany, and the Netherlands, in addition to Sweden. Although the Swedish government recovers over 80 percent of support obligations, these collections meet only somewhat over one-third of the amounts paid out as advance maintenance. As Marguerite Rosenthal

observes, “the maintenance advance is really serving as a supplementary grant to the custodial parent and her children.”<sup>79</sup> The difference between this approach and the U.S. grant to single parents with income deficiencies—Aid to Families with Dependent Children or its successor, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families—is profound. The former treats the government grant as child support and the latter, as welfare.

### *Social Welfare*

Deficient labor market rewards and ineffective child support measures do not exhaust the failure of U.S. policy to provide security for the most vulnerable of its families. Social policy analysts refer to pre-transfer and post-transfer poverty, the former meaning market income or earnings, private pensions, and private income transfers such as parental child support. The latter refers to income after taxes and government benefits are paid. Whereas other industrial countries reduce the pre-transfer poverty of lone-parent families by 42 percent on average, the figure for the United States is 12 percent. Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Hungary, the Netherlands, Norway, Slovakia, and Sweden reduce the poverty of these families by 60 percent or more.<sup>80</sup>

Poverty reduction measures that benefit lone parents but are not exclusively designed for them include assistance in paying for essential goods and services, protection against risks to income security such as unemployment insurance, and compensating for the costs and income losses of parenthood. In-kind benefits to pay for essential goods, such as food stamps, medicaid, and housing subsidies, are not counted as cash income or included in estimates of poverty but certainly mitigate its effects, their often stigmatizing attributes notwithstanding. Food stamps contributed to the decline in hunger in the United States in earlier decades and continue to be available to poor families with children who are U.S. citizens (or legal immigrants who were receiving these benefits before the passage of the new welfare law in 1996). Although millions of Americans are without health coverage, progress in providing medical care to lower-income children, including those well above the poverty line, has been significant in recent years. By contrast, the housing picture has worsened, increasingly burdening already meager incomes and leaving little money for other purposes. Declining government support for low-income housing has contributed to the shortage of affordable housing, and as a result four of five poor-renter households with incomes below the poverty line face housing costs that exceed 30 percent of their incomes, and more than three of five spend at least half their incomes on rent and utilities.<sup>81</sup>

Benefits that compensate families for the extra costs and income losses of bearing and rearing children include family allowances, paid parental leaves, and, in the United States, the Earned Income Credit (EIC), which supplements the

incomes of working-poor families with children. The United States, unlike many other countries, has neither family or children's allowances nor paid parental leaves to cover maternity and the care of very young children. Germany, for example, provides paid child-raising allowances for six months for families with less than \$56,183 a year (\$42,137 for single parents) and from the seventh to twenty-fourth month for two-parent and single-parent families with less than \$13,484 and \$12,922, respectively. The amount, \$4,045 a year, though a supplement to the income of a major breadwinner, cannot support a family by itself and is therefore insufficient for single mothers. France provides non-means-tested children's allowances to all families with two or more children, regardless of income. Recently Canada has changed from a policy of providing allowances to all children to one of grants that are means-tested but still reach 85 percent of Canadian families with children.<sup>82</sup> In the last decade, the United States has improved its support to lower-income families with children whose parents are gainfully employed. The Earned Income Credit has been increased substantially under both Bush and Clinton administrations in times generally unfavorable to low-income programs. Without the credit the number of persons in poverty in 1996 would have been nearly four million greater.<sup>83</sup> On the other hand, the credit has done little more than offset the declining value of the minimum wage.<sup>84</sup> Moreover, since poverty rates for families with children have remained constant after improvements in the EIC, it may be more accurate to say that the EIC has prevented poverty from rising still further.<sup>85</sup>

From its inception in 1935 until its repeal, the major U.S. program for poor, dependent children, AFDC, has been largely for single mothers and their families (89 percent in its last year).<sup>86</sup> The program was always stigmatized and inadequate in its benefits, and these declined 37 percent in real value in the last twenty years of the program's existence.<sup>87</sup> In January 1996, combined benefits of AFDC and Food Stamps fell below the official U.S. poverty level (\$12,320 for a family of three) in all fifty states, and the median state provided combined benefits equal to 65 percent of a poverty level that has itself been considered inadequate.<sup>88</sup> The program established in place of AFDC, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), is not an entitlement, meaning that state welfare departments are not obligated to provide benefits to all families who qualify.<sup>89</sup> TANF is the major item in a welfare law that is expected to reduce funding for low-income programs by nearly \$55 billion in a four-year period.<sup>90</sup> Whereas the age of the youngest child in the family was the only time limit on the receipt of AFDC, the new law cuts off TANF benefits after five years, regardless of whether jobs are available for those who are dropped from the rolls. The new law also has strict work requirements, frequently forcing recipients to enroll in unfair "workfare" programs in which they are obliged to work off their benefits under conditions that violate labor laws and leave them no more money than their meager welfare

allowances.<sup>91</sup> Already offsetting very little of the poverty of single mothers, the United States has enacted new welfare-“reform” policies that will reduce the anti-poverty effects of social welfare programs still further.

