

# Poverty, Social Rights, and the Quality of Citizenship\*

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## "New Poverty" in Europe and North America

The period since the late 1970s marks a watershed in poverty, inequality, and social policy on both sides of the Atlantic. With the erosion of the protective systems of social and economic cooperation erected in the earlier postwar era, a growing section of the workforce is now more likely to be exposed to the vagaries of the labor market. Economic insecurity has been accompanied by family breakdown and inferior and uncertain forms of public assistance. For an increasingly vulnerable minority population, the prospects are a life more or less detached from the broader economic and social experiences of mainstream society.

On both continents, a variety of economic, social, and political forces have been producing powerful new configurations of inequality. Described as "the new poverty," these recent forms of inequality reflect changes in the size and composition of economically marginal groups, the crystallization of racial cleavages among them, a downward turn in their life chances, and an increase in their social and political isolation.

In contrast to the period between the 1940s and 1970s, poverty rates have not only been rising in most Western societies, they have grown disproportionately among the younger sections of society and the prime-age workforce. The most significant rises have occurred, as the data from the Luxembourg Income Study (LIS) reveal, among the more vulnerable younger families and their children, particularly among the increasing numbers of lone-parent families.

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The period since the late 1970s has also seen a hardening of racial cleavages, especially among the more disadvantaged segments of the population. In the United States, deindustrialization, the growing plethora of low-wage and part-time jobs, rising unemployment, and the rolling back of greatly needed social and urban programs have affected all economically marginal groups. But the urban black poor have been particularly devastated, mainly because their plight has been compounded by their spatial concentration in deteriorating inner-city ghettos (Wilson, 1987, 1991). In Western Europe, links between race or minority status and social exclusion and deprivation have also become increasingly evident over the past decade, and they have been compounded by the upsurge of xenophobia and racism since the late 1980s.

What most characterizes the "new poverty" is that it affects the life chances of the poor more acutely than in the recent past. It has involved qualitative changes in the status, social relations, and expectations of the poor and does not just represent new forms of material inequality and deprivation. Terms like *feminization* and *racialization* of poverty and various explanations of poverty, which now center around labor market processes and work relationships, are used to convey or demonstrate these changes. In Europe, especially, efforts to treat poverty in the 1960s focused mainly on providing adequate services and benefits. Today, the new poor are exposed to more grudging, bureaucratic forms of welfare that many would regard as denying them the dignity and status essential to their social citizenship (Vincent, 1991).

In the tougher environment on both sides of the Atlantic, the "moral worth" of the poor (i.e., their willingness to work, sexual arrangements, and honesty) is subjected to more detailed scrutiny in means-tested programs. Recent research in the United Kingdom (Dean and Taylor-Gooby, 1993) has shown how changes in the official orientation to welfare tend to strengthen claimants' inclinations to view the state as adversary and to reduce the likelihood of their cooperation with the authorities. Rather than the creation of a "dependency culture," in the sense propounded by conservative theorists, the research pointed to an emerging "captive culture": claimants may be trapped unwillingly into dependency, and policies intended to promote 'independence' may serve in practice to sustain state dependency as a 'manageable' phenomenon." It should come as no surprise that the reactions of many poor people to such trends have been a willingness to "fiddle" the system to some degree and, among some, to turn to an alternative social economy based on illicit or semi-legal activities and earnings.

Furthermore, the social and political isolation of the poor has become more marked in the 1980s and 1990s. In the United States, poverty has become more urban, more concentrated, and more firmly implanted in inner-city neighborhoods in large metropolises, particularly in older industrial cities with immense and highly segregated numbers of black and Hispanic residents. Even the most pessimistic observers of urban life in America during the ghetto riots of the 1960s hardly anticipated the massive breakdown of social institutions in these neighborhoods and the severity of the problems of joblessness, family disruption, teenage pregnancy, failing schools, and crime and drugs that now involve many of those who live in the inner city. These social dislocations derive in part from macro-structural changes in the broader society, most notably from the declining labor market opportunities for the poor (Wilson, 1987).



An important aspect of the urban poor's predicament is the way the dwindling presence of nonpoor families has deprived ghetto neighborhoods of key resources, including structural resources, such as a social buffer to minimize the effects of growing joblessness, and cultural resources, such as conventional role models for neighborhood children. The absence of these resources increases social isolation (as reflected, e.g., in the rapidly decreasing access to job information network systems), which further reinforces already weak labor force attachment. Moreover, a social context that also includes poor schools, a lack of legitimate employment opportunities, and a depletion of other social resources increases the probability of illegal or deviant activities. This weakens attachment to the legitimate labor market even further (Wilson, 1987, 1991).

Europe and the United States provide a sharp contrast on the issue of urban inequality. No European city has experienced the level of concentrated poverty and racial and ethnic segregation typical of American metropolises. Nor does any European city include areas that are as physically isolated, deteriorated, and violence prone as the inner-city ghettos of urban America. As Loïc Wacquant's comparison of La Corneuve in Paris and Woodlawn in Chicago [McFate et al., 1995; See Lawson and Wilson in Acknowledgements on p. xi] suggests, there is, as yet, no real European equivalent of the plight of the American ghetto. Nevertheless, the omens are not always as favorable as they appear in La Corneuve. In France and in other parts of Europe, many inner-city communities and outer-city public housing estates have been cut off from mainstream labor market institutions and informal job networks, creating the vicious cycle of "weak labor force attachment," growing social exclusion, and rising tensions. As in the United States, evidence is now accumulating that once this process gets under way, it has serious consequences for the socialization of the next generation (Ashton and Maguire, 1991).

Although these European communities are more mixed than in the United States, their population is invariably drawn disproportionately from various ethnic minorities. Trends in a number of European countries suggest the beginnings of a social polarization in the cities that has been characteristic of American metropolises, featuring a growing gap in the concentration of social problems between some areas and others.

