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# Mothers' pensions : the origins of the relationship between women and the welfare state.

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MOTHERS' PENSIONS: THE ORIGINS OF THE  
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WOMEN AND THE WELFARE STATE

A Dissertation Presented

By

Libba Gage Moore

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

May 1986

Political Science

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Approved as to style and content by:



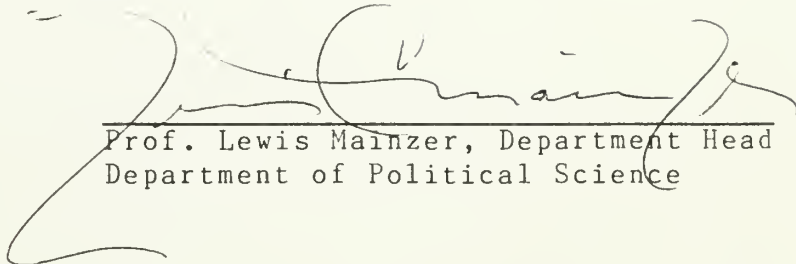
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## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Elizabeth Gage Moore, who from the beginning supported me and encouraged me to be "a thinker."

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ABSTRACT

MOTHERS' PENSIONS: THE ORIGINS OF THE  
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WOMEN AND THE WELFARE STATE

(May 1986)

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This dissertation is a historical study of mothers' pensions, the first state welfare program aiding poor mothers with dependent children. The early twentieth century mothers' pensions program represented a radical departure from nineteenth century relief policies of institutionalizing the poor. It laid the foundations for the legislation put forth in the New Deal and remains the basis of present day welfare policy. Importantly, this program marked a new relationship between the family--especially mothers--and the state, and provides the historical base to the current scholarship on women and the welfare state.

The analysis presented here establishes a feminist framework from which to analyze both historical and present welfare policy. Through a case study of mothers' pensions, I focus on the complex ways in which contemporary gender



relations inform welfare policy, and identify how welfare programs, in turn, act to define, reinforce, and reproduce gender relations in society.

First, the dissertation locates the mothers' pensions movement within the Progressive Era climate of reform and the contemporary debates on motherhood and the home during a period of destabilizing industrial growth. The study then moves to an examination of individual state mothers' pensions laws and administrative practices. Here, I look at the definitions of proper family life and gender relations embedded and promoted in the laws and implementation process. I argue that the definition of a "fit mother" was derived from white, middle class standards of motherhood and, as a condition for aid, functioned to structure the behavior, relationships, and work options of poor, often immigrant women.

In a review of the current liberal and marxist literature on welfare, the dissertation concludes with an argument for a feminist analysis of welfare policy. The discussion identifies women's primary relationships with men, children, and wage-work as the key traditional sources of women's dependency and the key areas of state regulation of women's lives. Finally, I address the problem of women's independence in a capitalist, patriarchal order.

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C H A P T E R I  
GENDER RELATIONS, THE STATE, AND THE HISTORY  
OF AMERICAN RELIEF POLICY

Introduction

Feminist scholars are beginning to make important inroads into the field of American welfare policy. They are discovering what kind of special impact welfare has on women and on gender relations in society as a whole. The breadth of this new feminist scholarship includes the development of analyses of race and class, as well as sex, in the effort to understand the complexities of the modern welfare system and its effect on women and the American family structure. However, this growing body of research on women and welfare lacks as yet an historical perspective which would reveal the particular patterns and continuity over time of the Welfare State's relationship to women. This project--conceived as a contribution to the development of a feminist theory of the state--seeks to fill that gap in feminist literature through a study of the earliest state welfare program aiding poor mothers with dependent children. Mothers' pensions, as the program was called, was first adopted by Illinois in 1911; by 1913, twenty states had similar programs, and by 1935, all but South Carolina and Georgia had mothers' pensions. It was the immediate precursor to the 1935 Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) program, established by the Social Security Act, and

the grandmother of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC).

The central purpose of the mothers' pensions program was to reconstitute--both morally and financially--poor families weakened by the loss of a breadwinner. States were responding to a growing national movement protesting current poor laws which favored the breaking up of families and institutionalizing the members in poor houses and children's institutions. Reformers sought especially to rescue the families of women who were forced--through reasons of poverty alone--to give up their children to orphanages, industrial schools or some charitable agency. As a result of this movement, state policies were drawn up to restore and promote family life through a dual-faceted program consisting of a small pension grant and close, personal social work with the mother.

It is indeed surprising that an in depth study and analysis of mothers' pensions does not exist in either the mainstream or left literature on welfare policy.[1] Most studies of modern welfare begin with the Social Security Act of 1935, and histories of social welfare in the U.S. either skip over mothers' pensions altogether or minimize its importance. Historians have looked at the Progressive Era and its social welfare initiatives from a number of viewpoints: in terms of the strides made in the progress of child welfare; or through the lens of class analysis; or as

the genesis of the benevolent liberal state. However, no study has made mothers' pensions the center of analysis or tried to ascertain the dynamics around and concern with gender that is evinced in the Progressive Era material. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to focus in on the historical period in America of 1900-1935, and begin to come to terms with the origins of the modern welfare state's relationship to women.

The history of welfare is a gendered process;[2] that is, the welfare system relies on and promotes particular cultural definitions of male and female. Historians of American relief practices always seem to recognize the role played by welfare in boosting the beliefs and institutions supportive of the work ethic, individualism, and the capitalist system; but the central role played by welfare in promoting a particular gender system is summarily missed. Side-stepping an analysis of gender here amounts to obfuscating core elements of the welfare system and obscuring how it relates to other socio-political institutions. Not only are the cultural concepts of masculinity and femininity defining features of welfare history, but they also, and perhaps more importantly, link the analysis of welfare practices to the study of women's oppression.

The sexual ordering of society is fundamental to the stability and continuity of any social system.

Anthropologist Gayle Rubin calls this the "sex-gender system." [3] The highly visible biological differences between the male and female of the human race has supplied a convenient principle of social distribution and organization. "The differences in genitalia and reproductive functions signal two categories of human beings around which are built an elaborate system for allocating the duties, privileges, and power of society." [4] The sex-gender system, by assigning culturally differentiated attributes to the two sexes, spins an intricate web of obligations, responsibilities, dependencies, authorities--in short, a culturally legitimated, moral system of order based on sex--which functions as the bedrock of human interactions.

The sex-gender system is at the same time a power system. In our culture, as a particular example, the personal characteristics approved for men and women center generally around the poles of male domination and female subordination. Overall, male privilege is consistently upheld and accommodated by this gender system, and women are enculturated to passively accept an inferior position in society vis a vis men. Men's claim to power and male superiority relies on the enforcement of a complementary concept of the weaker, dependent woman. "True manhood" only exists in relation to "true womanhood" and the two serve as ideological determinants of the social order. Historically, the family has lent a special legitimacy and, at times, the

force of "natural law" to these gender relations. Traditional western familial relations require the male breadwinner to be protective and aggressive and the female mother to be domestic and compassionate. Inside or outside of marriage and the family, masculinity in this culture entails an allowance for male freedom and a permit for male domination and rests on a femininity that projects female servitude.

I use the term "patriarchy" to describe the sex-gender system since patriarchy denotes the hierarchical power relations between men and women that have persisted over time, in different cultural contexts and in different historical periods.[5] Patriarchy is not a big, evil monolith; rather it is a complex, and, at times, contradictory process which is subject to historical change and development, and which interacts with other social forces and structures to shape the history of society. Although the form and degree of male power has changed through history, the basic relationship between men and women has left men in control.

To persist, patriarchy requires maintenance and reproduction. There is nothing natural or necessary about men holding power and privilege in society or about women performing the caring functions of the family and community. This division of labor between the sexes is reproduced and controlled through systematic, identifiable processes that



have political, ideological, and institutional dimensions. The major institutions of the social system--the church, the military, marriage--act to support and reproduce, generation after generation, the basic values and relations that constitute society's sexual ordering. The welfare system, as one of these major institutions in American society, participates in these gendered processes. The welfare system is one institution of many where analysis can reveal important insights about how patriarchy operates--how patriarchal relations are maintained and transformed. This dissertation, committed to the idea that patriarchy is neither simple nor impenetrable, seeks to assess the advances and set-backs to women's position in society brought about by state welfare policies.

Mothers' pensions represents a particularly compelling opportunity to examine a patriarchal institution from a feminist perspective, for a state policy that deals specifically with women in their role as mothers, tackles gender issues head on. "Women's mothering," as Nancy Chodorow has claimed, "is a central and defining structural feature of our society's organization of gender." [6] Our gender system equates child-bearing with child-rearing and, since women have the biological capacity to reproduce and to lactate, they have been accorded the duties of nurturance and the domestic sphere. Because they are associated with the home, women as mothers experience a double jeopardy that bears on

their status relative to men: Women are dependent on men or on some outside source for the material support of them and their children. As well, women's primary obligation to the home precludes them from fully participating in the advantages--political, social, economic--accrued from life in the public sphere. On top of the structural barriers to access to power, women in this culture are limited by ideological barriers that proclaim women to be "naturally" suited to the emotional and moral side of life and therefore ill-suited to cope with the rigors and responsibilities of rational public life.

With the understanding that this structural and ideological gender division in society translates into unequal access to power and opportunity, and that this division is rooted, at least in part, in the social relations of motherhood, it is important to see how the state is implicated in defining and reproducing these particular relations of motherhood. We must ask how state policies affect the extent to which and the terms under which women can move in and out of the public sphere.

The mothers' pensions laws were among the first articulations of the new welfare state's role in defining and controlling the relations of motherhood. Before the period of the "Progressive Era" (about 1900-1920) when the state took on a decidedly more "positive" or active role in shaping the

social and economic environment, law-makers were reluctant to explicitly involve the state in the internal affairs of families. The pre-positive state, nineteenth century poor laws reflected the rules of laissez-faire, and the role of the state in engineering the social welfare was accordingly limited. Around the turn of the century, however, the ideal of "social responsibility" significantly modified the laissez-faire definition of state relations, and the state was permitted a greater role in regulating the social and economic problems of the times. The mothers' pensions program was an important component of the formulation of this new "Progressive State," as it was termed, and constituted the basic framework for the state's relationship to women and the family, which has persisted through this century. This study looks at the origins of this relationship to try and understand the purposes and assumptions behind our modern welfare system and to shed light on how this system contributes to women's second class status in society.

#### Gender Relations and Relief Practices in the Nineteenth Century

There is a special historical continuity in the relationship between the state and the reproduction of patriarchal gender relations which is important to this thesis. The state's participation in gender control did not begin with the Progressive State, although its license for

regulating social conditions was indeed transformed and extended under the welfare state philosophy. Even under the domination of the "minimalist state" philosophy of the nineteenth century, social welfare initiatives functioned in a gendered world and served to enforce particular ideas of masculinity and femininity. A look at pre-Progressive State relief practices here will illustrate and underscore the assertion that the entire history of state actions is a gendered process. No matter how minimal the state's involvement, the purposes for intervention into social and economic affairs included a dimension which controlled for the proper behavior of men and women.

Moreover, an examination of nineteenth century relief practices affords us a look at some crucial gender transformations occurring in society at that time which provides important background to the study of mothers' pensions. Gender relations were undergoing significant changes over the nineteenth century as Victorian sexual ideology and industrial capitalism shaped the course of modern social life. The issues which dominated nineteenth century reform debate are a window for us into the larger social tensions produced by the evolving sex and class relations. Furthermore, through the nineteenth century example, we can begin to see the ways in which societal concerns and anxieties about gender instability informed welfare policy. In turn, we can see how social welfare

policies figured prominently in carving out and refining the contours of the changing and adjusting gender system. These themes are introduced in this chapter on nineteenth century relief practices and help prepare the ground for their further development and a deeper analysis in the study of mothers' pensions and the modern welfare state.

Early American Puritan communities relied on moral preachings, public whippings, and the "warning out" of outsiders to control poverty and deviant behavior. Nineteenth century, pre-Civil War America entered a remarkably different era where changing conditions, beliefs, and fears demanded new solutions. To contemporary observers, the combinations of industrialization, urbanization, commercialization, and immigration worked to dismantle the traditional sources of community stability and cohesion. As the authority of the church, family, and village neighbors declined, the influence of vice, crime, and urban poverty grew.[7]

Between 1800-1860, a staggering six million immigrants landed on American shores.[8] Three hundred, seventy thousand foreigners entered the United States in 1850 alone. To give an idea of the impact of these waves of immigrants on traditional early American life, the 1800 census recorded 5,511,000 people living in the U.S.; that number increased nearly five-fold to over 25 million by mid-century.

Compounding the effects of rapid immigration was the trend over the nineteenth century towards urbanization. In 1800, for instance, 8.6% of the American population lived in urban areas. By 1860, 30.2% were city-dwellers, and by in 1900, 44.2% of all Americans were living in urban settings. In 1900, 86% of the people in Massachusetts lived in cities.[9]

These were unsettling, if not frightening facts of social life to commentators of the day. Histories of this era are replete with examples of attempts by middle class reformers to impose order on the chaos generated by this unprecedented social and economic growth. The primary target of these efforts were poor, and especially immigrant, families. Early religious Tract Societies, Temperance Societies, Moral Reform Societies, Benevolent Societies, Children's Aid Societies, Humane Societies--all embarked on aggressive campaigns to uplift the poor and encourage habits of industry and proper family conduct.[10]

Alongside these efforts and often in conjunction with them, county, state, and government-subsidized private institutions were erected to cope with the social problem of stray and unemployed adults and children. In fact, housing the poor in institutions--indoor relief--was the dominant response of nineteenth century America to the destabilizing effects of urban poverty.[11] Public almshouses and work-houses were widely in use by the 1820's. Not long after the first almshouses appeared, authorities, who were influenced

by new theories of human behavior and deviancy, recognized the potential these institutions held for rehabilitation.[12] Removing the poor and the deviant from the community, not only served to protect society against such characters, as had been the institutions' earlier function. But, importantly, proclaimed the new theories, institutions provided an asylum, a special setting, in which to correct and reform problem individuals. Thus, on the basis of these new contentions and also because of growing reaction on the part of reformers and journalists to the overcrowded and unhealthy conditions in county poor houses, the period around 1830 witnessed the founding of separate institutions for the different types of society's dependents. A more specialized, segregated system of institutions grew up comprised of penitentiaries, mental hospitals, schools for the blind, orphanages, and so on.

An intense amount of reform effort at this time was focused on the care of neglected and dependent children. The concern for child welfare took center stage, particularly after mid-century, as the key to social betterment and social control. In a very interesting and enlightening study on children in the streets of New York City in the mid-1800's, Christine Stansell describes the "geography of social life" in the urban centers of America. "Unlike today," writes Stansell, "the teeming milieu of New York in the mid-nineteenth century was in large part a children's world." [13]

In the first place, there were greater numbers of children on the city streets after 1845, largely due to the massive immigrations that increased the presence of the poor in public places. Secondly, poor children of the city made a life for themselves in the streets, largely out of economic necessity. There they engaged in countless opportunities of huckstering, scavenging, peddling, and begging. A variety of circumstances put children on the streets. Runaways and abandoned children populated the streets as well as those out scrounging to contribute to their families' resources. Parents of children out working the streets could only partially control what their children learned there and how they conducted themselves. Often, scavenging led to petty theft and street trades led to sexual bartering. In the eyes of middle class reformers, the very presence of poor children in the street was inherently criminal. These children were waifs, vagrants, neglected children--potential or actual delinquents who needed to be rescued from the evil temptations that lurked in city streets.

The distinction between dependent and delinquent, poor and criminal became blurred in the analysis of poverty reform. Because of the lurid way of life fostered in the swelling urban ghettos, reformers believed that poor children, by virtue of their geographic location, were contaminated by the degrading and "viscious" influences comprising slum life. Poor children, by definition, were



pre-delinquent. Rescuing poor children from the evils of the city and sequestering them in protective institutions dominated the activities of child welfare enthusiasts.

The campaign against the streets, the "child-saving" movement, and later the legal trend of states demanding the removal of all children from county almshouses produced the rapid development of children's institutions.[14] Public and (publicly subsidized) private houses of refuge, orphanages, industrial schools for boys and girls, reformatories and correctional institutes dotted the landscape and attested to the promise of the institution to cure society's ills. State Boards of Charities were formed and charged with the responsibility of investigating and supervising all the state's charitable and correctional institutions.[15]

The subsidy arrangement between state and local governments and privately operated asylums encouraged the proliferation of children's institutions. Typically, states funded institutions on a per capita basis, which encouraged authorities to actively seek out neglected or unsupervised children and commit them to the institution, often without sufficient investigation.[16] But an equally important factor contributing to the "success" of children's asylums throughout the nineteenth century was that these institutions were often the only way for poor parents to assure shelter for their children.[17] At the Chicago Orphan Asylum, for

instance, at the rate of \$1.50 a week for most of the nineteenth century, parents could board a child for extended periods of time.[18] At the Lancaster School for Girls in Massachusetts, only certain charges allowed a girl to be committed, but parents learned early how to manipulate the system to gain access to the only state aid available to them. A superintendent's report from the School indicates that the practice of parents surrendering children for economic reasons was not uncommon:

We learn incidently from [Hannah] that the circumstances of the family were straitened, and we have supposed this fact may have some weight in inducing the parents to relieve themselves from her care and expenses.[19]

To look at histories of the juvenile reform and child-saving movements in particular and of nineteenth century welfare practices in general, one would think gender figured only marginally in the establishment of relief systems. It is often acknowledged that the child-saving movement was dominated by female reformers who promoted the ideal of maternalism in the institutional setting, but the relationship between the promotion of that ideal to the more complex sex-gender system is never analyzed. Most studies of juvenile history consider only the experience of male youth, assuming either that it is representative of the experience of both sexes--taking the male experience for the general experience; or that the female experience did not impact on society and juvenile law like the male experience did (since

there were fewer recorded cases of female juveniles, and institutions for girls came later).[20] Even a brief look, however, at the movement behind and purposes of the female institutions of this period show gender relations to figure crucially in relief practices themselves and in the relationship between relief practices and social control.

There was a societal reluctance to provide institutional homes for girls in the early part of the nineteenth century and it wasn't until 1856 that the first school for girls was established at Lancaster, Massachusetts. And for decades after that, advocates had to plead in front of State Boards of Charity and social workers' conventions for minimal facilities to house and reform troublesome young girls.[21] The lack of resources committed to female juvenile reform as compared to male juvenile reform was not due to general community indifference to girls' needs; and the woefully inadequate girls' wings on boys' reformatories were not the result of an afterthought on the part of school officials. Rather, this reluctance reflected the tensions in the issue of how to cope with problem young girls, given their specific gendered identity in Victorian America. Institutions for girls were slow in coming partly because girls of those days remained under the traditional controls of the family and the church longer than boys. As well, the reported numbers of female delinquents were artificially low.

Since delinquency in girls was considered synonymous with immorality, families hesitated to report a problem daughter to the authorities in order to guard her reputation. But most importantly, this reluctance bespeaks a profound ambivalence on the part of society about the reformability of erring young females. The question of female reformability was problematic for religious leaders, political leaders, and reformers alike, and was rooted in the historically specific gender differences taking shape in the emergent Victorian moral code. A closer look at this historical period reveals how patriarchal relations informed the problems and solutions of juvenile delinquency.

Relief systems do not exist apart from the organic social whole, and hence a backdrop of different fears and suspicions about women or expectations and judgements about men inform the ways authorities deal with the poor. The dominant feature of the Victorian era gender system was the blossoming of the ideology of female purity. The uncertainty and ruthlessness of the new market capitalist economy fostered a view of the family, with woman at its center, as the last stronghold of decency and morality against the life of vice and crime. Woman became imbued with a nature totally separate from man's and unique in its moral purity. The idolization of woman and her virtuous impact on society was a cultural obsession over the nineteenth century. Conversely, the impure, or "fallen" woman violated important symbols of

order that counted on the ideal of female chastity.[22]

Institutions for girls were intimately involved with other social pressures to curb what was believed to be the peculiarly female propensity toward immorality. Unrestrained and unsupervised young girls were of particular concern to a host of reformers whose mission was to stabilize family relations and woman's place in it. Prostitution and female vagrancy cut the bottom out of an emergent nineteenth century family ideal founded on the womanly virtues of purity and domesticity. At the very least, proclaimed proponents of female reformatories, these viscious young girls must be removed from the streets. The more optimistic authorities hoped that, once inside the reformatory, the wayward might eventually approximate the ideal of the home-centered, maternal figure of "mother".

To protect society from the demoralizing effects of the wanton and fallen woman was the driving thrust behind Henry Lord's verbose defense for incarcerating young wayward girls in corrective institutions. In front of the 1879 National Conference of Charities and Corrections (NCCC), he spilled his case. The point of his argument was first to link the presence of the fallen woman to societal breakdown and then to demonstrate the necessary relationship between a misguided girlhood and a life of immorality. The conclusion logically followed that society must intervene early in this

cycle and lift troublesome girls from the public streets.

A true spokesman for his age, Lord assigned women a singly moral identity. Purity was imperative in women, he explained, not simply out of respect for the virtue of fidelity in marriage which held individual families together; but because a woman's essence was virtue and modesty, and if she was found to be immoral, she was totally and irredeemably depraved:

It is not soley for reasons connected with the certainty of parental relations, without which there could be no families, that all governments have exacted under severe penalties ... perfect purity and fidelity on the part of women, involving a severety of judgement ... that is sustained and executed ... with augmented force and severety by women themselves; but there are reasons in the very extraordinary nature of the case ... which demand an exceptional view of unchastity in women, as compared with unchastity in general. As the world goes, an unchaste man is not considered, by either men or women, as utterly worthless. An unchaste woman is , and is called abandoned ... Men have been said to have many virtues; a woman that lacks one in particular is not credited with having any.  
[23]

According to Victorian logic, "the affects produced upon the public welfare" of a woman abandoned or depraved were infinitely more destructive than the social consequences deriving from the actions of a disorderly man. The morally depraved woman was an evil force, a temptress, who misused her female powers to lure men into her net. "The great numbers of wanton women and girls," writes Henry Lord, ...make it very dangerous for your sons in

all their necessary works and journeys in the business of their lives ... (O)ne of your sons is never free from danger ... by highway, railway or steamer, walking to business, or returning from church; near home or in distant States; the net, often not in vain, is spread plainly in his sight.[24]

The abandoned woman's depravity was contaminating and she was assumed to corrupt innocent girls who came in contact with her on the streets. Moreover, she was cited as perpetrating the grave social problems of crime and poverty: "... one of the most important and dangerous causes of the increase in crime, pauperism and insanity is the unrestrained liberty allowed to vagrant and degraded women." [25] Lord argued, "Viewed in this light, it is of vastly more consequence to the moral well being of the State that the exposed girls should be looked after than the boys ..." [26]

So consumed was the Victorian mind by this conception of the fallen woman and her ruinous affect upon male self-discipline and the social order in general, that all cases of troublesome or even unsupervised girls were cast in this light. Echoing a familiar assessment of juvenile behavior, Henry Lord remarked, "Vagrancy always implies crime on the part of boys, and almost always immorality on the part of girls." [27]

Interestingly, this perceived distinction between the nature of male and female deviancy appeared in all kinds of records and reports dealing with juveniles. The sexual division consistently identified the problem with boys as a

disregard for the rights of property and the problem with girls as a disregard for proper sexual conduct. In their study of 1899-1908 juvenile court records in Chicago, notable reformers Edith Abbott and Sophinisba Breckinridge reported the differences in the nature of offenses that brought the two sexes before the court. In the years studied, they estimated that violations against the rights of property made up 95% of the charges against boys; and having categorized the offenses of the girls, they concluded that "more than 80% of the delinquent girls were brought to court because their virtue is in peril, if it has not already been lost." [28] In her recent study of the Lancaster School for Girls, Barbara Brenzel found that in the institution's opening year, 68% of the inmates were in for crimes against "morality". [29]

As Estelle Freeman's work on women and prisons of this period shows, in adult categories also, female offenses carried a sexual definition. Of the three major categories of crimes--against person, property, and public order--only the last included a significant number of women. A subcategory of public order offenses, sometimes called crimes against chastity or decency, applied almost exclusively to women. [30] In reviewing statistics on nineteenth century offenders in Boston, Barbara Hobson found that women were overwhelmingly more than men brought before the court on accounts of of moral turpitude. And greater numbers of women



charged with immoral behavior were found guilty and upon sentencing, a larger proportion were imprisoned. Men were more often fined.[31]

Together, these studies show that claims of sexual misconduct were directed almost exclusively towards females and that these claims followed women through their whole lives, from girlhood on. The first objective of nineteenth century institutions for females (children and adults) was to contain and confine what was believed to be the totally ruinous influence of these fallen women. It was therefore morally incumbent upon the keepers of societal integrity, according to reformers such as Henry Lord, to restrict and control the sexuality of young juvenile girls:

If we may reflect upon this subject in the light of probable consequences, then, although the careful training of boys is vastly important, yet, when it is considered that the demoralizing influence emanating from a really depraved girl is twenty-fold greater than from a vicious boy, the question assumes additional consequence from that fact, and demands attention.[32]

Working against reformers such as Lord who favored opening more institutions for girls was the firmly held, more traditional opinion that given the female nature, reformatories for erring girls were pointless. It was widely acknowledged that the chances of rescuing a delinquent girl from a life of ruin were slim. Unlike boys, whose Victorian gender identity permitted them a variety of personal characteristics and acceptable behaviors, the whole female

person was tied up with sexual morality. A single violation of the strict female moral code threw a girl's entire worth into question.