Although blacks were somewhat over one-third (36.4 percent) of the AFDC caseload, welfare was long perceived as a program for blacks.<sup>92</sup> In my earlier work on the feminization of poverty, when blacks and Hispanics were together 56 percent of the caseload, I wrote that “the racism that has so long infected American social life plays an important role in the inadequacy of the American social welfare system and in the willingness of a society with such abundant resources to neglect so many of its women and children.”<sup>93</sup> Racism has also played a role in the repeal of the program which, for all its shortcomings, was an entitlement and a last resort for the nation’s poorest families.

In other countries, there are less stigmatizing programs that benefit single-mother families. I have already noted that France, Germany, the Netherlands, and Sweden have advance maintenance programs that assure child support to single-parent families. France has a relatively generous but time-limited, means-tested allowance for single parents with a child under three years of age.<sup>94</sup>

## **The Magnitude of Single Parenthood**

If labor market equalization and social policies seem unlikely to decrease the poverty of women who support families, what about the other major ingredient in the feminization of poverty: the number of women who are supporting families on their own? Single motherhood continues to increase, although it grew 16 percent between 1985 and 1995, compared to 26 percent in the preceding decade.<sup>95</sup> Single parenthood is more common in the United States than most other countries, but this family composition has become more widespread in all the industrialized countries in Europe and North America.<sup>96</sup> The increased rates of divorce, separation, and nonmarriage are related to social conditions and values associated with industrial societies, especially in the United States—individualism and the right to personal fulfillment, women’s liberation, increased employment and earnings of women, and widespread recognition and condemnation of family violence. Efforts to reduce single motherhood, short of restoring women’s total economic dependence on men, would seem futile and, in any case, outside the legitimate realm of the state.

Feminist writers have argued that stigmatizing programs for divorced, separated, and never-married mothers are intended to punish them for deviating from the family ethic or prescribed roles for women.<sup>97</sup> By contrast, widows and their children are often covered by the socially acceptable Survivors’ Insurance program. However, widows are a very small proportion (4 percent) of single mothers, whereas never-married women are nearly two-fifths (38 percent) and

divorced or separated women, nearly three-fifths (58 percent).<sup>98</sup> Since 1985, moreover, the numbers of never-married and divorced or separated mothers have increased, the former by nearly 70 percent, while widowhood has declined still further.

It is true that AFDC and TANF are punitive and stigmatizing compared to the Survivors' Insurance program for "respectable" widows, but not compared to what has been available to married-couple families who have little or no income. Until the growth of the Earned Income Credit, the latter had been covered, if at all, by state general assistance which was nearly always more demeaning and inadequate than AFDC. Indeed, it has been widely claimed that because AFDC went almost entirely to single-mother families it was an incentive to single

---

**In European countries with much more generous benefits for single parents, both single motherhood and teenage pregnancy are less frequent than in the United States.**

---

parenthood. It might have been anticipated that declining benefit levels in AFDC would be a decreasing incen-

tive to single motherhood, but in the last two decades, when AFDC benefits fell 37 percent, single motherhood rose by 46 percent.<sup>99</sup> In European countries with much more generous benefits for single parents, both single motherhood and teenage pregnancy are less frequent than in the United States.<sup>100</sup> New welfare policies, accompanied by an animus against single motherhood, particularly out-of-wedlock pregnancy, are more punitive toward single mothers than they have been since the 1960s.<sup>101</sup> A lifetime limit and strict work requirements during receipt of benefits make single parenthood more insecure economically and could thus make poor women more dependent on spouses, providing those men are employed or able to support them. The new policy is intended to push more women into the labor market, a policy that, by increasing the number of job seekers but not the number of jobs, is likely to increase unemployment and keep wages from rising. Thus, the new policies serve both capital and patriarchy.

Will new policies prevent a form of single parenthood that could and should be reduced by social policies? There is a single parenthood born of poverty, the result of limited employment opportunities and low earnings of both women and men. Such economic deprivation can strain marriages or prevent them from forming in the first place. Since the 1950s, observers have been pointing to increasing unemployment rates of blacks, partly stemming from their exclusion from the white-collar occupations where job growth was concentrated.<sup>102</sup> The consequences of declining labor market conditions on black men and their families were also recognized. For example, psychologist Kenneth Clark pointed out that the black husband who finds himself unable to function well as a hus-

band and father because he cannot be an effective breadwinner may simply withdraw from the family.<sup>103</sup> According to an executive assistant to Secretary of Labor Willard Wirtz, black unemployment in the 1960s was “cataclysmic, chronic, and malignant.”<sup>104</sup>

Under Willard Wirtz’s leadership the Labor Department documented “subemployment”—unemployment, very low wages, involuntary part-time employment, and dropping out of the labor force from discouragement. In November 1966, when national unemployment was 3.4 percent, considerably below the recent rates that have been considered low, the Department of Labor found that in ten urban slum areas, the rate was nearly 10 percent, and subemployment averaged 30 percent.<sup>105</sup>