Moreover, European research has been documenting how poverty, as it becomes more concentrated, multiplies forms of deprivation, and leads to a qualitative and not just material deterioration of conditions. A study of *Poverty and Labour in London*, conducted in the 1980s, notes the growing inequalities between boroughs in social and health conditions, particularly in the "geography of death." It also found

a lot more evidence of hostile and fearful relationships within local communities than did a corresponding team 17 years ago. The volume of concern about safety on the streets, burglaries and muggings has gained a major grip and affects ordinary people deeply in an increasing number of communities. . . . This makes poverty worse because it isolates people and stultifies community support and the readiness of others to offer . . . services to mitigate or compensate for the privations which old people and unemployed people experience. (Townsend et al., 1987:52)

Given these developments, it should not be surprising that in several quarters and with increasing frequency, European observers have been warning that if present trends continue, in a few years cities in Europe will feature ghettos that resemble those in the United States. However, when such comparisons are made, differences in the social and political organization of American and European cities are rarely taken into account.<sup>1</sup> In American cities, groups can be more easily separated by income, race, and ethnicity because of differences in land use policy, housing policy, the organization of social policy, and federal urban policy. Municipalities in the United States have much greater autonomy than do those in Europe. They have much greater control over population movements and urban developments. Through zoning and other measures ostensibly designed to ensure a community's health, they have the power "to determine what kinds of people can live and what kinds of business activities can be conducted within their borders" (Weir, 1993, p. 18).

A major factor in the movement to create separate political jurisdictions has been the organization of social policy that reflects the greater autonomy of localities in the United States. This is particularly true with respect to education. Given the middle class's long-established norm of enrolling its children in public schools, a strong impetus for groups to separate themselves by income, and/or by race, has been the traditional use of local property taxes to finance education.

Also, federal government policies have contributed to the growth of local fragmentation. On the one hand, the building of numerous federally financed freeways and the creation of federal government programs to subsidize private homeownership in order to meet the postwar housing demands contributed substantially to the growth of suburban communities, including many new political jurisdictions. On the other hand, the federal government "bowed to local opposition to subsidize housing that might promote integration" (Weir, 1993, p. 19). Indeed, opposition from organized community groups to the building of public housing in their neighborhoods and *de facto* federal policy to tolerate extensive segregation against blacks in urban housing markets have led to massive, segregated housing projects that have become ghettos for the minorities and disadvantaged (Sampson and Wilson, 1994). Accordingly, because local acceptance dictated federal housing policies, public housing was overwhelmingly concentrated in the overcrowded and deteriorating inner-city ghettos – the poorest and least socially organized sections of the city and the metropolitan area. In America, public housing represents a federally funded, physically permanent institution for the isolation of families by race and class and, therefore, has contributed to the isolation of many minority residents in inner-city ghettos in recent years.

Finally, since 1980, a fundamental shift in the federal government's support for basic urban programs has contributed to the worsening conditions of the urban ghettos in the United States. Spending on direct aid to cities, including general revenue sharing, urban mass transit, public service jobs and job training, compensatory education, social service block grants, local public works, economic development assistance, and urban development action grants, was sharply cut during the Reagan and Bush administrations. The federal contribution to city budgets declined from 18 percent in 1980 to 6.4 percent in 1990. In addition, the latest economic recession, which began in the Northeast in 1989, sharply reduced urban revenues



that the cities themselves generated, thereby creating budget deficits that resulted in further cutbacks in basic services and programs, and increases in local taxes.

Unlike during the Ford and Carter presidencies, in which countercyclical programs, such as emergency public service jobs, emergency public works and countercyclical cash payments were used to fight recessions, there was no antirecession legislation in 1990 and 1991 to combat economic dislocations in urban areas. As Demetrios Caraley (1992) has pointed out, if the antirecession package voted by Congress in 1976 and 1977 had been introduced during the early 1990s, it would have amounted to \$17 billion dollars in 1990 dollars.

Caraley (1992) also noted that the combination of the New Federalism, which resulted in sharp cuts in federal aid to local and state governments, and the recession created for many cities, especially the older cities of the East and Midwest, the worst fiscal and service crisis since the Depression. Cities have become increasingly underserved, and many are on the brink of bankruptcy. Therefore, they have not been in a position to combat effectively three unhealthy social conditions that have emerged or become prominent since 1980:

- 1 The outbreaks of crack-cocaine addiction and the murders and other violent crimes that have accompanied them
- 2 The AIDS epidemic and its escalating public health costs
- 3 The sharp rise in the homeless population not only for individuals but for whole families as well

Although these unhealthy social conditions are present in many neighborhoods throughout the city, the high jobless and socially unstable inner-city ghetto areas are natural breeding grounds for violent crime, drug addiction, AIDS, and homelessness. Life in inner-city ghetto neighborhoods, already imperiled by unprecedented levels of joblessness and social disorganization, has become even more difficult in the face of these new epidemics. Fiscally strapped cities have had to watch in helpless frustration as these problems – the new urban poverty, the decline of social organization of inner-city neighborhoods, the rise of unhealthy social conditions, the reduction of social services – escalated during the 1980s and made the larger city itself seem like a less attractive place in which to live. Accordingly, many urban residents with the economic means have followed the worn-out path from the central city to the suburbs and other areas, thereby shrinking the tax base and further reducing city revenue.

As Margaret Weir (1993) has pointed out, in 1960 the nation's population was evenly divided among cities, suburbs, and rural areas. By 1990, both urban and rural populations had declined, leaving suburbs with nearly half of the nation's population. The urban population dipped to 31 percent by 1990. And as cities lost population, they became poorer and more minority in their racial and ethnic composition, so much so that in the eyes of many in the dominant white population, the minorities symbolize the ugly urban scene left behind. Today, the divide between the suburbs and the city is, in many respects, a racial divide. For example, whereas 68 percent of all the residents in the city of Chicago were minority in 1990, 83 percent of all suburban residents in the Chicago metropolitan area were white. Across the nation, whereas 74 percent of the dominant white population lived in

suburban and rural areas, a majority of blacks and Hispanics resided in urban areas in 1990.

