

## **A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF RACE AND SOCIAL WELFARE HISTORY- KEY LEGISLATION**

**Following are some key events of racism in the history of social welfare. Unless otherwise cited, this history is drawn from Neubeck and Cazanave's (2001) *Welfare Racism: Playing the Race Card Against America's Poor*.**

- **Mother's Pensions in the early 1900s.**

In the early 1900s state legislatures began to pass bills that supported single mothers called 'Mother's Pensions'. While African Americans were more deeply impoverished, the aid was given almost solely to white women with Anglo ancestry. Because benefits were administered locally, rules frequently were created explicitly to exclude women of color. One common requirement was that a mother maintained a 'suitable home' for her children. The term 'suitable', which was not clearly defined, was frequently used to exclude African-American women due to negative stereotypes of African Americans.

- **The New Deal and Aid to Dependent Children in the 1930s**

In 1935 The New Deal established the Social Security Act, which included the Aid to Dependent Children program (ADC). Language from the original Social Security Bill that outlawed racial discrimination was totally removed from the bill, giving states silent permission to discriminate. Like the mother's pensions, ADC was administered at the local level, leaving more room for racial discrimination in some states. The federal government did not participate in personnel or administration in the individual states, tacitly allowing discrimination in hiring and African Americans were rarely hired as welfare workers.

The children of poor southern African American women were often barred or removed from ADC rolls under the rationale of "suitable work" or "employable mother." The same standards were not applied to white mothers- where staying home with children was socially valued.

In 1935 Congress approved support for widows of retired workers and their children under the Old-Age Insurance Provisions Act. While this was an important step in eliminating old-age poverty, the majority of professions which were covered in the act were occupations for whites, and occupations filled mostly by African Americans (domestic work, seasonal labor, farm labor) were excluded. White widows were offered an alternative to ADC that was preferable since they did not have to demonstrate economic need and were not subject to morality tests, suitable home policies, or compulsory work requirements. These white widows were considered the 'deserving poor', and they rapidly left ADC creating a two-tiered system.

- **Post World War II**

After World War II individual states and localities tried to control the growth and costs of ADC. This resulted in many more restrictive policies, including more "suitable home" policies, which were used to racially discriminate. "Man-in-the-house" policies were also implemented, which denied ADC to families whose mothers were suspected of receiving financial assistance from adult males. These households were subject to surprise middle-of-the-night raids by local welfare caseworkers in search of male guests,

or any sign that a male had been around. These policies were practiced more commonly on African American households.

Strict residency requirements also served to discourage poor southern African American families from migrating north. This discriminated against migrant farm workers, many whom were African American, whose work required moving from state to state. In the 1950s many states adopted an ‘employable mother’ rule with the intention of discouraging out-of-wedlock births by African American women. This played into the racist stereotype of the African American “breeder” woman.

As more African Americans from the South moved North, many white communities enforced, often through violence or threat of violence, practices that maintained segregated neighborhoods. As the proportion of ADC rolls made up of African Americans grew, many European Americans developed ‘punitive and antagonistic’ attitudes toward ADC recipients of color (Neubeck and Cazenave, 2001 p 65). During the 60s many studies showed that families of color received less in ADC money than their white counterparts and states where more people of color were on the rolls were more restrictive with benefits. ADC was renamed Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) in 1962 when mothers of the children receiving aid were made eligible to receive assistance.

While new policies, such as the G.I Bill and private health and pension policies helped fuel postwar prosperity for the middle-class, African Americans did not benefit from these programs because of discrimination in labor and housing markets. Practices like "redlining" began with the National Housing Act of 1934, which established the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) It describes the practice of marking a red line on a map to delineate the area where banks would not invest, primarily areas where people of color lived; later the term was applied to discrimination against a particular group of people (usually by race or sex) no matter the geography. The most devastating form of redlining and the most common use of the term refers to mortgage discrimination in which middle income black and Latino residents are denied loans available to lower income whites (Brown, 1999).

- **LBJ and “The Great Society” in the 1960s**

Launched in 1964, The Great Society was President Johnson’s anti-poverty program. In addition to alleviating poverty, the other stated goal of the Great Society was the elimination of racial injustice. However Johnson’s Great Society did not address the racially biased social policies inherited from the New Deal (Brown, 1999). While some gains were made by African Americans as a result of the War on Poverty, Nixon’s administration reversed much of the redistributive policies of the Great Society by limiting programs, and shifting resources to middle-class constituencies in the form of block grants.

- **1960s-1980s and the role of the media.**

During this time, the media played a key role in fostering and reinforcing racist stereotypes and negative controlling images African Americans who relied on welfare. The idea of the “Welfare Queen”-- an African-American woman who allegedly lived lavishly on AFDC money was a powerful radicalized controlling image perpetuated by President Reagan. This contributed to a national sentiment of primarily white people’s

hostility toward welfare, and this was the same hostility that caused the demise of AFDC in the 1990s.

In the 1980s, with the rise of new liberalism, more emphasis was placed on the market to solve problems than on social programs. Many have associated neoliberalism with exacerbating racism and inequalities by not acknowledging that social stratifications exist.

- **Clinton and G.W Bush's administration in the 1990s**

In 1996 AFDC was replaced by the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act's (PRWORA) Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Program. The focus of PRWORA and TANF are reducing those who receive welfare by instituting work requirements, ending welfare as an entitlement program, mandatory time limits, and the encouragement of two-parent households. Many believe that the philosophy behind PRWORA is a fear that immigrants and people of color relying on government aid instead of working. "By the 1990s a major goal of welfare reform was the reassertion of racial, gender, and class control over impoverished African-American mothers, and through them, control over their children (Neubeck and Cazenave, p 155)" During George W. Bush's presidency, eligibility for TANF became increasingly limited. However, funding was increased for marriage initiatives (Limbert and Bullock, 2005).