

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

March 13, 1969

FOR THE PRESIDENT

ATTITUDES TOWARD WELFARE

You asked that I prepare for you, by today, a note on the social acceptability of welfare. Your concern went to the point of whether the steady, and in some cities, sharp increase in AFDC case loads reflects changing attitudes. Are people, for example, more willing to accept welfare than in the past? Has some prior restraint, some feeling of guilt or shame, or whatever, given way to a more permissive, or even aggressive attitude?

I am loathe to weary you with responses to the effect that we don't have enough information to answer your questions, although alas, we rarely do. In this case, however, there is enough data to permit at least a preliminary answer.

YES. THERE SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN SOME CHANGE IN ATTITUDE. WELFARE WOULD SEEM TO BE LESS STIGMATIZING NOW THAN IN THE PAST.

This assertion derives as much from logic as from research. A Labor Department document puts the case thus: "A social phenomenon as impressive as the growth of the welfare population cannot be totally

without some kinds of attitudinal correlates." I can identify four basic reasons.

(1) Since the program began in 1935 the proportion of persons receiving AFDC support has risen sharply, and it is now a much more "normal" experience. At present rates, one youth in five, and upwards of six nonwhite youths in ten, will have been supported by AFDC payments sometime before his 18th birthday.

(2) Welfare payments are part of a general rise in government support payments of various kinds, all of which create an atmosphere of normalcy. There were few AFDC mothers in 1935. There were equally few millionaire farmers such as Senator Eastland receiving \$170,000, or so, a year in crop supports.

(3) The onset of black militancy has led to a more assertive attitude toward the (usually) white administrators who dispense welfare, and who have not always and everywhere made it a pleasant experience for recipients. The National Welfare Rights Organization, for example, founded in 1967 now has 30,000 members -- i.e., welfare mothers -- in 100 cities and 45 states.

(4) The immense prosperity of the 1960's has made the public more permissive generally on such matters, and has certainly contributed to the notion that we can afford what we now pay.

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It is essential, however, to see that a drift towards a more permissive attitude on welfare is a move away from a highly ambivalent and often punitive attitude -- not least on the part of welfare recipients.

The "literature", as social scientists say, is fairly consistent on this point. Opposing views of welfare, seeing it as wasteful and unnecessary on the one hand, and reasonable and desirable on the other, do not divide the public so much, as they divide individual members of it. That is to say, most Americans are themselves torn between the tradition of self-reliant individualism and a generous concern for the welfare of all. (Are we not a capitalist country that raises more money for charity than any society on earth?) It would seem that at different times one side or the other of the split national personality tends to dominate, but never for very long. Thus a paper presented in March 1967 to the Pacific Sociological Society concluded that "age, education, income . . . religious preference . . . do not, on the whole, relate to differences in attitude toward welfare." The study concludes however that "negroes and whites both see welfare as supporting mostly negroes, and tend to denigrate welfare recipients. The negroes may well feel that the stereotypes of welfare recipients held by whites reflect unfavorably on all Negroes."

In general, Negroes have been more "permissive" about welfare than have whites, but there has been an interesting trend in both groups toward the presumption that a person is master of his own fate. (In terms of general achievement, this is a good indicator of increasingly effective and purposeful people.)

The following two tables, from a recent survey, indicate the somewhat more lenient attitude of negroes toward welfare but the increasing feeling among both negroes and whites that individual lack of initiative is more responsible than outside forces for a person being in poverty.

Question: "All Men on Relief Who Are Physically Able to Work Must Take Any Job Offered Which Pays the Going Wage. Would You Favor or Oppose This Plan for This Area?"

		<u>Favor</u>	<u>Oppose</u>
White	1961	85.5%	9.1%
	1964	84.7%	10.6%
Negro	1961	74.8%	11.7%
	1964	73.6%	16.6%

* * * * *

Question: "In Your Opinion, Which is More Often to Blame, If a Person is Poor -- Lack of Effort on His Own Part, or Circumstances Beyond His Control?"