These demographic changes are associated with the declining influence of American cities. The shift of the population to suburban areas made it possible to win national elections without a substantial urban vote. Suburbs cast 36 percent of the vote for president in 1968, 48 percent in 1988, and a majority in the 1992 election. The sharp drop in federal support for basic urban programs since 1980 is associated with the declining political influence of cities and the rising influence of electoral coalitions in the suburbs.

These aspects of the American political system (land use policy, housing policy, the organization of social policy, and federal urban policy) contribute to greater racial differences and "make the problems of racially-identified concentrated poverty more extreme and intractable." (Weir, 1993, p. 2). Consider, by comparison, Britain and France, two countries that also have a significant number of citizens who are members of racial minorities and who tend to be concentrated in deteriorated areas.

In Britain, the strong central government has exerted a good deal of control over population movements and urban development. Local authorities have little autonomy in the highly centralized British political system. Until recently the only local source of revenue to which they had access was the property tax levied on businesses and property owners. Thus, unlike in the United States, the quality of local public schools is far less determined by the resources of local governments and, therefore, the association between schooling and residence is not as strong. Because of lack of autonomy and of discretion in financing, competition between local jurisdictions is far less apparent than in the United States.

Furthermore, unlike in the United States, where the federal government subsidized suburban home ownership to satisfy postwar housing demands, the rebuilding of housing stock in Britain occurred mainly through the construction of public housing. "By the end of the 1970s, a third of British households lived in 'council housing.' The very size of the British sector made some level of income mixing inevitable" (Weir, 1993, p. 21). Moreover, council housing in Britain was less concentrated in certain locations. The government's aim to decentralize the urban population resulted in the construction of council housing outside the central city. By the late 1980s, although 43 percent of council housing was located in poorer inner London, 29 percent was located in central London and 23 percent in outer London.

Although the postwar population sorting in Britain did affect racial mixing, the sharp racial concentration so characteristic of cities in the United States did not occur because public housing was not deliberately segregated. With the absence of preexisting ghettos, many public housing units were built in working-class neighborhoods that were not defined racially. Moreover, opportunities for the working class to move to suburban owner-occupied housing were restricted because of limited financing and less favorable tax treatment of mortgages (Weir, 1993).

A somewhat different pattern prevails in France. French cities tend to be more desirable as places to reside, with the more disadvantaged segments of the population concentrated in the suburbs. Overseen by the central planning agency, the public housing program, traditionally populated mainly by the lower middle classes and working classes, has recently opened up to immigrant minorities, and their representation in public housing has gradually increased since 1970.



Fourteen percent of the French population now resides in public housing, and the proportion of immigrants in public housing has reached 30 percent in some estates (Weir, 1993).

Although poor ethnic and racial minorities are often concentrated in suburban high-rise public housing, which leads to problems of physical isolation, French land use and housing policies controlled population movements more and permitted more mixing of people by income, ethnicity, and race than in either Britain or the United States (Weir, 1993).

However, recent population movements and government action in Britain and France that have increased concentrated poverty and racial/ethnic segregation suggest a growing convergence between these countries and the United States. Just as the promotion of home ownership by the United States government in the 1950s increased sharply the suburbanization of the middle class, so, too, has the central government's promotion of home ownership more than a decade later in both France and Britain contributed to the suburbanization of the middle classes there. Moreover, as the barriers to their entry have been removed, the minority poor have become more concentrated in public housing in both countries (Weir, 1993).

These two developments have separated populations along racial and ethnic lines in a manner that resembles historic racial sorting in the United States. And the problems associated with the construction of high-rise public housing have contributed to the growing segregation of the British and French minority populations. "Difficult to maintain, many of the housing blocks quickly became dilapidated, undesirable places to live, propelling those who were able to find housing elsewhere" (Weir, 1993, pp. 24-5).

Nonetheless, for the reasons discussed earlier, it is unlikely that Britain and France will eventually experience the degree of income and racial segregation that characterizes metropolitan areas in the United States. The central government's control over the formation of new political jurisdictions in Britain and France reduces the opportunities and incentives for the spatial separation by race and income. Structural arrangements, such as local control over education and taxation, and political arrangements that enable localities to incorporate and to resist federal government efforts to site public housing are far fewer in the two European countries. Accordingly, the "tipping" phenomena so characteristic of the ghettoization process in American cities is far less likely to develop in France and Britain. When the "tipping" mechanism is triggered, it is much more likely to be restricted to, say, a particular public housing project and can be more easily reversed by government interventions. As Weir, (1993, p. 26) has observed, "In neither country have residents had the same incentives or opportunities to act on their racial antipathies as in the United States."

Finally, in neither Britain nor France has suburbanization been associated with the abandonment of cities as residential areas. In France especially, governments have "continued to treat cities as a national resource to be protected and nurtured" (Weir, 1993, p. 25). These arguments are presented not to suggest that the new poverty in Europe does not represent some fundamental and major change in the system of inequality but rather to indicate that different structural and political arrangements in European countries reduce the likelihood that American-style ghettos will emerge in the near future.

### Policy Lessons from the United States

So far we have drawn attention to the emergence of the new poverty on both continents, the various economic, social, and political forces associated with it, and the special problems and challenges it presents. However, the chapters in this volume also raise important questions about variations between countries in the extent to which problems of poverty and inequality are addressed. Foremost among these are questions about the dismal record of the United States. Although poverty and inequality have increased in Europe and in Canada, the most severe consequences of the social and economic dislocations of the past two decades have occurred in the United States. This was already readily apparent in the late 1970s but became more pronounced during the 1980s, when the Reagan administration pursued policies aimed at improving the living standards of the broad middle class and relied on economic growth to trickle down and take care of the problems of the poor.

