

## Domestic Poverty

*Is a new approach needed to help the poorest Americans?*

**D**espite sweeping welfare reforms in the 1990s and generally healthy economic growth in recent years, domestic poverty remains intractable. Moreover, signs are emerging that so-called deep poverty is growing sharply — most significantly among children. U.S. poverty is fueled by a long list of problems, including Katrina's devastation, immigration, the growing income gap between rich and poor, the subprime mortgage fallout and education disparities. Conservatives say solutions must emphasize personal responsibility, higher marriage rates and fewer out-of-wedlock births. Liberals focus on the negative effects of government budget cuts for anti-poverty programs, tax cuts benefiting the wealthy and the need for more early-childhood-development programs. The Democratic Congress is making poverty a priority issue, as are some of the presidential candidates. President Bush himself acknowledged the gap between rich and poor, raising hopes that a bipartisan effort would be found to reduce poverty.



*Many minimum-wage fast-food workers are among the more than 15 million Americans living in "severe" poverty, with incomes of half or less of the official poverty threshold.*

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# Domestic Poverty

BY THOMAS J. BILLITTERI

## THE ISSUES

**M**arilyn Bezear, a 52-year-old single parent in Harlem who lost her husband to cancer, was living in run-down public housing and working two jobs last winter, cleaning offices and doing clerical work for a temp agency.

“Together, after taxes, I bring home up to \$300 a week,” she told a congressional panel in February. “With this I pay my rent, food, telephone and payments for the loan that I took out for my daughter to go to college.” When the temp agency has no work, Bezear scrambles for ways to meet expenses, like working the late shift at a bowling alley and “getting home at 4:30 in the morning.”

Bezear added: “I am just one of many who live through these struggles. . . . Wages, education, training and health care are a necessity. I hope my testimony did not fall on deaf ears.”<sup>1</sup>

It’s a hope that many of America’s poorest citizens would no doubt echo. Despite a relatively stable economy, an overhaul of the welfare system a decade ago and billions spent on programs for the needy, poverty remains pervasive and intractable across the nation.

Conservatives say solutions must emphasize personal responsibility, higher marriage rates and fewer out-of-wedlock births, while liberals blame the negative effects of budget cuts for anti-poverty programs, tax cuts benefiting the wealthy and the need for more early-childhood-development programs. The Democratic Congress has made poverty a priority issue. And a num-



AP Photo/Lynne Sladky

*Hispanic day laborers negotiate with a potential employer in Homestead, Fla. As low-skilled immigrants, many living below the poverty line, move to the South and Midwest to work in meatpacking and other industries, debate intensifies over immigration’s impact on native-born Americans at the bottom of the income scale. Newly released Census data for 2006 show that 36.5 million Americans — including nearly 13 million children — lived below the federal poverty line of \$20,614 in income for a family of four.*

ber of presidential candidates are focusing either squarely on poverty or more generally on ideas to narrow the growing gap between the rich and poor.

Newly released Census data for 2006 show that 36.5 million Americans — about one in eight — lived below the federal poverty line of \$20,614 in income for a family of four. More than a third of them are children, and 3.4 million are 65 and older. And while the nation’s poverty rate declined for the first time this decade, from 12.6 percent in 2005 to 12.3 percent last year, the number of children without health insurance rose to 11.7 percent in 2006.<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, among “rich” nations, the United States ranked second — behind

Mexico — in poverty at the turn of the 21st century.<sup>3</sup>

“An astonishing number of people are working as hard as they possibly can but are still in poverty or have incomes that are not much above the poverty line,” said Peter Edelman, a law professor at Georgetown University who was co-chairman of a poverty task force this year for the Center for American Progress, a Washington think tank.<sup>4</sup>

A number of indicators underscore the depth and breadth of American poverty:

- Those in “deep,” or severe, poverty, with incomes of half or less of the official poverty threshold, number over 15 million — more than the populations of New York City, Los Angeles and Chicago combined. Severe poverty hit a 32-year high in 2005, according to McClatchy Newspapers.<sup>5</sup>

- The gap between rich and poor is growing. In 2005, the average income of the top 1 percent of U.S. households rose \$102,000 (adjusted for inflation), but the bottom 90 percent saw incomes rise \$250, according to economists Thomas Piketty and Emmanuel Saez.<sup>6</sup> And the top 1 percent got the biggest share of national income since 1928.<sup>7</sup>

- The chance an average American family will see its income plummet at least 50 percent is roughly two-and-a-half times that of the 1970s.<sup>8</sup>

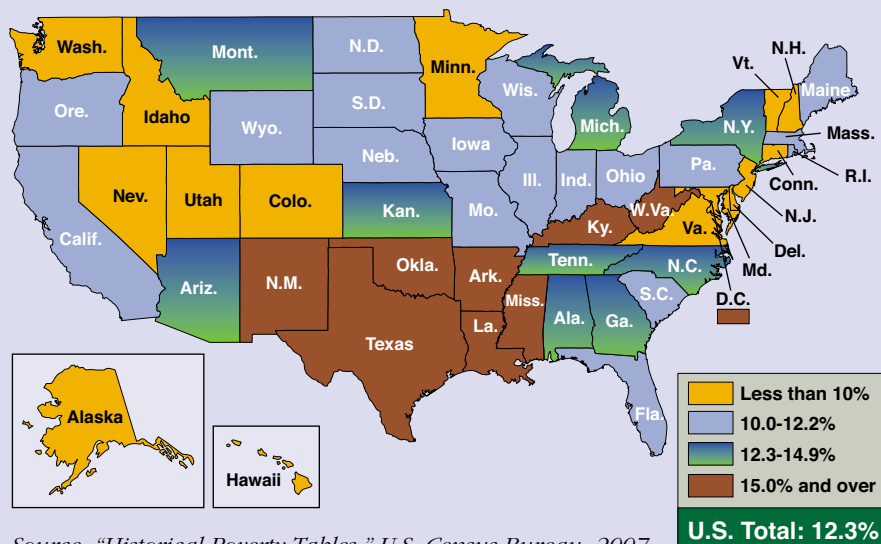
- At some time, most Americans will live at least one year below the poverty line, according to sociologists Mark R. Rank and Thomas A. Hirschl.<sup>9</sup>

Such trends have helped push poverty and broader issues of inequality and

## South Is Most Impoverished Region

Almost all the Southern states have poverty levels exceeding the national average of 12.3 percent of residents living in poverty. Mississippi leads the nation with a poverty rate of 20.6 percent. New Hampshire has the lowest rate, 5.4 percent.

Percentage of People in Poverty by State, 2006



Source: "Historical Poverty Tables," U.S. Census Bureau, 2007

Charles B. Rangel, D-N.Y., chairman of the powerful House Ways and Means Committee, declared this spring that "with the exception of getting the hell out of the Middle East, I can't think of anything more patriotic that we can do than eliminate poverty."<sup>11</sup>

In the 2008 presidential race, Sen. Hillary Clinton, D-N.Y., has accused the Bush administration of making the middle class and working families into "invisible Americans,"<sup>12</sup> while Sen. Barack Obama, D-Ill., alluding to his work as a community organizer in Chicago, has said poverty "is the cause that led me to a life of public service."<sup>13</sup> Former Sen. John Edwards, D-N.C., has staked his campaign on the poverty issue, calling it "the great moral issue of our time."<sup>14</sup>

Among other contenders, Mayor Michael Bloomberg of New York — who dropped his affiliation with the Republican Party in June — has been among the most outspoken on poverty. On Aug. 28, the billionaire founder of Bloomberg News, who is thought to be considering a third-party presidential bid, proposed a sharp expansion in the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), which provides tax relief to the working poor, and called on politicians of both parties to move beyond ideology to overcome poverty. Bloomberg proposed roughly doubling the number of Americans eligible to benefit from the EITC to 19.7 million people.<sup>15</sup>

"We are beginning to hear a chorus of voices urging action on poverty," Rep. Jim McDermott, D-Wash., chairman of the House Ways and Means Subcommittee on Income Security and Family Support, said in April.<sup>16</sup>

Edelman, at the Center for American Progress, echoed the point. "There's a rising concern in the country about inequality," he said. "There's concern about giveaways to the really wealthy, and there's concern about economic insecurity. The poverty issue is embedded in that."<sup>17</sup>

economic insecurity onto the national stage in ways not seen for decades. Two years ago, televised images of squalor in post-Katrina New Orleans refocused the nation's attention — at least temporarily — on poverty. More recently, the subprime mortgage debacle, higher gas prices and spiraling medical costs have edged millions of middle-class Americans closer to economic ruin. Meanwhile, Main Street angst is growing over globalization, which has contributed to the elimination of one-sixth of U.S. factory jobs in the past six years.<sup>10</sup>

Jacob S. Hacker, a political scientist at Yale University and author of the 2006 book *The Great Risk Shift: The Assault on American Jobs, Families, Health Care, and Retirement — And How You Can Fight Back*, says poverty is on the nation's radar for reasons that go beyond high-profile events like Katrina.

"Poverty is something the middle class

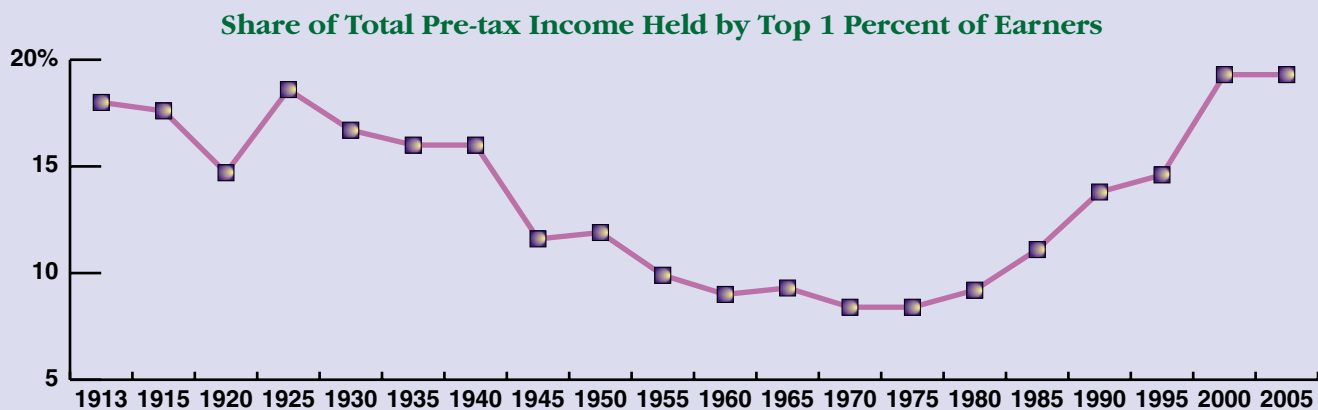
cares about when it looks down and sees itself poised on the financial precipice," he says. The middle class is looking up, too, at those in the top income strata, and "there's a lot more discussion about [income] inequality." And finally, many middle-class Americans "have a deep concern about the fact that we're such a rich nation, and yet children and hardworking adults who moved into the labor market after welfare reform are struggling to get by."