Many reformatory officials, in fact, doubted that girls once tainted or "exposed" could be rehabilitated at all. Regard this exchange during the 1889 NCCC. Responding to the question, "Do you have girls in your school?", Mr. J.W. Brown of the Minnesota State Reform School replied:

We have only a few girls. They occupy a separate department of the same institution ... Most of the girls come from the dregs of society, and must be watched very closely after leaving the school, lest they fall back into their evil ways.

Question: Why are there so many more boys than girls? Is it because the girls are better?

Answer: I am in doubt as to whether the girls are better or the magistrates think they are not worth saving.[33]

A boy, on the other hand, presented a different case. He was "frequently only a troublesome nuisance who needs discipline." [34] Misbehavior in boys was viewed as significantly more acceptable than female deviance and even normal. Often a certain fondness for the spirit behind juvenile boys came through in the literature: "... a boy's will is the wind's will and the period of wilful adventure must have its gusty way." [35] His reform treatment was likened to the straightening of a bent twig, and simply involved a re-channeling of misdirected energies toward more

socially constructive ends.

The idea of a boy's reformatory was perfectly in line with contemporary thinking about the nature of males and their role in society. In contrast to what was believed and promoted about the female sex, the essence of maleness was rationality. Male development entailed processes of intellectual growth and maturity. Hence, the young maladjusted boy could be re-trained, re-routed--in short, re-formed--to take his proper place in the social order. Reformatories offered the perfect opportunity to affect the socialization of the future men, citizens, and breadwinners of society.

However dubious were reformers of the success rate of reforming wanton young girls, a compelling reason for establishing juvenile reformatories for girls (aside from removing them from the streets) was the hope of allowing these misbegottens to become future mothers. For better or worse, these poor girls were the mothers of future generations. For social reformer Sarah F. Kelley, the challenge of the institution was to protect the young girls from further harmful influences of urban life, and to give them the chance to mature into womanhood in a wholesome environment. In her address before the NCCC in 1892, she argued,

It is considered much more difficult to reform a girl or woman than a boy or man; and yet, ... what greater need can arise than the

reformation of girls and women. If they are to be the mothers of the future generation, they are in a measure to control public thought through the inheritance and training they give to their children. For the sake of the future of our nation the many wilful, perverse girls of this day and generation must be taken from their present environments, and placed under better influences.[36]

By virtue of their sex, according to Victorian gender ideology, these girls were the rearers of tomorrow's children. And it was in society's best interest, argued the superintendent of the Lancaster School for Girls, to correct and control the development of poor and wayward girls, since in their hands would be entrusted the reproduction of social norms and values. Going in front of the Massachusetts State Legislature in a plea for support, Superintendent Pierce advised:

It is sublime work to save a woman, for in her bosom generations are embodied, and in her hands, if perverted, the fate of innumerable men is held. The whole community, gentlemen, personally interested as they are in our success because the children of the virtuous must breathe the atmosphere exhaled by the vicious, will feel a lively sympathy for you, in your generous endeavors to redeem the erring mothers of the next generation.[37]

The instruction and training at Lancaster reflected this aim of domesticating girls and preparing them for motherhood. It was hoped that with proper supervision in the domestic arts, these girls would someday take their proper place as wives and mothers.

## Conclusion

By this brief account, one can see that the societal objectives for reforming boys and girls were markedly different. The intention behind reform was clearly gender-based. Because of their predominant focus on boys, historians of this material miss the significance of gender in both defining the perception of the social problem and shaping the outcome. Hence, they only partially see what constitutes the issues in welfare matters and what enters into decisions about welfare policies.

Social historians such as Anthony Platt and David Rothman have brilliantly shown that motives other than humanitarianism inspired the movements behind reformatories.[38] As these works argue, institutions were meant to remove from the streets youth who threatened to violate capitalist norms and values and whose futures seemed non-productive in the capitalist context. Reformatories, according to this view, purported to instruct these youths in the habits and authority relations of industrial capitalism, and prepare them for work under capitalist rules.

Their understanding of this period, however, is limited in so far as they do not acknowledge that the cultural expectations for girls' and boys' performances in the social order were different and specific. The gender category "boy" prefigured reformers' thinking about how a boy

disrupts the normal functioning of the social order and how to curb his anti-social behavior. According to Victorian Era ideology, a boy's sexual appetites were normal and excusable; sexual activity in boys was not inconsistent with the masculine role of aggressor, achiever, competitor. A tendency toward violating the principles of property and ownership, however, and a disregard for authority, boded ill, given his presumed future breadwinning role in the capitalist system. The gender category "girl", on the other hand, automatically triggered suspicions of sexual immorality in the minds of authorities. Deviant behavior was seen in terms of its relationship to the moral code of female purity, modesty, and submissiveness. Signs of sexual conduct in females threatened the patriarchal foundations of the social order and hence had to be dealt with. Programs for reforming boys and girls, then, developed along gender lines, and reflected the fears and beliefs pertaining to gender stability.

The case presented here, of nineteenth century male and female juvenile reform, is meant to illustrate the argument that poor relief systems have endorsed societal gender biases, and in turn, have set up processes that continued and fed those biases. More specifically, through the example here, I have begun to outline the type of conditions under which the state could and did justify the

regulation of girls' and women's lives and the kinds of standards the state held up for female conduct. Seeing how the state operated to control the sexuality of young girls provides important background for understanding later state policies towards women in their role as mothers. The purpose of the next section is to show how mothers pensions drew upon the same gender base that evolved over the nineteenth century, and struggled with similar issues of the proper role of the sexes in the social order.

C H A P T E R    I I  
FAMILY DISORDER AND THE  
CLIMATE OF PROGRESSIVE SOCIAL REFORM

Introduction

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, children's asylums began to fall out of favor with reformers, as they were not producing the kinds of reformed children that early proponents had promised. There were complaints that reformatories were crowding into one building both the homeless child and the juvenile criminal, the innocent and the depraved. More and more, institutional life was faulted for being artificial and for not preparing youth for the outside world. Instead, it created a helpless and "inefficient" class of dependents who carried the additional burden of a lasting social stigma. Furthermore, reformers were convinced that orphanages stood as a temptation to parents to throw off on to state institutions "their most sacred responsibilities" of caring for their own children.[1]

The historic 1909 White House Conference on the Care of Dependent Children ushered in a new era in the field of child welfare. As the "natural" home replaced all other possible institutions as the best environment for child development in reform thought, activists began building reform movements around the preservation of the home and family life. Proclaiming that the home was "the highest and



development in reform thought, activists began building reform movements around the preservation of the home and family life. Proclaiming that the home was "the highest and finest product of civilization... the great molding force of mind and of character," and that "[c]hildren should not be deprived of it except for urgent and compelling reasons," the conference finally laid to rest the reign of nineteenth century children's institutions and made way for the radically different policy direction that culminated in mothers' pensions.[2]

Sometimes referred to as widows' pensions or mothers' aid, these pension programs were the result of a search for a solution to a pressing social problem: the support of poor families who were without a "normal" breadwinner. Especially bad working and living conditions in the industrial cities exposed the poor to a disproportionate amount of health problems, work accidents, and unemployment which drastically drained family resources and often left women alone responsible for earning the support for the family. Activists mounted swift, successful state campaigns advocating a government subsidy, or pension, for deserving mothers. The 1911 Illinois Act was the first state-wide law aiding poor families in their homes. In 1913, a flurry of legislative action saw 27 of the 42 state legislatures in

session consider a mothers' pensions law. Seventeen passed it that year. By 1915, 29 states had mothers' pensions laws on the books, and four years later, in 1919, the figure grew to 39.[3]

The immediate and particular aim of aiding poor mothers with dependent children must be seen in its larger social context. As we saw in the previous chapter, relief practices are never a simple, straight-forward means of aiding the poor. They are filled with bigger purposes and contain the current struggles for social order and security. The mothers' pensions movement, as we shall see, was as much concerned with the anxieties around perceived familial disintegration and changes in gender relations as it was with relieving the burden of poverty.

After a brief review of current scholarly work on mothers' pensions, this chapter will deal with the historical context of the mothers' pensions movement. The Progressive Era was an incredibly active time period in the history of this country and one must have a picture of the whole climate of reform to understand any one part of the social welfare movement. It was a hopeful and exciting time for social activists as well as a very frightening time, as social and economic forces threatened to wrest control from the traditional institutions that held together the social order.

There are several related themes in the history of

this period that I will touch upon in this chapter to help explain the evolution of the mothers' pensions movement. The advancing industrial era of the decades around the turn of the century generated tremendous economic growth and changes in society that needed to be brought under control. While the pressing and tangible problems of poverty, overcrowding, and disease occupied the daily energies of social activists, the larger fears of industrial unrest, the moral dissolution of society, and the degrading influence of the new waves of impoverished immigrants underlay the long term strategies for reform.

Moreover, I will argue, at the heart of reform activity was the concern for proper family life among the poor. Industrial conditions were seen to be tearing apart families, placing severe strains on their ability to sustain themselves amidst the social and economic turbulence of the times. Most Americans at the turn of the century considered the family to be the foundation of civilization. The family "is the unit of the State and upon its safety and perpetuity not only government and order, but the race itself depend." [4] Furthermore the family was believed to be the instrument through which social morality was relayed to future generations. The family "means the verile and chastening virtues of parents engrafting themselves into the characters of the progeny." [5] To witness social and

economic trends that seemed to be eroding family values therefore greatly disturbed protectors of the moral order.

The campaigns to save the family during this era cannot be fully appreciated without a look into the building sentimentalization of motherhood and the home. I briefly explore how leading child welfare theories on child development created a new, special sphere for motherhood which further hallowed the home and further increased the importance of saving the family from the disintegrating influences of industrial life.

The progressive social reform movement must also be seen in light of the emergence of the science of social engineering. Though the problems and fears confronting reformers presented a formidable challenge to society's most elemental structures, professional social workers were eager to pioneer the efforts in social reorganization. Riding on the wave of "science and investigative research," the profession of social work was enjoying a new status by the turn of the century, and a new confidence with which to tackle the country's social ills. As well, the growing acceptance of an activist state, as opposed to the rigid laissez-faire state characteristic of the nineteenth century, helped propell, define, and legitimate the reform efforts of Progressive Era activists. The social welfare "experts," then, combined with the new progressive state, permitted

exciting experiments in social engineering around the turn of the century. Mothers' pensions was one such experiment.

### Existing Scholarship on Mothers Pensions

Modern historians are beginning to piece together the story and significance of mothers' pensions. Although there is no existing book-length treatment of mothers' pensions, the subject has been taken up in articles and in sections of books on welfare history. Winifred Bell's 1965 book, Aid to Dependent Children, contains perhaps the most well-known piece on mothers' pensions.[6] The mothers' pensions movement forms her introductory chapter on the origins of the later "suitable homes" policies in American welfare. Since the purpose of her study on "suitable home" laws is to expose the subjective and prejudiced uses these provisions have been put to, her treatment of the criteria of a "fit mother" in the earlier mothers' pensions laws cuts through to the more interesting level of social values embedded in relief practices. In the relatively few pages she devotes to mothers' pensions, Bell brings a useful, critical perspective to the administration of mothers' aid. However, while she delves quite deeply into the racial consequences of suitable home policies in the main text, her analysis offers little insight into the specifically gender consequences in welfare policy.

Mark Leff's 1973 article entitled "Consensus for Reform: Mothers'-Pensions in the Progressive Era" is the single work to date that specifically focuses on the mothers' pensions movement and it has served as a sort of starting point for subsequent interested scholars.[6] His impressive historic research provides us with a picture of the various actors and coalitions involved in promoting and opposing public aid to widows. His theoretical perspective is limited, however, as his analysis remains on the level of political alliances and organizational jealousies.

Susan Tiffin in her recent book, In Whose Best Interest? Child Welfare Reform in the Progressive Era, takes off from Leff's work and probes beneath the superficial political struggles to the social problems giving rise to child welfare legislation.[8] By covering a spectrum of related social movements of the era, she brings to light some of the overriding concerns about social stability, the child, and the family. While recognizing the class biases promoted in the campaigns for preserving the family, Tiffin stops short of exploring how a particular set of gender assumptions and anxieties about gender stability helped shape Progressive Era reforms.

Another provocative work on mothers' pensions is Ann Vanderpol's 1982 article entitled "Dependent Children, Child Custody, and the Mothers' Pensions: The Transformation of

State-Family Relations in the Early 20th Century." [9]

Vanderpol contributes to the study of mothers' pensions by explicitly bringing the state into the analysis. Challenging the recent claim by social theorists that government has increasingly intruded into family life in the U.S., Vanderpol argues that in fact, earlier periods in U.S. relief history showed far greater state intervention into and disruption of family life than what characterizes today's state/family relations. From colonial times up through the nineteenth century children's institutional period, the government has inclined towards severing parent-child relations. From indenturing children and institutionalizing adults in the early 1800's, to the child-saving practices of the mid to late nineteenth century, the state and private philanthropies had disregarded or superceded the child custody rights of impoverished parents. Only since the inception of mothers' pensions, Vanderpol argues, has the government supported a degree of family unity and sovereignty. Contrary to contemporary social theorist assertions, then, claims Vanderpol, mothers' pensions marks the turning point in state/family relations where the state actively promotes family life. This article is important because it takes seriously the role of the state in shaping family relations. However, since Vanderpol lacks a theory of gender and its relation to women's oppression, she ends up embracing this

new direction in social policy without examining the implications it holds for women.

Linda Gordon's work-in-progress seeks specifically to understand the relationship of gender relations and social reform during the Progressive Era. In an unpublished paper entitled "'Child-Saving' and the Single Mother: A View from the Perspective of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, Boston, 1880-1920," she investigates the records of the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (MSPCC) in an effort to understand contemporary thinking about poor single mothers.[10] Improving on Leff's analysis, she argues that the opposition of private charity organizations to the public program aiding mothers was based as much on their fear of condoning single motherhood as on their territorial interests. The role of the state and its influence on the construction of gender, however, is beyond the scope of her paper.

As yet, the discourse on mothers' pensions lacks an analysis that attends specifically to the role of the state in defining the relations of motherhood. There is an intimate connection between the social construction of gender and state policies towards the family. The remainder of this dissertation is devoted to exploring that link.



## The Age of the Expert and the Progressive Era

The mothers' pensions movement was born out of the excitements, tensions, optimism and fears pulling at society during the Progressive Era. Although the social and economic troubles then were cause for great concern, the rise of a new generation of academics and intellectuals and the growing acceptance of an activist state created a fresh, hopeful attitude toward reform. In the midst of apparent social chaos and increasing social tensions appeared a creative spirit deriving from the combination of a faith in the emergent science of social engineering and the permissive powers of the state.

The economy during the early 1800's was growing in leaps and bounds. In 1900, the gross national product stood at about \$7 billion; by 1929, it was \$104 billion. Accounting for inflation, the per capita gross national product rose by 73% in the first thirty years of the century.[11] Moreover, the wealth in America became increasingly concentrated in large corporations. In 1897, about a dozen corporations other than railroads were capitalized at \$10 million. Six years later, nearly 300 corporations were in this position, of which about fifty were capitalized at more than \$50 million. U.S. Steel was capitalized at almost \$1.5 billion. To indicate the

magnitude of the concentration of wealth, Andrew Carnegie was said to have had an average annual income of over \$10 million at this period, and not a penny of it was subject to income tax.[12]

At the other end of the scale was the life of insecurity, poverty, disease and crime of the industrial poor. Overcrowding in the cities accounted for much of the social tensions. Between 1900-1915, 14.5 million people immigrated to the United States and almost 75% stayed in the cities.[13] New York City's population multiplied four-fold between 1860 and 1910, increasing from 1,174,779 to 4,766,883, and the population of Chicago increased twenty times in the same years.[14] New York's Lower East Side contained the densest crowding of people of all industrialized centers in the world. While 175,000 people were crowded into one square mile in London at the turn of the century, the Lower East Side had 330,000 inhabitants per square mile.[15] Inhabitants were cramped into small, filthy tenements in the cities' foreign quarters where, because of the damp, dark, airless conditions, tenants suffered from what they themselves called "tenant house rot." [16] Immigrants comprised the greatest majority of the population in other cities as well. By 1900, 60% of those living in the nation's largest cities were either foreign-born or of foreign parentage. In St. Louis, Cleveland, Detroit,

Milwaukee, Chicago and New York, the figure approached and sometimes exceeded 80%.[17]

Period writers focused on the growing misery and related problems of poverty. In Robert Hunter's 1904 account, Poverty, he wrote that 20% of the population in the northern industrial areas were poor.[18] Using the 1900 census report, he estimated that 22% of the country's labor force was unemployed at some point during that year--and none were receiving unemployment insurance.[19] Indicating the special needs of many poor families, Edward Devine's statistics on 5,000 relief cases in New York City in 1907 showed that 12% of poor households were headed by a man temporarily disabled or mentally ill, 30% by widows or permanently disabled men, and 6% by old people.[20] Figures also showed that even those gainfully employed struggled to make ends meet. A 1915 report by the Commission on Industrial Relations, which investigated wages and the standard of living of America's working class, concluded that despite the labor of women and children, and despite other income such as that from lodgers and boarders, 50% to 60% of working class families were poor and one-third lived in "abject poverty." [21]

Coloring the genuine concern over the crowding, the filth, and the poverty endured by the nations's new-comers was the middle class Yankee fear of the country being

overtaken by these foreign elements. Native-born, established white Americans looked upon the waves of immigrants filling the cities with great apprehension. In his often cited 1887 study, Samuel W. Dike warned in Perils to the Family that in Massachusetts, foreign mothers were averaging 50% more children than mothers of the "so-called native stock." Allowing even for the greater death rate of foreign infants, continued Dike, immigrant births far outnumbered native births.[22] Robert Hunter predicted in 1904 that, on the basis of immigration figures and the respective birth rates of children from native and foreign born parents, the poor immigrant population would eventually crowd out the Yankee stock.[23]

Findings like these on poverty, disease, and declining native birth rates presented by the government, social workers, and social scientists were accompanied by reports on the heightened intensity of labor disputes and industrial strife erupting in the urban centers at the close of the nineteenth century. Strikes, work stoppages, and numerous other displays of public agitation attested to worker struggles over inadequate health, safety, and wage standards.[24]

Clearly, over the period of years around the turn of the century, the country was undergoing huge economic changes and social disruptions which, according to concerned civic

activists, were occurring at great human and societal costs. A host of social reform movements arose to meet what seemed to contemporaries to be the urgent call for re-asserting social order in a world of uncontrolled industrial madness.

The trend towards "scientific" investigation in the area of reform and the professionalization of social work had a great impact on the perception of social ills and on Progressive Era reform activity. Before the 1880's, charity work was the province of upper class ladies who volunteered their energies to uplift the moral character of the poor. However, in the late 1880's, the Charity Organization Societies (COS) grew up in all major U.S. cities, and represented a movement among a new generation of professional social workers.[25] They sought to coordinate and systematize charity work and eliminate the inefficient, indiscriminate distribution of relief that characterized the sentimental "Lady Bountiful" approach to charity.

Investigation was the keystone of the scientific charity method. The sheer volume of data accumulated on poor families was astounding. By the mid-1890's, the New York City COS held records on 170,000 families or individuals.[26] The systematic collection of information on thousands of individual cases lent charity work the respect worthy of a scientific profession. Proud to be considered among the rising class of experts, one early historian of the movement

boasted that charity organization was the first reform movement "to apply scientific methods to human relationships." [27]

The developing social science disciplines added to the ceaseless generation of data on life among the poor. Beginning with Charles Booth's 1885 empirical survey of the working class of London, the study of poverty became systematic, standardized, and, in a word, scientific. [28] Booth introduced the concept of a "poverty line" and spoke of a "normal standard" of living to which families in his study could be compared. Defended in terms fashionable among the developing social sciences, these classifications were objectively derived from "observed facts of life." [29]

Booth's contribution of describing poverty in objective, measurable terms was the impetus for a whole range of survey and data collecting research. Many pathbreaking studies on poverty by students of social life, such as those by Robert Hunter and Edward Devine mentioned above, started appearing around the turn of the century and contained policy recommendations whose legitimacy rested on detailed scientific research. Several famous survey projects came out of this era and became models for subsequent investigative studies. Robert C. Chapin's The Standard of Living Among Working Men's Families in New York City and Margaret F. Byington's study of steel mill families in Pittsburgh,

Homestead: the Households of a Mill Town are two notable examples of this genre.[30]

To attract serious attention among reform leaders and law-makers, policy recommendations had to be based in scientific investigative research. Thus, federal and state agencies and private charitable foundations were eager to hire professional researchers to conduct investigations on various aspects of industrial life. Hence there was a proliferation of hundreds of state and federal commissions investigating slums, woman and child wage-earners, the system of home manufacturing, child-labor, and standards of living, to name a few.[31] Private foundations, too, such as the Russell Sage Foundation, and private charity societies, such as the New York Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor conducted investigations into all facets of life among the poor.[32] The most famous and extensive work of this type, funded by the Russell Sage Foundation and headed by Paul Kellogg, was the Pittsburgh Survey which began in 1908, took five years to complete, and filled six large volumes.[33] As well, research institutes like the Juvenile Psychopathic Institute in Chicago, established in 1909, produced volumes on the study of delinquent children and their families.[34]

With the tireless generation of facts and publication of data came interesting discoveries about the nature of life

among the poor. Researchers began to see that poverty was often the result of social and environmental factors, not solely the result of flaws in the individual's moral character. This insight represented a major turn-about from the typical nineteenth century perception of poverty and its causes. On the basis of this different understanding, the new generation of activists looked to the reform of social conditions rather than the individual for ways to alleviate the problem. Confident in their scientific method and its ability to determine causes and influence effects, they turned their efforts towards restructuring the urban environment.