The comparisons based on the LIS data illustrate the effects of these policies. By the second half of the 1980s, the American poverty rate among the nonelderly population rose to more than double that of most European countries and to almost three times the level in West Germany. Even when the elderly are included, the United States had the highest national poverty rate of all 13 countries represented in the LIS data base (Rainwater, 1991). Even more significant were the changing depth or severity of poverty in the United States and the sharply divergent patterns of poverty concentration between racial minorities and whites.

In recent years, the United States Census Bureau established what might be called "the poorest of the poor" category, that is, those individuals whose annual income falls at least 50 percent below the officially designated poverty line. In 1975, 30 percent of all the poor had incomes below 50 percent of the poverty level; in 1988, 40 percent did so. Among blacks, the increase was much sharper, from 32 percent in 1975 to nearly half (48%) in 1988 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1988).

As the comparisons with Europe suggest, these trends can be seen as the outcome of a distinctive response to poverty that has long prevailed in the United States. As Rainwater (1991) has noted, "America's various wars on poverty, unlike those of some continental European countries, have been particularly preoccupied with the situation of the very worst off in society, with the situation of the lower class rather than that of the working class more broadly." This difference has been reflected in the way antipoverty and social policy agendas have been structured. In most European welfare states, the prevailing view for much of the postwar period has been similar to that described by a French official. "A policy for the poor," he suggested, "is a poor policy. . . the general principle underlying steps to help the most disadvantaged is to ensure that they get the maximum benefit from programs which apply to the population as a whole. Rather than specific measures, the idea is to pay specific attention to groups in difficulty within the context of general measures" (Lion, 1984).

By contrast, most American "welfare" and antipoverty programs, including the Great Society's War on Poverty programs in the 1960s, have emphasized targeting and means testing rather than universalistic social policy. As such, they have been



relatively autonomous arrangements for the "poor" that have developed largely in isolation from broader national concerns with employment or indeed from macroeconomic interventions more generally. Politically and institutionally they have been sharply differentiated from mainstream social policies, especially social security, health, and housing, for the "stable" working class and middle class. Moreover, the American response to poverty has been typically characterized by a predilection for "programs" rather than "policy" and especially for decentralized and fragmented programs and experiments.

A number of excellent historical studies have shown that the American approach to poverty is part of the peculiar policy legacy of the New Deal (Weir et al., 1988; Katz, 1986, 1989; Patterson, 1981). These studies demonstrate how the development of nationwide social security programs under the New Deal marked an important extension of social citizenship to the "deserving" working class (i.e., workers with good job prospects and the ability to pay regular contributions). These programs were not only backed by a strong federal bureaucracy, they also had a broad base of public support, including support from the middle classes who gained from the improvements in social security entitlements.

However, the New Deal did much less to address the problems facing people with low skills and status, including many blacks migrating out of the rural South, who were prone to bouts of joblessness, low and fluctuating incomes, and poor health. Policy initiatives that would have rebounded to their benefit, such as attempts to establish a firm national commitment to full employment or to a nationwide health care program, were notably unsuccessful in the 1930s and 1940s. As Paul Osterman's chapter notes [McFate et al., 1995; see Lawson and Wilson in Acknowledgments on p. xi], the United States also lacked the combination of laws, union power, and customs used in Europe after 1945 to raise the bottom of the labor market. Instead, under the New Deal system, efforts to combat the real threat of poverty among the weakest sections of society were confined to a number of disjointed, second-tier programs grouped under the rubric of "welfare." With much weaker administrative capacities than social security, the fate of these programs was largely dependent on the altruism of the nonpoor.

The historical analysis shows how the development of second-tier "welfare" programs from the New Deal not only restricted the scope of antipoverty initiatives but also reinforced traditional concerns with the "undeserving poor" and, more importantly, images of the poor and of many black Americans as a class apart in American society. In many important respects, the Great Society programs of the 1960s helped sustain these images.

Although the War on Poverty appeared to herald a new and less divisive era in social policy, its impact on social rights contrasted sharply with the extension of political and civil rights to blacks in the 1960s. The poor gained some notable improvements in welfare benefits, but from policies that did little in practice to integrate the recipients into the economic and social life of mainstream society. On the contrary, issues like unemployment and the growth of female-headed households among the newly urbanized black poor were still treated as distinctive welfare issues to be addressed through "special interest" programs. As one study puts it, "despite a greater willingness to expend resources on the poor... the labor economists and sociologists who became architects of the poverty programs in the 1960s saw efforts

to change the behavior of the poor as the most promising route to ending poverty – for poverty was, by definition, not a national economic problem” (Weir et al., 1988, p. 206). Even the more radical measures of the War on Poverty, such as the efforts in the Community Action Programs to secure poor and minority group control of social policy institutions, effectively maintained the separation of poverty policy from broader issues of social solidarity and wider economic and workplace concerns (Klass, 1983).

The events of the past two decades have exposed the real weaknesses of the targeted welfare programs. As Skocpol (1988, p. 309) has argued, “When the political going gets rough for public social policies, as it has in the United States since the 1970s, policies that lack clear political and cultural legitimation as expressions of social compassion and collective solidarity are difficult to either defend or extend against individualist, market-oriented, and anti-statist attacks.” Put another way, the most significant welfare state backlash in this period has occurred, not where social spending is highest, but in countries like the United States, where there has been a more marked “us/them” divide in social policy between programs for the broad middle mass in society and programs for the poor. As Korpi (1980) explains, this dualism “in effect splits the working class and tends to generate coalitions between the better off workers and the middle class thus creating a larger constituency for welfare-backlash. In fact, the ‘welfare backlash’ becomes rational political activity for the majority of citizens.”