While politicians in both major parties have spoken to concerns about middle-class vulnerability, Democrats have been focusing squarely on poverty and inequality, blending appeals for middle-class protections with rhetoric reminiscent of the 1960s "War on Poverty."

Since assuming control of Congress in January, Democrats have held several hearings on poverty, hunger and economic threats to the needy. Rep.

## Gap Between Rich and Poor Widened

The top 1 percent of income households earned about 20 percent of the nation's total income in 2005, its highest share since 1929. From 2004 to 2005, the average income of such earners increased by \$102,000, after adjusting for inflation. By contrast, the average income of the bottom 90 percent rose by \$250.



Source: Thomas Picketty and Emmanuel Saez, based on IRS data; in Aviva Aron-Dine, "New Data Show Income Concentration Jumped Again in 2005: Income Share of Top 1% Returned to Its 2000 Level, the Highest Since 1929," Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, March 29, 2007

Nevertheless, it remains unclear how far voters will go in supporting new programs for the poor. A mere 1 percent of respondents to a Gallup Poll in June ranked the "gap between rich and poor" as the most important economic problem, and only 5 percent named "poverty, hunger and homelessness" as the most important "non-economic" problem.<sup>18</sup>

Likewise, Edwards has trailed his rivals for the Democratic nomination and even failed to capture much support from voters who are struggling financially. In a survey of independent voters, 40 percent of respondents in households earning less than \$20,000 said they would not vote for Edwards if he were the Democratic nominee.<sup>19</sup>

The public's fickle interest in the poor has been evident in the two years following Hurricane Katrina, which produced some of the starkest and most widely disseminated images of urban poverty in American history.

"After Katrina, with its vivid images, a lot of people who have been working in the area of poverty reduction

were excited. They said, 'now we have some visible images, now people will get excited, and we can push this anti-poverty platform,'" says Elsie L. Scott, president of the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation. "That lasted a month maybe, that excitement. Now that people in New Orleans have been dispersed around the country, people want to forget about it. They don't want to admit we have this kind of poverty in the United States."

Policy experts say it would be unfortunate if Middle America fails to recognize how much poverty undermines the nation's overall well-being. Childhood poverty alone saps the United States of \$500 billion per year in crime and health costs and reduced productivity, according to Harry J. Holzer, a professor of public policy at Georgetown University.<sup>20</sup>

Rising poverty should be a concern even among those who don't see a moral obligation to aid the poor, experts warn. "The global competitiveness of the U.S. economy suffers if

workers are too poor to obtain an education and modern job skills, the government loses tax revenue and spends more on public assistance because of poverty, and communities fall victim to urban decay, crime, and unrest," notes a recent study on severe poverty in the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*.<sup>21</sup>

Yet, the American public has always had a tendency to blame the poor for their ills, some poverty experts lament. "There is a common perception that the problem with the poor folks in the United States is a problem with values," said Dalton Conley, chairman of the Department of Sociology at New York University. "It's not a values deficit at all; it's really a resource deficit."<sup>22</sup>

And that deficit can be steep. "Most Americans would be shocked to know that full-time male workers, at the median, earned no more in 2005 than they did in 1973" after taking inflation into account, says Sheldon H. Danziger, a professor of public policy at the University of Michigan. And that wage

## Democratic Candidates' Stands on Poverty



**Joseph Biden** voted for the Fair Minimum Wage Act of 2007, which raised the minimum wage from \$5.15 an hour to \$7.25 an hour. Biden broke with his party to vote in favor of the Bankruptcy Abuse Prevention and Consumer Protection Act of 2005, which makes it harder for people to erase debt by declaring bankruptcy.



**Hillary Clinton** accuses the Bush administration of turning the middle class into “invisible Americans,” and says if she is elected president, “they will no longer be invisible.” In 2002, Clinton was criticized by liberal groups for supporting an increase in the work requirement for welfare; she said that she supported the measure because it was tied to \$8 billion in funding of day care for welfare recipients. She advocated for welfare reform under her husband’s administration. As a senator, Clinton voted for an increase in the federal minimum wage.



**Christopher Dodd** says that one of his policy priorities influenced by Catholic social teachings and the emphasis on the common good is “creating safety nets for the disadvantaged.” As a senator, one of Dodd’s priorities has been helping children, and he has authored numerous child care bills. Dodd has favored increases in the federal minimum wage.



**John Edwards** has made reducing poverty the signature issue of his campaign, calling it “the great moral issue of our time.” He has set a goal of ending poverty in 30 years by lifting one-third of the 37 million currently impoverished Americans above the poverty line each decade through a higher minimum wage, tax cuts for low-income workers, universal health care and housing vouchers for poor families.



**Mike Gravel** says America’s war on drugs must end because it “does nothing but savage our inner cities and put our children at risk.” Gravel proposes to help end poverty by creating a progressive tax system in which consumers of new products would be taxed at a flat rate. This would encourage Americans to save, Gravel says. This proposed system would replace the income tax and Internal Revenue Service.



**Dennis Kucinich** advocates ending the war in Iraq and using the money saved to fight domestic poverty, calling homelessness, joblessness and poverty “weapons of mass destruction.” In July 2007, Kucinich said that he was in favor of reparations for slavery, saying, “The Bible says we shall and must be repairers of the breach. And a breach has occurred. . . . It’s a breach that has resulted in inequality in opportunities for education, for health care, for housing, for employment.”



**Barack Obama** In the Illinois Senate, Obama helped author the state’s earned income tax credit, which provided tax cuts for low-income families. Obama has supported bills to increase the minimum wage. In *The Audacity of Hope*, Obama describes what he calls America’s “empathy deficit,” writing that a “stronger sense of empathy would tilt the balance of our current politics in favor of those people who are struggling in this society.”



**Bill Richardson** As governor of New Mexico, Richardson took steps to combat poverty in the state, one of the nation’s poorest. He eliminated the tax on food and offered tax breaks to companies paying above the prevailing wage. Richardson has backed a living wage in the state and created tax credits for the creation of new jobs.

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stagnation came amid a boom in productivity in the 1990s, he adds.

“There’s a tendency for people to blame the poor for their own circumstances,” Danziger says. “And I don’t think anybody would blame full-time male workers.”

As Congress, policy experts and presidential candidates consider what to do about poverty, here are some of the questions they are asking:

### **Is extreme poverty growing?**

In Savannah, Ga., not far from the lush parks and antebellum mansions of the city’s fabled historic district, poverty runs wide and deep.

More than one-fifth of Savannah’s residents live below the federal poverty line, and that’s not the worst of it. \* “We have six census tracts with over a 50-percent poverty rate,” says Daniel Dodd, who directs a project

that enlists Savannah’s business community in helping the poor.

Savannah is hardly unique. At least one neighborhood of “concentrated” poverty — often defined as a place where at least 40 percent of residents live below the poverty line — exists in 46 of the nation’s 50 biggest cities, according to Alan Berube, a fellow in the Metropolitan Policy Program of the Brookings Institution, a think tank in Washington. <sup>23</sup>

McClatchy Newspapers concluded this year that 43 percent of the nation’s 37 million poor people live in severe poverty — sometimes called “extreme” or “deep” poverty. Severe poverty reflects those with incomes of less than half the federal poverty threshold — in other words, under \$9,903 for a family of four and \$5,080 for an individual in 2005.

“The number of severely poor Americans grew by 26 percent from 2000 to 2005,” McClatchy reported. “That’s 56 percent faster than the overall poverty population grew in the same period.”

The rise in severe poverty extends beyond large urban counties to suburban and rural areas. “Severe poverty is worst near the Mexican border and in some areas of the South, where

\* Many people who study domestic poverty criticize the way the government measures poverty, arguing the standard federal poverty index does not accurately count the poor. Presidential candidate John Edwards is among those who call for reform of the poverty measure. His Web site states that it “excludes necessities like taxes, health care, child care and transportation” and “fails to count some forms of aid including tax credits, food stamps, Medicaid and subsidized housing. The National Academy of Sciences has recommended improvements that would increase the count of people in poverty by more than 1 million.” See also, for example, Reid Cramer, “The Misleading Way We Count the Poor: Alternatives to Our Antiquated Poverty Measure Should Consider Assets,” New America Foundation, September 2003, and Douglas J. Besharov, senior scholar, American Enterprise Institute, testimony before House Subcommittee on Income Security and Family Support, “Measuring Poverty in America,” Aug. 1, 2007.

6.5 million severely poor residents are struggling to find work as manufacturing jobs in the textile, apparel and furniture-making industries disappear," McClatchy noted. "The Midwestern Rust Belt and areas of the Northeast also have been hard hit as economic restructuring and foreign competition have forced numerous plant closings. At the same time, low-skilled immigrants with impoverished family members are increasingly drawn to the South and Midwest to work in meatpacking, food processing and agricultural industries." <sup>24</sup>

In Illinois, the rate of extreme poverty is the highest in the hard-hit Midwest, with more than 700,000 people in such straits, according to the Heartland Alliance for Human Needs & Human Rights, an advocacy group in Chicago. A family of four living in extreme poverty in Bellevue, Ill., would have monthly expenses of \$2,394 but monthly income of only \$833, the group says. <sup>25</sup>

But some researchers see little or no evidence that severe poverty is on the rise. Robert Rector, a senior policy analyst at the conservative Heritage Foundation, said "he's seen no data that suggest increasing deprivation among the very poor," according to the McClatchy report.

Rector "questioned the growth of severe poverty, saying that census data become less accurate farther down the income ladder. He said many poor people, particularly single mothers with boyfriends, underreport their income by not including cash gifts and loans." <sup>26</sup>

Such skeptical views extend beyond the severely poor. "While real material hardship certainly does occur, it is limited in scope and severity," Rector told a congressional panel this year. "Most of America's 'poor' live in material conditions that would be judged as comfortable or well-off just a few generations ago. Today, the expenditures per person of the lowest-income one-fifth . . . of households equal those of the median American household in the early 1970s, after adjusting for inflation." <sup>27</sup>

## Republican Candidates' Stands on Poverty



**Sam Brownback** voted for the 1996 welfare reform bill that required more work for recipients and placed limits on the amount of time they could receive benefits. He says poverty can best be addressed by encouraging people to get married, get a job and not have children out of wedlock. He has promoted a "marriage development account program" to help married couples get training, buy a car, get an education or purchase a house. Brownback has voted against increasing the minimum wage.