Joined by academics in the fields of law, economics, sociology, psychology, and political science, social workers were part of a movement that acted on their faith in the ability of experts to "engineer" society in the name of social betterment. Progressive reformers felt that through carefully planned intervention into social relations, the army of social work professionals could effectively and successfully steer the course of society. Their writings exuded a definite optimism and excitement about being a part of the progress which was pushing society towards rational social ends. To reformers, the new era seemed to hold the possibility of profound, enlightened social change:

Whereas once a few seers only dreamed of human progress, and painted pictures of good



times to come, which no one else in view of the actual facts could believe possible; whereas the prophet or reformer contented himself with telling the story of the unseen country, but could not show the way that led to it, now we begin to have a new science of social surveying and engineering; whereas solitary thinkers or poets hardly dared to place their visions within the compass of human achievement, and waited for the intervention of God to bring them to pass, thousands of common men are now becoming conscious sharers with God in his purpose and are cooperating with Him in setting forth to do his will.[35]

The idea of social justice through social legislation was at the heart of this Progressive spirit. In a speech to the American Sociological Association, Law Professor Eldon R. James expressed the enthusiasm dominating the Progressive Era:

The conception that legislation may be made a powerful agency in the promotion of social and economic development has been thoroughly grasped and the development of the law, through legislation, to meet the social and industrial problems of the present will continue.[36]

Earlier jurisprudence, based on a more rigid laissez-faire concept of government involvement, needed re-thinking, according to modern legal experts, if it was to respond to the new demands placed on the legal system. "The increasing dominance of social ideals in all departments of American thought," continued Professor James,

is convincing evidence that there is to be no let up in the demand for social legislation[,] and the need for a new statement of juristic theories and for a new

philosophy of law and legislation will become more and more urgent." [37]

With the distinct mission of helping give birth to a new and great progressive era, reformers organized to pass all kinds of protective and regulatory legislation. Though several important legislative acts served to curb monopolies and fix rates in certain industries, "no reform activities were more representative of the Progressive Era than those that occurred in the arena of social welfare." [38] New York City passed a Tenement House Law in 1901, for instance, which aimed at preventing the construction of lightless, airless tenements. Chicago followed suit in 1902, and by 1910, most cities had similar laws. [39] In 1902 the first Child Labor Committee was organized in New York. Shortly thereafter, similar committees were formed in other states and the National Child Labor Committee was founded in 1904. From 1902 to 1909, new child labor laws or amendments to previous statutes were enacted in 43 states. [40] Over the course of two prolific decades, social workers and reformers worked for a whole range of social legislation which would limit the hours of work; provide for compulsory education; prohibit night work for women; supply parks and playgrounds for the urban masses; regulate working conditions; improve sanitary and health conditions; and enact minimum wage, workman's compensation, and mothers' pensions laws. [41]

Motherhood, The Home, and the "Century of the Child"

Perhaps the common denominator underlying the plethora of social welfare reforms initiated at the turn of the century was the concern for the health of the American family. The fundamental goal of the many social welfare initiatives was to provide the conditions that would enable disadvantaged families to remain intact and to rear healthy, well-adjusted children. Emphasizing the important role legislation should play in maintaining the core relations upholding the American family, President Roosevelt delivered this message to Congress in 1904:

The prime duty of the man is to work, to be the breadwinner; the prime duty of the woman is to be the mother, the housewife. All questions of tariff and finance sink into utter insignificance when compared with the tremendous, the vital importance of trying to shape conditions so that these two duties of the man and of the woman can be fulfilled under reasonably favorable circumstances.[42]

New theories in child development then taking the country as if by storm called special attention to family relations and compelled reformers more than ever to promote a particular kind of family life. The work of internationally acclaimed child experts like G. Stanley Hall put the welfare of the child at the center of Progressive Era reform debate. With the development of the field of child psychology, childhood began to stand out as a distinct and fascinating phase of life. These radical new theories emphasized that

humans were most impressionable in their youth and that early character development largely determined the later behavior of adults. The child, then, was seen to hold the key to the future and the twentieth century was dubbed "The Century of the Child." [43]

Logically, in this schema, parenting and proper home environment were of utmost importance in the successful socialization of the child and future citizen. "In fact," pointed out contemporary historian James Bossard, "this emphasis [on the child] has taken many social students and workers to a point where adults are considered of significance largely as a means to an end." [44]

However, an interesting twist was developing that profoundly affected the status and perception of women in American society and was later reflected in reform policies towards the family. As child study experts came to reformulate the parent-child relationship as essentially affective and emotional, parenting became increasingly seen as the exclusive responsibility of women. [45] This thinking elevated motherhood to a higher plane than in any previous historical period. It placed motherhood at the center of family relations, so that motherhood itself became the focus for study and public debate.

Legal codes, too, advanced this shift to the mother as the essential guardian of the child. By the 1880's,

custody laws reflected these dominant theories and granted mothers custody over children of "tender years," upsetting the previous legal precedent of naming the father as primary guardian.[46]

In the wake of the scientific attention devoted to mother and child, mothers clubs and child study groups sprang up all across the country. Handbooks, lectures, and pamphlets echoed the message of the innocence of childhood and the grave importance of the mother's careful guidance and gentle supervision.

Feminists themselves helped to sculpt this new ideal of motherhood.[47] Jane Addams, Carrie Chapman Catt, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman were among those who grounded their actions for social change in the belief that women's unique qualities were positively expressed in motherhood.[48] As leaders in the new sciences of domestic engineering and home economics, Gilman and other professional women furthered the identification of womanhood with motherhood and the domestic sphere.[49] As well, suffragist arguments subscribed to the view that women possessed important maternal qualities that they alone could impart to the arena of government. Carrie Chapman Catt promoted this view in her case for women's suffrage. "To women have been given in greater perfection," she said,

the gentler traits of tenderness and mercy, the mother heart, which goes out to the wronged and afflicted everywhere, with the longing to bring them comfort and sympathy and help.[50]

Contrary to the charges of their contemporaries that career or suffragist women were denying their feminine nature by advocating a public life for women, these professional women actually affirmed the notion of a separate sphere for women and never intended to fundamentally upset the socially approved gender arrangements.[51] Hence, although they challenged the limits of the separate spheres doctrine, people like Addams and Gilman never intended to totally undermine it. Their pressing of the limits of established gender boundaries, however, sent shock waves through protectors of a more conservatively gendered world.

### The Fear of the Decline of the Family

The near fanaticism surrounding the new theories about motherhood and the child helps explain the dire fears expressed by reformers over the apparent decline in familial relations in America. The importance of the family having been lifted to new heights, the anxiety over its potential break down rose proportionately. The common perception at the turn of the century was that with the disruptive influences brought on by industrialization and urbanization, the structure of the American family, in all classes, was being

seriously challenged.[52] As William Grubb reminds us, "it seems that each generation [from colonial times to the present] has discovered 'the decline of the family.'"[53] But given the new thinking on childhood and its ultimate dependence on proper family relations, the progressive campaign to save the family seemed ever more urgent and desperate.

The potential collapse of the family and what that bode for the moral health of the nation was the hottest topic for discussion at the turn of the century. Critics pointed to a number of contributing causes of family decline, most of which involved the changing role of women in society and revealed the anxieties about and resistance to the shake up of established gender relations. According to concerned observers, the disturbing trends in divorce rates, birth rates, women entering the work force and institutions of higher education all indicated a disintegration of woman's commitment to her maternal duties. Moreover, given the rise in prostitution during these decades, it was feared that women were also abandoning the moral guardianship over the family and society. Americans feared that the traditional incentives and controls that in the past had governed women's socially and morally necessary role in the home were beginning to break down.

Divorce rates, which were negligible in the earlier

part of the nineteenth century, were increasing at a pace so alarming that by the century's end, the steadily rising divorce rate was recognized for the first time as a major social phenomenon.[54] In response to the concern over the number of marriages dissolving in divorce, beginning with a special survey by the Department of Commerce and Labor, the government regularly gathered statistics on the number of divorces. Public controversy stirred over the findings that divorces had jumped from 328,716 over the decades of 1867-1886 to nearly 946,000 in the period 1887-1906.[55] Critics noted that for several decades the divorce rate had risen five times as fast as the rate of the population.[56] Women, it was believed, were primarily responsible for marital break ups, since two-thirds of all divorce suits were filed by them.[57]

Around this same time, women were marrying later. Before mid-century, early marriages predominated, but by 1890, only 47% of women aged 20-24 were married. (This compares to 77% of the same age category of women in 1950 who were married.)[58] At the turn of the century, only about half of the graduates from women's colleges ever married.[59] The fertility rate as well was interpreted to indicate women's avoidance of their proper sphere. The fertility rate for white women dropped from 7.04 in 1800, to 4.24 in 1880 and fell to 3.56 by 1900.[60]



The statistics and publicized discussions around extended work opportunities for women also stepped up the anxiety around women's role in the home and in society. The expanding industrial economy increased the proportion of women in the paid labor force from 16% in 1890 to 25.5% in 1910, twenty years later.[61] Women comprised 36% of the rapidly growing clerical sector of the work force in 1910, compared to less than 3% in 1879.[62] Between 1870 and 1910, the total number of women employed outside the home had doubled.[63]

At the least, these trends of women entering the labor force were regarded as disruptive and damaging in their effect of pulling women out of the home and away from their maternal duties. At a 1909 Sociological Society meeting held to discuss the topic of "The Family in Modern Society," the consensus of a session on working women was that "the entrance of women into factory and office gives rise to a number of anti-family reactions and certainly presents a real social problem." [64] Expressing a similar reaction, Then-U.S. Secretary of Labor James S. Davis granted that in many cases women needed to earn a living, but "at the same time all will agree that women in industry would not exist in an ideal social scheme. Women have a higher duty and a higher sphere in life." [65]

Not only were lower class women entering the labor

force, but more and more middle class women were pursuing higher education and moving into professional careers. This situation was especially disturbing to defenders of a more traditional family structure. Women's magazines and reform journals and national conferences addressed the controversial issue of the "new woman." "The effect of higher education [for women]," claimed some, "is to beget a distaste for the normal career of woman; to raise an incoherent rebellion against wifhood and motherhood." [66]

In a piece in the National Congress of Mothers Magazine, the president of the Congress expressed her condemnation of the "new woman" who "deliberately chooses to be childless, because she is engaged in social activities [meaning social work] which she considers most useful to the world." The president concluded, "One can but pity the childless wife... who deliberately chooses to forego the joys of motherhood." [67]

Then-president Roosevelt was one of the country's leading spokespersons against the "new woman". In his portrayal of the issue, we can see the dread, the anger, the fear towards women who chose to pursue careers:

...the woman who, whether from cowardice, from selfishness, from having a false and vacuous ideal shirks her duty as wife and mother, earns the right to our contempt, just as does the man who, from any motive, fears to do his duty in battle when the country calls him. [68]

Social critics blamed middle and upper class white

women for perpetrating the threat of "race-suicide," as the low birth rate among native whites was termed. Higher education and professional careers for women were accusingly correlated with later marriages, low birth rates, and the increase in divorce. "Professional women," charged one irritated observer, "have found that however dear the home is, they can exist without it." [69] In this view, upper class women were shirking their natural maternal duties and presenting a menace and a threat to Yankee dominated society.

Social reformers were equally critical of the standards of maternalism found among the poor. Not only did many poor mothers work for wages and were therefore unavailable for their children. "Visitors" to the poor also found that mothers were scarcely able to meet the modern standards of household efficiency, nutrition, or child rearing. [70] Because of lack of resources, or commitment to foreign ways, or simple ignorance of modern theories of child care, to the modern social worker, these women seemed unfit as homemakers. Representative of the findings of social workers was Sophinisba Breckinridge's assessment:

The essence of the problem...is to be found neither so much in the poverty of the family, nor in the misfortune of widowhood and desertion, as in the fact that on the whole and as a group these mothers are untrained and unskilled, not only as wage-earners, but as heads of homes and as mothers. [71]

On top of these trends pointing to a decline in

women's commitment to the family, the sharp increase after 1896 in prostitution, or the white slave trade, served to heighten public alarm over the erosion of family life and traditional controls on female moral behavior. The concrete, identifiable issue of the white slave trade gave expression to an underlying, more generalized fear of female sexual independence.

Starting with the 1896 New York Raines Law, which inadvertently made it advantageous for saloons to add bedrooms and become hotels, the white slave trade seemed to take off in big cities like New York, Chicago, and Detroit.[72] What intensified the panic over the increase in prostitution was the assumption in the public mind that immigrants were behind the rising social evil, not only as prostitutes, but as organizers and traffickers.[73]

Private investigative teams and government vice commissions were formed to investigate the problem in response to fervent pressure from the morally offended citizenry. Active media coverage over the first decade of the century both reflected the level of concern over prostitution and served to keep the issue in the public eye. The titles of two exposes in the popular publication, McClure's Magazine, were indicative of the outrage felt toward the encroaching immorality: "Daughters of the Poor: A Plain Story of the Development of New York City as a Leading

Center of the White Slave Trade of the World Under Tammany Hall" and "The City of Chicago: A Study of the Great Immoralities." [74]

The anti-prostitution campaign drew into its quarters a broad range of people from the reform community. It heard from vice crusaders like Boston's Benjamin Flower in his serial publication "The Arena", from prominent settlement house workers such as Jane Addams in her thoughtful book, A New Conscience and an Ancient Evil, and from social activist leaders like Grace Abbott.

The fear of innocent women and girls falling victim to the big-city trade in prostitutes loomed large in the minds of social observers. Many single women were lured to the big cities by the possibilities of economic opportunities. Concerned reformers felt that once there, disillusioned with low pay, and confronted by the ever-present advances from men, young women often turned to the more lucrative occupation of prostitution:

Is it any wonder that a tempted young girl who receives only six dollars per week working with her hands sells her body for twenty-five dollars per week when she learns there is a demand for it and men are willing to pay the price? [75]

And it wasn't only the single girl who was believed to engage in the social evil. "Do you know, if facts could be ascertained," warned a disturbed on-looker, "we would find

more dependent widows with little children guilty of the social evil than young girls?"[76]

The turn of the century brought with it tremendous fears about the level of commitment Americans, and particularly women, felt towards the family. The ideal of the self-sacrificing, nurturant, caring mother was being undermined by social forces that were pulling women out of the home and likely corrupting their moral character. The movement towards women's economic independence, unguarded female sexuality, and more worldly experience for women in general, served to erode the intimate connection between woman and the home. Not only did the connection between woman and the home ensure a particular kind of child rearing endorsed by middle class standards, but it also provided the basis for the larger moral social order, where women took responsibility for the emotional health of the family and engendered in men a responsibility to protect and provide. It was believed that, should this basic relationship expressed in family dynamics break down, the whole moral, social, and economic structure of society could give way.

### C H A P T E R   I I I

## THE HAND THAT ROCKS THE CRADLE: MOTHERS' PENSIONS, THE FAMILY, AND THE MORAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE SOCIAL ORDER

### Introduction

Historically speaking, the treatment of the nation's poor has reflected the contemporary issues around social stability and the moral order. Inevitably, a major component of the struggle for social order has been the control of proper gender relations which govern the behavior of men and women. As we saw in Chapter 1, nineteenth century relief measures responded to the fears of unbridled female sexuality and the disregard in young boys for the norms of property relations. The institutions that were established to rehabilitate child deviants and delinquents reflected the particular reform theories developed over the nineteenth century, but, as well, were defined by the threats to particular moral and gender values concerning authorities at the time.

So, too, did the twentieth century proposal of mothers' pensions aim to control for proper gender behavior. Moving from the focus on the individual deviant child, however, this generation of reformers was preoccupied with the breakdown of the family. Chapter 2 described how reformers believed that social and economic forces threatened especially to corrupt women and divert them from their

reformers believed that social and economic forces threatened especially to corrupt women and divert them from their socially necessary role and duty in the family as mothers. Because of these threats and the changing views on childhood which cited the predominant role of motherhood in socializing children, relief practices concentrated on creating the conditions for proper motherhood among the poor. Promoting motherhood, saving the family, and restoring the moral order were all one and the same ventures in twentieth century reform work.

In this third chapter, we see how the generalized fears of family and gender breakdown described in the last chapter worked their way into the formulation of relief policy. Importantly, however, the mothers' pensions movement not only reflected the current concerns over the family and the social order, but helped give shape and direction to these issues. The mothers' pensions debates served as a very important forum for social workers, child experts, the courts, philanthropists, and the like to discuss the crucial topics of the day. Since mothers' pensions was the one progressive reform idea proposed specifically to deal with the troubled institutions of motherhood and the home, the mothers' pensions debates were the medium through which reformers of this era articulated the ideal social relations



governing family life. An examination of the debates on mothers' pensions gives us the opportunity to view the processes that served to construct and reproduce particular gender relations at least among the lower classes, if not throughout society.

In keeping with the theme of this dissertation, I argue that mothers' pensions was not simply a program designed to dispense aid to the poor. It was not merely a changing trend in emphasis in relief practices from the institution to the home, nor a mere strategy to combat juvenile delinquency and child neglect, nor simply a program of immigrant assimilation. Though the mothers' pensions movement advanced all of these goals, the realm in which these concerns took shape was a gendered realm. As we shall see, values promoted in these goals were embedded in larger gender struggles.

Interestingly, the language used in progressive discussions on mothers' pensions and the family revealed a strict gender division where women were primarily mothers and the duty of family support was reserved for men. Today's terms "single mother" and "female-headed family" label and therefore recognize independent women-headed households. These terms imply that women can provide for their families, both emotionally and financially. However begrudgingly, today's society has recognized these families as legitimate.

In contrast, the language used to refer to families comprised of women and children at the turn of the century was "dependent mothers" and "fatherless families." The earlier generation's gender system did not allow them to consider women-headed families as whole or properly self-sufficient (morally or economically). In so far as "dependent" or "fatherless" families were considered lacking, the standard of the "normal," two-parent heterosexual family was upheld.

This chapter begins with a discussion of twentieth century reformers' philosophical movement away from the institution as the locale for relief work and toward the family. Next, I look at the investigative research into family conditions among the poor which laid the groundwork for a mothers' pensions solution to perceived home life deficiencies. The mothers' pensions movement fills the remainder of the chapter. The various advocates of mothers' pensions are reviewed and then an in depth analysis of proponents' reasons for support follows. As we will see, mothers' pensions supporters were responding to three grave threats to the home: the working mother, the irresponsible mother, and the immoral woman. Finally, I examine reformers' ideas on the impact of mothers' pensions on the breadwinning role of men in society. Together, these sections illustrate the fundamental place of controlled gender relations in the formulation of relief policy.

## The Family and Social Reform

Child welfare activists took a special interest in the new theories and prescriptions on home life and incorporated them into their policies and programs for the care of dependent children. Echoing the popular cry that the family was the foundation of society, social reformers explicitly made it their mission to aggressively defend and preserve this crucial institution. "We must grasp in all its mighty significance," urged Charles E. Faulkner in his 1900 Presidential Address to the National Conference of Charities and Corrections (NCCC),

the truth that the family is the unit of social order, and lend effort to the alignment of every helpful influence to insure blessings and protection to society through its family life.[1]

Part of the struggle by child welfare leaders to posit the family as central to the treatment of dependent and delinquent children entailed discrediting the children's institution as a place to rear the nation's young. Thus, many of the calls to save the family were inspired by objections to the institution and included an implicit comparative judgement between the family and its institutional counterpart. Such was the case with Edward Hall's remarks to the NCCC as he sang the praises of the home:

We hold to this fundamental principle and well-established truth that no conceivable combination of personalities, no imaginable adjustment of human relations, can ever furnish a better environment for a child than the family - father, mother, brothers, and sisters, and, be it ever so poor and lowly, "there's no place like home." [2]

The greatest and most pressing impetus behind activists' efforts to re-assert family values, however, was the general insecurity about the stability of the family and gender roles in society. When seen in this light, these earnest proclamations about the function of the family and the social order take on added significance. Reporting for the Committee on Needy Families in Their Homes at the 1903 NCCC, Edmond J. Butler's pro-family speech reflects their uneasiness about the perceived breakdown of family life among the poor:

The family is the unit of the state; hence in order that our governmental or social life should attain to that perfection which is necessary for our common welfare it is essentially necessary that the families composing it should possess normal characteristics imposed by nature. In the aggregate of our families lies the strength or weakness of our social fabric, according as they conform to or lack these necessary qualifications. [3]

Clearly, the "necessary qualifications" and the "normal characteristics imposed by nature" to which Butler referred were understood to be the demonstrated conformance to proper gender roles by men and women in the family. As President Roosevelt had confirmed, "The prime duty of the man

is to work, to be the breadwinner..." He was to assume authority over the family and take responsibility for its support. "[T]he prime duty of the woman is to be the mother, the housewife." She was to embody the emotional and moral fullness of the family and provide the overall care of the home.[4] Reform measures were to boost this system of values and behaviors that, in this view, gave the family its form and its strength. Mary Richmond compelled her audience of social workers to examine every case they dealt with "with reference to this central fact. Ask yourselves, Have we made this man a better or worse husband and father? Have we made this woman a better or worse wife and mother?"[5]

Reformers, then, approached the problem of poverty and its related social ills via the structure of the family and its established gender determinants. Their profound commitment to these developing ideals of family, especially motherhood and home life, furnished the lens through which they viewed all social problems. Because of this perspective, beginning around the turn of the century, the problem of dependent and delinquent children was seen in a new light. Rather than viewing the individual child as the problem and establishing institutions for rehabilitation, reformers began to look carefully into the home-life of the dependent child for possible causes of neglect and delinquency. Out of this perspective came the family-

based twentieth century solution of mothers' pensions.

The "Discovery" of the Fatherless Family

According to welfare activists investigating the home life of the poor, a predominating defect in families of dependent children emerged from the information recorded by public and private relief agencies, children's institutions, juvenile courts, the census bureaus--and other such agencies where the plight of the poor was registered. Looking at the evidence as a whole, there appeared to be a significant category of needy mothers with children who were without the support of a male breadwinner. Poor mothers deprived of their "natural" breadwinners, activists reasoned, were being robbed of the necessary support without which they could not properly care for their children. "Fatherless families," they explained, were a significant cause of the problems of delinquency, neglect, and dependency then plaguing public and charitable relief agencies.

Lack of a breadwinner not only meant that these families were without a provider, their means of support, But also, and very importantly, according to views of the family during this period, they were without a proper head, a father. Children from fatherless families suffered from a lack of paternal influence in their lives, the lack of a father's authority and control. Regardless of how valiantly

such families struggled to survive, they were seen as defective, deficient, and in need of a guiding hand.

Given the new focus on the family composition of dependency cases, reformers were concerned about the extent and the nature of the problem of fatherless families. They investigated the home situations of needy children in institutions, foster homes, and day nurseries, and sought to educate their colleagues and the public to the phenomenon of fatherless children. This, it turns out, was the background work for the later mothers' pensions movement. The problem was found to be so pervasive and so harmful to family life and child development, that a coalition of activists pushed for a program that would assist poor, dependent mothers in rearing the nation's next generation.

The numbers alone of dependent children in institutions and foster homes suggested that "normal" family dynamics among the poor were being sorely tested. Pointing to the size of the problem in front of a national audience of social workers at the 1909 White House Conference on the Care of Dependent Children, President Roosevelt spoke of the 93,000 dependent children in orphanages and children's homes, the 50,000 more in foster homes, and the 25,000 children in juvenile delinquent institutions.[6] According to the research conducted by various social workers and organizations, a disturbing portion of these dependent and

wayward youths were from families lacking a male head.

Reformers committed to the idea of keeping poor families together were appalled to find that many institutionalized children came from homes where one or both parents were still living.[7] In a study of children's institutions in New York, Michigan, Minnesota, and St. Louis, no more than one fifth of the institution population were full orphans, with both parents dead. About 40% of the children overall were half-orphans, meaning one parent remained. The data showed that in Michigan and Minnesota, the majority of children residing in the institutions had both parents still living. In many of these cases, however, the parents did not live together and a single mother was likely to be the sole responsible parent. In this particular study, no less than 80% of the cases had at least one parent living.[8]

The child in the institution, concluded reformers, reflected less a problem of orphanage than a problem of parents being unable (or unwilling) to meet their responsibilities. And, more often than not, the children were removed from homes where the mother was left alone to support the family. In a 1910 study that focused on the problem of deserting fathers in Georgia, for example, it was determined that of all the children's institutions investigated in Georgia, 37% of the children residing there



came from homes with recreant or deserting fathers.[9] And, in Linda Gordon's recent study of cases from the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, she found that from 1890-1920, children were more likely to be separated from single mother than from two parent homes (64% and 54% respectively).[10]

Several studies of the time showed that the fatherless children of widows filled the institutions and foster homes. In her 1914 study entitled Mothers Who Must Earn, Katherine Anthony explained that:

Most of those who had put their children away were widows with more children than they could possibly support. They had kept at home the younger children, spreading a small income out thinking to make it nourish as many as possible, and had put the older ones in institutions.[11]

In a report from a special New York commission to study relief for widowed mothers, the Commission found that, in New York State, 2,716 children of 1,483 widowed mothers were committed to institutions for destitution only, and that 933 children of 489 widows were in institutions because of the mother's illness.[12] A similar commission was set up in Massachusetts to study the support of dependent children of widowed mothers. The Commission requested all of the important child-helping agencies in the state to report the causes of separation of children from their widowed mothers for the first six months of 1912. Of the 754 cases returned,

economic causes, announced the Commission, determined the separation in a clear majority (56.7%).