But the welfare backlash is also activity that has been fueled by the way America’s antipoverty efforts have, in the long run, fostered group misunderstanding and isolation and distrust of the poor. A weakening of community support for the poor – or what Alan Ryan (1992) has called “the retreat from caring” – is another of the broader themes associated with the new configurations of poverty. Ryan used the phrase in a commentary on the new “tough love” policies advocated by both Democrats and Republicans in the 1992 US presidential campaign and particularly on the way even Democrats appeared to despair of the poor. The 1992 Democratic party platform took a line that 10 years earlier would have been denounced as “blaming the victim.” Why this exasperated mood seemed so widespread was, to Ryan, a puzzle, given the low costs of the social programs that evoked so much hostility. However, he attributed it partly to despair at the apparent intractability of black poverty and, more specifically, to the decline of basic formal and informal institutions in ghetto neighborhoods. This placed severe constraints on welfare services in locating their clients but, more importantly, made it “harder to recruit community organizers who provide grassroots support to go with government assistance.”

The problem of who now speaks for the poor is raised in Guy Standing’s discussion [McFate et al., 1995; see Lawson and Wilson in Acknowledgements on p.xi] of the dramatic erosion of trade union rights and influence on both sides of the Atlantic. As he argues, unions have sometimes been castigated for representing mainly relatively secure male employees. But, in reality, union membership has often in the past made a substantial difference for the most vulnerable groups in the labor market. His figures for the United States in the late 1980s are worth repeating: “whereas white men gained a wage premium of about 50 cents an hour from union membership, black men gained about \$1.61, Hispanic men about \$2.18, white women about \$0.83, black women \$1.23 and Hispanic women \$1.53.”



The retreat from caring in the United States reflects a more widespread sense of pessimism about the intractability of poverty and the failure of welfare programs than has been evident in Europe. The European comparisons indicate that much of the problem in the United States stems from the limited range of tools available for combating poverty. Without the support of more universal social services or labor market interventions, welfare programs have attempted to do too much, not too little. However, the prevalent mood in America by the 1970s and 1980s offered a very different interpretation. To many middle Americans, the nation's poorest citizens had come to be virtually synonymous with a "welfare class" posing a growing threat to the public peace and to dominant American norms. To be more specific, as a study of social standing in America in the 1970s showed, lower America was seen to be separated into two status subdivisions. At the bottom of the ladder was the welfare class, people who were described in terms of their behavioral and cultural deficiencies by the great majority of those interviewed in the study, and who were seen as being caught up in a "welfare way of life" that undermined initiative and encouraged apathy, alienation, and normlessness. Above them were people who were "lower class but not the lowest": Significantly, they were "accorded their superior standing 'because they are never on welfare' or 'only occasionally' (and 'if on, they're trying to get off')" (Coleman and Rainwater, 1979).

The heavy emphasis on the individual traits of the welfare poor and on the duties or social obligations of welfare recipients is not unique to the general public. This "common wisdom" has been uncritically incorporated into the work of many poverty researchers. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the expanding network of poverty researchers in the United States paid considerable attention to the question of individuals' work attitudes and the association between income maintenance programs and the work ethic of the poor. They consistently ignored the effects of basic economic transformations and cyclical processes on the work experiences and prospects of the poor.

However, despite this narrow focus, these very American researchers have consistently uncovered empirical findings that undermine, rather than support, assumptions about the negative effects of welfare receipt on individual initiative and motivation. Yet these assumptions persist among policy makers, and "the paradox of continuing high poverty during a period of general prosperity has contributed to the recently emerging consensus that welfare must be reformed" (Melville and Doble, 1988). Although it is reasonable to argue that policy makers are not aware of a good deal of the empirical research on the effects of welfare, the General Accounting Office (GAO), an investigative arm of Congress, released a study in early 1987 that reported that there was no conclusive evidence for the prevailing beliefs that welfare discourages individuals from working, breaks up two-parent families, or affects the child-bearing rates of unmarried women, even young unmarried women.

The GAO report reached these conclusions after reviewing the results of more than 100 empirical studies on the effects of welfare completed since 1975; analyzing the case files of more than 1,200 families receiving public assistance in four states, and interviewing officials from federal, state, and local government agencies. Nonetheless, despite the report's findings, the growth of social dislocations among the inner-city poor and the continued high rates of poverty have led an increasing

number of policy makers to conclude that something should be done about the current welfare system to halt what they perceive to be the breakdown of the norms of citizenship. Indeed, a liberal-conservative consensus on welfare reform has recently emerged that features two themes:

- 1 The receipt of welfare should be predicated on reciprocal responsibilities whereby society is obligated to provide assistance to welfare applicants who, in turn, are obligated to behave in socially approved ways.
- 2 Able-bodied adult welfare recipients should be required to prepare themselves for work, to search for employment, and to accept jobs when they are offered. These points of agreement were reflected in the discussions of the welfare reform legislation passed in the United States Congress in 1988.

These two themes are based on the implicit assumption that a sort of mysterious "welfare ethos" exists that encourages public assistance recipients to avoid their obligations as citizens to be educated, to work, to support their families, and to obey the law. In other words, and in keeping with the dominant American belief system, *it is the moral fabric of individuals, not the social and economic structure of society, that is taken to be the root of the problem* (Wacquant and Wilson, 1989).

The poverty tradition in the United States, including the lack of comprehensive programs to promote the social rights of American citizens, is especially problematic for poor inner-city blacks who are also handicapped by problems that originated from the denial of civil, political, and social rights to the previous generations. And their degree of current economic deprivation and social isolation is in part due to the limited nature of institutionalized social rights in the United States (Schmitter-Heisler, 1991). Indeed, the effects of joblessness on all the poor in the United States are far more severe than those experienced by disadvantaged groups in other advanced industrial Western societies. While economic restructuring and its adverse effects on lower-income groups has been common to all these societies in recent years, the most severe consequences of social and economic dislocations have been in the United States because of the underdeveloped welfare state and the weak institutional structure of social citizenship rights. Although all economically marginal groups have been affected, the inner-city black poor have been particularly devastated because their plight has been compounded by their spatial concentration in deteriorating ghetto neighborhoods, neighborhoods that reinforce weak labor force attachment.