**Rudolph Giuliani** advocates requiring welfare recipients to work or engage in job training to receive benefits. New York City's welfare rolls were cut by more than half while Giuliani was mayor, and he touts his overhaul of the city's welfare system as one of his major successes. During his 2000 senate campaign, Giuliani indicated that he would support an increase in the minimum wage if studies showed it would not reduce the number of available jobs.



**Mike Huckabee** says one of his priorities is to address poverty because it's "consistent with me being pro-life." He calls his desire to fight poverty a "faith position" rather than a political position. He says it is impossible to address poverty without "prioritizing stable homes and families."



**Duncan Hunter** says tax cuts are the best tool for reducing poverty because they enable the poor to save and support their families. He advocates what he calls a "Fair Tax," which would replace the national income tax with a national retail sales tax. As part of his anti-poverty agenda, he supports tariffs on Chinese imports to help preserve American manufacturing jobs.



**John McCain** voted for a 1996 welfare reform bill that required more work for recipients and placed limits on the amount of time they could receive benefits. Although McCain voted for a bill to increase the federal minimum wage in February 2007, he has historically voted against minimum wage increases, arguing that they can hurt small businesses.



**Ron Paul** In May 2007, Paul asserted that "subsidies and welfare" only provide poor people with "crumbs," while "the military-industrial complex and the big banks" receive "the real big welfare," further impoverishing the middle class and the poor. Paul opposes foreign aid, writing that "the redistribution of wealth from rich to poor nations has done little or nothing to alleviate suffering abroad."



**W. Mitt Romney** As Massachusetts governor, Romney proposed a plan requiring more people to work in order to receive state welfare benefits, bringing Massachusetts policy in line with federal welfare reforms. He supports increasing the minimum wage to match inflation but vetoed a bill to raise it in Massachusetts, saying it called for increases that were too extreme and too abrupt.



**Tom Tancredo** The Colorado Congressman advocates moving from an income-based tax to a consumption-based tax, which he says would create an "explosion of job opportunities and economic growth" that would benefit all sectors of society, particularly the poor. He also supports repealing the 16th Amendment and establishing a flat, national sales tax to alleviate the burden on American companies and "put billions back into the economy."



**Fred Thompson** In May the actor and former U.S. senator criticized programs that would "redistribute the income among our citizens" as "defeatist." A policy of lowering taxes, he said, would stimulate economic growth and "make the pie bigger." In 1999 he voted against an increase in the minimum wage. He also voted to reduce taxes on married couples in 2000. He has yet to officially declare his candidacy.

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In fact, many more consumer items are within reach of a wider segment of the population — even the poor — than they were 30 or 40 years ago, thanks in part to globalization and the spread of discount retailers. But the cost of neces-

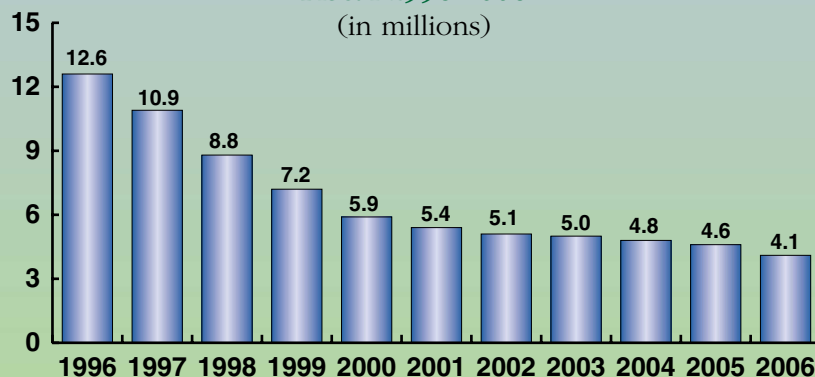
sities such as health care and shelter have exploded, taking a much higher proportion of income than they once did.

Indeed, while the poor may have more material goods than in the past, many analysts say poverty is much

## TANF Assistance on the Decline

The number of households receiving financial support through the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program has declined every fiscal year since 1996. A monthly average of just over 4 million households received TANF assistance in 2006, less than a third of the number of recipients 10 years earlier.

Average Number of Monthly TANF Recipients, Fiscal 1996-2006  
(in millions)



Source: "2008 Budget in Brief," Department of Health and Human Services, 2007

more complicated than comparisons with earlier eras might suggest.

"On the one hand, the poor have vastly more consumer goods than a generation ago — TVs, cars, washing machines, dishwashers in many cases," says Hacker of Yale University. "But at the same time, if you think about where they are relative to middle-class Americans, to say nothing of those at the top, they're much further behind."

A major portion of the spending done by poor people is for basics, especially housing, transportation, child care and health care, and the poor have had a tough time keeping up with those costs, Hacker says. What's more, "the consumption of the poor is supported by higher levels of debt that can leave them extremely vulnerable."

And those most vulnerable are people who live in severe poverty. From 2000 to 2004, its prevalence rose sharply. The risk of extreme poverty is significantly higher for children than adults, and it is higher for African-

Americans and Hispanics than for whites or Asian-Americans, according to the study in the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*.

"Millions of Americans, overrepresented by children and minorities, have entered conditions of extreme poverty," the study said. "After 2000, Americans subsisting under these conditions grew as a class more than any other segment of the population."<sup>28</sup>

Reducing severe poverty is a daunting challenge that has spurred an outpouring of policy proposals from all sides of the political spectrum.

In Savannah, Dodd's project — called Step Up, Savannah's Poverty Reduction Initiative — represents one of the nation's most ambitious local anti-poverty efforts. Formed in 2004, it is a collaboration of more than 80 organizations representing business, local government, nonprofit organizations, neighborhood groups and others. It receives donations from several major foundations as well as other sources, including businesses.

Step Up's methods include asking employers and business executives to role play for a few hours what impoverished residents experience every day. "These things are quite eye-opening for a lot of people," Dodd says. The "poverty simulation" exercise reveals "how frustrating the system is to navigate if you're making minimum wage, if you don't have the skills, and how hard it is to keep a job with what you're getting paid. There's transportation obstacles, crime," and other impediments.<sup>29</sup>

The exercise "provides a common frame of reference for the community and demystifies myths" about poverty, adds Dodd, who points out that welfare reform has led to a 70 percent reduction in government subsidies for the city's poor in the past seven years.<sup>30</sup>

Step Up's goals include expanding poor people's access to good jobs and quality health care, training them for career-level positions and expanding access to the EITC.

The effort grew from a realization that "we hadn't had a decline in poverty in 30 years," Dodd says. "People realized we'd thrown millions of dollars at this but hadn't had the impact we needed to have."

For all the project's earnestness, though, it remains unclear whether Step Up will succeed. "What I always tell people," says Dodd, "is we don't have it all figured out yet."

### Has welfare reform reduced entrenched poverty?

In August 1996, President Bill Clinton's signature ended a six-decade practice of guaranteeing cash assistance to the poor. A new system required most people who get aid to work within two years of receiving it. The revised law also limited most aid to a total of five years. And it turned over to states and localities much of the control over how federal poverty money is dispensed.<sup>31</sup>

More than a decade later, experts are still debating whether the poor are better off.

Ron Haskins, a former Ways and Means Committee staff member who played a key role in the welfare overhaul, has written that “above all, welfare reform showed that work — even low-wage work — provides a more durable foundation for social policy than handouts.”<sup>32</sup>

“Before welfare reform,” Haskins, now a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, said last year, “the main goal of state welfare programs was simply to give out money. But now the message families receive when they apply for welfare is that they need a job, that the ‘welfare’ program is there to help them find one and that they can receive cash benefits for a maximum of five years. As a result, welfare rolls plunged by over 60 percent, as many as 2 million mothers entered the labor force, earnings for females heading families increased while their income from welfare payments fell, and child poverty declined every year between 1993 and 2000. By the late 1990s, both black child poverty and poverty among children in female-headed families had reached their lowest levels ever.”

Even after four years of increased child poverty following the 2001 recession, Haskins said, the rate of child poverty was still 20 percent lower than in 1993.

Haskins went on to say that “the success of welfare reform was created both by welfare reforms itself and by the work-support programs that provided tax credits, health insurance, nutrition supplements and child care to low-income working families.”<sup>33</sup>

Yet, despite what many see as its positive effects, welfare reform re-



*Step Up Savannah, one of the nation's most ambitious local anti-poverty efforts, is a collaboration of organizations from business, government, education and the nonprofit sector that helps residents of high-poverty neighborhoods become self-sufficient.*

Courtesy Step Up Savannah

mains a mixed bag. It is not clear, for example, to what degree welfare reform itself, along with its time limits on benefits, caused poverty rates to fall and work rates to rise.

“Welfare reform, and in particular the onset of time limits, arrived in the midst of an extremely tight labor market and a flourishing economy,” says Katherine Newman, a professor of sociology and public affairs at Princeton University.

“So how much the shift toward work was attributable to the pull of a growing economy and [demand for] labor is very hard to sort out,” she continues. “My sense is that welfare reform had something to do with it, but it’s hardly the whole story. A lot had to do with favorable market conditions.”

The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, a Washington think tank, last year noted, among other negative trends, that while child poverty declined in the 1990s, as Haskins pointed out, it nonetheless rose sharply after 2000, as did the number of children living in severe poverty.<sup>34</sup> (See sidebar; see p. 735.)

Many anti-poverty advocates say even though welfare reform put more people to work, further steps are needed to ensure that families can climb out of poverty and stay there, and that poor children are protected.

Timothy M. Smeeding, director of the Center for Policy Research at Syracuse University, says welfare reform “turned the welfare poor into the working poor. You’ve got more self-respect, you’re earning it, but the effect on kids is mixed.” He calls for a system that will “make

work pay,” where “you go out and you work, you show the effort, you put in 1,000 hours, and we’ll find a way to make sure you’ve got \$15,000 or \$20,000 and you’re not poor.”

In Wisconsin — where some of the earliest efforts at welfare reform took place — the rate of growth in the number of people living in poverty was higher in 2003-2004 than in any other state.<sup>35</sup> Richard Schlimm, executive director of the Wisconsin Community Action Program Association, a statewide association of community-action and anti-poverty groups, says welfare reform simply “has not worked,” in reducing poverty in his state.

“Certainly it was the right thing to do, to get people working,” Schlimm says. “But I’ve always believed poor people want to work, and they prefer work over welfare. . . . We successfully achieved the elimination of welfare, but I maintain that we had the wrong goal. The goal was to reduce poverty, and if we kept that in our sights we would have focused a whole lot [more] funding on that than we did.”

## ***Would more government spending on poverty help?***

While welfare reform encouraged work and reduced government case-loads, many experts say the fight against poverty has only begun.