Charity organization records, too, showed that fatherless families comprised a significant portion of cases treated. In the year 1911, for instance, United Charities of Chicago dispersed a budget of \$300,000 to 5,000 dependent mothers: 3,018 widows, 1,163 deserted wives, 172 divorced and 121 unmarried mothers.[14] According to MSPCC records, in the single year 1890, 70.6% of the neglect cases handled by the charity were from families with single female heads.[15]

Juvenile Court records also revealed that a considerable number of delinquent children came from homes where the father was either absent, disabled, or idle, forcing the mother to work, leaving the children unsupervised. In a 1910 study of the Chicago Juvenile Court, the data showed that 23% of the boys and 25% of the girls were fatherless. And though, as the researcher suggested, the statistics probably underrepresented the number of mothers of delinquent children who worked, of the 89 working mothers for whom there was information, "46 were widows, 5 had been deserted, 4 were separated from their husbands, 17 were the wives of men who had low wages, and the husbands of 13 others were unemployed." [16] Clearly, the children of women who could not count on a male breadwinner for support were children likely to come up before the juvenile court.

Statistics from the day nurseries (private day care facilities established primarily for poor mothers who worked) also pointed to the number of mothers who were without the stable support of a breadwinner. The figures from a survey conducted by the Association of Day Nurseries in New York exposed the family conditions of poor children in need of day time supervision. The study found that 17% of their participating mothers were widows; 20% were deserted wives; 27% reported that their husbands were sick; 17% had husbands whose income was insufficient; 13% of the husbands only worked part time; and 6% had husbands who were unemployed.[17]

Reformers' preoccupation with fatherless families is better understood in light of the formidable incidents of disease and industrial accidents that killed or incapacitated many a male breadwinner at the turn of the century. Pneumonia, tuberculosis, periodic outbursts of typhus, typhoid fever, and small pox took the lives of many, especially those in the bigger cities.[18] In Mary Richmond's study of 985 widows, for instance, tuberculosis was the cause of 29% of their husbands' deaths.[19]

The lack of safety precautions in industry, too, took its toll on industrial workers. Of Richmond's study, for example, 9% of the husbands died in industrial accidents.[20] The death rate of railroad trainmen in 1900 was 1% per year,

and of coalminers, the death rate was 1% per two years. One out of every five husbands nationwide died from these or similar causes before the age of 45.[2] Industrial accidents also produced permanently or temporarily disabled husbands. Taking the state of Illinois as one example, 15,000 husbands were disabled by industrial accidents between the middle of 1907 and the end of 1912.[22]

Agitators for health and safety regulations in industry heightened public awareness of these social problems. The link between the conditions in these areas of urban life and their affects on child welfare was not missed among progressive reformers. Judge Ben Lindsey of the Denver Juvenile Court lamented:

We have all read the amazing statistics in recent years, showing the awful sacrifice of health, strength, intelligence and life in certain of the great industries of this nation, and its neglected and congested centers. And we stand aghast to find it is increasing rather than decreasing. I firmly believe it is responsible for not less than a million dependent and delinquent children in every generation of childhood.[23]

The growing recognition among reformers of the problem of male desertion and non-support took its place beside industrial ills in contributing to the alarm over fatherless families. The replies to a 1911 questionnaire sent to charitable societies across the country showed 9% of the charities thought the problem of family desertion was

decreasing, 27% thought it stationary, while 64% declared it increasing.[24] In a Pittsburgh study brought up before the NCCC, of the 1,149 poor families visited over a nine month period, 42% were in distress because the man of the household had either run away or squandered his earnings in idleness.[25] A report on conditions in Atlanta, Georgia showed that of the children in day nurseries, a total of 15,573 were neglected or deserted by their fathers, and of the 75 children in the City Orphanage, 26 were deserted. The same presenter of these statistics reported that 65 of the 186 children at the Orphans Home of North Georgia were deserted or abandoned by their fathers and that one third of the 99 inmates of the County Reformatory came from deserted homes.[26]

Reformers all agreed that desertion was a terribly difficult situation to treat since the father was alive and presumably able-bodied and capable of taking his place as responsible head of the family but was clearly wayward in his duties. To punish him, however, often incurred more suffering on his children and their mother; to aid the mother, on the other hand, in effect rewarded his behavior. Regardless of treatment, reformers were certain of the impact of the deserter on his family and society. Minnie F. Low summed up these sentiments:

The recreant husband and father is the cause of much suffering and distress, of untold heartaches and despair, of family disintegration and collapse, of demoralization and delinquency in the young. Family life is the foundation of the state, and the man who deliberately and maliciously disrupts it, is a menace to society, dangerous to its well-being.[27]

### The Mothers' Pensions Movement: Coalition for Reform

Studies such as these on desertion, juvenile court children, and widowed mothers reflected the targeted areas ripe for reform and provided the statistical and scientific basis from which to launch a mothers' pensions campaign. The issue, identified variously as the fatherless family, the dependent mother, or the dependent child, captured the attention of the Progressive Era social welfare community. Leaders in the field were invited to formally address this concern at the momentous White House Conference on the Care of Dependent Children, hosted by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1909. Though there were members of the Conference who expressed disapproval of public rather than private aid for needy mothers, the unanimous resolution pertaining to relief for deserving dependent mothers spurred the drive for public funds for mothers without breadwinners:

...children of parents of worthy character, suffering from temporary misfortune and children of reasonably efficient and deserving mothers who are without support of the normal breadwinner, should, as a rule, be kept with their parents, such aid being given as may be

necessary to maintain suitable homes for the rearing of children... Except in unusual circumstances, the home should not be broken up for reasons of poverty, but only for considerations of inefficiency or immorality.[28]

The greatest opposition to mothers' pensions came from the private charity establishment, who disdained the notion of public outdoor relief and who feared the encroachment of the state into their territory.[29] They also objected to relieving needy women, possibly, because they believed doing so would encourage single women heads of households.[30]

The heartiest support for public funds for mothers came from women's organizations, particularly the National Congress of Mothers (later to become the PTA). Made up of white, middle class, married, and poorly educated women, the Congress of Mothers was a highly mobilized organization whose mission was to preserve and promote the female-guarded values of home, family, and moral purity. With active chapters in every state, the Congress presented and lobbied for mothers' pensions bills at state houses, placed members on special commissions studying proposed statutes, and held study classes on mothers' pensions. At virtually every national convention after 1911, the Congress passed a mothers' pensions resolution.[31]

Not surprisingly, the Congress of Mothers was also actively involved in the crusade against the threat of race

suicide among whites. The mothers' pensions reform, they claimed, offered the perfect solution to the disturbing trend of lower birth rates while providing the appropriate recognition to the service of motherhood. In a piece to Child Welfare, the magazine of the Congress of Mothers, a contributor wrote:

The decline in the birth rate may force the time when the state will give honorable recognition to motherhood. It is inevitable that the day will come when the supreme service of the mothers of the nation will be publicly honored, when the strongest claim that a woman can make to social distinction will be the number of healthy children she has contributed to its citizenship. When that time comes every mother will have the pledge of the state that her reward for bearing children shall not be a struggle against poverty, but that every child she brings into the world will have a guarantee against want until it has arrived at an age when it can earn its own living.[32]

Other women's groups also joined the movement. The more militant, predominantly female, National Consumers League with Florence Kelley at its head advocated public pensions. Many prominent settlement house workers, too, such as Jane Addams, Lillian Wald, and Mary Simkhovitch favored mothers' pensions as did Chicago social activists Julia Lathrop, the Abbott sisters, and Sophinisba Breckinridge.[33] The Women's Suffrage League actively supported a mothers' pensions bill in Virginia and the Women's Christian Temperance Union was instrumental in gaining support for the



cause in Tennessee.[34]

As Mark Leff, a student of this "Consensus for Reform" points out, no particular individual or group was vital to the movement.[35] Rather, it received support from a wide array of people including President Roosevelt, Louis Brandeis, and Robert Lafollett and engaged the efforts of juvenile court judges like E.E. Porterfield of Kansas City, Merritt Pinckney from Chicago, and Ben Lindsey of Denver. A multitude of reformers as well contributed articles to various journals expressing sympathy for needy mothers and pressing for public subsidy.[36]

Still more activists endorsed mothers' pensions legislation because it helped further other reforms. Calling for more public responsibility for social problems, proponents of social insurance, for instance, claimed that these pensions would "prove at least a good entering wedge for those social and industrial-insurance laws that must come in time as the public is educated to their necessity." [37] The struggle for mothers' pensions legislation, claimed another supporter, would do the work of investigating and publicly exposing the human tragedies left in the wake of needless industrial accidents:

In the final analysis, the contribution of this movement to social evolution will be seen to have been to make the truth public. Knowing the causes of premature and abnormal widowhood and disability leaves only one step to be taken towards prevention - and then we shall have instead of pensions for widows, longer lives for fathers.[38]

Support for mothers' pensions was also drawn from reform projects further afield. A mothers' aid program, it was claimed, could help stem the problems associated with the "lodger evil." There was great concern over the immoral implications of the widely-used practice of families taking in male boarders.[39] Receiving lodgers and boarders was a common way for poor women heads of households to bring in some sorely needed money. However, cautioned one Massachusetts report, "it must often be true that the receiving of male lodgers and boarders is the first step towards immorality." The report, which recommended that Massachusetts adopt a mothers' aid law, suggested that public assistance to dependent mothers would remove the economic basis for this morally questionable method of generating income.[40]

#### The Wage-Earning Mother and the Home

The mothers' pensions idea forwarded many progressive ideals, but the chief reason why reformers moved to support a mothers' pensions program was because it enabled

poor women to properly perform their social duty as mother. There was much discussion during the years around the turn of the century about the harm done to the home by the working mother and reformers were clear about how that effected the social problems of delinquency and neglect. Single mothers forced to go out to work for the family support, claimed social workers, necessarily neglected their children and could not possibly provide the nurturant, caring environment so important to child development. "No money earned in the United States," Florence Kelley told her audience of social workers, "costs so dear, dollar for dollar, as the money earned by the mothers of young children." [41] A subsidy allowing dependent mothers to stay home, argued proponents of mothers' aid, would prevent the damage done to society by the mother who must earn.

Advocates of mothers' pensions claimed that women who worked did so only because they could not rely on a male breadwinner for support. If relieved from the burden of support, proponents argued, these women would normally remain at home with their children. Several published reports on married women wage-earners presented the case that married women only worked in the face of adverse circumstances. A study conducted in 1908 by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics investigated a group of 140 wives and widows employed in the glass industry. Of these women, 94 were

widows, deserted wives, or married to permanently disabled men. Seventeen were married to men earning minimum wages in uncertain employment; thirteen were married to drunkards or loafers; ten of the husbands were not working due to sickness or injury. Only six were married to skilled, regularly employed laborers.[42]

The New York Commission on the Relief for Widowed Mothers drew on Katharine Anthony's work, Mothers Who Must Earn, to claim that mothers worked primarily out of grim necessity. From Anthony's study of 370 wage-earning mothers, the New York Commission quoted:

All of the circumstances emphasize the fact that the primary reason why the women worked was not moral or racial, but economic. They were the wives and widows of underemployed and underpaid men and were compelled to contribute to the family whatever earning value their labor possessed.[43]

The reference in Anthony's statement to the suggested "racial" motivation behind women working was a challenge to a current opinion held by some charity workers that women of foreign ethnic origins worked because it was part of their ethnic heritage.[44] Anthony, however, dismissed this view and maintained "they had become wage-earners in obedience to the most primitive of maternal instincts. Their children would have suffered seriously had they failed or refused to earn." [45]

According to mothers' pensions advocates, although it was admirable for women to try to fulfill both the

mothering and breadwinning functions for their families, it was not desirable. The type of work available to these women, they argued, was physically straining, involved long hours, was underpaid, and often demoralizing. All these factors bore on the ability of the mother to properly care and provide for her children.

Many of the women who would be included in a mothers' pensions program of government aid were unskilled and in mainly low paying, laborious occupations. The majority worked as cleaners of public buildings, washwomen, or seamstresses.[46] Not only were these occupations damaging to the mother's health--the back-breaking and knee-destroying positions required of charwomen, for example--but also, charged reformers, they were the most undignifying of jobs. "The dishevelled working clothes and the humble posture of the scrubbers," noted Katharine Anthony, "seem to deprive them of any measure of human dignity." [47]

The long hours of work and the substandard wages characteristic of these unskilled jobs were further reasons given by reformers to subsidize these mothers and allow them to stay at home;

Serious as are the conditions in these forms of unskilled, unregulated labor, they become an even more serious menace to the state in view of the fact that the mother is forced out of the home at the very hours when her children need her most, and is so worn out by her daily struggle that she is unable, even

when she is at home to give them the proper care and attention.[48]

In one study it was determined that 67% of the weekly women wage-earners worked eight hours or more a day.[49] Adding to those hours the travel time to and from work, these mothers, warned concerned social workers, were absent from the home a great deal of the day. For many mothers, night work, such as cleaning offices, enabled them to be with their children by day; but, pointed out observers, it inevitably meant exhaustion and overwork, and ultimately, poor mothering when combined with the necessary household tasks at home.

Moreover, the substandard wages of women workers in these occupations, claimed proponents, inhibited them from being adequate breadwinners. As one reformer noted, superintendents of office buildings were able to hire six cleaning women for the price of three men.[50] Better to subsidize these mothers, argued mothers' pensions advocates, and let them perform their highest service at home, rather than send them out to work where they did not belong anyway: "She earns much more by the contribution of her devotion to her children," advised one charity leader, "than by her small commercial competence, often at the expense of personal caliber and sometimes at the expense of personal purity." [51]

The specific nature of the impact on the home of these breadwinning mothers was of great concern to social

workers. "Almost invariably," claimed two social investigators, "the fact that the mother goes out to work means that the home is cheerless and untidy..."[52] It was a central tenet of progressive child welfare reform that the child be assured of a healthy home environment, surrounded by constant love and guidance. Where the father was gone and the mother was forced to earn, it was believed that children were deprived of this essential home-life ingredient. Since money was the more tangible and immediately necessary side of the equation, and love and guidance the more elusive side, children suffered from the lack of the latter. As Sophonisba Breckinridge explained:

...what often happens is that the unsupported mother undertakes to carry the double burden of earning the support and of performing the domestic duties which, under our present habits of thinking, are inextricably intertwined with her maternal duties. When any one of these phases of her work must be neglected it is the side of nurture and personal care which is slighted, since the dollars and cents with which to pay for the daily meal and the weekly rent must be found, while the discipline and coddling can, of course, be deferred.[53]

That the working mother was a significant cause of neglect and delinquency was a primary theme that ran through Breckinridge and Abbott's monumental work, The Delinquent Child and the Home. With the mother away working, "the children have every opportunity to stay away from school and live that life of the streets which is at once so alluring

and so demoralizing."[54] The co-authors go on to demonstrate through a long record of cases "how direct is the line of descent from the working mother to the delinquent child."[55] Children of night-workers had an even greater risk of going astray:

Exposed, too, to special and great temptations are the children of scrubwomen who clean offices at night. For as the streets grow more fascinating when the lights along "the avenue" make the cheap theater and low resort more attractive, and the darkness casts its spell of excitement everywhere, so, in a greater degree, do the dangers of the street multiply for the boy or girl who wanders there.[56]

A government program of mothers' pensions would contribute not only to combatting the problem of delinquency in general, claimed proponents, but to the problem of immorality among young girls in particular. A 1914 Massachusetts investigation of the white slave traffic was used to suggest that the working mother was a possible cause of prostitution:

Practically all prostitutes come from families in adverse circumstances. In 29 percent of the families, the mother was obliged to work out of the home during the upbringing. In 30 per cent either one or both parents had died or the family had been broken up by separation or divorce before the child was twelve years old.[57]

Again, the logic went that if mothers received a pension that enabled them not to work, young girls would not become prostitutes. As Sophinisba Breckinridge summed up the



benefits of allowing the mother to stay home:

Undoubtedly, in many instances, the ability to keep the mother at home both as natural caretaker of the family and as the agent of the court would mean success of the boys and of girls where her absence, her consequent neglect, and her fatigue, result in obvious failure.[58]

Thus, on the basis of all such claims about the detrimental effects to the home of the working mother, mothers' pensions advocates could only conclude that government aid in this area would substantially further the progress of child welfare. "The child's right to a healthy and normal family life," proclaimed Judge Julian Mack in his 1912 presidential address to the NCCC,

is to be met, not merely by forbidding child labor and by destroying the pest-breeding hovels of the slums, but also by maintaining the integrity of the family through making it possible for the widowed mother to remain at home and devote herself to the nurture and training of her children.[59]

Opponents of mothers' aid, however, charged that the pension system, by drawing women back into the home, would obstruct progress towards industrial gains for women. They felt the campaign for mothers' pensions was misdirected, and believed that the strategy most beneficial to women in the long run was the fight for industrial protections for women. The strongest statement on this came from Marie Van Kleeck who argued that relief measures represented only a temporary solution and the more pressing goal for reformers should be

to secure industrial training and real living wages for women:

We are facing an economic trend which is much deeper than any discussion of relief measures, and that economic trend is drawing women into these labor markets, whether they be married women, widows or young girls, and the idea of subsidizing women workers is standing in the way of putting through an important problem of industrial progress.

When we talk about public relief we are simply talking about a transitory service measure, but what we have to do is to get some other service, a program of industrial education, a trade union organization or something to take its place, in the direction of collective bargaining and recognition of the right of women to be trained for their work and a demand on industry that it pay living wages to women workers.[60]

Other opponents, too, disagreed with the emphasis in mothers' pensions on keeping women from working. Mary Richmond, a leading charity figure and staunch opponent of mothers' aid, warned:

We must be careful to put no further barriers in the way of social workers who are striving to give all women a more dignified, better organized, and better safeguarded industrial status. Six mothers' pensions bills on my desk would put up such a barrier for they prohibit the beneficiary from work outside the home altogether or for more than one day a week, but do not provide complete support.[64]

Furthermore, claimed Richmond, the mothers themselves did not take well to being required to stay in the home. "[I]n some of our cities," she continued, "especially their foreign quarters, the mothers who have always been wage earners

resent enforced home-keeping and grow very restless under the nervous strain of it." [61]

Another leader of the opposition, Edward Devine, concurred with Richmond's assessment:

To the mothers themselves it seems natural, inevitable, and appropriate that they should work. Most of them have worked before marriage, many of them have worked during their married life, and that as widows they should earn a living for themselves and children is simply in the course of nature, an obvious and unquestionable obligation. What they feel is that the mother should work. [63]

Whatever arguments were mounted by the opposition in the attempt to secure satisfactory conditions for women in industry or to merely retain their marginal place there, they were met with direct resistance. The New York Commission charged with studying the advisability of a mothers' pensions scheme for New York was particularly clear and forceful about the social values that state legislation should promote. The Commission stated in no uncertain terms that industrial regulation on behalf of women workers was in all respects subordinate to legislation that would protect homelife:

We have seen that work inside [referring to industrial homework] and outside of the home robs the children of that mother love that is so essential to their development and for which no institution can offer a substitute. Adequate homelife is the only preventive for juvenile delinquency, and all work looking toward the betterment of society, whether public or private, must endeavor to keep the mother, who is a proper guardian, at home as a

mother, rather than to improve the conditions under which she might work outside as a wage-earner. (Emphasis mine)[64]

In this view, motherhood and wage-earning were mutually exclusive sets of obligations. Given the duty of rearing, training, and socializing children, mothers could not earn support at the same time. "Morally, mentally, and physically children must be educated," explained one reformer,

That education chiefly falls to the mother, and therefore it has come about with us that the mother is not expected to become the breadwinner. When anything happens to the breadwinner, if the mother is capable, it seems to be perfectly clear that it is our business, either as a state or as individuals, to see that she has material support.[65]

Since motherhood was defined as necessarily a full-time, all-encompassing--in effect a personified endeavor--any activity that mitigated against the contact hours between mother and child detracted from that perfect relationship. In reformers' logic, mother love and the home were one and the same: "The mother being alive," said one reformer, offering in his view the obvious, "the home is ready without any need to look elsewhere. The home is there." [66] Sending the mother away to work, or preoccupying her with the drudge and exhaustion of industrial homework, necessarily broke down the family life deemed so crucial to the child's development. For the sake of the child, argued reformers, the first object of state legislation should be to keep the mother available

to the child by keeping her at home.[67] Thus, some of the most ardent defenders of mothers' pensions were forced on principle to oppose the drive for better conditions for women industrial workers.

Children at Her Apron Strings: Engendering Maternal Responsibility

To the community of social welfare activists interested in re-asserting a particular family order among the poor, a mothers' pensions program would function in another way to re-establish women's place in the family. Not only would mothers' pensions enable women to stay home and care for their children, they would also oblige errant mothers to do so. At the same time that the campaign for mothers' pensions was a movement to provide the child with a home, it was also a movement in reaction to the practice of poor, seemingly irresponsible women giving up their children to institutions. Requiring the mother to raise the child was best not only for the child, claimed reformers, but, equally important, it kept women in their proper relation to children and the family.

Typically, as described in my first chapter, over the latter part of the nineteenth century, many poor women were forced for economic reasons to shelter their children in institutions, sometimes temporarily, sometimes permanently.

Too, it was the policy of help-agencies and child-saving organizations to remove poor children from what was determined to be substandard homes or "deficient" home environments, and sequester them in protective institutions. Apologists claimed that the institutional life, ordered along the principles of the "natural" home, "presided over by a christian gentleman and lady, who, as husband and wife, hold the relation of father and mother toward the youth of the household," provided a more wholesome environment for children than life in the slums.[68]

However, by the early years of the first decade of the twentieth century, the outcry against the institutional solution to poverty was hard felt. "Such care can be no real substitute for the good mother," objected one observer. "No institution can take her place." [69] As the values of home and mother love became firmly lodged in reform thought, the solution of mothers' pensions more aptly addressed the concerns of child welfare activists. Give the money to the mother herself, demanded reformers, and let her raise the child rather than pay to board the child under the public roof.

The issue of keeping children with a poor but otherwise deserving mother was the focal point of the White House Conference. In his opening remarks at the Conference, President Roosevelt drew attention to the all too familiar

plight of the widow in poverty:

One of the most distressing cases [is] where the father has died, where the breadwinner has gone, where the mother would like to keep the child, but simply lacks the earning capacity. Surely in such a case the goal toward which we should strive is to help that mother so that she can keep her own home and keep the child in it; that is the best thing possible to be done for that child.[70]

Kindness to the mother was certainly one reason advanced for not removing children from impoverished homes:

When a mother is dependent and has a family, she feels that dependency keenly, and it seems to me an outrage to add to that sorrow by taking away the only bright light in her life - her children.[74]

But far more typical were the arguments pertaining to the positive effects on the parents' behavior of the presence of children in the home. Children, it was believed, evoked in parents a deep sense of moral obligation that served to keep the family together and striving. "We realize that the best place for the child is its own home," advised a charity leader at the White House Conference. "It is best for the child," he continued, "it gives strength and ambition to the parents, it raises the morals and responsibilities of parents to children, and forms a world of love and fellowship." [72]

At the same time, concurred a fellow conferee,

The separation of children by permanent decree from the company of delinquent parents may often remove the strongest aid to their reformation, and such an alternative should never be resorted to when avoidance is possible.[73]

When applied to dependent mothers, this principle was deemed even more important. Given the uneasiness pervading society about the decline of women's commitment to the family and the home, a reform like mothers' pensions that held women to their mothering responsibilities was seen as a most socially constructive measure. Rather than removing children from homes of dependent mothers, argued proponents, encourage in women their maternal responsibilities.