In the 1980s, sociologist William Julius Wilson attributed the high rates of single and unmarried parenthood among blacks to unemployment which, in turn, reduced the number of marriageable men.<sup>106</sup> The research of Wilson and his colleagues showed that between 1960 and 1980 the number of employed black males per 100 females of the same age and race declined significantly in three of four regions of the country, whereas the marriageability of white males declined only slightly. This research, however, overlooked poor employment prospects for young women, particularly blacks.<sup>107</sup> Nonmarriage, divorce, separation, and desertion would seem less likely if women as well as men were stably employed and could contribute a second income to a family.<sup>108</sup>

While current unemployment rates are lower than they have been in several decades, the official national statistics conceal much real joblessness and substantially higher unemployment among youth and minorities. In 1997, when the unemployment rate was at its lowest in twenty-seven years, 6.7 million workers were officially counted as unemployed, but there were, in addition, 2.8 million part-time workers who wanted full-time work and 4.9 million non-job seekers who wanted a job, a total of 14.4 million people, double the number counted in the official figures.<sup>109</sup> In 1998, unemployment rates for black men and women were more than double those of white men and women. Youth unemployment (16–19 years) was more than triple the overall rate (16 percent), and that of black teenagers was double that.<sup>110</sup>

A better gauge of available work than the unemployment rates is the number of job vacancies per job applicant, and surveys even in areas with relatively low unemployment rates show three to five job seekers for every job. In ghettos the ratio of job seekers to jobs is much higher.<sup>111</sup> Work requirements are punitive when there are not enough jobs and, as long lines for decent jobs so frequently tell us, unnecessary when there are enough jobs.<sup>112</sup> Real welfare reform would begin by assuring decent jobs for all men and women and might well discourage the single parenthood born of poverty. Not surprisingly, civil rights organizations have long considered “full and fair employment” true welfare reform.<sup>113</sup>

## Feminization of Poverty in the Future

Poverty will remain feminized and, more important, too high, until the United States changes its social and economic policies and priorities. A policy of full employment would be the best insurance against poverty. Income support would still be necessary to deal with the economic costs of parenthood, the single parenthood that persists when its purely economic causes are removed, and the inevitable risks to income security such as disability, as well as to supplement earned income as long as wages remain too low to support families. Even with full employment, Sweden paid for all but the last of these, which was obviated by its wage solidarity policies. Sustained full employment is likely to increase wages, which declined for men and failed to rise sufficiently for women during two decades of loose labor markets.

The U.S. economy has functioned optimally during brief periods of very low unemployment, but, with the exception of war times, economic and political elites have preferred and achieved relatively loose labor markets that drive down wages and reduce the power of workers. Unemployment also serves to undermine and break families. The United States is far wealthier than other nations that provide more economic security to their people.<sup>114</sup> If maintaining substantial amounts of unemployment is U.S. economic policy, then that should be openly acknowledged and the victims of unemployment compensated rather than castigated for alleged unwillingness to work. The United States could well afford to prevent the poverty that results from unemployment, but the nation would be richer, healthier, and less wasteful of its potential resources with full employment as the centerpiece of its policies. With welfare "reform" we are left with neither an entitlement to work nor an entitlement to welfare, and consequently with the prospect of greater poverty among women and their families. Without either full employment at decent wages or adequate income support, we can expect that poverty will remain high in the world's wealthiest nation and that it will continue to be the special burden of women. (WA)

## Notes

1. Sociologist Diana Pearce identified the phenomenon in the United States in the late 1970s. See "The Feminization of Poverty: Women, Work and Welfare," *The Urban and Social Change Review* 11, no. 1 and 2: 28-36. See also Barbara Ehrenreich and Frances Fox Piven, "The Feminization of Poverty: When the Family Wage System Breaks Down," *Dissent* 31 (Summer 1984): 162-168.

2. Pearce, 28.

3. Single-mother families are 81 percent of all single-parent families, and their poverty rates are double that of single-father families (42 percent versus 20 percent). Leatha Lamison-White, *Poverty in the United States: 1996, Current Population Reports*, P60-109 (Washington, DC: U.S. Gov-

ernment Printing Office, 1997): table C-3, C-8. Some good news in regard to division of labor in the home comes from a recent survey by the Families and Work Institute which found that in the last twenty years men have increased the amount of time they spend with children and on household chores. Women, however, still spend more time on both. See Tamar Lewin, "Men Assuming Bigger Share at Home, New Survey Shows," *New York Times*, 15 April 1998: A1.

4. Ibid., table 2, 2. There are more than five times as many poor, unrelated elderly women as there are unrelated elderly men who are poor. See U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *1993 Handbook on Women Workers: Trends & Issues* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1994): table 11, 42.