In short, the socioeconomic position of the inner-city black poor in American society is extremely precarious. The cumulative effects of historic racial exclusion have made them vulnerable to the economic restructuring of the advanced industrial economy. Moreover, the problems of joblessness, deepening poverty, and other woes that have accompanied these economic changes cannot be relieved by the meager welfare programs targeted to the poor. Furthermore, these problems tend to be viewed by members of the larger society as a reflection of personal deficiencies, not structural inequities.

Accordingly, if any group has a stake in the enhancement of social rights in the United States, it is the inner-city black poor. Unfortunately, given the strength of the American belief system on poverty and welfare, any program that would improve



the life chances of this group would have to be based on concerns beyond those that focus on life and experiences in inner-city ghettos. The poor and the working classes struggle to make ends meet, and even the middle class has experienced a decline in its living standard. Indeed, Americans across racial and class boundaries continue to worry about unemployment and job security, declining real wages, escalating medical and housing costs, childcare programs, the sharp decline in the quality of public education, and crime and drug trafficking in their neighborhoods.

These concerns are reflected in public opinion surveys. For the last several years national opinion polls consistently reveal strong public backing for government labor market strategies, including training efforts, to enhance employment. A 1988 Harris poll indicated that almost three-quarters of the respondents would support a tax increase to pay for childcare. A 1989 Harris poll reports that almost 9 out of 10 Americans would like to see fundamental change in the United States' health care system. And recent surveys conducted by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago reveal that a substantial majority of Americans want more money spent on improving the nation's educational system and on halting rising crime and drug addiction.

These poll results suggest the possibility of new alignments in support of the enhancement of social rights. If a serious attempt is made to forge such an alignment, perhaps it ought to begin with a new public rhetoric that does two things: focuses on problems that afflict not only the poor, but the working and middle classes as well; and emphasizes integrative programs that promote the social and economic improvement of all groups in society, not just the truly disadvantaged segments of the population.

### European Responses to Poverty

While the experience of the United States suggests the need for a fundamental shift in policy away from the emphasis on targeted, fragmented, and "isolationist" anti-poverty programs, the various economic crises facing European welfare states over the past two decades provide a sobering reminder of the difficulties now involved in sustaining more universal and integrative social citizenship rights. Europe's postwar commitment to universal programs and social inclusion was premised, as Guy Standing [McFate et al., 1995; see Lawson and Wilson in Acknowledgments on p. xi] emphasizes, on assumptions of steady growth and full employment and, although this occurred in varying degrees in different countries, on improvements in a range of closely interrelated employment and labor market securities. It was also closely – and, many would now argue, too inflexibly – identified with notions of collective solidarity associated with organized "wage labor" and class-based labor movements, and revolving primarily around the risks facing the male "breadwinner." Fundamental to the postwar version of social inclusion were conceptions of citizenship that assumed a fair degree of cultural homogeneity, or at least played down the significance of historic cleavages between Catholics and Protestants or between various ethnic groups.

In the 1990s, by contrast, issues of race, ethnicity, and cultural diversity loom large in all discussions of citizenship in western Europe. The future of the European

welfare states depends crucially on the ability of European countries to widen their definitions of citizenship to embrace their new minority and immigrant communities, and prevent the emergence of a racialized underclass, marginalized by the welfare state as well as the economy. However, this itself depends on the capacity and willingness of governments to revitalize "social citizenship" by combating broader marginalizing tendencies in the welfare state that have accompanied the return of mass unemployment and the growing fragmentation of European labor markets.

Since the late 1970s, increasing numbers of indigenous workers as well as immigrants in western Europe have found themselves in the "secondary labor market," with a high risk of unemployment, low skills, poor working conditions, and weak trade union protection. Many are on temporary or part-time contracts, or in the gray areas of employment where employers can evade social or labor rights. At the same time, the growth of long-term unemployment – in 1993 it constituted about half of all Western European unemployment, compared with 10–20 percent in the rest of the industrialized world – has created a substantial group more or less detached from the labor force. It includes many young people unable to enter the employed labor force, as well as those "pushed into long-term unemployment or economic activity through discouragement, illness, alcoholism, disability, drugs or crime, much of which could be linked to experience of unemployment in one way or another" (Standing, 1986, p. 20).

An important, interdisciplinary study of poverty and marginalization in West Germany (Leibfried and Tennstedt, 1985) reveals the effects of growing economic dislocations on social rights. The study shows how during the 1970s and 1980s, those that formed the "productive core" of German society and who could continue to rely on regular, stable employment consolidated their hold on the established social insurance system, the traditional nucleus of the German welfare state. Despite cuts in social insurance provisions, most of the beneficiaries of the system still enjoyed comparatively high standards of social security, health, and welfare and on the whole succeeded in preserving their relative position in the income hierarchy. By contrast, a growing German *lumpenproletariat* – those in more precarious employment or increasingly detached from the labor force – was effectively excluded from many of these provisions and forced to depend for its livelihood on an "alternative welfare state in reserve," mainly localized public welfare and assistance, or on family support, or on illegal forms of "self-help."

The study showed, for example, how prior to the onset of the recession in the 1970s, the idea of applying for local means-tested public assistance was anathema to most German workers, and less than 1 percent of those receiving such assistance were registered as unemployed. By the mid-1980s the proportion had grown to more than 25 percent, with surveys suggesting that more than half of all the unemployed eligible for these benefits were still not applying, mainly because of feelings of shame and the stigma attached to public assistance (Balsen et al., 1984).