So strong was the reaction against institution-  
alization, that even the removal of children from the home for simple day care was viewed as a threat to women's obligation to mother. Pioneers of the day nursery idea managed to provide day care for poor women, but had to do so amidst a storm of controversy.[74] Committed to the ideal of the home-centered environment for child development, many reformers charged that the day nursery, likened to a day institution, was no substitute for the natural mother and the home. Day nursery proponents were forced to justify the service as a temporary expedient, which, when economic and social conditions improved, would no longer be necessary. Reassuring a doubtful public, Dr. Lee Frankel told the 1905 Conference of the National Federation of Day Nurseries that, "The Day Nursery is only makeshift. The great issue is the family, and the proper place for development is the home. Any system that permits the breaking up of home surroundings



must be makeshift." [75]

A brief look at the day nursery discussion is illustrative of the prevailing fear that women, especially women of the poorer immigrant districts, often wanted to abandon their familial responsibilities. The option of the day nursery, it was charged, might further encourage women to shirk their duties towards their children. Because they "freed" mothers from their primary responsibilities towards their children, day nurseries were accused of loosening family ties, making mothers lazy and irresponsible, encouraging women to work, and reducing the father's sense of responsibility for being the sole breadwinner. [76]

Referring particularly to the dangers deriving from the day nursery idea, Edward Devine cautioned that the effect on the family and its constitutive web of responsibilities must be kept in mind whenever performing reform work:

Here, as in other forms of child-saving work a snare lies before those who hope 'to save the child,' disregarding the other members of the family. The family must be considered as a whole. Neither the child nor the adult can be dealt with separately. The managers of the day nursery who are actuated by a desire to be of real service to the families whose children are received must in each instance face the question as to whether the family is a proper one to receive this kind of assistance - whether the result in this particular instance is likely on the whole to be beneficial... [77]

The family member to whom most of these cautionary statements referred was the mother. The suspicion that many

women worked in order to have the burden of child care lifted was behind the speech of Miss M.H. Burgess. As she outlined the proper cases where in her opinion day nursery care was justifiable, she clarified the following:

I wish to exclude from my definition those cases where the mother works from a mere whim or the desire to have a little more in the way of dress or even money saved, or for any reason wishes to shirk the care of her children. This is to be condemned when it causes her to neglect her home duties. The mother's place is at home.[78]

Though Mr. Rosenau was among those who supported the day nursery, he too revealed his suspicion of the poor mother. He framed his argument in terms of the destitute mother's weak sense of responsibility for her children. Comparing it to the children's institution, which totally absolved the woman from all responsibility for her children, Rosenau asserted that the day nursery was acceptable because it made it clear to the mother that she remained the principle carer:

For, orphanages almost invariably relieve the mother from all responsibilities for her offspring, while the creche, being a day home, merely takes care of the children only during the day, and only when the mother is at work. The children go home with the mother after the day's work, and she understands that she is in no sense relieved from their care.[79]

According to progressive reformers, it was important for social policy to move in directions that helped combat the forces that pulled poor families apart, not create new

forces. Many feared that the day nursery was one more social evil that loosened the ties between mother and child, one more avenue that carried women away from the home. Mothers' pensions, on the other hand, both allowed the mother to keep her children and required that she care for them.

#### Children at Her Apron Strings: Saving Female Morality

Keeping children beside their mothers also had a positive effect on women's moral behavior. If poor children were allowed to stay with their mothers rather than be taken from them, reformers maintained, the mother's will to lead a righteous life would be preserved. The love of the child, it was believed, was often the mother's only proper stay in the world.[80]

The concern in the mothers' pensions debates over immorality was partially fed by the uproar over the prevalence of prostitution in the cities and partially influenced by the native middle class view that foreign-born women were more inclined to yield to sexual temptation.[81] The view from the white middle class held that ethnic women, living in the crowded urban settings, were made of weaker moral fiber than the women who guarded the native born homes. Although social workers had daily interactions with poor families in their own homes and undoubtedly witnessed the courage and strength that dwelt there, they too were touched

by the predominant ethnocentric views towards the immigrants.

Hence, in working with the immigrant poor, reformers feared for the dependent, unattached mothers whose likely fate, in their view, was a downward spiral into immorality. Proponents of mothers' pensions argued that taking children away from these mothers was the first step towards the mother's moral plunge. Judge Pinckney passionately expressed this before his audience of social activists:

And then after you as judge, have broken up the family circle and have distributed all the little ones among the appropriate institutions, there still remains the mother. What of her? She is mentally and physically and morally sound. She is the victim of circumstances and conditions for which society, and not she, is responsible. What is to become of her? Heartbroken, alone, her children widely separated, not only from her but from each other, weakened now, mentally and physically and morally, by the ruthless tearing of maternal heart-strings, where will her footsteps tend to lead this pitiable object of a state's ingratitude? Will she survive the test and continue to lead an honest, upright life, or will she drift along the line of least resistance, ending in the brothel or in the madhouse.?[82]

Children in the home, claimed social workers, were an effective control on women's behavior. As Mr. James Jackson put it: "When we take her children from a mother simply because of poverty, we subject her to temptations which frequently she is not able to bear. The child, in many instances, is the anchor that holds the woman to a good life...."[83]

Juvenile court Judge Julian Mack, an avid supporter of mothers' pensions, delivered a similar message:

...if we stop that mother from giving away her child,... if she is supplied with the money to keep her child in her own home, it is in that case particularly that we are going to save not only the child, but the mother too - possibly from a life of immorality.[84]

Clearly, a program that allowed the mother to keep her children and required that she stay at home to care for them kept the woman responsible in her social duty and moral in her social conduct. In important ways, claimed mothers' pensions advocates, the mothers' aid program stepped in to enforce what were held to be the fundamental American values reflected in the family. Since the family, expressed in its web of obligations and duties, was the foundation of society and the protector of its moral order, every effort was made toward encouraging mothering in women.

#### Mothers' Pensions and Its Impact on the Male Breadwinner

It must be remembered here that the staggering numbers of poor immigrants settling in the urban centers were the focus of reform attention. In the view of middle class, native born reformers, immigrant family life was being torn apart by the demands and hardships deriving from the

industrial order. The object of much social reform work during the Progressive Era was to make it possible for these struggling foreigners to adjust to American values and habits. Key to these values and habits, instructed visitors to the poor, was a particular quality of mothering in the women and a strong sense of being the sole provider and responsible head of the family in the men.

Activists in the mothers' pensions campaign were part of this larger reform effort to encourage a socially desirable gender structure among the poor. It was as important to keep men in their social role as proper family head and supporter as it was to ensure that women mothered and cared for the home. On the one hand, the mothers' pensions reform was in perfect accord with this social construct. As far as the preferred gender role for women went, it thoroughly endorsed the current notion of motherhood and it discouraged mothers from entering the realm of the breadwinner. On the other hand, some activists questioned the effect of mothers' pensions on the man in society and his responsibility to support the family. Did state subsidy of motherhood undermine the man's authority and duty to support?

The profession of social work warned of what happened when mothers crossed the boundary into breadwinning.

Woman breadwinners, as a social entity, posed a threat to the male incentive to be the sole provider of the family. As well, they signified self-reliance in women which violated the sacred interdependent triad of mother, father, child--the cornerstone of the family.[85] Common to both theory and practice was the view that a breadwinning mother threatened familial and therefore social stability. Mary Conynton in her manual for charity workers, How to Help, addressed the issue of whether or not the charitable worker should find work for the wife of the unemployed husband. She cautioned that in a household where the wife becomes the breadwinner, the "husband's sense of responsibility for his family is steadily weakened." [86] Warning the social worker of the likely consequences, she continued,

His failure to find work may be wholly involuntary, but it is dangerously probable that the edge will be taken off his desire to do so by the knowledge that his wife can supply his deficiencies. If he is disposed to be idle or intemperate or of a wandering disposition, the direct result of giving work to the woman is to encourage these tendencies and to hasten the time when he may become either a steady burden on his family or that "bete noir" of the modern charity worker, the deserting husband.[87]

Mary White Ovington reported a similar finding in her social work among "The Negro" in New York. The fact that the woman of the Negro household was often a wage-earner, Ovington explained, accounted for much of the breaking up of

families. "The economic independence of the woman and the frequent absence from the home of the man lead to desertions and separations," she said.[88] Not only was the husband's sense of responsibility steadily weakened by the wife's economic independence; her reliance on a male head of the family also declined: "The attractive woman who is able to care for herself may grow to resent the presence of a husband whose support she does not need." Ovington concluded, "That there are many separated families among the poorer class of colored people all charitable workers know, and the woman's economic independence coupled with the man's inability to earn a good wage does something to promote such a condition." [89]

Although there may have been temporary circumstances that warranted a mother's wage-earning, members of the charity and social work establishment were in agreement that women should not take the place of the man in the family. The mothers' pensions movement must be seen in this context. Not only were mothers prohibited from working in order to stay home with their children, but, in general, reformers resisted the idea of an economically independent woman-head-of-household. Though dependent mothers were supplied with a minimum income through a mothers' pensions plan, they remained firmly tied to the private sphere of the home, dependent on a source outside of themselves for support.



As opposed to the day nursery idea, which was designed "to make it easier for the woman of the normal family to become a breadwinner," but which in effect was "building up family life with two fingers and tearing it down with eight,"[90] mothers' pensions allied itself with the approved rules of gender.

The fact that mothers' pensions was promoted as a reliable, long term form of aid to mothers, however, led some opponents to fear that the program would create permanent female-headed families.[91] Though the actual implementation of mothers' pensions showed it clearly to be a meager program, often degrading in its effects and hardly a stable source of income (the subject of the next chapter), the intent of idealistic, optimistic reformers was for mothers' pensions to be a dignified partnership with the state. Aid was to be rendered as a right--"as justice due mothers whose work in rearing their children is work for the state as much as that of the soldier who is paid by the state for his services on the battlefield." [92] It was to be long term and reliable:

There is no question here of immediate relief, or even of temporary aid; the assistance must continue on often for years. Moreover, it must be of such an amount and character that the widow may rely upon it as an asset in her struggle to bring up her fatherless children.[93]

This understanding of the relationship between the mother and

her source of aid suggested to some observers that the state was establishing women heads of families. Women-headed families, in reform opinion, were necessarily defective, broken households, that trespassed on the sovereign form of the male-headed family. To say the least, it was hard for some activists to support such a program.

There arose too, the serious problem of whether subsidizing motherhood would in fact undermine the man's role in society and his incentive to support his family. Although many states chose to consider only widows eligible for state support, the discussion often focused on whether or not to aid deserted or illegitimate mothers. Admittedly, the children of non-widowed mothers were equally deserving, but reformers especially connected questions of eligibility to the gender conduct of the father in these situations. The state could not risk rewarding behavior that contributed, in reformers' view, to the breakdown in gender specific family relations.

The case of pensioning the widow usually stirred little antagonism, since there could be no blame or moral slur attached to her situation. Even here, however, there was some doubt cast on how a widow's pension might effect the man's duty to provide. Apparently, it was felt that a man's duty to his family was so complete that even at death he was held responsible for his family's welfare. Providing a

pension for his widow, cautioned some observers, may reduce his efforts during his lifetime to save for his family after he was gone. The Boston Overseers of the Poor raised this problem: "It may possibly have a tendency to encourage dependence by lessening the feeling of the necessity for saving for support of wife and family after the man's death." [94]

The more heated discussions, however, arose over questions of whether or not to pension deserted or illegitimate mothers. "To pension desertion or illegitimacy would, undoubtedly, have the effect of a premium upon these crimes against society," reported the New York Commission studying relief to widows. "It is a great deal more difficult," it continued, "to determine the worthiness of such mothers than of the widow, and a great deal more dangerous for the State to attempt relief on any large scale." [95] The problems associated with determining the worthiness of such cases were based in gender considerations. To pension the deserted wife would condone the recreant father's anti-social behavior and, as well, would offer the mother the means by which to refuse his return. To pension the illegitimate mother would relieve the father of all responsibilities for support and reward the mother for her immoral behavior.

To some reformers, aiding the deserted wife would serve to completely break down the fabric of family life,

undermining the very principles for which it stood. "It is absurd," protested Mary Richmond, "to go into a home and do for it what the legal and recognized head...had deliberately shirked...and then to suppose...that you have not interfered between man and wife." [96]

Gertrude Vaile illustrated this point with a case in Denver, Colorado of a deserted mother with six children who was granted a \$40 a month pension. Though the father changed his course and wanted to come back, the mother refused to have him. "She naturally prefers a \$40 pension to a 40 cent man," explained the relief officer. [97] However reasonable a response this was, Vaile raised the question: "Shall we simply give mothers their choice of having their children cared for by their fathers or by the public, if the fathers are not conveniently available?" [98] Like Richmond, Vaile understood the mutual responsibilities of man and woman to be the glue that held the family together. The option of state support for the deserted mother undermined the motivation and the strengths in family relations:

But there are probably hundreds of mothers in this land who are held to their husbands through trying years...only by the necessity of their support for young children - and yet being held[,] do somehow develop that patience and mutual consideration and self-sacrifice that eventually saves to the children the care and affection of both parents. Shall a pension policy cut the bonds and lose this to the home? [99]

Moreover, pensioning deserted mothers, it was

claimed, would encourage irresponsible fathers to up and leave their families, since they knew the state would support their children. Cynics who opposed an earlier "Destitute Mothers Bill" in New York dubbed it the "Shiftless Fathers Bill" for this reason.[100]

Though there was some support behind pensioning mothers of illegitimate children, it was for the most part discouraged--again, not because the children were less deserving, but because the parents violated the socially approved gender code of conduct.[101] To do so would unfairly, but necessarily associate the upstanding dependent mothers with these immoral, degraded mothers. As a consensus of Massachusetts reformers held,

The presumption is against aiding such mothers under this law, since to do so would offend the moral feeling of respectable mothers, and would thus do violence to a traditional sentiment that is inseparable from a respect for virtue.[102]

Nor should the state be associated with the support of immoral behavior: "The state must leave no room for doubt that it holds fast by the moral capital of the race." [103]

The complex nature of desertion and illegitimate mother cases caused many in the mothers' pensions movement to shy away from state involvement with these anti-social behaviors. Aiding a dependent mother with a living-but-absent breadwinner simply presented too serious a problem for

a single purpose program to handle. Achieving the proper balance of gender relations in the family was a tricky business in "abnormal" cases. Regrettably, the children of these families may suffer, the logic went, but the risk of the state taking a hand in disturbing rather than boosting the social order caused reformers to postpone solving this social puzzle. "The claim of the children of such families may, perhaps, be as real and as needy of attention at the present time," replied a reform commission,

but the proper method of fulfilling the obligation of the state is too delicate a task to assume without much deeper study and more careful consideration than the time and money at our command permitted.[104]

Wrestling with the same problem of aiding deserving but deserted women, Gertrude Vaile took comfort in knowing that private charities existed and could help these kinds of families without drawing the state into undesirable territory. She expressed a common concern among reformers about the impact of state policy on society-wide familial relations:

What private benevolence does for individual needs, can have but small and slow effect upon social and industrial conditions, but what government does as a public policy to which the whole citizenry can turn at any time as to a right, must immediately have tremendous and far-reaching effects upon social conditions. (Emphasis mine) [104]

If the guaranteed, legal option of public support was held out to any mother in the United States, "as to a

right," the fundamental dynamics between man and woman, the web of obligations and responsibilities, the relations of power and authority--in short, the gender system--would surrender its foundation. Activists involved in the mothers' pensions movement certainly understood this predicament, which is why far and away, the largest group of mothers pensioned were widows. A nationwide survey in 1931 showed that 82% of mothers receiving a pension were widows. Aiding widows did not come between the preferred relationship between men and women.

### Conclusion

The mothers' pensions debates brought to a head many of the underlying issues concerning Progressive Era reformers. The policy solution of mothers' aid, at its grandest, was meant to restore the nation's commitment to its most basic institution, the family. Speaking of the first Illinois pensions law, Judge Merrit Pinckney praised the values it embodied: "The motherhood it honors, the child it protects, the home it preserves are worthy objects of a people's solicitude and of a state's benefactions.[106]

The intentions of proponents of the mothers' pensions idea were for the most part sincere and honorable. However, it is the framework from which they approached the social problems of the age that deserves our scrutiny.

Clearly, it is important for a study of mothers' pensions to recognize the positive value of state support of women with children, and certainly, given the options of single mothers at the turn of the century, these pensions offered some security in an otherwise very insecure world. But relief is never unattached from a system of social values and institutions and it is those things which we must examine.

Importantly, many reformers were outraged at the kinds of lives led and hardships endured by poor dependent mothers. Most of the social workers out in the field visiting poor homes were women. They deeply sympathized and identified with their poorer sisters, who were struggling to keep their families together and provide decent homes for their children. They recognized the problems faced by these impoverished mothers to be problems specific to women in their role as mothers. Marching under the banner for social justice, social workers pushed for a system of mothers' aid on behalf of their sisters.

However, their framework, based on a particular arrangement of gender relations, forced them to advocate a severely circumscribed role for women. Their commitment to a certain ideal of motherhood and the home and to the preservation of man's social role as breadwinner served to confine women to the home and limit their interests to their children's welfare. The program of day nurseries which



maintained the assumption that women could both work and parent their children failed because this assumption violated the sanctity of motherhood. Given the predominant set of social values, any policy option that widened women's scope of interests and activities was ruled out because of its damaging effect on the preferred gender roles in the family.

Originating within the white middle class, the mothers' pensions movement was stamped with its particular class and race biases as well. The prevailing ideas of motherhood and the home were developed and refined by the white middle class intellegensia, social workers, journalists, novelists, and so on. Social reformers integrated these concepts into their work during a period of tremendous influx of immigrants and profound social and economic change. The foreign ways of the impoverished masses of immigrants at the turn of the century indeed affronted middle class Americans' sense of decency, privacy, and order. The mothers' pensions movement reflected the native born Americans' desire to temper and in many ways control the seemingly loose habits of the incoming poor.

This is not to say that the particular ideals of motherhood and the home promoted by white middle class reformers were totally foreign to poor immigrant families. To a large extent, they shared and embraced these values. However, the ideals of motherhood and the home obviously were

modified by the poor to fit the particular experiences and situations of lower class life in the industrial centers of America. The variations, adaptations, or "negotiations" as Frank Parkin puts it, of middle class values found in poor neighborhoods were what likely disturbed visiting reformers and activated their fears about family decline.[107] In middle class eyes, for instance, the wage-earning mother was seen as a threat to family stability, rather than as a workable, necessary solution to family support.

Anxieties about the disintegration of American family life pervaded the country as trends of higher divorce rates, women moving into the workforce, and the rise of prostitution became publicized. The mothers' pensions movement voiced many of those fears and sought to re-establish the proper place for women. As a public statement, claimed supporters, mothers' pensions represented a proud state endorsement of motherhood and the home. As a practice, mothers' pensions would keep woman out of the economically exploitative and morally corruptive world of work, while demanding that she perform her social duty of mother in the home.

The mothers' pensions movement, then, was built from the concerns of white middle class reformers who worked among the poor and were sincerely motivated by social justice, but who at the same time felt the order and control of pre-

industrial life slipping away. They targeted the family as the site of reform and identified women as its pivotal character. Though much of the reform work was done in the name of child welfare, clearly the larger purposes of gender conformity and social order were the ultimate goals of reform activity.

Having explored the intent and social values behind this radically new direction in relief policy, in the next chapter we turn to the role of the state in the mothers' pensions movement. We will look at the development of the legal rationale for state involvement in family affairs and at the nature and extent of state power there by examining the various individual state mothers' pensions statutes. Such an analysis will provide us with a better understanding of how the state participated in structuring particular gender relations.

## C H A P T E R I V

### MOTHERHOOD AND THE STATE: THE LAWS OF THE MOTHERS' PENSIONS PROGRAM

#### Introduction

Reformers in the early mothers' pensions movement carved out a child welfare policy intended to alleviate the problems of "fatherless families." Left without a breadwinner, mothers of these families were forced either to give up their children to institutions or leave the children unsupervised and neglected during the day when they left the home to work. An allowance paid to these women, argued mothers' aid supporters, would enable the poor mothers to stay home and properly care for the nation's young.

The mothers' pensions program, however, went far beyond a simple subsidy for poor mothers without breadwinners. Over the course of creating mothers' pensions laws and procedures, the state developed and fine-tuned a particular definition of motherhood for mothers in need to emulate. Law-makers hoped the program would function to foster and reward proper maternal behavior and discourage (or in some cases punish) anti-social, anti-family behavior. Conditions for aid were intended to guide the conduct of not only those women actually in receipt of the pension, but also all women whose lives were anywhere within the reach of

poverty. The Massachusetts State Board of Charity articulated the purposes of the policy:

Since the people who may benefit by this act will inevitably adapt their lives to the conditions under which they can receive help, [t]he policies...will have an educational influence, not only on the beneficiaries, but on all those families that are on the border line of need.[1]

Black mothers, however, were not included in the purview of mothers' pensions. Shamefully few black women were granted aid not only because of the personal prejudices of program administrators, but also because of the political climate surrounding mothers' pensions. In order to win legislative support for this experimental program, leaders in mothers' pensions administration strategized that only the most "respectable" and "high-type" women should be granted aid. Just as immoral women, if included, were thought to degrade the program, so too would black recipient women lower the standards and alienate the intended "higher quality" mothers in need. Consequently, black women--as a category--were virtually excluded from this chance at public assistance.

Earlier chapters surveyed the historical period of the Progressive Era and its urgent campaigns to save the family. The mothers' pensions movement, I argued, was a central element in activists' efforts to preserve the family

ideal. As well, we saw how policy advisors' ideas on the proper relations of motherhood matured during the mothers' pensions debates as reformers clarified their notions of the moral, responsible, nurturant mother. I now turn in chapters 4 and 5 to mothers' pensions laws and administration. Here, I investigate how the state not only reflected and defined certain ideals of gender relations, but also moved to enforce them. Chapter 4 deals explicitly with the different legal aspects of mothers' pensions and Chapter 5 delves into the methods of administration.

Mothers' pensions had its legal and administrative roots in juvenile court legislation. The juvenile court laid the original groundwork for the state to legitimately enter the private realm of family relations. Thus, to understand how the state got into the business of regulating motherhood, I set the context for the next two chapters in a brief look at the juvenile court system.

There are three major themes developed in this chapter. The first investigates how mothers' pensions laws expressed preferred gender relations and served to strengthen the state's role in enforcing them. Eligibility laws in particular articulated specific behavioral criteria of a "fit mother" and as well contained implications for proper male behavior. As another instance, work requirements in the laws also outlined particular gender prescriptions by setting

stringent limits on the kind and amount of wage work mothers engaged in.

The second major theme in this chapter deals with the power relations between mothers and the state. Though the mothers' pensions program was often put forth as a partnership between the two parties, the state maintained crucial leverage over the mothers and used it to enforce certain standards of behavior. A look into different provisions in the laws and court pronouncements on the subject shows that a mother's pension was a privilege granted or withdrawn at "the pleasure of public authorities." The state clearly dictated the terms under which this "partnership" occurred, while the mother had virtually no legal guarantees to her pension.

The third theme points out the critical role of local authorities and community prejudices in enforcing particular standards of motherhood. State level policy set the limits of what constituted a fit mother, but the lower level administrators, who daily interpreted the upper level directives and translated them into judgements on individual cases, further refined those standards to reflect area values and prejudices. My study shows that local implementation practices of the mothers' pensions laws made the program even more restrictive and moralistic than state laws had intended.

Evidence of legally sanctioned invasion of the

private lives of mothers in the program runs as a sub-theme through these two chapters and helps substantiate the argument of state patriarchal domination. The fact that the state legitimately moved into the regulation of motherhood, when the liberal tradition normally placed it outside of private relations, raises some interesting questions about the power relations between women and the state. State regulation of the private lives of mothers pushes it to the center of the patriarchal processes and structures that limit life choices and options for women. These next two chapters explore when and how the state entered the private realm to regulate motherhood, setting the historical background for a more contemporary analysis to be developed in the final chapter.

### The Juvenile Court System

As we saw in earlier chapters, the turn of the century witnessed a meteoric rise in the importance society placed on the child. The child was the promise of the future, claimed reformers, and society should ensure the proper care and nurturance of its future citizens. Prior to 1899 and the passage of the first Juvenile Court Act, however, the state had little say in the rearing of the nation's children. What supervision and control there was exerted over the wayward and dependent children of the lower



and immigrant classes was largely left up to private charitable organizations.

Near the close of the nineteenth century, however, child welfare advocates became increasingly disillusioned with the effectiveness of private charity efforts. Mounting social disorder related to problems of industrialization, urbanization, and immigration pointed up the limitations of the uncoordinated and financially restricted private agencies. More and more, activists looked to the state as protector of the nation's dependent children.

Before 1899, the state had no more legal influence over the social development of poor, misguided children than to send them to state homes of correction or industrial schools.[2] Often, juveniles were crowded into the county jails with the "adult criminals, the harlots, and the drunkards...being daily contaminated physically and morally." [3] Frustration was building in reform circles over this situation and the state's inattention to young delinquents. Reformers criticized the cold-hearted treatment of children which helped neither to prevent nor reform the bad ways of youth. The state made no efforts to find out the history of the child offender, "his heredity, his environment, his associations... [It] put but one question, 'Has he committed this crime?'" [4] The punishment, complained reformers, was given in proportion to the severity

of the crime, not according to the needs of the offender.