5. Gertrude Schaffner Goldberg and Eleanor Kremen, eds., *The Feminization of Poverty: Only in America?* (New York: Praeger, 1990). In this work, U.S. data usually pertained to 1987, the last available when we were writing it.

6. Lamison-White, table C-3, C-9.

7. Here we deal with single-mother families who maintain their own households, primarily because statistics on poverty are collected by family households. According to Philips Cutwright and John Scanzoni ("Trends in Marriage and the Family: The Effect of Past and Future Income Supplements," Indiana University, unpublished manuscript, May 1972, cited by Martin Rein and Hugh Heclo, "What Welfare Crisis?—a Comparison among the United States, Britain, and Sweden," *Public Interest* 33[Fall 1973]:74-75.), the major part of the increase in single-parent households between 1940 and 1970 was due to the much greater tendency for such mothers to head separate households, not to marital disruption. Between 1970 and 1998, such households nearly continued to increase, from 12.8 percent of all families with children to 24.1 percent. Calculated from Lamison-White, table C-3, C-8–C-9.

8. Ibid.

9. All families maintained by women, with or without children, were 52 percent of all poor families (Ibid., table C-3, C-8).

10. See, e.g., Mimi Abramovitz, *Regulating the Lives of Women: Social Welfare Policy from Colonial Times to the Present* (Boston: South End Press, 1988).

11. Gertrude S. Goldberg and Eleanor Kremen, "The Feminization of Poverty: Only in America?" *Social Policy* 17(Spring 1987): 3–14.

12. Women's labor force participation, for example, was up from 38 percent in 1960 to 56 percent in 1987. U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Labor Force Statistics Derived from the Current Population Survey, 1948–87*, Bulletin 2307 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1989): table A-10, 133.

13. Poverty rates of all families maintained by women were down from 42 percent in 1960 to 34 percent in 1987; the figures were 56 percent and 46 percent respectively for single-mother families. Lamison-White, table C-3, C-8, C-9.

14. After being stuck for more than a decade at the 60 percent mark or below, the ratio of women's to men's full-time wages began to climb in 1982 and was up to 66 percent in 1988. U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Money Income of Households, Families, and Persons in the United States: 1991, Series P-60-180* (Washington, DC: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1992), table B-18, B-34.

15. Lamison-White, table C-3, C-9.

16. Real GNP per capita ranged from \$18,530 in the United States to \$1,930 in Poland. Figures for the Soviet Union were not available for 1987 but were \$4,550 the year before. Second to the U.S. was Canada with \$15,160. For 1987, see World Bank, *World Development Report 1988* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988): 165.; for 1986, see UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989): 95.

17. Timothy M. Smeeding and Lee Rainwater, *Cross National Trends in Income Poverty and*

*Dependency: The Evidence for Young Adults in the Eighties*, Working Paper No. 67 (Syracuse, NY: Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse University, 1991): table 7, 16. These data are part of the Luxembourg Income Study which used a relative poverty measure consisting of households with equivalence adjusted incomes less than 50 percent of the median adjusted household income (in their countries) of the 20–55 year old household head group being studied.

18. Marguerite Rosenthal, "Sweden: Promise and Paradox," in Goldberg and Kremen, 129–156.

19. June Axinn, "Japan: A Special Case," in Goldberg and Kremen, 91–106.

20. See, e.g., Gosta Esping-Andersen, *Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990): Chapter 6. O in Gosta has a slash through it in Swedish manner.

21. With solidarity wage policies the aim is to reduce wage inequalities and raise the earnings of low wage workers. The object is equal pay for equal work regardless of the profitability of a firm. For a discussion of solidarity wage policies, see Helen Ginsburg, *Full Employment and Public Policy: The United States and Sweden* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1983): 123.

22. Smeeding and Rein, table 7, 16.

23. Ibid.

24. Rosenthal, 142.

25. Smeeding and Rein, table 7, 16.

26. For the former, see, e.g., Elaine Boris and Peter Bardaglio, "The Transformation of Patriarchy: The Role of the State," *Families, Politics and Public Policy*, Irene Diamond, ed. (New York: Longman, Green, 1983). For the latter, see Helga Hernes, *Welfare State and Woman Power* (Oslo: Norwegian University Press, 1987); and Berta Siim, *Reproductive Politics, Gender Politics, and the Political Mobilization of Women*, paper presented at the Conference on Public Policies and Gender Policies, Social Science Research Council and Wagner Institute, City University of New York, September 1988.

27. See, e.g., Alan Cowell, "Germans Stage Huge Protest on Budget Plan," *New York Times*, 16 June 1996: A8.; Anthony DePalma, "Protesters Take to Streets to Defend Canada's Safety Net," *New York Times*, 10 October 1996: 3.; and Katha Pollitt, "French Lesson," *The Nation* 262 (19 February 1996): 9.