Some argue that reducing poverty depends in large measure on the poor exercising greater personal responsibility. “While it is often argued that the U.S. devotes far fewer resources to social welfare spending than other rich nations, the facts show otherwise,” Rector of the Heritage Foundation said. “The good news is that remaining poverty can readily be reduced further, particularly among children. There are two main reasons that American children are poor: Their parents don’t work much, and fathers are absent from the home.”<sup>36</sup>

Others say more government spending on anti-poverty programs is the key, Schlimm, at the Wisconsin Community Action Program Association, says that to reduce poverty, the nation needs political leadership coupled with “a massive investment” in affordable housing, accessible health care, education and job creation for the poor. “Let’s face it, we have committed massive investments in Iraq,” he says, “and [with] half of that — even a fourth of that — focused on poverty in the United States, we could make remarkable strides.”

Smeeding, the Syracuse University policy researcher, says U.S. poverty could be cut by a third to a half with an outlay of \$45 billion to \$60 billion a year, focused on three things: child care for working mothers; guaranteed child support for mothers who have established paternity with fathers who can’t or won’t pay because of disability or prison, and an expansion of the EITC.

Lawrence Mead, a professor of politics at New York University, advocates a stick-and-carrot approach with low-income men. “In 2005, there were more than 7 million poor men ages 16 to 50 in the United States, and only half of them worked at all,” Mead wrote. “Among black men in poverty, near-

ly two-thirds were idle, and their employment has fallen steadily in recent decades.”

Mead proposes using the child-support and criminal-justice systems to promote work among poor males. “Right now, these institutions depress male work levels by locking men up and by garnishing their wages if they do work,” he wrote. “But they could be used to promote work. For example, men in arrears on their child support could be assigned to government-run work programs, as could parolees with employment problems. These men — about 1.5 million each year — would have to show up and work regularly — on penalty of going to jail. Both groups might also receive wage subsidies. The combination might instill more regular work habits.”

Mandatory work for 1.5 million men would run \$2 billion to \$5 billion annually, according to Mead. “In return, governments could collect more in child support and spend less on incarceration.”<sup>37</sup>

“Everyone recognizes that men are the frontier,” Mead says. The ultimate goal, he says, should be to both reward and enforce work in ways the current system doesn’t do now.

While spending on new programs is one approach to fighting poverty, some argue the solution isn’t more outlays for anti-poverty programs but rather a mix of free-market capitalism and charity.

“Despite nearly \$9 trillion in total welfare spending since Lyndon B. Johnson declared [the] War on Poverty in 1964, the poverty rate is perilously close to where it was when we began, more than 40 years ago,” wrote Michael D. Tanner, director of health and welfare studies for the conservative Cato Institute think tank.

“Clearly we are doing something wrong. Throwing money at the problem has neither reduced poverty nor made the poor self-sufficient. . . . [I]f we have learned anything by now, it

is that there are limits to what government programs — even reformed ones — can do to address the root causes of poverty.

“Observers have known for a long time that the surest ways to stay out of poverty are to finish school; not get pregnant outside marriage; and get a job, any job, and stick with it. That means that if we wish to fight poverty, we must end those government policies — high taxes and regulatory excess — that inhibit growth and job creation. We must protect capital investment and give people the opportunity to start new businesses. We must reform our failed government school system to encourage competition and choice. We must encourage the poor to save and invest.

“More importantly, the real work of fighting poverty must come not from the government, but from the engines of civil society. . . . [P]rivate charities are far more effective than government welfare programs.”<sup>38</sup> ■

## BACKGROUND

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### **Warring on Poverty**

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Concerns about work, hardship and who deserves help go back to the roots of the Republic. The Virginia Assembly of 1619 decreed that a person found guilty of idleness would be forced to work under a master “til he shewe apparant signes of amendment.”<sup>39</sup>

In the 19th century, poorhouses sprang up to accommodate a growing tide of desperate people flooding the cities from the countryside. Poverty flourished along with widespread indifference to the plight of the needy. After the Civil War the journalist and political economist Henry George called

*Continued on p. 732*

# Chronology

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## 1950s-1960s

*Many Americans enjoy a post-war economic boom, but poverty persists. Poverty rate is 22.4 percent in 1959.*

**1962**

Michael Harrington's book *The Other America* helps spur President Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty. . . . Welfare program is renamed Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC).

**1964**

Congress establishes permanent food stamp program. . . . Federal government develops income thresholds to define poverty in American society.

**1965**

Congress enacts Medicaid to provide health care to low-income people.

**1967**

Congress establishes the Work Incentive Program, requiring states to establish job-training programs for adults receiving welfare.

**1969**

President Richard M. Nixon calls hunger in America an "embarrassing and intolerable" national shame.

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## 1970s

*The energy crisis, recessions and industrial restructuring put new strains on the poor.*

**1975**

Congress approves Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), partly to offset the burden of Social Security taxes on low-income families and to provide an incentive to work.

## 1980s

*Poverty programs of the 1960s and '70s come under scrutiny from the Reagan administration.*

**1981**

Congress cuts cash benefits for the working poor and lets states require welfare recipients to work.

**1988**

President Ronald Reagan signs Family Support Act, requiring states to implement education, job training and placement programs for welfare recipients.

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## 1990s

*Clinton administration pushes Congress to pass massive welfare reforms.*

**1992**

Democratic presidential candidate Bill Clinton pledges to "end welfare as we know it."

**1993**

Clinton expands EITC.

**1996**

Congress ends 60-year welfare entitlement program, passing a reform law that imposes work requirements and puts time limits on cash benefits.

**1997**

Federal minimum wage rises to \$5.15 an hour.

**1997**

State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) is created.

**1999**

The government of British Prime Minister Tony Blair introduces a plan to end child poverty in Britain

by 2020, spurring calls for a similar effort in the United States.

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## 2000s

*Hurricane Katrina devastates Gulf Coast, putting spotlight on poverty.*

**2000**

Federal poverty rate falls to 11.3 percent, lowest since 1974.

**2004**

Federal appeals court upholds the "living wage" law in Berkeley, Calif., rejecting the first major challenge to civic ordinances requiring contractors to pay above-poverty wages. . . . Poverty rate climbs to 12.7 percent

**Aug. 29, 2005**

Hurricane Katrina hits New Orleans.

**2006**

Congress reauthorizes Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) as part of Deficit Reduction Act.

**2007**

McClatchy Newspapers analysis finds that percentage of poor Americans living in severe poverty reached a 32-year high in 2005. . . . Congress spars with the Bush administration over expansion of SCHIP. . . . House Ways and Means Committee hearings focus on poverty and inequality. . . . Democratic presidential candidate John Edwards takes a three-day, 1,800-mile "Road to One America" poverty tour. . . . Federal minimum wage rises for the first time in a decade to \$5.85 an hour; it goes to \$6.55 in summer 2008 and \$7.25 in summer 2009. . . . Poverty rate falls to 12.3 percent.

## Military Families Face Financial Strain

*"This spring our caseload doubled."*

Meredith Leyva's work with military families recently as led her to a troubling conclusion: Poverty is growing among the ranks of deployed service members, especially those who have been seriously injured in Iraq or Afghanistan.

"This spring our caseload of both military families and wounded warriors doubled," says Leyva, who is the founder of Operation Homefront, a Santa Ana, Calif., charity that helps military families through 31 chapters nationwide. And, adds Leyva, whose husband is a Navy physician, "We saw a significant change in the types of cases. We're now seeing many more complicated and high-dollar crises that are compounded by deployment after deployment."

Operation Homefront served approximately 1,700 families of wounded service members in 2006, Leyva says, and "over half and possibly more were living in poverty."

As for the 1.5-million-member military as a whole, however, little if any hard data exists on the extent of poverty in military families during the current conflict. Much of the government information on issues like food stamp use among military families predates the war.

Indeed, the financial health of military families can be a highly complicated and nuanced issue to analyze, even leaving aside the struggles of those dealing with catastrophic injury. "By any traditional measure of poverty . . . , military families are a lot better off than their civilian peers based on such things as age and education," says Joyce Raezer, chief operat-

ing officer of the National Military Family Association, a policy advocacy group in Alexandria, Va.

Still, she says some military families may be on the "financial edge," often because "they're young and financially inexperienced" and perhaps "prey for financial predators." Others may be strained by relocation demands that put them in temporary financial straits, she says

"My sense is that you don't have folks living in poverty so that day in and day out things are inadequate," says Raezer. "But it can be episodic, where they're strapped for cash because of the military lifestyle, financial inexperience and predators."

Most military families are ineligible for food stamps because the military housing allowance puts them over the eligibility threshold, Raezer notes.

Even so, in fiscal 2006 food-stamp redemptions at military commissaries rose about \$2.3 million over the previous year, to \$26.2 million. While it was not clear what caused the increase, three military stores affected by Hurricane Katrina and other storms accounted for more than 80 percent of the increase.<sup>1</sup>

In May, U.S. Reps. James McGovern, D-Mass., and Jo Ann Emerson, R-Mo., introduced a bill that would expand spending for federal nutrition programs, including a provision that would exclude combat-related military pay from income calculations for food-stamp eligibility.<sup>2</sup>

National Guard and active-duty families can feel financial strain differently. Lt. Col. Joseph Schweikert, state family program direc-



Meredith Leyva, founder of Operation Homefront.

CinCHouse.com/Operation Homefront

*Continued from p. 730*

the United States a place where "amid the greatest accumulations of wealth, men die of starvation, and puny infants suckle dry breasts."<sup>40</sup>

Later came the first rudimentary efforts to measure poverty. In 1904 the social worker Robert Hunter set what might have been the first national poverty line — \$460 per year for a five-member family in the Northern industrial states and \$300 for a family in the South.<sup>41</sup>

In the post-World War I boom years, some Americans enjoyed unprecedented comfort and wealth, but poverty wracked much of the nation.

Between 1918 and 1929, some 10 million families were poor. By 1933, in the depths of the Great Depression, a fourth of the labor force was without jobs, and an estimated 15 million families — half the American population — lived in poverty.<sup>42</sup>

World War II jump-started the U.S. economy, and in the 1950s and early '60s many Americans enjoyed middle-class prosperity. But not all saw their living standards rise. Poverty persisted and grew, much of it concentrated in the rural South, Appalachia and the gritty urban cores of the industrial North. Many Americans blamed the poor for their plight, dismissing racism,

educational inequality and other entrenched societal ills as major factors in perpetuating poverty.