The neglect of the child by the state was the issue addressed by the 1899 Illinois act entitled the "Law for the Care of Dependent, Neglected, and Delinquent Children," more commonly known as the Juvenile Court Act. This act officially declared all children within its borders to be treated as wards of the state and legally recognized the state's responsibility for their care and protection.[5] The act set up a special juvenile court in order to differentiate both the procedures and the proceedings of children's cases from those defining the criminal court.[6]

The philosophy behind the juvenile court reflected the growing attention in the reform community to the social and psychological components of child delinquency. Acting as the child's protector rather than its enemy, the state under juvenile court proceedings was to concern itself with the child's problematic background or difficult home environment with the purpose of helping rather than punishing the offender. In cases brought before the juvenile court, the state stood in relation to children "not as a power demanding vindication or reparation," explained Judge Merritt Pinckney of the Chicago juvenile court, "but as a sorrowing parent anxious to find out and remove all the causes of delinquency and to reform the child." [7]

Illinois passed the first Juvenile Court Act.

Shortly thereafter, juvenile courts modeled after Chicago's were established in Wisconsin (1901), New York (1901), Ohio (1902), Maryland (1902), and Colorado (1903). By 1928, all but two states had set up a juvenile court system.[8]

Standing on the legal doctrine of "parens patriae," a principle derived from English chancery law, the state gained new license in juvenile cases as the "higher or ultimate parent" of its neglected and erring children.[9] Though parens patriae operated in the resolution of children's cases throughout the nineteenth century, the Juvenile Court Act revived the doctrine and expanded its purview. Judges were granted considerable powers in their role as ultimate guardians. In addition to their earlier single option of committing wayward children to state institutions, judges were given the authority to transfer custody to a proper guardian, or--and this was the sine qua non of the juvenile court system--the judge could return a child to its own home subject to the visitation and supervision of a probation officer.[10]

Probation, as Judge Julian Mack of the Chicago court said, was "the foundation stone of juvenile court legislation."[11] It was also the beginning of formal, legitimate state involvement in setting and enforcing particular standards of child care. The probation system enabled the state to carry out its role as ultimate parent of

the child. It was the method by which the state investigated the child's home environment and then intervened into family government to actively influence the child's surroundings.

"It is the personal influence of the probation officer," explained Homer Folks,

going into the child's home, studying the surroundings and influences that are shaping the child's career, discovering the processes which have been exercising an unwholesome influence, and, so far as possible, remedying these conditions - this is the very essence of the probation system... [The probation officer] is not a dispassionate observer but an active influence.[12]

In its newly expressed duty as guardian, the state donned an unmistakably paternalistic cloak. The image projected by the courts of the ideal probation staff and the task before them was that of "discreet persons of good character," bestowing wisdom and enlightened guidance upon "the weak, the ignorant, the greedy, the degraded parent." [13] In one observer's view, probation officers went into their client's home and taught them "lessons of cleanliness and decency, of truth and integrity." [14] The officer, stated another authority, acted as

an elder brother, offering encouragement and helpful advice as to how the home may be improved and the environment of the children and of the family generally sweetened and purified.[15]

The state was the kindly, loving parent exercising the "tender solicitude and care over its neglected, dependent

wards."[16]

Clearly, the state via the probation system secured the right to dig deep into the personal lives of its client families for the purpose of rooting out what it determined to be unhealthy influences on the child. "The work must be carried into the home and the heart of the boy and of his people," advised Charles Heuisler.[17] To truly help the child and fulfill the duty of guardian, court advocates instructed that the state must be involved with every aspect of the child's moral and physical development. As part of the child's environment, parents, too, were a target of the treatment. "The voice of pity and compassion," continued Heuisler,

must reach him in his home, and reach his parents also in his home. Down to the very depths of that home must it go. The probation system must recognize that in the moral as in the material, the rain and the sunshine of pity and compassion are for the roots of the plant as well as its flowers.[18]

Nothing in the child's surroundings escaped the scrutiny of the parent state: "Not the offense alone must pass under the observation of the court," Heuisler warned his audience,

"but the temptation, the lack of opportunity, the bad examples, all the inducing causes of the offense must be discovered and when discovered rooted out."[19]

Great powers, then, to influence the home life of poor, often immigrant families were handed to the court through the Juvenile Court Act. For the most part, advocates

of the juvenile court and probation system were absorbed in creating a kindly, protective, benevolent state and overlooked the potential for coercion in their project.

So convinced were juvenile court enthusiasts of the benevolence and wisdom of state authority that they appeared unmoved by the blatant control probation officers assumed over family life: "Threats may be necessary in some instances," explained one official,

to enforce the learning of the lessons that [the probation officer] teaches, but whether by threats or cajolery, by appealing to their fear of the law or by rousing the ambition that lies latent in each human soul, he teaches the lesson and transforms the entire family into individuals which the state need never again hesitate to own as citizens.[20]

Judge Julian Mack was also quite frank in his statement on the legitimate use of state force in asserting its interest over the parent's in a child's welfare:

Very often...what [parents] need, more than anything else, is kindly assistance and intelligent counsel, though sometimes there is necessity of forcing upon their attention the fact that the interest of the child is now a matter of concern to the state, and that the community and not the parent has the power to determine when the interests of the child are being ignored or inadequately protected. (Emphasis mine.)[21]

There was no question, however, in the court's mind, but that this use of force, cajolery, or kindly persuasion in "influencing" family life was for the good of the family. As Judge Mack advised,

[We must] make that family feel and believe that it is not the power and authority of the state trying to dictate and compel, but it is the loving care of the state trying to guide, educate, and develop that is brought in to help the parent.[22]

Juvenile court and the probation system, then, marked the full scale entrance of the state into the affairs and behaviors of poor families. The procedures introduced there were the foundations for mothers' pensions legislation. The justification of *parens patriae* continued into the administration of mothers' pensions and allowed the state to involve itself in defining and monitoring the proper relations of motherhood.

### The Evolution of the Mothers' Pensions Program

The mothers' pensions program naturally evolved out of the juvenile court system. A program of assistance enabling poor mothers to keep their children rather than relinquish them to institutions, mothers' pensions was originally a simple extension of the powers of the court in its role as *parens patriae*. Judge Merritt Pinckney explained:

We like to think of the state as "*parens patriae*" - the ultimate parent of all children. Upon this basic principle the state has fashioned a law and a Court for the child. The state must not stop here. Its duty is to enact and enforce such laws as will raise the standard of its citizenship. When bad

conditions over which the individual has no control, stand in the way of this result, it is the duty of the state to remove them. The Funds to Parents Act is the next step forward. Its proper enforcement means normal, healthy, well-trained, properly clothed and comfortably housed children guarded and protected at home by a mother's care and love, to the end that they become intelligent, industrious, and respectable citizens and add to the industrial prosperity of the community.[23]

As the authority responsible for the care of delinquent children, the juvenile court, claimed reformers, had rescued many wayward youths accused of petty crimes from the terrible fate of the institution, and had restored them to a supervised home environment. As guardian also of the state's poor dependent and neglected children, the juvenile court was targeted as the appropriate agency to save another group of defenseless children from life in the dreaded institution--children of destitute mothers forced to give up their children for reasons of poverty alone.

State money was available to support the child of a destitute mother in an institution, activists protested, but no provisions existed to enable a poor but otherwise capable mother to maintain her household and raise her children in her own home. If a mother refused to part with her children, her only recourse was to look to the irregular and inadequate assistance offered through public outdoor relief. In Chicago, for instance, outdoor relief at this time existed only in kind, and "no rents are paid, so that, even if



regularly given, the relief consists of baskets of groceries with occasional allowances of coal and of shoes for school children." [24] The state provided no protection or security to children whose only crime was their mother's poverty.

Originally called the "Funds to Parents Act," the first mothers' pensions law consisted of one amending paragraph to the Illinois Juvenile Court law. The 1911 Illinois Act empowered the court to give the parent or parents of dependent children the necessary financial allowance to provide for the child in its own home. It stipulated simply that:

[I]f the parent or parents of such dependent or neglected children are poor and unable to properly care for the said child but are otherwise proper guardians and it is for the welfare of such a child to remain at home, the court may enter an order finding such facts and fixing the amount of money necessary to enable the parent or parents to properly care for such child. [25]

Mothers' pensions legislation spread rapidly after this first Illinois Act. Twenty states joined the ranks by 1913. The western and mid-western states led the country as 16 of these first 20 pension laws were enacted in those states. By 1919, thirty-nine states had mothers' pensions legislation on their books. The southern states were the slowest to respond. As late as 1934, South Carolina and Georgia still did not have mothers' aid programs. [26]

Administration in the different states varied

according to when the legislation was passed and what existing state agencies were suitable to the task. On the whole, mothers' pensions was very much a local program with little coordination, direction, or oversight on the part of the state. Local financing and administration allowed programs to be tailored to area needs, but also to institute area prejudices.

Early in the movement, most programs were administered locally by the juvenile court, since it was the agency best qualified in dealing with the care of dependent children. This was the case in 20 states, most of which were in the mid-west and west.[27] In 12 other states, however, mothers' pensions were handled as part of the local poor relief system, while New York, Pennsylvania, and Rhode Island set up special county boards to administer the funds. Several other states chose already existing agencies--such as the county board of children's guardians in Indiana or the state child welfare board in Arizona--to administer mothers' aid.

Characteristically, members of these administrative boards served gratuitously, and were generally appointed by a governor, mayor, or county judge. Often the law specified that a certain portion of the board members be women. Pennsylvania's Mothers' Assistance Fund board of trustees, for example, was entirely made up of women--not less than

five, not more than seven--appointed by the governor.[28] In New York, execution of the law was entrusted to a seven-member local board of child welfare, appointed by the county judge, two of whom were to be women. Indiana's law was administered by the county board of children's guardians, a nonsalaried board of six appointed by the circuit court, all of whom must be parents and at least three of whom had to be women.[28]

The state statutes were permissive, that is they gave localities the option but did not require that programs be set up, and since programs were financed through local taxes, with some supplemental state funds, there was little incentive for local communities to fund mothers' pensions. The result was that the majority of mothers' pension programs were located in urban areas while rural areas continued to rely on the existing poor law relief. Local financing led to substantial variation in grants at both the county and state level, with the highest average monthly grants in the urban northeast (\$69.31 in Massachusetts) and the lowest grants in the rural south (\$4.33 in Arkansas).[30]

Experience slowly taught states the value of mandatory appropriation laws and state financial assistance as incentives to localities to set up programs or upgrade the standards of relief. For example, in 1915, funds in all states except California, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and

Wisconsin were paid out of the county treasury with no help from the state.[31] By 1922, 29 of the 41 states with mothers' pensions laws still derived funds from county resources alone, but in 10 states, the state shared the expenses with the locality, and in two states (Arizona and New Hampshire), the entire cost was born by the state.[32] By 1934, 14 states were paying part of the bill for carrying out the law.[33]

#### The Funds to Parents Act: Lessons Learned

The original Illinois Funds to Parents Act was a simple eight line enabling act. It was a very loosely drawn statute that gave juvenile court judges the authority to grant pensions of any size to any parent. There were no provisions in the law about the amount of the grants or the plan of administration, and very little about the eligibility requirements of the recipients--only that they be proper guardians for the children. Technically, allowances could be granted to fathers, aliens, non-residents, property owners, deserted, divorced, or illegitimate mothers. They were all eligible under this law.[34]

Immediately after the law went into effect, the juvenile court was flooded with applications for the Fund. According to one observer, the stimulation of applications was purposely done by one individual for political gain.

This person apparently launched an aggressive post card campaign, spoke to church groups, women's clubs, "or wherever opportunity offered" in order to boom the mothers' pensions program.[35] Whether the overwhelming number of applications was artificially stimulated or not, it reflected a real need of poor parents in Chicago, who were seeking relief from their economically pressed circumstances. However, it also came as an embarrassment and a hard jolt to authorities as they attempted the impossible task of administering the program. Not surprisingly, there followed a crack-down in eligibility requirements.

The Illinois law was amended in 1913 to strictly curtail the authority of the judge in granting allowances. The new law was the Aid to Mothers Law. Fathers could no longer receive grants, nor could deserted, divorced, or illegitimate mothers. Alien women, women who had lived in the county for less than three years, and women property owners were also rendered ineligible. Paring down the basic economic criteria of the original law, the new law

practically restricted the pension grants to destitute widowed mothers who had children under 14 years of age and who could prove citizenship and a residence in the county for a period of 3 years.[36]

The immediate and unfortunate consequence of the eligibility crack-down was that many families had their pensions revoked. The month before the amended law went into

effect, there were 532 families and 1,753 children benefitting from the Funds to Parents Act. Between July 1 and November 3, 1913, 263 families and 895 children were dropped from the program. Of these children, the largest number (567) ceased to receive aid because they were children of unnaturalized citizens; 103 because their mothers were deserted women; 16 because their length of residency was under the required 3 years; 7 because their mothers were divorced; and 3 because their fathers were in a house of correction.[37] Clearly this action represented a backlash against immigrants and also served as a message to deserted mothers.

Critics and sympathizers alike took careful note of the Illinois mothers' pension experiment.[38] The exceedingly broad directives of the original Funds to Parents Act had caused a heavy drain on the program's funds and, more importantly, made a mockery of the state's ability to incorporate sound social principles and scientific social work into its administration of aid. The barely circumscribed limits on eligibility and the indiscriminate support of homes of unsure moral or deserving character was an affront to the values of family and proper child development so dear to activists in child welfare. To aid a depraved, immoral home or an ill-kept home deficient in love and care, argued reformers, was a disservice to the children

living there and contributed to the spread of an unhealthy, degrading influence in the community. "Ill-trained, ill-nourished children," warned mothers' pensions activist Florence Nesbitt,

predisposed to crime and disease, growing into stunted, ineffective adulthood, are a serious liability, not an asset to society. Perpetuating homes which produce such results would be both uncharitable and unwise.[39]

For the sake of responsible social work as well as economy, mothers' pensions leaders insisted that limits had to be set on which families qualified for aid.

The lessons learned from the Chicago experience forced law-makers to reflect on the specific social objectives of mothers' aid and explicitly build them into the qualifications for eligibility. In all states, eligibility laws were refined to achieve the goal of promoting a proper home environment for children. However, given the contemporary early twentieth century definition of proper home life and the identification of "mother" with that particular scheme, law-makers found themselves primarily in the business of defining and enforcing the proper relations of motherhood.

Mothers' Pensions Eligibility Laws and  
the Definition of the Fit Mother

Quite clearly, the objective of the mothers' pensions program was to supply the poor children of the state with the positive influence and guidance that came from proper family life. However, the needs of children were not the state's only concern. The program had an important symbolic value as well. As a "family" policy, the mothers' pensions program was intended to endorse and promote particular gender relations throughout society.

Although different state laws outlined different eligibility requirements, most states minimally required the mother to be "morally, mentally, and physically fit" to rear, train, and supervise her children.[40] It is important here to further clarify the state's definition of a fit mother. As discussed in the previous chapter, motherhood was never viewed in isolation, but rather as one component of a gendered world. Motherhood functioned in relation to the social duties and obligations that society expected of men. According to the gender prescriptions of the time, "good" mothers stood in a particular socially and legally sanctioned relationship to men. A good mother was committed to the institutions of marriage and the family, and the values, roles, and mutual responsibilities those institutions



entailed. The state's view of a fit mother, then, relied as much on the status of a mother's relationship to her man as it did on her individual moral character and ability to care for her children.

Not surprisingly then, in all states, widows were the favored applicants. Their circumstances did nothing to violate the rules of obligation and responsibility that wedded the family together. During the early years of the program, the laws of California, New Jersey, Oklahoma, and St. Louis, Missouri specifically restricted aid to widows. By 1926, California and Oklahoma had extended eligibility to others beyond this boundary, but Connecticut, Maryland, Texas, and Utah joined New Jersey in limiting pensions to the preferred widowed status.[41]

Deserted or divorced women, on the other hand, suffered a tainted reputation for their failure to attain or retain the "normal" gender relations in the family. Though it was acknowledged that individual mothers in these categories could themselves quite possibly be worthy, as a rule, pensioning these wives introduced problems into the social system as a whole. Aiding such women had the severe consequence of undermining the man's duty of support and commitment to the family. "Our Widows Law does not apply to divorced women," explained a Kansas officer of the court.

First, because it would encourage divorce, a condition that gives the juvenile court one-

third of its work...Second, although divorce often relieves a man of the duty and liability to support his wife, nothing can relieve him of the duty and liability to support his child. Whether a man is divorced from his wife or not, his duty to support his minor children continues. There is no such thing as a divorce from that duty.[42]

States went to great lengths to specify the exact relations between men and women worthy of state support. The detail of the Pennsylvania ruling on divorced women reflected the rigorous attention given to the mother's relationship to her children's father. From the following conditions for aid, we can see that the state was particularly concerned with issues of the male's responsibility and obligation of support:

- a) A mother may not be assisted for her children by her husband from whom she is divorced if her husband is still living.
- b) She may be assisted in the above case if her divorced husband dies and she has not remarried.
- c) A mother is eligible to assistance for her children whose father is dead, should she remarry and secure a divorce from her second husband.[43]

In 1914, only Michigan funded divorced mothers, though the number of states making divorced women eligible for aid grew to eight by 1926.[44]

Deserted wives were viewed slightly more favorably than divorced women, presumably because desertion implied less intentionality on the part of the mother in the

dissolved relationship (although desertion was also known as the "poor man's divorce"). Deserted wives were eligible to receive allowances in 4 states in 1914 and in 20 states by 1926. There were certain restrictions in some states, however, on the length of time the father had to have been away before a pension was granted. He must have deserted for at least 3 months prior to application in Kansas and Minnesota; 6 months in North Dakota; and 1 year in South Dakota, Virginia, Wisconsin, and Wyoming. The father must have been gone for 2 years in New York and Texas and 3 years in Ohio before his family was eligible for help.[45]

Aiding unmarried mothers also had dire consequences for promoting and enforcing proper, socially sanctioned male/female relations. Not only were the fathers in these cases delinquent in their familial responsibilities, but the mothers had, by definition, demonstrated their moral unfitness. To fund such families would be to fly in the face of the socially necessary gender rules of conduct and morality. Consequently, only one state, Michigan, specifically extended aid to unmarried mothers in 1914, and only Nebraska, Tennessee, and Wisconsin made these mothers eligible over the later years.[46] For a time in Chicago, a mother with an illegitimate child could not receive a pension even for her legitimate children, because she as a person was judged morally unfit. Eventually, the ruling was changed and

pensions were granted to such families, but for the legitimate children only.[46]

Many state laws included mothers whose husbands were alive and committed to the family, but whose circumstances prevented them from bringing in the support. Women whose husbands were mentally or physically incapacitated were eligible for a pension in 24 states; those whose husbands were in a penitentiary were eligible in 22 states; and families of men who were feeble-minded or in an insane asylum were eligible in 16 states.[47]

Aside from specifying the status of the father, restrictions in state laws pertaining to women's work life were also incorporated into the definition of a fit mother and proper gender relations. At least 12 states specifically limited the conditions under which women could labor.[48] Most of these laws authorized the court to "specify," "limit," "prescribe," or "determine" the hours during which a mother could be absent from the home and the type of work she could take "without detriment to her health" or "the neglect of home and children." The Montana statute, for instance, provided that the "mother may be at times absent for work with the consent of the judge of the District Court, if he should deem it for the best interests of said child or children." [49] In Minnesota, "the court may require the mother to do such remunerative work out of the home as she

can do without detriment to her health or neglect of family; [the court] may limit the time she may be employed."[50]

As *parens patriae*, the state watched out for its wards, "surrounding children of tender years with home association, with the care and nurture of their natural protector, the mother..."[51] At the same time, however, it legislated certain very personal aspects of women's lives. Because the state had assumed the right to determine what was in the child's best interest and because the state regarded a particular model of motherhood as necessary to proper child development, women receiving pensions were required to comply with the work orders set forth by the court.

In fact, many orders of the court penetrated the private lives of pensioners. In Nebraska, for instance, the court could demand the removal of an incapacitated husband from the home should his presence be "deemed a physical or moral menace to the family."[51] Similar laws applied in Illinois, Ohio, and San Francisco.[52] In New Bedford, Massachusetts, families were required to move if their neighborhood was considered "undesirable from a moral standpoint, or if the tenements were in poor repair or below standard."[53] A social worker told of a woman in Buffalo, New York who had been asked to relocate her family and resisted, "the mother not yet having been persuaded to leave her friends and neighbors for sunshine and fresh air."[54]

Courts also legally delved into the mother's extended family and involved members in the pension business. Illinois, for instance, required relatives to contribute financially to the mother's support. If the relatives refused, the pension applicant was required to prosecute. If she refused, either her application was dismissed or her pension terminated.[55]

Other criteria used to determine a mother's moral, mental, and physical fitness also implied a certain invasion of a mother's privacy and personal perogatives. For instance, in several states recipients could not have male boarders or lodgers because, authorities reasoned, they presented an "overwhelming temptation" to the mother and had a "demoralizing influence" over the household.[56] Many states required the mother to "protect and foster" the child's religion and, in Delaware, recipient children had to show satisfactory progress in school.[57]

Furthermore, a mother's nationality or the degree of her commitment to American ways also spoke to her fitness to receive aid. Laws in Minnesota required the mother to speak English in the home, and a number of states had detailed citizenship requirements which ranged anywhere from aiding only American citizens to aiding those whose husbands had at least declared their intention to become a citizen of the United States within a period of 5 years immediately preceding their death.[58] Those states that denied aid

prior to full citizenship status could postpone a foreign family's eligibility for a crucial period of time. Becoming a naturalized citizen took anywhere from 4 months to 2 1/2 years.[59]

The mothers' pensions application process itself contained similar elements of judgement and intrusion. The act of applying for mothers' aid was often a difficult, always a tedious one. When the original law granting mothers' assistance in Pennsylvania was passed, receipt of aid depended on a widowed mother's chance learning of the program and applying before the funds ran out. Philadelphia officials feared an onslaught of applications for aid should they make the program known. As expected, when the words "Mothers' Assistance Fund" was eventually lettered on the window, the office was flooded with applicants.[60]

Once having gained entrance into the grants office, mothers were required to complete quite detailed applications. Montgomery County, New York, for instance, had an 8 page application. More typical was the shorter St. Louis form which asked for dates of birth, school progress, and work history of children; date and cause of death of disability of the father, his previous employment, and insurance; names, addresses, and economic status of relatives; and church affiliation.[61]

After the mother completed the application form, an

investigator of the court or official board proceeded to verify the facts and obtain further information on the mother's circumstances, background, and reputation in the community. All authorities agreed that a thorough and complete investigation was crucial to the success of the program.[62] Thorough investigations ensured that the "right" mothers received the state's assistance.

On the other hand, incomplete or ill-informed investigations resulted in funding ineligible, non-deserving applicants which undermined the entire purpose of the program.

"The whole purpose of the law," claimed a Michigan report,

is defeated by inadequate investigation to determine the fitness of the mother...and consequently pensions are granted to women who are living immorally, neglecting their children and contributing to their delinquency. This practice brings the whole system into disrepute.[63]

There were complaints, however, from professionals and clients alike that sometimes the investigations were mean-spirited and more closely resembled espionage than friendly verification. One observer accused some investigators of doing their job "with a brutality to which no applicant for assistance should be exposed." He found "insinuations regarding immorality" which were "based upon neither facts nor suspicions...but...by means of which [the investigator] hoped to get incriminating information." [64]

In Pittsburgh, investigators routinely visited



teachers, several relatives on both sides of the family, the minister, the family physician, the landlord, employers and other references in order to determine the mother's fitness for aid.[65] North Carolina investigators were instructed to contact not only teachers, preachers, and relatives, but also the mail carrier and "the leading man in the community." They were also urged to look into the applicants ancestry for evidence of immorality, drunkenness or insanity and her reputation before marriage.