28. Paul Pierson, *Dismantling the Welfare State? Reagan, Thatcher and the Politics of Retrenchment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

29. While taking the position that the welfare state "has proved rather more robust than many thought 20 years ago, not just in the UK but also in other industrialized countries," British scholar Jane Millar, for example, points out that benefit cuts have failed to protect women and children and that men have lost ground, particularly in unemployment insurance. See Jane Millar, "Diminishing Welfare: The Case of the UK," *Diminishing Welfare: A Cross-National Study of Social Provision*, ed. by Gertrude Schaffner Goldberg and Marguerite G. Rosenthal (New York: Praeger, forthcoming). Economist Jörg Huffschnid points out that the welfare state in Germany has been cut back for twenty years. See Jorg Huffschnid, "Economic Policy for Full Employment: Proposals for Germany," *Economic and Industrial Democracy* 18(February 1977): 74, 76.

30. Lamison-White, table C-3, C-8 –C-13.

31. U. S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Money Income in the United States: 1996, Current Population Reports*, P60-197 (Washington, DC: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1997): table 1, 1.

32. U. S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Employment Characteristics of Families: 1996*, News, USDL 97-195, Washington, DC, 16 June 1997: table 4.

33. U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *A Profile of the Working Poor, 1996*, Report 918, 2.

34. Whereas 39 percent of mothers with children under six were in the labor force in 1975, the

figure was 62 percent in 1996. Howard V. Hayghe, "Developments in Women's Labor Force Participation," *Monthly Labor Review* 120 (September 1997): table 1, 42. For differences in labor-force participation by age, see *Employment and Earnings* 45 (January 1998): table 3, 164.

35. U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Women in the Workforce: An Overview*, Report 892, July 1995: table 2, 6. Male and female single parents are about equally likely to have children under the age of three (25 percent). Arlene Saluter, "Family and Household Characteristics: March 1996," *Current Population Reports*, P60-195 (Washington, DC: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1997): table 10, 92. Thus, the higher labor force participation of male single parents may be related more to social norms and to the more favorable labor market conditions for men than to differences in responsibility for care of very young children.

36. U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *1993 Handbook on Women Workers: Trends & Issues*, table 15, 12.

37. *Ibid.*, table 18, 13.

38. Ann Nichols-Casebolt and Judy Krysik, *The Economic Well-Being of Never- and Ever-Married Single Mother Families: A Cross National Comparison* (Syracuse, NY: Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse University, 1995): table 2.

39. *Ibid.*

40. Saluter, table 10.

41. Since black single mothers are more likely to be never-married and less likely to be poor than Hispanics, factors other than marital status account for high rates of poverty.

42. For treatment of "jobless ghettos," see William Julius Wilson, *When Work Disappears: The World of the New Urban Poor* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996).

43. U.S. Department of Commerce, *Money Income: 1996*, table 7, 28–29.

44. *Ibid.*

45. Heidi Hartmann and Julie Whittaker, "Stall in Women's Real Wage Growth Slows Progress in Closing the Wage Gap," *Research-in-Brief* (Washington, DC: Institute for Women's Policy Research, 1998).

46. U.S. Department of Commerce, *Money Income: 1996*, table 10, 38, 40.

47. U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *A Profile of the Working Poor*, table 6, 11.

48. U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Employment and Earnings* (January 1998): table 11, 174–175.

49. Barbara H. Wooton, "Gender Differences in Occupational Employment," *Monthly Labor Review* 120 (April 1977): 18.

50. U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Women in the Workforce*, 7.

51. U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *A Profile of the Working Poor, 1996*, 2.

52. *Employment and Earnings* 45 (January 1988): table 39, 209–214.

53. U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *1993 Handbook on Women Workers: Trends & Issues*, 8.

54. *Ibid.*, and U.S. Department of Labor, *Contingent and Alternative Employment Arrangements, February 1997*, USDOL 97-422. 97-422.

55. Mary Corcoran and Greg J. Duncan, "Work History, Labor Force Attachment, and Earnings Differences between the Races and Sexes," *Journal of Human Resources* 14 (Winter 1979): 3–20.

56. The black applicants were coached to present qualifications apparently equal to the white applicants. Michael Fix and Raymond J. Struyk, eds., *Clear and Convincing Evidence: Measurement of Discrimination in America* (Washington, DC: The Urban Institute, 1993), cited by Barbara R. Bergmann, *In Defense of Affirmative Action* (New York: Basic Books, 1996): 50–52.

57. "Pay Equity and the Wage Gap: Success in the States," *Research-in-Brief* (Washington, DC: Institute for Women's Policy Research, undated). According to the Institute, the date of the report is 1994.

58. U. S. Department of Commerce, 1997: table 9, 35, 37.

59. U. S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Poverty in the United States: 1992, Series P60-185* (Washington, DC: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1993): table 11, 70–72.

60. See Bergmann, 169–176, for a discussion of problems in enforcing the laws against discrimination.

61. U.S. Department of Labor, *OFCCP Quick Facts* (Washington, DC: U. S. Department of Labor, n.d.), cited by Bergmann, 44.