		<u>Effort</u>	<u>Circumstances</u>
White	1964	36.9%	26.1%
	1965	43.1%	26.6%
	1967	43.5%	17.0%
Negro	1964	8.9%	45.0%
	1965	13.1%	46.4%
	1967	19.6%	35.4%

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As would be expected, these general public attitudes are found among the poor also, including those who are on welfare. A frequently encountered pattern is for the welfare recipient to be quite harsh about the welfare population generally, while asserting that their own case is special. Of New York City welfare mothers interviewed by Podell,

- * a majority (58%) said that being on welfare bothered them.
- * over half (56%) of the publicly assisted mothers agreed with the statement, "Getting money from welfare makes a person feel ashamed."
- * over eight in ten of the mothers on welfare agreed with the statement, "People should be grateful for the money they get from welfare." The less schooling they completed, the more likely respondents were to agree.
- * seven out of ten mothers in publicly assisted families agreed that, "A lot of people getting money from welfare don't deserve it."

Podell also found that two-thirds of negro mothers on welfare in New York preferred to work -- given child day care arrangements -- than to stay home. This was twice the proportion of white mothers:

	<u>Mothers with Pre-school Children</u>		
<u>Preference, Assuming Appropriate Child Day Care Arrangements</u>	<u>White</u>	<u>Negro</u>	<u>Puerto Rican</u>
Prefer to work	38	69	54
Prefer to stay home		28	43

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These attitudes are notable if you consider that in fact welfare is a right. By and large, it is a legal entitlement which society has nonetheless managed to stigmatize. A brilliant Berkeley law professor, the late Jacobus ten Broek, argued for many years that in fact we have two sets of laws in America, one law for the general populace, another law for the poor. This he argued -- persuasively! -- is essentially an inheritance of the Elizabethan poor laws which began a duality that now suffuses our social arrangements. (You could send to Congress one hell of a message on this subject one day!)

Another, and vital point, is that for all the rise in the welfare rolls, the fundamental fact is that the majority of persons going on AFDC (60 percent) have never been on before, and that most get off welfare after a relatively short period.

The turnover rate for the program is approximately 50 percent per year. Only a quarter of the recipients have been on the rolls more than five years. The average length of stay is two years, and the median 18 months. (i. e., half of all who receive aid do so for 18 months or less.)

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There is a major exception to this statement. We have information -- which we cannot prove, for which indeed we have no data whatever, but which comes from a usually reliable observer -- that New York City has gone crazy. Lindsay's welfare administrators seem determined to give the city away. One estimate is that of the 1,000,000 recipients in New York Reproduced at the Richard Nixon Presidential Library ~~including~~ like 300,000 to 400,000 do not, by any reasonable test of poverty, belong on the rolls. Most represent "fiscal abandonment,"

that is to say they are wives and children of men who are regularly employed and who have taken this means to double their income. The men earn \$4000-\$5000 a year; their wives get \$4000 in AFDC payments, plus Medicaid plus, perhaps, Head Start for the kids (at an average annual cost of \$1000 per child), plus public housing, etc. Given the general hustle of New York life a man and woman might reasonably look upon such a scheme as moderate in its deprivations on the public fisc, especially if those involved are allowed, even invited to get away with it, and that I fear is what Lindsay has done. But in the process he is jeopardizing the whole effort the nation is making to respond to the needs of the black urban lower class. (You may have noted that this morning a 28-year-old employee of HARYOU was indicted for stealing \$466,150 in poverty funds.)

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You did not ask for recommendations, but I will offer three.

(1) With every day I am more convinced that a National Welfare Standard is necessary to keep persons from being "pushed" out of small town and rural areas into the big cities such as New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles where the welfare rolls have been increasing most sharply. (Note that in some southern jurisdictions they are increasing hardly at all.)

(2) In order not to permit particular jurisdictions to get completely out of line, whether through permissiveness or just incompetence, Federal Eligibility Standards, at least of a generalized character, should be developed to a greater extent than they are, and where cities, such as New York, go haywire, inspectors should be sent to enforce conformity with a more rational and popular standard. Swindling, assuming it exists, can be detected, and should be. HEW should insist on it.

(3) I feel we do need an annual survey to give the Federal government accurate information on this issue (My memorandum to you dated March 1). The costs would be trivial -- \$50,000 or so -- and the saving might be enormous.



Daniel P. Moynihan

Re: Annual HEW Welfare Survey.

_____ AGREE

_____ DISAGREE