Since judgements about a mother's fitness were based on her home-making abilities as well as her on moral character, North Carolina visitors were advised to notice if there were curtains, rugs, pictures, books, and flowers in the home. "It will be readily seen," concluded the investigator's manual, "that the pauper type of woman is not the kind intended for Mothers' Aid." [66] Boston investigators were also asked to report on the house and furnishings of applicants.[67] In Delaware, the mother's use of tobacco or any intoxicating liquers were indicators of her unfitness.[68] Pennsylvania investigators were aided by intelligence tests to help determine eligibility.[69] And, worse than one thorough investigation was two. The states of Massachusetts and Illinois required two independent investigations of the mother's home by two separate official bodies.[70]

Though it is rare to find reactions of the women applicants in social workers' recorded material, there is some evidence that mothers in need resented the intrusive character of the court investigations. "More than one mother," wrote Gertrude Vaile of the Denver program, "has decided to withdraw her application when she found that relatives and various kinds of references must be consulted." [71] Women in Chicago resisted divulging how they spent their money, complaining that "asking for such an accounting is a needless prying into their private affairs." [72]

After the investigation process was completed, the county commission appointed to the task determined whether or not to grant aid. Many states, however, required official hearings before the county court. [73] In Oregon, the law stated that the court could summon and compel the attendance of witnesses as in a criminal case. In New York, members of the local child welfare board reviewed the investigation, and aid to the mother was granted or rejected by majority vote. [74]

### The Intended Partnership

Many advocates of mothers' pensions conceived of the program as an equal "partnership between the state and the mother for the purpose of raising good citizens." [75]

Ideally, the state committed sufficient funds to enable the mother to rear the nation's young, while the mother agreed to be a fit and proper guardian of her children. In reality, however, the state maintained leverage over the mothers through a number of provisions in the laws.

Twenty state laws explicitly granted the courts the distinct power to "discontinue or modify [the allowance] at any time." Included here was the Tennessee law which specifically pointed to the judge's discretionary powers in this matter: The allowance "may be discontinued...if in the opinion of [the] judge, allowance is not properly used."(Emphasis mine) [76] Similarly, in New Jersey, the court could revoke the order if the child "is not receiving proper care." [77] Again, the judge had the authority to determine what qualified as "proper care."

Moreover, in 7 states, the mothers' pensions law included a clause recognizing the right of any taxpaying citizen to come forward and file a motion to set aside the allowance of any mother suspected of illegally or improperly receiving it. [78] Given these sorts of provisions, the mother was not left alone to fulfill her part of the agreement, but rather was constantly supervised and examined and legally held up to public scrutiny upon threat of losing her pension.

Public assistance relations have never consisted of

a partnership between recipients and the state.[79] As far as the courts were concerned, relief to the poor, including mothers' pensions, was a bounty from society, and the recipients had no legal right to that bounty. Since the 1800's, the courts had consistently held that

while there [was] a strong moral obligation resting upon organized society to relieve all poor persons in its midst standing in need, there [was] no legal obligation to do so in the absence of a statute creating it.[80]

The poor thus had no contractual rights to relief, only limited statutory claims, subject to change by the legislature.

Mothers' pensioners found that what the legislature gave, the legislature could take away. The state of Pennsylvania, for instance, had originally granted pensions to deserted mothers, but the statute was later revised limiting aid to widows or women whose husbands were permanently confined to institutions for the insane.[81] The state of Washington also withdrew aid from abandoned mothers after having earlier granted them support. The court found that granting pensions to widows but withholding them from deserted mothers

did not constitutionally grant any unequal privileges and immunities or deny them equal protection of the laws because a mother had no vested right in a pension granted her by the state which will preserve its withdrawal at the pleasure of the public authorities.[82]

Vested rights can never grow out of gratuitous favor. The Fourteenth Amendment offered no protection to these mothers, because it applied only to rights sounding in contract or rights that become vested under some rule of the common law, or to a statute which partakes of the nature of a contract.[83] In case there were any lingering doubts about the rights of poor mothers, the court added that:

[T]he state may care for its indigent and poor in any manner it pleases. It is wholly within the discretion of the legislature. That body may provide that certain classes may be cared for by regular allowance, while others receive intermittent allowances. No individual or class of individuals can acquire a right to be cared for because the state is under no legal obligation to care for its poor at all. Such relief as it does provide is legally in the nature of a largesse, which may be discontinued at the legislative will.[84]

This was no partnership. Moreover, the state sought to utilize its advantage to enforce a particular model of motherhood. With a specific middle class standard of motherhood in mind, with certain ideas about morality, cleanliness, and child rearing, state policy-makers planned to use mothers' pensions as a means of assimilating foreign mothers and educating lower class native mothers to the gender prescriptions embodied in their idea of the "normal" family.

Administrators of mothers' aid were acutely aware of and lauded the manipulative function of the program. "The public authorities can make adequate relief a powerful lever

to lift and keep mothers to a high standard of home care," announced the Massachusetts Board of Charity.

If we grant the aid to any woman whose care of her children will just pass muster, we throw away a chance to make these women improve. If, on the contrary, we make relief under this law conditional on a fairly high standard of home care, we shall find that the mothers will rise to this standard.[85]

The Director of the Minnesota State Children's Bureau also registered his desire to see the law reach its potential as an active social tool to promote "normal" family relations:

I hope we shall be able...to bring home to the judges of the juvenile courts of our State the fact that they have here a means of great power...if they will use it in the development of family life...[86]

With few limits on its legal powers, then, and ultimate confidence in its ability to do good, the state expanded its authority over the guardianship of children to include control over the relations of motherhood. To the extent that states enforced their laws and eligibility requirements, the mothers' aid scheme produced the desired effects. As the only hope for many poor women of keeping their families together, the mothers' pensions program shaped the ambitions and goals of the population of needy mothers according to its definition of fitness. In this way, even though mothers' pensioners were few, the program had a controlling effect out of all proportion to its size.

## Local Authorities' Interpretations of the Fit Mother

The actual determination by local judges of who did and who did not receive the valued pension grant played as vital a role in promoting a particular definition of fit mother as did eligibility laws. State eligibility laws outlined the limits of what kind of mother in the state's view was deserving of a mothers' pension. Within those limits, local judges authorized to grant pensions further defined the standard of "fit mother." Because programs were locally financed and administered, local authorities were under no necessary, legal obligation to grant pensions to divorced, deserted, or unmarried mothers even though the state law may have permitted it. Administratively, they created their own "sub-policy" on what type of mothers in the community to aid.

Moreover, judges exercised great discretion in defining the "unfit" mother and removing mothers of this description from the rolls. The concept of the unfit mother was only implied in state level policy. However, local level rulings that expelled unfit mothers from the rolls made the concept a reality and an effective tool for control. Consequently, the local level of mothers' pensions policy made its own imprint on the program and created results that were not at all pre-determined by state level laws.

Local mothers' pensions administrators were under a

certain amount of community pressure to grant assistance only to the "high-type," upstanding mother. Since mothers' pensions was an experimental idea in public relief, administrators had to demonstrate through the families it pensioned the value that the state placed on fit motherhood. To attract taxpayers' and legislators' support for the program, taxpayers had to see that public funds supported only the respectable, outstanding mothers. "North Carolina communities," explained a social worker from there,

...regard receiving of Mothers' Aid as a special privilege whereby the mother is set apart by the state, so to speak, as a partner in rearing good citizens.[87]

Should a mother fall into disrepute, she continued, the community expected administrators to remove her immediately from the public's support:

Any lapse on her part into extra marital sex relationships is not only severely censured, but it is expected that she will automatically be discontinued from receiving Mothers' Aid.[88]

The roles must be kept "clean."

Relatedly, it was important to aid only the most respectable, high-type mothers in order to distinguish the program from ordinary poor relief. To gain credence (and thus support) as a program that sponsored and honored motherhood, home, and the child, mothers' aid had to separate itself and its clients from the pauperizing, degrading



practices of public relief. It was crucial to the proper functioning of the program that the public, the mothers, and the state understood this as a special form of aid. Mothers' pensions "should be considered fundamentally different from charity," advanced a leader in mothers' assistance. "It should be regarded as a compensation, something given for a definite service performed." [89] Because of the mothers' value as caretaker of their children, claimed another, "the relation established between them and the state [is] a professional status..." not to be confused with the degrading status accorded the recipient of ordinary public assistance. [90]

Furthermore, unless this critical distinction between poor relief and mothers' pensions was maintained, the sought-after high-type mothers would refuse to participate. "Many times," reported an investigator,

some quiet, self contained mother has refused to discuss her affairs until she has come to realize that the worker did not represent charity, but the interests of the State. Then her attitude entirely changed. [91]

Another social worker told of similar findings:

[I]n many parts of the State the mothers would disdain to receive poor relief. There is a distinct feeling that mothers' assistance is honorable and that it is payment for service. [92]

San Francisco set up a system that perhaps most clearly gave distinction to the high-type mothers. In 1913,

the city created a separate widows pension bureau, apart from the juvenile court system which aided the more "inferior" type mothers. Of the 223 cases who had been receiving aid through the juvenile court, only 109, or 48.9%, passed the grade to be admitted under the new widows pension bureau. The other 114 were retained by the juvenile court, because the mothers either were not citizens, or maintained improper homes, or were deserted, remarried, or self-supporting.[93]

Widows aided under San Francisco's widows pension bureau truly were the "gilt-edged widows." Women admitted to this exclusive program were regarded as responsible, mature individuals capable of administering their own affairs. In fact, administrators felt that imposing advice and guidance upon these women would cause them to suffer indignity. Mary Bogue, the leading defender of close, vigilant supervision from Pennsylvania, could hardly swallow the firm San Francisco policy of non-interference. She reported:

The mothers retained under the bureau's supervision were those who seemed capable enough to make their own plans. Doubtless, they would have profited by further guidance in regard to health, education, recreation and employment; but the bureau held that for the sake of preserving individual liberty and initiative,...the mothers should be free to manage their households in their own way without close follow-up, however friendly. According to this interpretation, as long as the mothers conformed to the regulations, any case work would be impertinence unless the mother expressed a desire for it.[94]

On the other hand, a San Francisco mother who

appeared to need "careful supervision in order to guarantee adequate home life for her children" was handled by the juvenile court system. There, the case was committed to one of the three child-caring agencies that cooperated with the court and the family was supervised and visited regularly.[95] This class of women, as opposed to their gilt-edged sisters, received the more common paternalistic--in a sense infantilizing--treatment that the majority of pensioners across the country received.

Figures of who was aided in different localities around the country reflected a shared opinion that widows were the most respectable, deserving category of mother. Though most states legally extended aid beyond the "widows only" category, the greatest number of mothers pensioned were widows. The following figures show the small proportion of divorced, deserted, and unmarried mothers aided relative to widows and the discrimination practiced against them nationwide. The imbalance of these figures represents the impact of local authorities' interpretation of state eligibility laws.

In Chicago, under the first Illinois Funds to Parents Act, there were virtually no legal restrictions on who could receive aid. However, 83% of the families funded in 1912 were headed by widows. In 11% of the families, the father was mentally or physically handicapped,

in only 5% was the mother a deserted wife, and only one divorced woman was on the rolls.[96] Colorado laws, too, were very liberal, stipulating that aid could be given to any parent or other person designated by the court. Yet 62% of the recipients in 1913 were widows, but a comparatively large portion, 31%, were deserted wives.[97] Similarly, Hamilton County, Ohio records from 1914 showed that 75% of its funded mothers were widows, while 19% were wives of disabled husbands, and the remaining, slight 6% of the recipients were deserted wives.[98]

A 1923 survey of several localities reported that 85% of Denver's 73 pensioned mothers were widows, while only 2 recipient mothers were divorced and 2 were deserted.[99] The Minneapolis records showed that 59% of the 207 aided families were headed by widows, 32% had mentally or physically incapacitated fathers, only 5% of the cases were deserted mothers, and in 4% of the families the husband was in prison. The law did not allow for aiding divorced or unmarried mothers. In Boston, also, the largest funded category of recipients were widows at 50%, and families with incapacitated fathers received the second largest portion at 39%. Deserted women accounted for only 8% of the recipients. No divorced women were receiving aid, although the statute did not explicitly forbid it. As well, the study reported, Haverhill, Massachusetts and Westchester County, New York

allocated most funds to widows, 76% and 89% respectively. Twenty of Westchester County's 283 families were aided because the father was incapacitated and only 9 of the total aided were deserted mothers. One recipient family's status was reported as "separated," an unusual category. Neither Haverhill nor Westchester County reported funding any divorced mothers.

The Wisconsin statute specifically permitted granting aid to divorced and deserted women, but in 1921, only 4% of the 3,065 women aided statewide were divorced, and a meager 9% were deserted. Seventy-four percent were widowed.[100] Rhode Island also legally extended aid to divorced, separated, or deserted mothers, although only 11 out of 223 mothers funded in 1924 were from these three categories. Widows, on the other hand, accounted for 89% of the cases.[101] Michigan, from the start, led the other states in its liberal eligibility requirements.[102] It was the first state to permit grants to both divorced and unmarried mothers, but apparently localities did not choose to take advantage of this authority. In 1934, 175 out of 2,000 Michigan mothers pensioners, or a tiny 8%, were divorced women and only 25 mothers (1.2%) were unmarried. Again, widows were the largest category, representing 61% of the recipients, deserted wives representing another 16%. The remaining 12% of the grants went to families whose fathers

were either imprisoned or incapacitated.[103]

In a nationwide survey conducted in 1931, an astounding 82% of the 60,119 families receiving aid were headed by widows.[104] States with the highest percentages included Connecticut, which reported aid to widows at 100%; Pennsylvania at 97%; Utah at 96%; Iowa at 94%; and New Hampshire at 93%. Some of the states with a lower percentage of widowed recipients were Washington (54%); Nebraska (60%); Kansas (64%); and Michigan (65%). Across the states, deserted wives accounted for a mere 5% of the mothers' aid cases; mothers with physically disabled husbands accounted for 4%; divorced women received only 2% of the grants nationwide; and the remaining 6% went to families with fathers mentally disabled or imprisoned. Only 55 of the total 60,119 cases were families headed by unmarried mothers. Michigan funded 17 of these; Nebraska funded 14; Washington, 5; Ohio, 4; Indiana, Illinois, and Maryland, 3 each; New York, Minnesota, North Dakota, West Virginia, Mississippi and Nevada each had one unmarried mother on the rolls.

Although official state policy often did not deny aid to categories of mothers who were not widows, the above figures show that local administrators rarely admitted non-widows to the rolls. Divorced, deserted, and unmarried mothers, however needy and competent, did not measure up to community standards because of their improper relations with

men. Local administration allowed authorities to make their own determinations, which often resulted in making the program more restrictive than even the state laws intended.

As well as being widows, a great deal of those aided were foreign immigrants. Mothers' pensions was an important way for the state to begin to "Americanize" the foreign elements then arriving to this country in droves. Many states had citizenship eligibility requirements in their mothers' pensions laws which served as an inducement to this population to become naturalized citizens. Once granted a pension, these families were closely supervised and encouraged to adopt American ways of life.

Careful records were kept in most areas of the country of the nativity of the mothers aided. In 1917, 66% of the recipients in Chicago's mothers' pension program were foreign born, natives of thirteen different national backgrounds. The majority of the 638 foreign born recipient mothers were Polish, followed by German, Italian, Russian, Irish, and Scandinavians. Slavs, Greeks, and Canadians were also among those funded.[105]

Forty-nine percent of Denver's 1923 mothers' pensions population were foreign born, one third of whom came from Russia.[106] The program in Minneapolis recorded 52% foreign born mothers that year, 77% of them being from Scandinavia or Russia. The St. Louis records from 1923 showed

that 40% of the mothers were foreign born, the majority being from Central Europe. Non-native Americans accounted for 67% and 66% of mothers aided in Boston and Haverhill, respectively, and foreigners accounted for 60% of the Westchester County program. Rhode Island reported in 1924 and 1927 an average of 43% foreign born mothers on the rolls.[106] At least in the large cities, then, a significant portion (between 40% and 60%) of mothers' pensioners were immigrants.

Though mothers' pensions were used to socialize foreign families and acquaint them with middle class American standards, very few localities attempted to extend these same "treatment" goals to American blacks. In a 1914 report, Cincinnati listed 4 of the 100 mothers as black and Philadelphia showed a relatively high percentage (13%) of its 1926 pensioned widows to be black.[107] Twenty-six, or only 2.7%, of the 966 mothers aided in Chicago in 1917 were black.[108] St. Louis aided one "negress" of the total 94 pensioned mothers in 1923, and a 1928 North Carolina report showed only 5 black pensioners out of a total 400.[109]

Many localities, however, mentioned no black families on the rolls at all. The only systematic nationwide study on the racial composition of mothers' pensions was made in 1931. In the localities that reported figures, 96% of the mothers were white, only 3% were Negro, and another 1%



were of other racial extraction. About half of the black families aided nationwide were from counties in Ohio and Pennsylvania.[110]

### Local Authorities' Interpretations of the Unfit Mother

The removal of mothers from the pension rolls was an important tool in enforcing a community's idea of proper motherly behavior. An accounting of the circumstances which warranted rejection or dismissal from the program sheds light on the extent to which local authorities could dictate the standards of motherhood.

The most frequent reason offered by local records for why a mother was denied aid was that the family's circumstances had changed. For instance, the mother remarried, or received money from another source and became self-supporting, the father returned home from prison or desertion, the family moved, the children came of working age, or the mother died. Of the 925 discontinued cases in North Carolina in 1934, 65% were closed for these sorts of reasons.[111] They accounted for 59% of the 1,219 cases rejected in Pennsylvania over the years 1918-1920, and 62% of some 170 stayed pensions in Chicago during 1913-1915.[112] Similarly, a good many mothers were removed from the rolls in Rhode Island for these reasons--60% in 1924 and 43% in 1930.[113] In an extensive study covering 6 states and 5

counties containing large cities, 71% of the total 7,480 cases were discontinued because family circumstances had changed.[114]

Other mothers were disqualified from aid for technical reasons. Mothers were found, for instance, not to be citizens or not to have fulfilled residency requirements, or they were disqualified as property owners. In Chicago, between 1913 and 1915, three women were removed because their marriage could not be verified and two were removed because they could not prove the death of their husbands.[115] Six Rhode Island mothers were disqualified in 1924 because it was determined that they only needed temporary relief, and two others were found to have assets above the eligibility requirements.[116] Mothers also were denied aid because of insufficient funds in the local treasury. This happened to 13% of the penisons in North Carolina and 30% of the families in Pennsylvania during one report period.[117]

A significant number of pensions were stayed, however, because authorities determined the mother to be unfit. Local records showed that women were denied aid for keeping "improper homes," for "incompetence," "immorality," "intemperance," for being "untruthful," "keeping roomers," or having an "illegitimate child." Often reasons for rejection were listed as "mother uncooperative." This could mean that the mother refused to move from an insanitary or demoralizing

neighborhood when advised to do so, or insisted on keeping male boarders, or was unwilling to prosecute relatives who were expected to make financial contributions to the mother's support.[118]

Seven women in Rhode Island were denied aid because they were not willing to give up their work at the mill.[119] Another woman in Chicago refused to take part-time work and hence lost her funding.[120] Thirteen women had their applications dismissed in Chicago because they were unable to prove their marriages. A social worker commented that these cases really belonged in the "unfit morally" category since "the court can usually find records of marriage when such records exist."[121]

In 1934, 58 mothers in Massachusetts were removed from pension rolls for being "unfit." Another 49 lost funding because they failed to conform to agency policies, 4 kept male lodgers, and 2 were disqualified for unsuitable housing.[122] Another 40 cases in Pennsylvania, 18 in Rhode Island, and 37 in Chicago were closed because the mother failed, in the authorities estimations, to act as proper guardians.[123] One hundred and sixty-nine North Carolina mothers were considered either incompetent or immoral and thus lost their pensions.[124] In a survey of records from 6 states and 5 counties, 823 mothers were discontinued because the home was found unsatisfactory or the mother proven

unfit.[125]

Thus, while the mothers' pensions program was very beneficial to those women willing to live their lives according to the rules of conduct set up by their local mothers' pensions bureau, those who did not measure up or refused to comply, met with swift removal from the rolls.

### Conclusion

The patterns and standards established by lower level administrators contributed as much to the character of the mothers' pensions program as did the more widely known state policies. To understand how a particular policy acts to shape social relations, it is crucial to look beyond official statements in state laws and into the implementation practices of the area programs. The next chapter probes further into the administrative processes of the mothers' pensions program and examines how local administrators faced the challenges and problems of implementing the state's mandate.

## C H A P T E R V

### MOTHERHOOD AND THE STATE: ADMINISTRATIVE PRACTICES OF THE MOTHERS' PENSIONS PROGRAM

#### Introduction

The administrative procedures that grew up around the mothers' pensions laws reinforced the state's purpose of promoting proper home life. Their most striking feature, however, was their intrusive and domineering quality. The state presumed unlimited access to the inner workings of families receiving pensions, and gained control over some of the families' most elemental decisions. The principles that underlay these methods set the state up as the father of the household and in this way encroached upon mothers' most basic authority in their homes.

The domineering, paternal approach to mothers' pensions social work was greatly promoted by the Progressive Era view of the state. The Progressive State was viewed as an activist, interventionist, and above all, benevolent force in the lives of its citizens.[1] As agents of the good, father state, leading social workers justified their intensive involvement in family matters in the name of the Progressive State's responsibility for child welfare. Although this approach to welfare administration came under bitter attack during the 1960's welfare rights movement, in the eyes of

early twentieth century mothers' pensions administrators, the deeper the state's involvement in the problems of the poor and the wider its boundaries of legitimate intervention, the more care and protection it could provide to those in need.

Furthermore, the social work profession during this period was "treatment" oriented. Social workers were presumed to be the "experts" on family problems and on that basis assumed an authoritative posture towards their clients. Moreover, since poor, particularly immigrant women--deprived of a "protective" husband--were viewed as morally vulnerable and physically at risk, they were thought to need a guiding, helpful hand from the state.

Thus, pensioners were the recipients of at times oppressively close supervision and investigations into their personal lives, and often endured unwanted "treatment" from do-gooder social workers. At the mercy of their case workers' judgements, mothers were forced to comply with their decisions or lose the pension.

At the same time, however, the underlying ethic of the treatment was genuinely sympathetic and caring in nature. Social workers introduced thousands of poor mothers to the public health, education, and social service systems in their communities. Undoubtedly, they used their influence to obtain better housing, special allowances, or simply to

gain access to worlds normally beyond the reach of a poor, possibly immigrant mother.

In this chapter, I detail the supervisory methods utilized in the administration of mothers' aid and the underlying principles used to defend them. I then move to a discussion of how administrators met the challenge of insufficient funds. A major frustration for leaders in mothers' pensions administration was that inadequate funds forced mothers to engage in wage-work. To them, working mothers undermined the purpose of the program. In the final section, I show how case workers' efforts to accommodate recipient women's work lives to their maternal roles served to press women further into dependency and away from a life of dignity and self-respect.

#### Paternal Guidance and Supervision: Overseeing the Pensioned Household

Through its mothers' pensions program, the state intended to stand in as father in the "unfortunate" families deprived of his influence. "His loss demands a substitute for the provision of income," explained the Philadelphia's Mothers' Assistance Fund Report of 1915,

[B]ut it demands no less a substitute for his judgement and affection and discipline as influences in the development of his children, for whose education the State assumes responsibility.[2]

Charlotte Parrish expounded upon this important

function of the state as father in the Mothers' Assistance Fund Manual. Although the state offered financial relief, it also assumed the crucial guidance and supervisory role that fathers "normally" performed in the family. Mothers, apparently, were incapable of supplying these influences:

We must always remember that a widow with children plus a lump sum of money does not make a normal family. The father of the family is not only a "breadwinner;" his loss deprives the family of affection and discipline as well as of their means of support. The lack is more than a material one and cannot be filled by money alone. Because the state recognized this need of "fathering" its dependent children, the clause providing for the appointment of unpaid county boards of trustees was introduced. Their duty is not only proper administration of the funds, but - equally important - the supervision and guardianship of the families.[3]

The attitude, then, that the state had to act as father--the major influence and source of guidance and discipline in the family--opened the door to a wide range of administrative directives to pensioned mothers. (Interestingly, the fatherly duties of the state were carried out by women social workers.) The state as *parens patriae* had moved into the home and became the authority in the family. To the extent that state agencies fulfilled their obligations as "father," the mothers' aid administrative procedures correspondingly reduced the mother's authority in the family.