62. Eric Foner, *From Civil War to Civil Rights: The First and Second Reconstructions*, The Frank Tannenbaum Lecture to the Fifty-third Annual Meeting of the University Seminars at Columbia University, New York, 16 April 1997.

63. See, e.g., Shelby Steele, "A Negative Vote on Affirmative Action," *New York Times Magazine*, 13 May 1990, 46–48ff. Instead of affirmative action, Steele favors stiffer penalties for discrimination, indeed treating it as a criminal, not just civil, offense. See his "Affirmative Action Must Go," *New York Times*, 1 March 1995: A19. For black scholars who favor affirmative action, see, e.g., Orlando Patterson, "Affirmative Action on the Merit System," *New York Times*, 7 August 1995: A13. Patterson holds that affirmative action "has been the single most important factor in the rise of a significant, if still economically fragile, black middle class." In response to the claim that affirmative action has lowered standards, Patterson points out that during the twelve years when the University of California was working toward the goal of incorporating students from disadvantaged minorities, it increased its eligibility requirements five times. For an excellent conceptualization of the basic issues, see Milton Gordon, "Models of Pluralism: The New American Dilemma," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 454 (1981): 94–111.

64. A Labor Department report prepared by Rutgers University law professor Alfred W. Blumrosen found fewer than 200 reverse-discrimination cases among more than 3,000 discrimination opinions by Federal district and appeals courts from 1990 to 1994. Blumrosen reported that a "high proportion" of the claims lacked merit, and when reverse discrimination was established, courts provided appropriate relief. See "Reverse Discrimination of Whites Is Rare, Labor Study Reports," *New York Times*, 30 March 1995: A23. Check 100 or 200

65. In a *New York Times*/CBS News Poll based on telephone interviews with 1,258 adults throughout the United States in December 1997, more than half rejected preferences in hiring and promotion for both women and blacks where there has been job discrimination in the past. Only slightly over one-third of respondents favored preferences. More than half of the respondents, however, supported "special efforts to help minorities." See Sam Howe Verhovek, "In Poll, Americans Reject Means but not Ends of Racial Diversity," *New York Times*, 14 December 1997: A1, 32. Sociologist William Julius Wilson points out that "while opposing 'preferential' racial policies such as college admission quotas or job hiring and promotion strategies designed to achieve equal outcomes, recent studies reveal that most white Americans approve of 'compensatory' affirmative action policies, such as race-targeted programs of job training, special education, and special recruitment efforts." Wilson, 203–204.

66. In the December 1997 *New York Times*/CBS News Poll (Verhovek, op. cit.), over half favored "preferences" to help people from poor families.

67. Bergmann, 168.

68. Institute for Women's Policy Research, "Pay Equity and the Wage Gap."

69. Claudia Goldin, *Understanding the Gender Gap: An Economic History of American Women* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990): 210.

70. An example of such initiatives is a bill that passed the West Virginia legislature in March 1998, prohibiting the state from paying male and female employees different wages for work of "comparable character" that requires "comparable skills," except where differences are based on seniority, merit, or quantity or quality of production. The Fair Pay Act, introduced in Congress in 1997, would prohibit wage discrimination based on sex, race, and national origin by requiring employers to provide equal pay for work of equal value, whether the jobs are the same or not. Written communication to the author from Evelyn Knolle, National Committee on Pay Equity, Washington DC, 13 April 1998.

71. Mark Granovetter and Charles Tilly have written that "the two events most likely to cause a household from relative prosperity into poverty are a major wage earner's loss of job and the loss of a major wage earner through divorce, separation or death." See their "Inequality and Labor Processes," *Handbook of Sociology*, ed. Neil J. Smelser (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1988): 178. Single women who have never married have always been without the income of a second breadwinner.

72. U. S. House of Representatives, Committee on Ways and Means, 1996 *Green Book: Background Material and Data on Programs within the Jurisdiction of the Committee on Ways and Means* (Washington, DC: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1996): 577.

73. Ibid., 578. Using samples from the Luxembourg Income Study, which uses national income surveys such as the Current Population Survey of the U. S. Bureau of the Census, Nichols-Casebolt and Krysik (table 2) found that 38 percent of families with ever-married single mothers had child support, compared to 10 percent of those with never-married mothers.

74. U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Ways and Means, 1996, 579.

75. Ibid., 581.

76. Children's Defense Fund, *The State of America's Children: Yearbook 1998* (Washington, DC: Children's Defense Fund, 1998): table 85, 112. The source is the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Child Support Enforcement.

77. Ibid., 13.

78. U. S. House of Representatives, Committee on Ways and Means, 575.

79. Rosenthal, 142.

80. Jonathan Bradshaw and Jun-Rong Chen, *Poverty in the UK: A Comparison with Nineteen Other Countries, Working Paper No. 147* (Syracuse, NY: Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse University, 1996): table 4, 8. Data are for circa 1990.

81. Edward B. Lazere, *In Short Supply: The Growing Affordable Housing Gap* (Washington, DC: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 1995): 10.