In 1962 Michael Harrington wrote in his groundbreaking book *The Other America: Poverty in the United States*:

"There are sociological and political reasons why poverty is not seen; and there are misconceptions and prejudices that literally blind the eyes. . . . Here is the most familiar version of social blindness: 'The poor are that way because they are afraid of work. And anyway they all have big cars. If they were like me (or my father or my grandfather), they could pay their own way. But they prefer to live on

tor for the Illinois National Guard, says “there are definitely families that go through financial hardships, sometimes due to deployments. But it varies from soldier to soldier, family to family. Some make more while deployed.”

Nonetheless, at least 30 percent of Guard soldiers suffer a financial loss when deployed, he says.

Because the Guard offers a college-scholarship program, many young soldiers enlist, get a degree and then enter a well-paying career field. When they are mobilized, their pay may drop sharply. “It causes the family to go through a lot of hardships,” Schweikert says, especially if the soldier doesn’t have savings or a spouse’s income to rely on.

Still, he suggests, many Guard members can be more stable financially than active-duty troops. Guard soldiers tend to be older and to have established civilian careers. Moreover, a working spouse will not have had to uproot periodically from a job, as often happens within the active-duty forces.

“In active duty, a lot of time you have to transfer from base to base, and it’s hard to establish a long-term career,” Schweikert says.

Nonetheless, military families in both the Guard and regular forces may find it hard to avoid financial ruin, especially

in cases of serious injury suffered in war.

When a soldier is deployed, a spouse may have to pay others to do jobs the soldier performed at home, such as mowing the lawn and maintaining the car, Leyva says. And if a soldier is wounded, she says, “his pay immediately drops while the expenses skyrocket.” Often, a spouse takes leave from a job or quits altogether to be at the wounded soldier’s bedside or to help the soldier through rehabilitation, spending long days or weeks away from home.

“Service members were never paid well,” Leyva says, “but these extraordinary crises certainly overwhelm.”

Leyva fears that poverty among veterans will skyrocket in the wake of the current war, as it did after the Vietnam conflict. “I think we’re going to see a whole new generation of disabled veterans that are sort of

the mirror images of the Vietnam veterans,” she says. “It’s as much about mental as physical wounds,” she says, and it could lead to a new “generation of poverty.”



CinCHouse.com/Operation Homefront

*Wounded soldiers and their families attend a get-together sponsored by the Texas chapter of Operation Homefront at Brooke Army Medical Center at Fort Sam Houston.*

<sup>1</sup> Karen Jowers, “Storms May Have Spurred Jump in Food-Stamp Use,” *Air Force Times*, July 5, 2007, [www.navytimes.com](http://www.navytimes.com).

<sup>2</sup> The Feeding America’s Family Act, HR 2129.

the dole and cheat the taxpayers.’

“This theory,” Harrington went on, “usually thought of as a virtuous and moral statement, is one of the means of making it impossible for the poor ever to pay their way. . . . [T]he real explanation of why the poor are where they are is that they made the mistake of being born to the wrong parents, in the wrong section of the country, in the wrong industry or in the wrong racial or ethnic group. Once that mistake has been made, they could have been paragons of will and morality, but most of them would never even have had a chance to get out of the other America.”<sup>43</sup>

By 1962, more than a fifth of Americans were living in poverty. Harrington’s book helped spur Washington to act.<sup>44</sup>

A few months before his assassination, President John F. Kennedy directed his Council of Economic Advisers to study domestic poverty and recommend ways to fight it.<sup>45</sup>

Kennedy’s successor, President Lyndon B. Johnson, followed through, declaring in his first State of the Union address, on Jan. 8, 1964, “unconditional war on poverty in America.” Later that year Congress established the Office of Economic Opportunity, which attacked poverty through a phalanx of new programs, from Head Start — a

school-readiness effort — to Job Corps, a training program for teens and young adults.<sup>46</sup> Johnson’s fight against poverty also included a wide range of “Great Society” programs, from the 1964 Food Stamp Act to Medicare and Medicaid.

The War on Poverty persisted under the Nixon administration, which broadened the Food Stamp program and saw the passage of the Supplemental Security Income program for disabled people, among others. Even so, President Richard M. Nixon sought to dismantle the Office of Economic Opportunity, disbursing many of its programs among various federal agencies. The office was finally closed by President Gerald R. Ford in 1975.

## Under Attack

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By the 1980s and the start of the Reagan administration, poverty programs were under full-scale attack. The poverty rate, which dipped to just over 11 percent in the early 1970s, hit 15.2 percent in 1983. Conservatives, impatient with the Johnson-era philosophy of federally funded social aid for the poor, charged that the government's expensive programs were making poverty and dependence worse rather than better.

"[S]ome years ago, the federal government declared War on Poverty, and poverty won," Reagan famously said in his 1988 State of the Union address. "Today the federal government has 59 major welfare programs and spends more than \$100 billion a year on them. What has all this money done? Well, too often it has only made poverty harder to escape. Federal welfare programs have created a massive social problem. With the best of intentions, government created a poverty trap that wreaks havoc on the very support system the poor need most to lift themselves out of poverty: the family."

The Reagan administration argued "that the social policies enacted in the 1960s and '70s had undermined the functioning of the nation's basic institutions and, by encouraging permissiveness, non-work and welfare dependence, had led to marital breakup, non-marital childbearing and the erosion of individual initiative," according to the University of Michigan's Danziger and Robert H. Haveman, a professor of economics and public affairs at the University of Wisconsin.

"The Reagan philosophy was that tax cuts and spending cuts would increase the rate of economic growth, and that the poor would ultimately benefit through the increased employment and earnings that would follow such growth," they wrote. "However, a deep recession in the early 1980s increased poverty, and the sub-

sequent economic growth did not 'trickle down.' Although the economy expanded for many years in the 1980s, the wage rates of low- and medium-skilled male workers did not. On the other hand, the earnings of those in the upper part of the income distribution grew rapidly."<sup>47</sup>

## Welfare Reform

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The 1980s laid the groundwork for the radical shift in anti-poverty policy that was to come during the Clinton era. In 1993 Clinton pushed through a record expansion of the Earned Income Tax Credit. Then, Clinton signed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 — otherwise known as the Welfare Reform Act.

The move to overhaul welfare outraged some. Georgetown University's Edelman resigned from the Clinton administration in protest. In a blistering critique, Edelman wrote that the measure would lead to "more malnutrition and more crime, increased infant mortality and increased drug and alcohol abuse" and "increased family violence and abuse against children and women."<sup>48</sup>

But others have praised the reform measure. What the Clinton bill did, a *Boston Globe* columnist opined on the act's 10th anniversary, "was end the condescending attitude that the poor were incapable of improving their situation, and that 'compassion' consisted of supplying money indefinitely to women who had children, but no husbands or jobs." The bill "replaced deadly condescension with respect."<sup>49</sup>

Still, while welfare caseloads plummeted, poverty persisted, even among those who joined the labor force.

"Basically, things are better than most people thought," Danziger says today. "On average, welfare recipients did much better moving from welfare to work, in part because the minimum wage was increased in 1997, the Earned Income

Tax Credit expanded so much in the early '90s, states put so much into child-care subsidies, and the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) came in. But the poverty rate among single mothers remains very high, and there's nothing new on the horizon."

Danziger noted in a 2006 paper that as many as 30 percent of single mothers who left welfare and took jobs are out of work in any given month.<sup>50</sup>

Advocates point out that it is possible to make real gains against poverty — and not just gains in cutting welfare caseloads. They point to big strides against child poverty in Britain, where in 1999 Prime Minister Tony Blair pledged to end child poverty by 2020.

## 'Elusive Dream'

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But in cities and towns across America, President Johnson's 1964 pledge "not only to relieve the symptom of poverty but to cure it and, above all, to prevent it" remains an elusive dream.<sup>51</sup>

The loss of manufacturing jobs — and the stability and safety net they once provided — is a big reason the dream remains out of reach.

In Wisconsin, a state of 5.6 million people, the poverty rate shot from 8.2 percent to 11 percent over five years, says the Wisconsin Community Action Program Association's Schlimm. "I'm 58 and have lived in Wisconsin all my life, and it's very unusual to see those kinds of numbers," he says. It is the "loss of good jobs, manufacturing jobs" that is to blame.

"A lot of Wisconsin's good jobs support the auto industry," he continues. "And we're a paper-making state. Many of the papermakers moved. . . . When I got out of college, you could go to a paper mill, and if it didn't work out, you could drive a couple of blocks down the street and find work with another company. In 1968 they paid \$6 to \$7 an hour. Now they pay \$25. They're very coveted jobs. But there aren't as many

# Did Recent Reforms Help Needy Families?

*Bush administration tightened TANF work requirements.*

Mention welfare reform to a political observer, and it is Bill Clinton who typically comes to mind. It was candidate Clinton who pledged to “end welfare as we know it” and President Clinton who signed the landmark welfare reform act into law in 1996.

But the Bush era also has engineered significant reforms in the welfare system, changes that could have far-reaching effects on the nation’s poor.

The most important came with last year’s congressional reauthorization of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), the federal block-grant program that replaced the old welfare system.

The reauthorization strengthened work requirements and closed a loophole so that separate state-funded TANF programs have to be included in work-participation calculations.

“In effect, the Bush administration and Congress put teeth back into TANF work requirements but set difficult benchmarks for state programs that are working with adult populations experiencing many barriers to employment,” Scott W. Allard, an assistant professor of political science and public policy at Brown University, noted recently.<sup>1</sup>

Others looking back on more than a decade of welfare reform worry the recent changes in the welfare rules could make poverty trends worse. Two analysts at the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, Sharon Parrott, director of the center’s Welfare Reform and Income Support Division, and senior researcher Arloc Sherman, argue that even though changes in TANF a decade ago “played a role in reducing poverty and raising employment rates during the 1990s, our safety net for the poorest families with children has weakened dramatically.”<sup>2</sup>

Among the trends they pointed to: child poverty fell in the 1990s, but began rising after 2000, and the number of children in “deep” poverty rose; the number of jobless single mothers receiving no government cash assistance has risen significantly, and TANF now helps a far smaller share of families that qualify for the program than it used to help.

Last year’s reauthorization could weaken the safety net even more, the two analysts suggested. Welfare reauthorization requires states to place a much bigger portion of their TANF caseloads in work activities and restricts the kind of activities that can count toward state work-participation requirements, Parrott and Sherman noted. “In many cases, state programs designed to address two of the biggest problems that have emerged over TANF’s first decade — that parents who leave welfare for work often earn low wages and have unstable employment, and that

many families with the greatest barriers to employment are being left behind — will no longer count toward states’ work requirements,” they wrote.

“In fact, the cheapest and easiest way for a state to meet the new work rules would simply be to assist fewer poor families, especially the families with barriers to employment who need the most help.”

On top of that, the amount of basic federal block-grant funds for states has not been adjusted since 1996 and has lost 22 percent of its value to inflation, Parrott and Sherman wrote.