This bifurcation of the welfare state remains evident in newly unified Germany in the 1990s. Indeed, it has acquired new dimensions, as growing numbers of East Germans have been forced to depend on public assistance and – a more disturbing trend, if it persists – as Germany's large foreign population appears to have become more ghettoized and more dependent on means-tested welfare in the aftermath of



unification. Until the end of the 1970s, foreign workers and their families were much less likely than native Germans to rank among the "official poor" receiving public assistance. Since then, but particularly in the 1990s, the situation has changed markedly. During 1991, almost 15 percent of all foreigners at some stage drew upon public assistance, compared with less than 5 percent of the German population (Statistisches Bundesamt, 1993). Foreigners are also disproportionately affected by the cuts in social benefits in the much heralded "Solidarity Pact" of 1993 aimed at diverting resources to the former GDR. This involves major savings in benefits paid to asylum seekers and refugees and, more generally, in means-tested poverty programs, in which foreign workers and their families tend to be overrepresented (Schneider, 1993).

Similar developments have been evident throughout western Europe, though the form they have taken and their effects have varied from country to country. In the United Kingdom, for example, the Thatcher governments of the 1980s consciously accentuated the "splitting apart" of the welfare state by encouraging the growth of tax-supported private and company-based welfare among the middle classes and more affluent workers. At the same time, major cost-cutting reforms in social security and housing led not only to an increased association of residual care for the poorer sections of society with social security and housing, but also to a toughening of entitlement requirements and reducing of minimum standards for the poor. By the second half of the 1980s, around 8 million people or one in seven of the total British population were living in households dependent on a national means-tested and last-resort income support program. This compared with 4 million people in 1973 and 1.2 million in 1950 (Lawson, 1987). A shift toward more targeted welfare has been a feature of recent French and Dutch policies, although with less pronounced effects than in Britain. In the Dutch case, a period of "self-discipline" in the 1980s involved austerity measures significantly reducing the proportion of national income allocated to social security, more emphasis on individually earned social insurance, and a strategy focusing benefits more on the *echta minima* (the truly needy).

While trends like these point to a growing convergence between western Europe and the United States, it is important not to overstate the case. Despite clear tendencies in social policy in the 1980s that appear to promote group separation rather than social integration, a commitment to universal social services remains firmly institutionalized in most European welfare states. . . . much of the difference between Europe and America in the incidence of family and child poverty, particularly among lone-parent families, can be attributed to family policy packages that still receive wide popular support in Europe. In addition to income transfers to all or almost all families with children, family policy packages include a range of measures providing mothers at work, as Sheila Kamerman [McFate et al., 1995; see Lawson and Wilson in Acknowledgments on p. xi] emphasizes, with a "social infrastructure . . . far ahead of the United States." Europe's commitment to publicly provided health care is another area where efforts to contain costs and trim programs have had to contend with a deeply entrenched popular preference for universal services, as well as strong support for universalism from health professionals. Although not a direct focus of our inquiries in this volume, differences in health care provision would seem to have a major bearing on the quality of life among the poor.



For the United States, important lessons can be learned from recent European efforts to coordinate economic and social policies, and to adjust social policies and public expectations of welfare to the new economic situation. The new policies emerging in Sweden following the much publicized defeat of the Social Democrats in 1991 are one example that will be interesting to follow. The liberal-conservative coalition that took office has introduced a wide-ranging reform package aimed at stimulating industrial restructuring and more competitiveness and "enterprise" in Swedish society through tax and public expenditure cuts and curbs on the state monopoly in social policy.

However, the Swedish reform package involves a commitment not to dismantling the welfare state but rather to revitalizing it by giving priority to those components seen to be more consistent with the obligations and rights of "active citizenship." Foremost among these components are the labor market programs pioneered in Sweden in the 1950s, programs that subsequently played a key role in one of the most effective strategies in facilitating social participation and eliminating poverty found in Europe. The programs, which have deliberately sought to avoid passive reliance on welfare among the working-age population by using alternative labor market measures, include retraining measures and publicly supported job creation in areas of high unemployment, subsidized travel for job search, paid costs for movement to a new residence, and an active labor market exchange system.

Germany is another country with a tradition of active labor market measures and close links between industries and educational institutions in its "dual" apprenticeship system. Germany sought to foster a "community of skills" and a successful partnership between economic and social policies. This partnership suffered, however, between the mid-1970s and mid-1980s, when cuts and retrenchment in public expenditures were the overriding concern of governments. Between 1982 and 1984, in the early years of Chancellor Kohl's coalition, almost half the cuts in the federal budget were in labor market and unemployment measures, creating what was dubbed "a new labor market policy without the unemployed."

As Bernard Case [McFate et al., 1995; see Lawson and Wilson in Acknowledgments on p.xi] shows, it also became clear in these years that Germany's much admired dual system was failing to integrate many young people into permanent, core employment. Inspired by the problems of restructuring and reskilling the former East German economy, a more determined effort has been made to revamp the provisions of the dual system since 1989. But, as Casey indicates, the situation was already improving prior to unification, partly as a result of a well-directed trade union campaign, but mainly because of successful pressure on government from two national institutes, the Federal Labour Institute and the Federal Training Institute, comprised of employers, union representatives, and government. As in Sweden, powerful, semi-independent bodies overseeing labor market and training programs and setting goals for employers have played a key role in Germany.

Paul Osterman [McFate et al., 1995; see Lawson and Wilson in Acknowledgments on p.xi] shows how other European countries have witnessed an explosion of interest in altering the relationship between schools and the workplace, inspired partly by the German system. In countries like France, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands, there has been a noticeable reaction against more passive, compensatory social rights for the working-age population, with their connotations of



welfare dependence, and a movement to reorient social protection toward forward-looking interventions aimed at improving skills and job opportunities. This reaction includes more acknowledgment than has been given in the past to the potential of welfare and to the obligations, responsibilities, and rights of "social citizenship." But it also reflects a new interest in developing mixed packages of work and welfare in line with what the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has described as the central role of public social policy in the 1990s: "to design interventions so as to maximize both the numbers of people who have opportunities for active social roles, and the duration of their lives over which they can experience such activity" (OECD, 1988, p. 18).