82. Patricia Evans, "Downloading the Welfare State: The Canadian Case," in Goldberg and Rosenthal.

83. Lamison-White, table 6, 28.

84. In 1996, the minimum wage, plus the EIC benefit, was 107 percent of the poverty standard for a three-person family. The minimum wage alone was 102 percent of this standard in 1975, when the EIC was enacted, and 120 percent of the three-person poverty line in 1968. For values of the minimum wage, see Isaac Shapiro, *No Escape: The Minimum Wage and Poverty* (Washington, DC: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 1987): 19.

85. Poverty rates for all families with children were 16.4 percent in 1990, when the EIC was significantly increased, rose to 18.5 percent in 1993, and fell to 16.5 percent in 1996, the last year for which data are available. Lamison-White, table C-3, C-8-C-9.

86. U. S. Congress, Public Law 104-193, *Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996* [hereafter PRWORA]: Sec. 101(10).

87. Calculated from U. S. House of Representatives, Committee on Ways and Means, table 8-12, 437-438.

88. Ibid. The official U. S. poverty standard is based on an "economy" food plan that is "for temporary use when funds are low." Mollie Orshansky, "Counting the Poor, Another Look at the Poverty Profile," *Social Security Bulletin*, 28 (January 1965):6. The standard, low to begin with, is adjusted annually to reflect changes in the cost of living but has not been revised since the middle 1960s.

89. The new law explicitly declares that "this part [pertaining to TANF] shall not be interpreted to entitle any individual or family to assistance under any state program funded under this part." U. S. Congress, Public Law 104-193, Sec. 401 (b).

90. David A. Super, Sharon Parrott, Susan Steinmetz, and Cindy Mann, *The New Welfare Law* (Washington, DC: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 1996): 1.

91. See, for example, Maurice Emsellem, *Welfare Reforming the Workplace: Key Concerns with the Work Requirements of the Personal Responsibility & Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996* (PRWORA) (New York: National Employment Law Project, 1996). See also Vivian S. Toy, "Tough Workfare Rules Used as Way to Cut Welfare Rolls," *New York Times*, 15 April 1998: A1, B4. This article reports that workfare is being so harshly and unfairly enforced in New York City, which has the country's largest workfare program, that clients who contest their sanctions or loss of benefits through state hearings procedures win two-thirds of the time.

92. U. S. House of Representatives, Committee on Ways and Means, table 8-28, 474. The figures on race are for 1994.

93. Goldberg, *The Feminization of Poverty amidst Plenty*, 36.

94. See, for example, Jane Jenson and Ruth Kantrow, "Labor Market and Family Policy in France: An Intersecting Complex for Dealing with Poverty," in Goldberg and Kremen.

95. Calculated from Lamison-White, table C-3, C-8 -C-9.

96. See, for example, Connie Sorrentino, "The Changing Family in International Perspective," *Monthly Labor Review* 103 (March 1990): 41-58.

97. See, for example, Abramovitz, and Dorothy C. Miller, *Women and Social Welfare: A Feminist Analysis* (New York: Praeger, 1990).

98. Saluter, table 10, 92.

99. For increases in single motherhood, see Lamison-White, Table C-3, C-8 -C-9.

100. Teenage pregnancy rates in the Netherlands, France, Sweden, and the UK ranged in this order from 3 to 33 per 1,000 females aged 15-19, compared to 61 per thousand in the United States. See Kristin A. Moore, Nancy O. Snyder and Dana Gleib, *Facts at a Glance* (Washington, DC: Child Trends, Inc. 1995). In the mid-1980s, government income transfers reduced the poverty of single mothers by 89 percent in the Netherlands, 59 percent in France, 81 percent in Sweden, and 75 percent in the UK, compared to 5 percent in the U. S. Smeeding and Rainwater, table 7, 16.

101. In the "Findings" preceding PRWORA, legislators deal with what they consider the "crisis in our Nation": "The increase in the number of children receiving public assistance is closely related to the increase in births to unmarried women....areas with higher percentages of single-parent households have higher rates of violent crime....it is the sense of the Congress that prevention of out-of-wedlock pregnancy and reduction in out-of-wedlock births are very important Government interests and the policy contained in [the section on TANF] is intended to address the crisis." PRWORA, Sec. 101.