Some observers are more sanguine about the course of welfare reform. Writing in a “point-counterpoint” format with Parrott and Sherman, Lawrence Mead, a professor of politics at New York University and an architect of welfare reform, describes it as an “incomplete triumph.” He says reform achieved its two main goals: Work levels rose sharply among poor mothers, the main beneficiaries of welfare. And caseloads plummeted.

Still, Mead says that the reform effort has had limitations. For one thing, he says, it did not create a system that promotes work on an ongoing basis through a combination of government incentives and emphasis on personal responsibility. He notes that 40 percent of those who have left welfare have not gone to work, and many welfare recipients have moved in and out of jobs.

Nor did welfare reform ensure that people leaving welfare for jobs will have enough income to live on, Mead says. “The situation has improved, but not enough.”

And welfare reform did not adequately address the employment challenges among poor men, many of whom are fathers in welfare families, Mead says.

Nonetheless, Mead is hopeful the limitations of welfare reform can be addressed at least partly through engagement by the poor in the political process. Because more of the poor are working or moving toward work, they are in a stronger position to demand changes, such as payment of living wages, than they were under the old entitlement system of welfare, Mead says.

First, though, the poor must assert themselves both on the job and in the political sphere, he says.

“Finally,” he writes, “what reform enforced was not work, but citizenship.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Scott W. Allard, “The Changing Face of Welfare During the Bush Administration,” *Publius*, June 22, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Sharon Parrott and Arloc Sherman, “Point-Counterpoint,” in Richard P. Nathan, editor, “Welfare Reform After Ten Years: Strengths and Weaknesses,” *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, Vol. 26, No. 2, 2007.

<sup>3</sup> Lawrence Mead, “Point-Counterpoint,” in *ibid.*

of them. The economy hasn’t been able to replace those very good jobs.”

What matters most in the fight against poverty, many advocates contend, is

leadership and political will.

The No. 1 problem is leadership, says David Bradley, executive director of the National Community Action Foundation.

“We’re not talking billions of dollars. We’re talking receptivity to looking at ideas.”

Bradley notes that the Johnson-era Office of Economic Opportunity was

a laboratory for anti-poverty innovations. “For many years we’ve not had the federal government willing to fund and be experimental in partnering in new ideas on poverty. A lot of ideas start at the grass roots. I see incredible projects out there but no mechanism to duplicate them nationwide.”

At the same time, Bradley laments that some in both political parties believe none of the ideas from the 1960s are worth keeping. “I find it frustrating that some candidates who are talking about poverty view anything that’s gone on previously as not successful or not innovative or creative enough,” he says. “If you’re a program that started in 1964 or 1965, that doesn’t mean by definition that you’re still not innovative in your community.”

Bradley is cautiously optimistic that a renewed commitment to fighting poverty is afoot in the nation. Political leaders in both parties are talking about the issue and the government’s role in bringing about solutions, he points out.

But that will happen, Bradley says, only if solutions are not overpromised, the effort is bipartisan, innovation and creativity are part of the approach, sufficient government money is available and, “most important, if there is a general acceptance that the federal government wants to be a positive partner.

“It can be a partner that requires accountability,” he says, “but a partner nevertheless.” ■

## CURRENT SITUATION

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### Presidential Race

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It remains unclear how much traction the poverty theme will have

in the 2008 presidential race. But as the campaign began moving into high gear this summer, poverty — and what to do about it — has been high on the list of priorities among several leading Democratic candidates, most notably Edwards and Obama.

Edwards has set the ambitious goal of cutting poverty by a third within a decade and ending it within 30 years. Echoing President Johnson’s Great Society program, Edwards proposes a “Working Society” where “everyone who is able to work hard will be expected to work and, in turn, be rewarded for it.”

To attack poverty, Edwards is pushing more than a dozen ideas, from raising the minimum wage, fighting predatory lending and reducing teen pregnancy to creating a million temporary “stepping stone” jobs for those having difficulty finding other work.

Obama has his own long list of proposals. He also backs a transitional jobs program and a minimum-wage increase, for example, along with such steps as improving transportation access for the working poor and helping ex-prisoners find jobs.

But deeper differences exist in the two candidates’ approaches. “Edwards has focused on the malignant effects of the concentration of poverty in inner cities,” *The Washington Post* noted. “He has argued for dispersing low-income families by replacing public housing with a greatly expanded rental voucher program to allow families to move where there are more jobs and better schools.” Obama, on the other hand, has “presented a sharply different overall objective: fixing inner-city areas so they become places where families have a shot at prospering, without having to move.”<sup>52</sup>

Part of what is noteworthy about the Edwards and Obama proposals is that they exist at all. Many Democratic candidates, including Sen. Clinton, have focused on the plight of the middle class rather than the poor. “Since the late

1980s,” the columnist E. J. Dionne Jr. noted, “Democrats have been obsessed with the middle class for reasons of simple math: no middle-class votes, no electoral victories.”<sup>53</sup>

With the exception of recent comments by former Republican Bloomberg of New York, GOP rhetoric on poverty has not been nearly as prevalent as the Democrats’. In January, President Bush acknowledged that “income inequality is real,” suggesting his administration might be poised to do more on poverty and perhaps get ahead of Democrats on the issue.<sup>54</sup> But more recently the administration has resisted congressional efforts to expand the SCHIP program, which benefits poor children.

Meanwhile, Republican presidential hopeful Mitt Romney echoed the longstanding conservative criticism of Democrat-backed social policies, declaring that Democrats are “thinking about big government, big welfare, big taxes, Big Brother.”<sup>55</sup>

### Anti-Poverty Proposals

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In recent months several think tanks and advocacy groups have turned out policy proposals for reducing poverty. In April the liberal Center for American Progress advanced a dozen key steps to cut poverty in half in the next decade, including raising the minimum wage to half the average hourly wage, expanding the EITC and Child Tax Credit, promoting unionization, guaranteeing child-care assistance to low-income families and creating 2 million new housing vouchers “designed to help people live in opportunity-rich areas.”

The center’s main recommendations would cost roughly \$90 billion annually — “a significant cost,” it conceded, “but one that is necessary and could be readily funded through

*Continued on p. 738*

# At Issue:

## *Should immigration be reduced to protect the jobs of native-born poor?*



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FROM TESTIMONY PREPARED FOR HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE, MAY 9, 2007

**t**here is no evidence of a labor shortage, especially at the bottom end of the labor market where immigrants are most concentrated. . . . There is a good deal of research showing that immigration has contributed to the decline in employment and wages for less-educated natives. . . . All research indicates that less-educated immigrants consume much more in government services than they pay in taxes. Thus, not only does such immigration harm America's poor, it also burdens taxpayers. . . .

While the number of immigrants is very large . . . the impact on the overall economy or on the share of the population that is of working age is actually very small. And these effects are even smaller when one focuses only on illegal aliens, who comprise one-fourth to one-third of all immigrants. While the impact on the economy . . . may be tiny, the effect on some Americans, particular workers at the bottom of the labor market may be quite large. These workers are especially vulnerable to immigrant competition because wages for these jobs are already low, and immigrants are heavily concentrated in less-skilled and lower-paying jobs. . . .

It probably makes more sense for policymakers to focus on the winners and losers from immigration. The big losers are natives working in low-skilled, low-wage jobs. Of course, technological change and increased trade also have reduced the labor market opportunities for low-wage workers in the United States. But immigration is different because it is a discretionary policy that can be altered. On the other hand, immigrants are the big winners, as are owners of capital and skilled workers, but their gains are tiny relative to their income.

In the end, arguments for or against immigration are as much political and moral as they are economic. The latest research indicates that we can reduce immigration secure in the knowledge that it will not harm the economy. Doing so makes sense if we are very concerned about low-wage and less-skilled workers in the United States. On the other hand, if one places a high priority on helping unskilled workers in other countries, then allowing in a large number of such workers should continue.

Of course, only an infinitesimal proportion of the world's poor could ever come to this country even under the most open immigration policy one might imagine. Those who support the current high level of unskilled legal and illegal immigration should at least do so with an understanding that those American workers harmed by the policies they favor are already the poorest and most vulnerable.



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FROM TESTIMONY BEFORE HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION, CITIZENSHIP, REFUGEES, BORDER SECURITY, AND INTERNATIONAL LAW, MAY 3, 2007

**w**e can acknowledge that immigration probably hurts the employment and wages of some less-educated citizens and still conclude immigration is a net benefit for the United States. The most methodologically sound estimates of the net effects of immigration on the nation conclude that the United States, as a whole, benefits from contemporary immigration. Properly measured, this conclusion means that during a period of time reasonably long enough to allow immigrants to adjust to their new situations, they produce more national income than they consume in government services.

Confusion about this issue is caused by some analysts' failure to make appropriate distinctions between immigration's impact on specific local governments and groups and its impact on the whole nation. Although benefits of immigration — such as lower prices for consumer and producer goods and services, greater profits and tax revenues — accrue to the nation as a whole, nearly all of the costs for public services consumed by immigrants are borne by localities and specific demographic groups. . . . Even so, inappropriate methods of analysis have led some analysts to overstate the costs of immigration even at the local level. . . .

On average, Americans receive positive economic benefits from immigration, but, at least in the short run, residents of particular localities and members of certain groups may lose. . . .

Democratic concepts of justice suggest the losses of a few should not override the gains of the many. Democratic concepts of justice also demand that society's least-advantaged members should not be paying for the immigration benefits enjoyed by the entire nation. A democratic society benefiting from immigration and debating how to reshape its immigration policies should also be discussing social policies to compensate less-skilled workers through combinations of better training, relocation and educational opportunities. . . .

[T]he evidence supports the conclusion that from an economic standpoint immigration's broader benefits to the nation outweigh its costs. An assessment of the effects of immigration on the employment prospects of less-educated native-born workers is that the effect is negative but modest, and probably is significant in some specific industries and geographic locations. . . . However, it is just as likely that the relative importance of less-educated young native [workers'] job losses due to the competition of immigrants is swamped by a constellation of other factors diminishing their economic status.

*Continued from p. 736*

a fairer tax system.” Spending \$90 billion a year “would represent about 0.8 percent of the nation’s gross domestic product, which is a fraction of the money spent on tax changes that benefited primarily the wealthy in recent years.”

The Urban Institute estimated that four of the center’s recommendations — on the minimum wage, EITC, child tax credit and child care — would cut poverty by about a fourth. Moreover, it said, both child poverty and extreme poverty would fall.<sup>56</sup>

A Brookings Institution proposal to “reinvigorate the fight for greater opportunity” includes seven recommendations for the next U.S. president, from strengthening work requirements in government-assistance programs, promoting marriage and funding teen pregnancy-prevention efforts to subsidizing child care for low-wage workers, increasing the minimum wage and expanding the EITC.