While these are promising trends, their prospects of revitalizing social rights are by no means secure. So far, as McFate [McFate et al., 1995] emphasizes, many of the new employment and training innovations have been ill-planned and poorly coordinated, partly because they have been developed in a period that has emphasized decentralized program delivery. It has become abundantly evident in the deepening recession of the early 1990s that efforts to combat the problems of economic dislocation through employment and training strategies can only be effective as part of broader national programs of economic recovery and adjustment to structural change. With European unemployment rates climbing again in 1993 to around 10 percent of the workforce, many of the new training initiatives now look more like remedial actions serving to delay the onset of unemployment.

While the recession of the 1990s has set back the prospects for more "active" social rights, it has also created situations ripe for the demagogic mobilization of racism and anti-immigrant feelings. As economic conditions in Europe have worsened, generating a widespread urban housing crisis and insecurities in the labor market, many in the majority white population have come to view the growth of minorities and immigrants as a source of the problem. The new inflow of refugees and asylum seekers from eastern and southeastern Europe has further exacerbated this feeling. Although extremist violence in Germany and France has attracted the greatest attention, heightened racial and ethnic antagonisms have been evident in most countries. In the United Kingdom, for example, 7,780 racially motivated attacks were officially reported in 1991; the total had climbed by around 1,000 a year over the previous 3 years (*Economist*, 1992).

The recession has also underlined the particular vulnerability of immigrant and minority communities to economic stagnation, industrial restructuring, and the decline of traditional manufacturing. Immigrant unemployment rates are commonly more than double those of the indigenous workforce, reaching levels ranging from 25 to 50 percent in cities that have experienced unprecedented high levels of unemployment overall. At a time of growing strains on the welfare state, the minority population, thus, has become more dependent on public assistance for survival. Studies of poverty and welfare benefits show that the onus is often put on minorities and immigrants to prove their entitlement in ways that are not required of the majority, while among more recent immigrants rights are even less often secured (Smith, 1989, p. 176; Townsend et al. 1987, p. 56). As the German example discussed earlier indicates, immigrants are often ready and easy targets for government cut-backs, particularly when they lack citizenship and effective political voice. Moreover, many of those most acutely affected by the recession have been the second and

third generation of minority youths who "often suffer from educational deficiencies, are unable to find meaningful employment and are culturally and institutionally removed from the societies of their parents. Their isolation, dislocation, and alienation have been increasing" (Schmitter-Heisler, 1991).

However, as Loïc Wacquant [McFate et al., 1995; see Lawson and Wilson in Acknowledgments p.xi] stresses in his comparisons of urban deprivation in Paris and Chicago, we ought not to exaggerate the salience of race in European countries. The new social tensions in Europe may be manifested in xenophobia and racial enmity, but they stem primarily from the deteriorating economic and social conditions and declining organizational resources in poorer working-class neighborhoods that afflict the native populations and immigrants alike and that create situations that enhance racial antagonisms. Accordingly, if Europe is to avoid the levels of poisonous racial flareups and antagonisms that have plagued America, it will be important to generate public recognition and appreciation of the impact of these changes on the lives of the poor, including the minority poor, and on intergroup relations.

### Conclusion

In this chapter we have argued that a new poverty has emerged on both sides of the Atlantic represented by changes in the size and composition of disadvantaged groups, the hardening of racial cleavages among them, an increase in their social and political isolation, and a worsening of their life chances. Although aspects of the new poverty are more severe in America than in Europe, recent trends in a number of European countries suggest a growing convergence of income and racial segregation between the two continents. However, as we have attempted to show, different structural and political arrangements in European countries reduce the likelihood of the emergence of American-style ghettos in the near future.

Moreover, there are still notable differences between the United States and Europe in the extent to which problems of poverty and inequality are addressed. In contrast to many European nations, the United States has not created comprehensive programs to promote the social rights of American citizens. Antipoverty programs have been largely targeted and fragmented. Instead of helping to integrate the poor into the broader economic and social life of mainstream society, they tend to stigmatize and separate them (Schmitter-Heisler, 1991).

However, recent economic crises in Europe have made it difficult to sustain programs that embody universal and integrative social citizenship rights. With the growth of mass unemployment and the growing fragmentation of European labor markets, pressures to cut back on welfare state benefits have mounted. Moreover, the increase of racial and ethnic diversity has led some to reexamine the postwar commitment to universal programs and social inclusion, a commitment originally based on conceptions of citizenship that assumed a fair degree of cultural homogeneity. Recent challenges to this commitment often reflect racial bias. As economic conditions have worsened, many in the majority white population view the growth of minorities as part of the problem. Stagnant economies and slack labor markets have placed strains on the welfare state at the very time when the immigrant



population, facing mounting problems of joblessness, has become more dependent on public assistance for survival.

Nonetheless, although the conditions for the expressions of racial antagonisms have increased, as pointed out earlier, because of differences in political organization, Europeans do not have the same opportunities as Americans to act on their racial antipathies. Moreover, official and scholarly explanations of the new poverty in Europe tend to focus much more on the changes and inequities in the broader society than on individual deficiencies and behavior and, therefore, lend much greater support to the ideology of social citizenship rights. Furthermore, welfare programs that benefit wide segments of the population, including the poor and minorities, such as childcare, child allowances, housing subsidies, education, and medical care, have been firmly institutionalized in many Western European democracies. Efforts to cut back on these programs in the face of growing joblessness have met firm resistance.

However, changes in Europe are occurring very rapidly. The extent to which the multiracial and multiethnic countries there will approach the United States in the levels of racial and income segregation, belief systems on poverty and welfare, and commitment to social rights is a question that cross-cultural researchers will pursue with considerable interest.

#### NOTE

- 1 In the following discussion in this section, we are indebted to the stimulating work of Margaret Weir (1993) and Demetrios Caraley (1992). Parts of this discussion are also based on Wilson (1995).

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