102. Writing in the middle 1960s, Arthur M. Ross analyzed the position of blacks in the American economy and concluded that "it seems evident that the period since the end of the Korean War has been one of retrogression rather than progress for the Negro." Arthur M. Ross, "The Negro's Position in the Labor Market," *Employment, Race and Poverty: A Critical Study of the Disadvantaged Status of Negro Workers from 1865 to 1965*, Arthur M. Ross and Herbert Hill, eds. (New York: Harcourt, Brace & world, Inc., 1967): 17. During the years Eisenhower administra-

tion that followed the Korean War, black unemployment averaged 9.4 percent, compared to 4.5 percent for whites. Despite the fact that the four preceding years had been ones of uninterrupted economic growth, the black unemployment rates in 1964 were 9.8 percent, still more than double the white rate. U.S. Department of Labor, *Manpower Report of the President*, March 1965 (Washington, DC: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1965): table A-11, 204. Blacks had begun to catch up with whites in manufacturing, but this was not the growth sector. Speaking in 1963, former Secretary of Commerce, Luther H. Hodges, gave an important reason for the black decline: blacks were, to a large extent, excluded from white-collar occupations which accounted for 97 percent of the increase in employment since 1947. Quoted by Kenneth B. Clark, "Sex, Status and Underemployment of the Negro Male," in Ross and Hill, 139.

103. Ibid., 147.

104. John Donovan was the official. See his *The Politics of Poverty* (New York: Pegasus, 1967): 22.

105. For background on the subemployment index, see William Spring, "Underemployment: The Measure We Refuse to Take," *New Generation* 53(Winter 1971): 1–25. See also U.S. Department of Labor, *A Sharper Look at Unemployment in U.S. Cities and Slums* (Washington, DC: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1967). A survey using a similar subemployment index, which was administered in fifty-one urban areas as part of the 1970 Census and analyzed by the Senate Subcommittee on Employment, Manpower, and Poverty, came up with results similar to the 1966 survey. For the latter, see William Spring, Bennett Harrison, and Thomas Vietorisz, "Crisis of the Underemployed: In Much of the Inner City 60% Don't Earn Enough for a Decent Standard of Living," *New York Times Magazine*, 5 November 1972: 44, 46ff. Helen Ginsburg discusses these surveys and the unemployment problem in depth in *Unemployment, Subemployment, and Public Policy* (New York: Center for Studies in Income Maintenance Policy, New York University School of Social Work, 1975).

106. William Julius Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass and Public Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

107. The unemployment rates for young women, especially blacks, were not favorable in the 1960s. When unemployment stood at 3.8 percent in 1967, the unemployment rates of young (18 to 24 years), out-of-school women with some work experience averaged 24 percent for white and 38 percent, nearly two-fifths, for blacks. Even with thirteen or more years of schooling, young black women had an unemployment rate of 32 percent, only a few points less than high-school graduates (35 percent) or those lacking a diploma (36 percent). The Twentieth Century Fund Task Force on Employment Problems of Black Youth, *The Job Crisis for Black Youth* (New York: Praeger, 1971), 91. The data were calculated from John Shea et al., *Years of Decision*, vol. 1 (Columbus, O: Center for Human Resource Research, February 1971): table 5.2.

108. "The working poor," writes an economist at the Bureau of Labor Statistics, "are most likely to be in families maintained by single parents (especially women), and least likely to be in married-couple families (especially with two or more earners.)" Thomas W. Hale, "At Issue: The Working Poor," *Monthly Labor Review* 120(September 1997): 47.

109. Employment and Earnings, January 1998, tables A-1, 9; 8, 171; 35, 206. To be counted as unemployed, a person has to have worked less than one hour a week in paid employment and to be actively looking for work.

110. The figures were 4.2 percent for both white men and white women, compared to 10.2 percent for black men and 9.9 percent for black women. Ibid., table 3, 164–166.

111. A study conducted in Harlem found that an average of fourteen people had applied for every job opening in the local McDonald's restaurant during a five-month period in early 1993. Among those who applied but were rejected, 73 percent had not found work of any kind a year later. Katherine S. Newman and Chauncy Lennon, *Finding Work in the Inner City: How Hard Is It*

*Now? How Hard Will It Be for AFDC Recipients?* (New York: Columbia University, 1995).

112. In 1987, when unemployment was 2.5 percent in Dutchess County, New York, 800 people lined up to apply for 170 jobs at a new hotel which was located within walking distance of poor neighborhoods, "one of the few available pools of labor." Harold Faber, "In Dutchess, Jobs with Few Takers," *New York Times*, 26 September 1987: 30. In March 1997, when the national unemployment rate was 5.2 percent, 4,000 applicants lined up outside a newly reopened hotel in Manhattan, hoping to land one of the 700 job openings that had been announced in a tiny newspaper ad. Included were welfare mothers, teenagers, middle-aged men clutching leather portfolios and immigrants hoping to find the American Dream. "Hearts Filled with Hope and Resumes in Hand," *New York Times*, 19 March 1997: A1, B4 .

113. Dona Cooper Hamilton and Charles V. Hamilton, *The Dual Agenda: The African-American Struggle for Civil and Economic Equality* (New York: Columbia University, 1997).

114. The real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita of the United States was \$28,752 in 1996 (1993 dollars), compared to \$23,289 for Japan, the next highest. Moreover, the U.S. has more than doubled its GDP per capita and has increased it by 29 percent since 1980. U. S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Comparative Real Gross Domestic Product Per Capita and Per Employed Person, Fourteen Countries, 1960–1996*, Washington, DC, February 1998: table 1.