“We need a new generation of anti-poverty policies that focus on requiring and rewarding work, reversing the breakdown of the family and improving educational outcomes,” the proposal states. The \$38.6 billion per year cost should not be incurred, the authors say, unless it “can be fully covered by eliminating spending or tax preferences in other areas.”<sup>57</sup>

Many advocates emphasize the need to help poor people build their assets, such as savings accounts and home equity, as a way of propelling them out of poverty. Also key, they say, is the need to spend more on early-childhood programs to help keep youngsters from falling into poverty in the first place.

“Universal high-quality early childhood education is the single most powerful investment we could make in insuring poverty doesn’t strike the next generation,” says Newman of Princeton University.

## Tax Policy

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Proposals to adjust federal tax policy to help lift the poor into the economic mainstream are among those getting the most attention. Much of the discussion has focused on expansion of the child and earned income tax credits.

A letter sent to members of Congress last spring by hundreds of advocacy groups urged expansion of the child credit, which can reduce the tax liability of families with children. “The current income threshold — in 2007, it is \$11,750 — excludes 10 million children whose families are too poor to claim the credit,” the letter stated. “The threshold keeps rising with inflation, increasing the tax burden on the poor and dropping many families from the benefit altogether.”

The letter added that according to the Tax Policy Center, operated by the Urban Institute and Brookings Institution, “half of all African-American children, 46 percent of Hispanic children and 18 percent of white children received either no Child Tax Credit or a reduced amount in 2005 because their families’ earnings were too low.”<sup>58</sup>

Along with the child credit, the EITC is widely cited as ripe for expansion.

Created in 1975 to protect low-wage workers from rising payroll taxes, the credit has been expanded several times, under both Republican and Democratic administrations. More than 20 million families benefit from more than \$40 billion in credits today, according to Brookings’ Berube. Most of those eligible for the credit have children under age 18 living at home and earn less than \$35,000, according to Berube. In 2004 the average claimant received a credit of about \$1,800.<sup>59</sup>

While claims of abuse have been leveled at the tax credit, it has generally been popular across the political spectrum because it encourages work, helps the needy and does not levy a cost on wealthier taxpayers.<sup>60</sup>

But anti-poverty advocates say the tax credit could be even more effective by making it easier for families with two earners to get the credit and extending it to single workers in their late teens and early 20s.<sup>61</sup>

“Childless adults are the only group of working tax filers who begin to owe federal income taxes before their incomes reach the poverty line,” says the letter to members of Congress. Workers in that category got an average credit of only \$230 last year, the letter said. “Increasing the amount of the credit for low-income workers not living with children would increase work incentives and economic security for millions of Americans working in low-wage jobs.”

Making poor people aware of the tax credit is also an obstacle that must be overcome, advocates say. Many people who are eligible for the credit don’t claim it, sometimes because of language or educational barriers.

Dodd, at Step Up in Savannah, says the Internal Revenue Service said \$10 million to \$12 million in credits go unclaimed in his city alone.

## States and Localities

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As federal policymakers wrestle with the poverty issue, states and localities are making inroads of their own. Mayor Bloomberg has been promoting a plan to pay poor families in New York up to \$5,000 a year to meet such goals as attending parent-teacher meetings, getting medical checkups and holding full-time jobs. Patterned after a Mexican initiative, the plan aims to help poor families make better long-range decisions and break cycles of poverty and dependence that can last generations.<sup>62</sup>

Other efforts are afoot in the states. A proposed bill in the California Assembly, for example, would establish an advisory Childhood Poverty Council to

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develop a plan to reduce child poverty in the state by half by 2017 and eliminate it by 2027.<sup>63</sup>

Not all such steps pan out, though. In 2004, Connecticut passed legislation committing the state to a 50 percent reduction in child poverty by 2014, but child poverty has risen since then, an official of the Connecticut Association for Community Action complained this summer, blaming the failure to enact a state-funded EITC.<sup>64</sup>

As states seek ways to reduce the number of poor within their borders, they also are trying to adjust to the stiffer work requirements that Congress enacted last year when it reauthorized welfare reform.<sup>65</sup>

The new rules are forcing some states to adapt in creative ways. In California, for example, where less than a fourth of welfare recipients work enough hours to meet federal requirements, officials are moving some teenage parents, older parents and disabled people into separate programs paid entirely by state funds so they aren't counted in federal work-participation calculations.

Arkansas, on the other hand, has been sending monthly checks to the working poor. "Arkansas eventually aims to artificially swell its welfare population from 8,000 families to as many as 11,000 and raise the work-participation rate by at least 11 percent," according to a press report. "Officials hope the extra cash will also keep the workers employed."<sup>66</sup>

The tougher work rules have upset poverty advocates, who argue they damage efforts to help those most vulnerable or lacking in skills to prepare for the job market. "Some of the changes made it almost impossible in some ways for people to use the system to get out of poverty," said Rep. McDermott, the Washington Democrat.<sup>67</sup>

But others defend the approach. "The bottom line is that the only real way to get out of poverty is to find a job," said Rep. Wally Herger, a California Republican who chaired the House subcommittee that worked on last year's

reauthorization. "There's always the line, 'Well, some people can't do it.' What that's really doing is selling those people short."<sup>68</sup> ■

## OUTLOOK

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### Ominous Signs

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The outlook for real progress against domestic poverty is mixed, especially in the near term.

On one hand, concerns about poverty, income inequality and declining mobility are playing a bigger role on the national scene than they have in years. The kind of political momentum that spurred the War on Poverty in the 1960s may be emerging again — albeit in a more muted fashion and with a different set of policy proposals.

But big obstacles remain, especially funding. Congress would face difficult fiscal choices if it sought to enact any major anti-poverty program, many analysts point out. Even the Democratic majority, which has long pushed for more spending for social programs, would face major barriers.

"The Democrats have committed to pay-as-you-go budgeting, so I don't think we'll have a major push on anti-poverty [programs] or on programs designed to help the poor and middle class" over the next four to eight years, says Yale's Hacker. "That's part of the reason for the public's frustration — we're hamstrung by the budgetary situation."

At the same time, a number of ominous developments have been occurring that suggest the poor will have an even rougher time financially than they have in recent years. The explosion in mortgage foreclosures, rising prices for basics like gasoline and milk and the ever-present threat of recession and layoffs all conspire most

heavily against those with the fewest resources. Recently, job growth and expansion in the service sector have both been weaker than expected, indicating tougher times ahead for those on the economic margins.

Coupled with the uncertain economic outlook is the unresolved issue of immigration. Some analysts are less concerned about illegal immigrants taking low-paying jobs from native-born Americans as they are about the chance that immigrant groups will become mired in permanent poverty because of out-of-wedlock births and other social problems.

"In the long term," says Mead of New York University, "overcoming poverty probably does depend on restricting immigration" to 1970 levels. Curbing immigration, he says, not only would make more entry-level jobs available to native-born men — the group that Mead sees as a priority for anti-poverty action — but also help keep a new underclass from developing even as the nation struggles to reduce poverty in the established population.

As scholars and activists look ahead, some express optimism, as Lyndon Johnson once did, that poverty not only can be substantially reduced but actually eliminated. Others note that Johnson's vow to eliminate poverty raised expectations that were never satisfied.

"I think the poor are always going to be with us," says Bradley of the National Community Action Foundation. "Can we substantially reduce poverty? Yes. But the [idea] that somehow certain programs are going to eradicate poverty in America is just unrealistic." ■

### Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Testimony before House Ways and Means Subcommittee on Income Security and Family Support, "Hearing on Economic Opportunity and Poverty in America," Feb. 13, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Figures reflect U.S. Census Bureau data for 2006. For background, see Kathy Koch, "Child Poverty," *CQ Researcher*, April 7, 2000, pp. 281-304.

<sup>3</sup> Timothy M. Smeeding, testimony before House Ways and Means Subcommittee on Income Security and Family Support, "Hearing on Economic Opportunity and Poverty in America," Feb. 13, 2007. The study is based on Smeeding's calculations from the Luxembourg Income Study.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Bob Herbert, "The Millions Left Out," *The New York Times*, May 12, 2007, p. A25.

<sup>5</sup> Tony Pugh, "U.S. Economy Leaving Record Numbers in Severe Poverty," McClatchy Newspapers, Feb. 22, 2007, updated May 25, 2007.

<sup>6</sup> Aviva Aron-Dine, "New Data Show Income Concentration Jumped Again in 2005," Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, March 29, 2007, [www.cbpp.org/3-29-07inc.htm](http://www.cbpp.org/3-29-07inc.htm).

<sup>7</sup> David Cay Johnston, "Income Gap Is Widening, Data Shows," *The New York Times*, March 29, 2007, p. C1.

<sup>8</sup> "Panel Study of Income Dynamics; Cross-National Equivalent File," Cornell University. Cited in John Edwards, Marion Crain and Arne L. Kalleberg, eds., *Ending Poverty in America: How to Restore the American Dream* (2007), The New Press, published in conjunction with the Center on Poverty, Work and Opportunity, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Data are from Jacob S. Hacker, "The Risky Outlook for Middle-Class America," Chapter 5, p. 72.

<sup>9</sup> Mark R. Rank, "Toward a New Understanding of American Poverty," *Journal of Law & Policy*, Vol. 20:17, p. 33, <http://law.wustl.edu/Journal/20/p17Rankbookpage.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> Steven Greenhouse, "A Unified Voice Argues the Case for U.S. Manufacturing," *The New York Times*, April 26, 2007, p. C2.

<sup>11</sup> Katrina vanden Heuvel, "Twelve Steps to Cutting Poverty in Half," Blog: Editor's

Cut, *The Nation*, April 30, 2007, [www.thenation.com/blogs/edcut?pid=190867](http://www.thenation.com/blogs/edcut?pid=190867).

<sup>12</sup> Patrick Healy, "Clinton Vows Middle Class Will Not Be 'Invisible' to Her," *The New York Times*, March 11, 2007, [www.nyt.com](http://www.nyt.com).

<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Alec MacGillis, "Obama Says He, Too, Is a Poverty Fighter," *The Washington Post*, July 19, 2007, p. 4A.

<sup>14</sup> Jackie Calmes, "Edwards's Theme: U.S. Poverty," *The Wall Street Journal Online*, Dec. 28, 2006.

<sup>15</sup> Edward Luce, "Bloomberg urges US to extend anti-poverty scheme," *FT.com (Financial Times)*, Aug. 29, 2007.

<sup>16</sup> "McDermott Announces Hearing on Proposals for Reducing Poverty," press release, House Ways and Means Subcommittee on Income Security and Family Support, April 26, 2007.

<sup>17</sup> Mike Dornig, "Will Poverty Make Political Comeback?" *Chicago Tribune*, June 3, 2007, p. 4.

<sup>18</sup> Gallup Poll, June 11-14, 2007.

<sup>19</sup> Jon Cohen, "Despite Focus on Poverty, Edwards Trails Among the Poor," *The Washington Post*, July 11, 2007, p. 7A.

<sup>20</sup> Testimony before House Committee on Ways and Means, "Hearing on the Economic and Societal Costs of Poverty," Jan. 24, 2007.

<sup>21</sup> Steven H. Woolf, Robert E. Johnson and H. Jack Geiger, "The Rising Prevalence of Severe Poverty in America: A Growing Threat to Public Health," *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, Vol. 31, Issue 4, October 2006, p. 332.

<sup>22</sup> Quoted in "Statement of Child Welfare League of America," House Ways and Means Subcommittee on Income Security and Family Support, "Hearing on Economic Opportunity and Poverty in America," Feb. 13, 2007. According to the statement, Conley's comment came in an ABC television profile of poverty in Camden, N.J., broadcast in January 2007.

<sup>23</sup> Testimony before House Ways and Means Subcommittee on Income Security and Fam-

ily Support, Feb. 13, 2007. Berube said concentrated poverty is defined by Paul Jarrogowsky of the University of Texas-Dallas as neighborhoods where at least 40 percent of individuals live below the poverty line.

<sup>24</sup> Pugh, *op. cit.*

<sup>25</sup> Nell McNamara and Doug Schenkelberg, *Extreme Poverty & Human Rights: A Primer* (2007), Mid-America Institute on Poverty of Heartland Alliance for Human Needs & Human Rights. For the Bellevue data, the report cites Pennsylvania State University, "Poverty in America (n.d.) Living Wage Calculator," retrieved Nov. 15, 2006, from [www.livingwage.geog.psu.edu/](http://www.livingwage.geog.psu.edu/).

<sup>26</sup> Pugh, *op. cit.*

<sup>27</sup> Testimony before House Ways and Means Subcommittee on Income Security and Family Support, Feb. 13, 2007.

<sup>28</sup> Woolf, *et al.*, *op. cit.*

<sup>29</sup> Peter Katel, "Minimum Wage," *CQ Researcher*, Dec. 16, 2005, pp. 1053-1076.

<sup>30</sup> Sarah Glazer, "Welfare Reform," *CQ Researcher*, Aug. 3, 2001, pp. 601-632.

<sup>31</sup> Dan Froomkin, "Welfare's Changing Face," [www.Washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/special/welfare/welfare.htm](http://www.Washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/special/welfare/welfare.htm), updated July 23, 1998.

<sup>32</sup> Ron Haskins, "Welfare Check," *The Wall Street Journal*, July 27, 2006, accessed at [www.brookings.edu](http://www.brookings.edu).

<sup>33</sup> "Interview: Welfare Reform, 10 Years Later," *The Examiner*, Aug. 24, 2006, accessed at [www.brookings.edu](http://www.brookings.edu).

<sup>34</sup> Sharon Parrott and Arloc Sherman, "TANF at 10: Program Results are More Mixed Than Often Understood," Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, Aug. 17, 2006.

<sup>35</sup> Wisconsin Council on Children & Families, "Wisconsin Ranks First in Growth in Poverty: Census Bureau Reports," press release, Aug. 30, 2005. See also testimony of Richard Schlimm, House Ways and Means Committee, "Hearing on the Economic and Societal Costs of Poverty," Jan. 24, 2007.

<sup>36</sup> Testimony before House Subcommittee on Income Security and Family Support, Feb. 13, 2007.

<sup>37</sup> Lawrence Mead, "And Now, 'Welfare Reform' for Men," *The Washington Post*, March 20, 2007, p. 19A.

<sup>38</sup> Michael D. Tanner, "More Welfare, More Poverty," *The Monitor* (McAllen, Texas), Sept. 8, 2006.

<sup>39</sup> Proceedings of the Virginia Assembly, 1619.

<sup>40</sup> Henry George, "Progress and Poverty," first printed in 1879. Quoted in H. B. Shaffer, "Persistence of Poverty," *Editorial Research Reports*, Feb. 5, 1964, available at *CQ Researcher Plus Archive*, [www.cqpress.com](http://www.cqpress.com).



## About the Author

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<sup>41</sup> Gordon M. Fisher, "From Hunter to Orshansky: An Overview of (Unofficial) Poverty Lines in the United States from 1904 to 1965-Summary, March 1994, retrieved at <http://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty/papers/htssmiv.htm>.

<sup>42</sup> *CQ Researcher*, *op. cit.*

<sup>43</sup> Michael Harrington, *The Other America: Poverty in the United States* (1962), pp. 14-15.

<sup>44</sup> U.S. Census data show the poverty rate for individuals was 22.2 percent in 1960; 21.9 percent in 1961; 21 percent in 1962; 19.5 percent in 1963; and 19 percent in 1964. For families the rate ranged from 20.7 percent to 17.4 percent in that period.

<sup>45</sup> See H. B. Shaffer, "Status of War on Poverty," in *Editorial Research Reports*, Jan. 25, 1967, available at *CQ Researcher Plus Archive*, [www.cqpress.com](http://www.cqpress.com).

<sup>46</sup> Marcia Clemmitt, "Evaluating Head Start," *CQ Researcher*, Aug. 26, 2005, pp. 685-708.

<sup>47</sup> Sheldon H. Danziger and Robert H. Haveman, eds., *Understanding Poverty* (2001), Russell Sage Foundation and Harvard University Press, pp. 4 and 5.

<sup>48</sup> Peter Edelman, "The Worst Thing Bill Clinton Has Done," *The Atlantic Monthly*, March 1997.

<sup>49</sup> Jeff Jacoby, "Welfare Reform Success," *The Boston Globe*, Sept. 13, 2006, p. 9A.

<sup>50</sup> Sheldon H. Danziger, "Fighting Poverty Revisited: What did researchers know 40 years ago? What do we know today?," *Focus*, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Institute for Research on Poverty, Spring-Summer 2007, p. 3.

<sup>51</sup> Lyndon B. Johnson, "Annual Message to Congress on the State of the Union," Jan. 8, 1964.

<sup>52</sup> MacGillis, *op. cit.*

<sup>53</sup> E.J. Dionne Jr., "Making the Poor Visible," *The Washington Post*, July 20, 2007, p. A19.

<sup>54</sup> Mary H. Cooper, "Income Inequality," *CQ Researcher*, April 17, 1998, pp. 337-360.

<sup>55</sup> [www.mittromney.com](http://www.mittromney.com).

<sup>56</sup> Mark Greenberg, Indivar Dutta-Gupta and Elisa Minoff, "From Poverty to Prosperity: A National Strategy to Cut Poverty in Half," Center for American Progress, April 2007, [www.americanprogress.org/issues/2007/04/poverty\\_report.html](http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2007/04/poverty_report.html).

<sup>57</sup> Ron Haskins and Isabel V. Sawhill, "Attacking Poverty and Inequality," Brookings Institution, Opportunity 08, in partnership with ABC News, February 2007, [www.opportunity08.org/Issues/OurSociety/31/r1/Default.aspx](http://www.opportunity08.org/Issues/OurSociety/31/r1/Default.aspx).

<sup>58</sup> Coalition on Human Needs, "Nearly 900 Organizations Sign Letter to Congress in Support of Expanding Tax Credits for the Poor," May 25, 2007, [www.chn.org](http://www.chn.org). The let-

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

**Center for American Progress**, 1333 H St., N.W., 10th Floor, Washington, DC 20005; (202) 682-1611; [www.americanprogress.org](http://www.americanprogress.org). A liberal think tank that issued a report and recommendations on poverty this year.

**Coalition on Human Needs**, 1120 Connecticut Ave., N.W., Suite 910, Washington, DC 20036; (202) 223-2532; [www.chn.org](http://www.chn.org). An alliance of organizations that promote policies to help low-income people and others in need.

**Economic Policy Institute**, 1333 H St., N.W., Suite 300, East Tower, Washington, DC 20005-4707; (202) 775-8810; [www.epi.org](http://www.epi.org). A think tank that studies policies related to the economy, work and the interests of low- and middle-income people.

**Heritage Foundation**, 214 Massachusetts Ave., N.E., Washington, DC 20002-4999; (202) 546-4400; [www.heritage.org](http://www.heritage.org). A conservative think tank that studies poverty and other public-policy issues.

**Institute for Research on Poverty**, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1180 Observatory Dr., 3412 Social Science Building, Madison, WI 53706-1393; (608) 262-6358; [www.irp.wisc.edu](http://www.irp.wisc.edu). Studies the causes and consequences of poverty.

**Mid-America Institute on Poverty**, 4411 North Ravenswood Ave., Chicago, Ill. 60640; (773) 336-6084; [www.hearlandalliance.org](http://www.hearlandalliance.org). A research arm of Heartland Alliance, which provides services for low-income individuals.

**National Community Action Foundation**, 810 First St., N.E., Suite 530, Washington, DC 20002; (202) 842-2092; [www.ncaf.org](http://www.ncaf.org). Advocates for the nation's community-action agencies.

**Step Up, Savannah's Poverty Reduction Initiative**, 101 East Bay St., Savannah, GA 31401; (912) 644-6420; [www.stepupsavannah.org](http://www.stepupsavannah.org). A coalition of more than 80 local business, government and nonprofit organizations seeking to reduce poverty.

**U.S. Census Bureau**, 4600 Silver Hill Road, Suitland, MD 20746; [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov). Maintains extensive recent and historical data on poverty and demographics.

**University of North Carolina Center on Poverty, Work and Opportunity**, UNC School of Law, Van Heck-Wettach Hall, 100 Ridge Road, CB#3380, Chapel Hill, N.C. 27599-3380; (919) 962-5106; [www.law.unc.edu/centers/poverty/default.aspx](http://www.law.unc.edu/centers/poverty/default.aspx). A national forum for scholars, policymakers and others interested in poverty, established by presidential candidate John Edwards.

**Urban Institute**, 2100 M St., N.W., Washington, DC 20037; (202) 833-7200; [www.urban.org](http://www.urban.org). Studies welfare and low-income families among a range of issues.

ter, dated May 24, 2007, was accessed at [www.chn.org/pdf/2007/ctceitcletter.pdf](http://www.chn.org/pdf/2007/ctceitcletter.pdf).

<sup>59</sup> Alan Berube, "Using the Earned Income Tax Credit to Stimulate Local Economies," Brookings Institution, [www.brookings.org](http://www.brookings.org).

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## *Additional Articles from Current Periodicals*

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