"Supervision" was key in the administration of



mothers' aid. As father of the family, the state was responsible for the quality of care its dependent children received. Frequent visits to the homes made certain that mothers were maintaining the advised standards of maternal conduct and home care. Visits were intended both as routine investigations and as helpful advisory calls, assisting mothers and encouraging them in their job as guardian of the children.

The amount of supervision in the better staffed and financed programs was really quite extensive. Ideally, the minimum standard for frequency of visits to families was once a month. "Good standards of work," instructed the New York State supervisor of the board of child welfare, "require at least one monthly visit; really constructive work demands a number of visits." [4]

One-third of the Westchester County, New York recipients were visited more than 6 times in 6 months and another 38% were visited 6 times in 6 months. In Denver, 15% of the 73 mothers were visited 7-10 times in a 6 month period and another 45% were visited from 4-6 times over the same period. [5] Chicago boasted that 211 of 212 families had been visited at least once a month, while 182 of the 212 had been visited more frequently. "This is a good measure of supervision," remarked the Chicago authorities,

when it is remembered that the families under

care are very carefully selected. Only those mothers are placed on the pension roll who seem, after a searching inquiry, to be women who can be trusted to make reasonably wise expenditures and to maintain fit homes for their children.[6]

Programs in Buffalo, Chicago, Philadelphia, and Pittsburgh, one study reported, could schedule at least one visit per family a month. The caseload per worker in these areas was from 40 to 60 families. Social workers in other, less well equipped localities were reported to carry anywhere from 90 to 250 families, generally in addition to making new investigations each month. Caseloads above about 60 families per worker were considered beyond the reasonable load where intensive constructive social work was possible.[7]

The need for supervision, claimed officials, was in part to guard the public treasury against misuse of program funds, "to discourage fraud in obtaining and heedless profligacy in expending allowances." [8] More importantly, periodic inspections were necessary to ensure that the mother was in fact satisfactorily performing her job. The court officer

must be sure that the mother is staying at home with the children, keeping them clean, keeping the house in order, keeping the children in school, and in every way doing her duty towards the children.[9]

Supervision was the means by which the state could fulfill its duty as ultimate parent, according to authorities. Having accepted the grave responsibility for

the welfare of its children, the state was then obligated to follow through with its promise. Granting aid to needy mothers was not the end of the state's responsibility:

...if the purpose of the grant is to create positive values in the child's life, along lines of health, education, mother-care, then co-equal with the responsibility for making its grants adequate is the responsibility for guaranteeing that these values are really being created; that the child is actually receiving what the state is paying for.[10]

More than casual or infrequent visits were required if children were to receive proper guidance:

This cannot be done, on the principle of leaving it all to the mother or of semi-annual or quarterly visits for the purpose of re-investigation.[11]

To realize these goals, the state engaged in constant supervision.

Since the state was regarded as the father or guardian of the client family, close supervision over family habits and behaviors was in keeping with its paternal role. The few challenges to the "undemocratic" nature of such watchful paternalism that emerged from within the social work profession were easily brushed aside in the name of child welfare. "We do believe," claimed Mary Bogue of Pennsylvania,

that these mothers' pensions laws, paternalistic though they are, offer the best working expedient yet put into practice for the amelioration of an intolerable evil and demand for their successful administration an

enforcement of a minimum standard of child welfare, which can only be accomplished by close, constant and vigilant supervision.[12]

Further defending mothers' pensions administration against claims of unreasonably close supervision, Bogue explained that the responsibility for something like child welfare was a total responsibility. The extent to which the state should involve itself in family business was limited only by achievement of that goal. She stated,

For my part, I cannot conceive of the state's assumption of responsibility in the passage of these laws as anything less than covering the whole well-being of the child.

Speaking for her colleagues, she continued,

The touchstone, therefore, of all our work, the ultimate and final test of our effectiveness, is the physical, mental, and spiritual good of the child, and whatever ministers to this within the limits of the law is its own justification.[13]

Thus, the leading figures in mothers' pensions administration believed that the state had every right, in fact the state was morally obligated, to thoroughly involve itself in enforcing a particular standard of home and child care.

Though conducted from a decidedly paternalistic point of view, visits from state social workers to the homes of pensioned mothers accomplished much in the way of quality of life for needy families. Case workers used their knowledge of a city's medical, recreational, and educational

facilities to secure needed services for these families. Findings from a nation-wide survey of several localities showed how some families, left broke and dispirited after the death of the father, had regained their health and a measure of control over their lives as a result of "a great deal of patient and interested work" by social workers.[14] Many children would have been left to go through life crippled for lack of attention to feet and legs, the study reported, or would have suffered life-long problems related to decayed teeth or diseased nose and throat.[15]

Social workers put mothers in touch with local infant-welfare clinics, nutrition clinics, and health classes to provide them with a grasp of basic health and sanitary issues. Case workers were also instrumental in obtaining scholarships for exceptional children that enabled them to continue in school past the 8th grade. As well, they provided needed companionship for lonely or isolated single mothers: "Raising a family alone is almost more than a woman can do," offered one pensioned mother. "I should never have been able to bear it, if it had not been for the help of Miss A and Miss B." [16] Hence, their guidance and close supervision was often a very welcome and, at times, life saving service.

Aside from visits to the homes of children under its care, the state obtained additional information about

the children's well-being from the schools. Most mothers' aid offices required regular reports on special blanks from school teachers 2 to 4 times a year. The school standing and attendance blank from Chicago asked teachers to report on grades, scholarship, deportment, neatness, and attendance. Buffalo added aptitude, punctuality, disposition, and health to the list. Seattle asked for evaluations on conduct, parental care and deficient areas of study.[17]

Regular expense accounts also became an increasingly popular requirement in the administration of mothers' aid. As with other, more sophisticated administrative techniques, such as "budget schedules," expense accounts were part of the trend to quantify and evaluate the expenditure of public funds by pensioned mothers. More importantly, expense accounts became one of the key supervisory tools available to the social worker.

Localities varied in their degree of detail required of the mother in recording her expenses. Some programs required monthly accounting, while others expected semi-monthly, quarterly, or semi-annual reports. Chicago, for example, required semi-monthly statements of family income and expenses which were to be "carefully kept showing each item of expenditure and each item of income." [18] Their official form was broken into daily columns for recording the quantity, article, and price of an expenditure. Food items

were broken down into 7 different food categories. Other expenditures were divided into daily columns for recording household supplies, fuel and light, clothing, and miscellaneous expenses. The mother was also to specify the article of clothing and for whom it was bought.

In St. Louis, the monthly expense account was presented to the case worker who "went over this carefully with her,...checked the accuracy of the figures, and gave advice about management of income." [19] Wisconsin required a monthly statement showing all expenditures "together with the original receipts or vouchers therefor." [20]

Not surprisingly, the mothers greeted this rather tedious procedure and the accompanying unsolicited advice with little enthusiasm. "Mothers objected a little at first," observed one official, "but very soon objection ceased." [21] Objections ceased, we can be sure, because aid depended on a mother's cooperation in this venture.

Mothers' pensions advocates used expense account records as ammunition in their requests to the legislature for larger appropriations, for the records plainly documented the need for bigger pension grants. "A valuable body of material is being built up," reported a leader in the efforts to increase funds, "which will be useful...for legislative and publicity work." [22] Expense accounts, claimed another, are "very interesting to mothers' pensions workers as

propaganda material for increased appropriations." [23]

The main use of these mandatory expense accounts, however, was as a monitoring device for pension administrators. "As a taxpayer, as well as a trustee of the Mothers' Assistance Fund," announced Mrs. Daniel Ancona of Pennsylvania, "I am much interested in seeing that justice is done to the State as well as relief given to the mother." [24] Administrators insinuated that mothers often did not disclose their true spending practices. Thus, officials preferred to get their information in written, documented form. "Such accounts," explained one official, "often tell quite a different story from that gained in conversation with the mother." [25] Once the record was made known to the case worker, the state could more adequately monitor the mother's management habits and better "correct for extravagant and indiscreet purchases." [26]

As well as investigative, the expense accounts were also intended to be the basis of household management instruction. Though claims were made that expense accounts provided a test for the adequacy of the grant--that they would show when the grant was insufficient to cover necessary expenses--often, mothers were "educated" to the ways in which a small grant could be made adequate. To a woman who complained that her grant was too small, officials offered only more advice:



It was necessary to show her just how the \$30 could be laid out to cover what she thought would cost \$50. Sometimes this involved the sacrifice of some pet extravagance such as puffed rice or boiled ham.[27]

Social workers were the self-proclaimed best judges of what constituted pet extravagances. As well, they determined what were the appropriate items to buy and in what quantity. If a mother persisted in buying the items she valued over those instructed by her case worker, the social worker backed up her opinion with the authority of the judge:

But all of us believe that you need 3 quarts [of milk] and that is why the judge granted you \$60 a month. If you were to have had only one quart, he would have given you only \$55.[28]

In its supervisory capacity, the state accomplished much in its efforts to create and enforce a particular household model. Limitless advice was dispensed over the years and many mothers adjusted their lifestyles and habits to meet the standards espoused by the constantly vigilant case worker. As one contemporary observer remarked,

For the children of mothers with right motives and willingness to accept and follow kindly and intelligent advice, the system has been of great benefit.[29]

### The Problem of Inadequate Grants

State workers were in a tight position in their job of matching too little funds with too many families in need. Though the mothers' pensions program was new and small in

scope, the number of needy mothers was not. Leading advocates of mothers' pensions spent a great deal of their careers demonstrating to the public and politicians the need for more money for the program. Across the country, grants were pitiably small.

According to studies made by Municipal Research Boards, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, and Wage Arbitration Boards, the cost of living for a "working man's" family in 1918 ranged from \$1,200 to \$1,505 per year.[30] Using the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics estimate of \$1,434 and deducting the cost of the husband's food and clothing plus some other expenditures, a knowledgeable expert figured that the cost of living for a mother and three children in 1918 was \$1,000 a year, or \$83 a month.[31] Similarly, the Standard Chicago Budget for Dependent Families issued by the Chicago Council of Social Agencies estimated the amount needed for the same family to be \$84 a month in 1920.[32]

When measured against these standards, even the maximum possible grant permitted in most of the 42 states with mothers' pensions in 1926 fell below the suggested resources. In 35 of the states, the greatest possible amount according to the formula for a mother and three children was less than \$66 a month. In 20 of these states, the amount was less than \$40.[33] A 1931 study of mothers' pensions grants showed that in 7 states a mother and three children could

receive a maximum grant of \$60 to \$70; in 5 states, \$50 to \$59; in 9 states, \$40 to \$49; in 8 states, \$30 to \$39; and in 7 states, mothers could only hope for a mere \$20 to \$29 a month. Though an occasional family received the maximum grant, the majority received less.[34] The average monthly grant (irrespective of the number of children in the family) ranged from \$4.33 in Arkansas, \$7.29 in Oklahoma, and \$10.00 in Florida, Texas, and Louisiana to \$69.31 in Massachusetts, \$55.09 in Rhode Island, and \$52.62 in New York.[35] The Mothers' Aid Committee of the White House Conference on Child Health and Protection concluded that adequate grants in 1930 in large urban centers should average \$60 or more. A grant of \$60 or more was provided in only 8 cities in 1931, 6 of which were in Massachusetts.[36]

Bound by funding constraints, social workers were constantly faced with the dilemma of whether to aid a small proportion of mothers adequately or divide the limited funds among a large number. Professional leaders in mothers' pensions administration urged local officials to assist the few mothers adequately and demand of them high standards of home care.[37]

Though it appeared more fair, argued these leaders, the alternative policy of equal distribution among all those eligible in fact damaged the program's social goals and political strategies for increasing appropriations. They

protested that overloaded case workers could not properly supervise, guide, and instruct client families. Moreover, a small grant did not instill in recipients the pride and drive necessary to attain the high standards the public expected of the pensioner. Low grants begat low returns, they maintained, and thereby denied the program its chance to prove to the public and the legislature its validity and viability. "The low grant policy condemns our demonstration to failure from the start," insisted Mary Bogue,

and thereby we forfeit the right to ask greater support from the public purse for a project whose value has not been clearly and undeniably proven.[38]

Denver, which had the best record for adequate grants, received high praises from a conference of mothers' aid professionals for its courage to refuse to spread the money thinly over all the families eligible. Seventy-three percent were receiving income that was equal to the family's estimated budget and another 20% were within 10% of it. Denver funded 73 mothers that year but, 82 eligible mothers were on the waiting list.[39]

The trade off for funding the few in hopes of eventually funding the many was of course forcing the many onto a waiting list. A Pennsylvania report on mothers' assistance noted that in 1914 only 9% (85 out of 944) of the eligible applicants in Philadelphia were granted aid. Even

though funds had increased by 1918, still only 25% of the eligible mothers were funded that year, leaving 762 mothers on the waiting list.[40] A student of the Pennsylvania program, Elizabeth Hall, explained that there was a 2 year wait in 1925 for any widow no matter how great her need.[41]

Funds throughout the country were very meagre, claimed mothers' pensions advocates. A Children's Bureau study in 1922 concluded that in 13 of the 38 states studied, a range of from less than one-third to one-two-hundredth of the needy children were reached through mothers' aid; in 14 states, from one-half to one-third of the need was met; in only 11 states, two-thirds or more of the needy children were reached.[42] In Kentucky, Louisiana, Texas, and Tennessee, the mothers' pensions program functioned in 5% or less of all counties.[43] Emma Lundberg reported that only 130,000 of the potential 350,000 to 400,000 children in need were receiving aid in 1926.[44] On the whole, admonished supporters, states had a dismal record for funding and protecting their disadvantaged dependent children.

Additional evidence marshalled by mothers' pensions leaders of the paucity of the grants lay in the number of families forced to supplement their pension with outside funds. In her study of several localities, Florence Nesbitt reported that 89% of the families funded relied on some sort of other income besides the mother's allowance. Cities in

Massachusetts reported the lowest percentage of mothers dependent on outside funds, likely because the grants were highest in this state. Sixty-six percent in Boston and 55% of the mothers in Haverhill depended on outside funds, as opposed to 100% in Denver, 96% in Minneapolis, 95% in Westchester County, and 93% in St. Louis.[45] Of the 45 agencies nationwide responding to another survey, 10 reported that public agencies supplemented their pension grants and 27 reported that private agencies helped aid families. Others reported that the family's earnings were the only supplement and another said that the poor board contributed heavily in several cases.[46]

According to these and other studies, mothers' pensions grants were not adequate to support a mother and her children. Social workers fought long, arduous battles to try to increase the appropriations for the program so that poor mothers could properly care for their children. Grants remained small, however, and mothers had to turn to other sources of support for their families.

#### Women Wage-Earners and the Pension Grant

Although the main objective behind the mothers' aid policy was to grant public assistance to mothers who normally would be forced into wage-work, most pensioned mothers labored to support their families all the same. "The

representatives of the Chicago Social Agencies are agreed," offered Helen Russell Wright,

that, in general, gainful employment for mothers of young children is undesirable, and that when the support of the father is no longer available, the family should be given adequate support from either public or private funds.[47]

According to the Pennsylvania Mothers' Assistance Fund, however, the reality of the situation was much different: "By far the majority of mothers receiving help are doing some kind of work for wages." [48]

As far as was possible, most localities kept records on the number of mothers working. Analysts of these records, however, commonly understood the figures to underrepresent the number of mothers actually engaged in wage-labor. Nevertheless, the figures were significant. Of 1,940 cases in Pennsylvania in 1920, 46% were reported as actively laboring, and 16% were reported as not gainfully employed. For the remaining 38% or 730 mothers, there was no record of employment. Speaking from experience, the author of the report advised, however, that this group of women were most likely employed:

In spite of the fact that for 730 mothers there is no record of regular employment, most of them would be found on investigation to be engaged with a fair degree of regularity in gainful work.[49]

In a 1919 Illinois study, it was reported that 67% of the 501 mothers aided were gainfully employed.[50] A 1923

study of several different localities had found positive documentation that over half of the 942 mothers receiving aid were earning part of the family support, and suggested that the percentage was probably much greater. Sixty-seven percent of Denver's pensioned mothers were gainfully employed, 59% in Mineapolis, 57% in St. Louis, and 69% in Westchester County. Boston, however, reported that only 21% of the mothers receiving assistance were also working for wages. The analyst explained this unusually low number:

It seems probable that in Boston...where visits to the family were less frequent than in other places, some mothers not reported as earning may have been doing so.[51]

It was in fact quite likely that mothers not reported as earning were doing so. Especially in the urban industrial centers, many more women than were reported were engaged in the homework industries, performing such tasks as sewing buttons on clothes, cracking nuts, making lace, or sorting beans.[52] Though the figures were artificially low, 42, or 22%, of the 194 recipient mothers recorded as working in Westchester County in 1923 worked at home. Twenty nine percent of the working recipients in Denver were classified as homeworkers, as were 30% in Boston; 34% in Minneapolis; and 41% in St. Louis.[53] Sixty of the 501 Illinois sample, or 12%, were reported as gainfully employed at home.[54]

Since the mothers' aid grants were clearly



insufficient to support a family, wage-work for mothers was an unavoidable necessity. Recognizing this, many social workers tried to adjust the family and home life to this imperative. So that mothers could still fulfill their duty to their children and the state, case workers encouraged mothers to do homework or part-time work structured around the needs and schedules of children. A Kansas City officer explained:

We expect and require the mother to earn all she can at home by pursuits which are compatible with her position, such as washing, sewing, baking bread for neighbors, teaching music, or doing work supplied from the mercantile houses.[55]

Mothers' pensioners formed a large part of the ghettoized, exploited, unprotected workforce of homeworkers and part-timers. Indeed, in many cases they were actively shuttled into this labor pool by the mothers' aid case workers. "In every instance," began a 1925 Rhode Island report,

where it was found that a mother was away from home all day at work in a mill or a factory she was advised to give up this work and return to the job of caring for and training her own children. Other work of a less confining nature such as jewelry work at home, sewing, cleaning by the hour, and part-time work in lunch-rooms was secured for these mothers....All this in an effort to build for the State the best possible type of citizen.[56]

Homework was advised for mothers in charge of young children, whereas "short hour" work was considered the best

arrangement for mothers with school age children.[57] Though short hour work took the mother away from the home 5 or 6 days a week, she was gone only during the hours her children were in school.

The majority of mothers who were employed away from home worked "by the day." Day workers went out by the day--regularly or irregularly--to do washing, ironing, or cleaning in private homes.[58] An authority on women wage-earners, Helen Russell Wright, located these workers at the bottom of the chart:

From an occupational point of view, these women might perhaps be classed with the domestic servants, except that the work of women who go out by the day is almost invariably the hardest part of domestic service.[59]

Characteristically, day work was the lowest paid, most physically strenuous, most poorly protected and unsteady of all women's occupations. "The fact remains," continued Wright,

that day work is harder physically than most factory work; that in common with all domestic service it is unstandardized and unregulated, and that it is on a lower plane socially than work in a factory. Also, it is more irregular than industrial employment - a fact which, while offering some advantages, makes earnings uncertain and the problem of having steady work more difficult.[60]

That the head of a household was expected to rely on this form of labor for the support of her family was remarkable

indeed. However, since it enabled women to spend hours with their children, social workers urged mothers to seek this type of employment:

It is for this reason that social agencies, the limited Charities and the Aid to Mothers division of the juvenile court, encourage many of the women...to do day work instead of taking work in the factory.[61]

In her extensive study of several localities, Florence Nesbitt found that more than half of the 329 wage-earning mothers on the rolls in 1923 worked by the day. Figures from Boston, Denver, Haverhill, Massachusetts, St. Louis, Westchester County, and Hennepin and Yellow Medicine Counties in Minnesota showed that 59% of the mothers reported working worked by the day. Another 9% did sewing and laundry work. Only 16% were engaged in factory work.[62] In a Pennsylvania survey of 166 mothers receiving assistance, three-quarters were reported working and over half of those were doing a day's work. The wages for a day's work, this study explained, ranged from 2 dollars a day to 50 cents a day.[63] If it is remembered that the estimated cost of living for a mother and three children in 1918 was \$83 a month or \$20 a week, a mother would need a sizable pension to make up for what she could not earn doing a day's work, even 7 days a week.

For obvious reasons, the mothers themselves wished to avoid work by the day if they possibly could. Though

social workers believed child welfare was better served under these arrangements, the mothers had a different perspective:

"The advantages of this arrangement," suggested Wright,

appealed more strongly to the agencies than to the women themselves, in whose eyes the disadvantages loomed larger than any possible gains.[64]

As more and more factory work became available to women, it was harder to keep them at home or get them to partake in the drudge of day work. Women most likely to escape the lot of day work and take a job in a factory, mill, or the trades were white.[65] As Wright confirmed, day work fell increasingly to the black women who were barred from many factory sites. "This opposition to day work on the part of mothers," wrote Wright,

has increased greatly in the past few years with the increased demand for women in factories. The tendency has been more and more for white women to leave this work for the colored women, for whom industrial openings have become more limited.[66]

Case workers often reported that mothers were reluctant to give up their jobs in factories or the trades, which offered more security and higher pay than a pension and day's work. Many women, it was claimed, voluntarily gave up allowances and took employment

in the stock yards, in the steel industries, with the railroads or in tailor shops. In all cases the reason given was the possibility of receiving a larger income in this way.[67]

Emma Lundberg found similar reactions among mothers who

elected "to dispense with both the aid and the regulations that accompany it" for a better employment situation.[68]

Officials found, then, that mothers to whom they were offering pensions did not necessarily embody the self-sacrificing, naive, sentimental picture of motherhood around which the program was designed. Instead, mothers were practical and had a clear understanding of their choices and how to meet their obligations of child rearing. The problem of keeping women at home to care for the state's children could only be met with increased grants from the legislature. Field workers who personally knew the mothers understood this well. If the state wanted women to stay home, it had to pay them more:

It is evident that the adoption of any policy which meant that more women stayed in their homes without engaging in gainful employment would involve an increased expenditure of considerable proportions....This means that a decrease in the number of mothers with children who are gainfully employed by an extension of the benefits of the Aid-to-Mothers Law and by the withdrawal from industry of pensioned women can be accomplished only by and with the consent of the legislature.[69]

Since the strategy of securing adequate funds from the legislature was less than successful, mothers continued in their wage-work.

The intent of the regulations restricting the hours and type of wage work for mothers receiving pensions was to

keep women in a certain relationship to their children. Mothers were to be as physically and emotionally available to their children as possible. The regulations as well reinforced current popular ideas about women not being "real" wage-earners. Homework and work by the day were seen as work women performed to "supplement" their pension grant and not as regular, long-term work arrangements, though they in fact were. Consequently, these occupations of day and home work were often invisible and not subject to government regulations, protections, or wage standards extended to recognized work situations.

Moreover, in keeping with contemporary proper gender relations, mothers' pensions work restrictions ensured that mothers would not cross into breadwinner territory. Women engaged in homework or part-time domestic service were no threat to the male responsibility of family support. Neither did women in these occupations compete with men for the better paid, more stable and secure jobs in the trades and factories. Though children of single mothers were in desperate need of more support, the message from the program's work regulations was to keep women next to children and reserve the wage-work for men.

## Conclusion

The laws and administration of the mothers' pensions program not only offered the state a unique opportunity to influence the welfare and development of poor children--the original and stated aim. The program also amplified and secured the state's role in regulating motherhood. Since maternity entirely consumed the woman's identity in the popular ideology, regulating motherhood translated into regulating the most personal aspects of a recipient woman's life. The laws allowed local authorities to articulate and enforce standards of proper child rearing, home-making, wage-earning, moral conduct and maternal responsibilities, potentially leaving very little of the mother's private life or decision-making power to herself.

It is hard to imagine a public relief program that would have so closely monitored a family headed by a man. The state did not attempt to dictate the moral behavior of a male head of household or his choice of wage-work. The state did not attempt to control a man's family budget or judge him by his children's deportment or performance in school and church, or by the furnishings in his home. A man's worth and identity were not totally reflected in his home and children as was a woman's. Furthermore, the cultural respect for manhood protected his home and personal affairs from being violated by state interference. The state heartily consented

to and sanctified a man's right to privacy.

Womanhood, on the other hand, did not command the same respect for privacy and self determination. A "fatherless family" was determined to be unstable and lacking not only in income, but, equally as important, in the guidance, discipline, and protection normally supplied by the man. Moreover, since poor women, especially lonely and immigrant women, were considered morally vulnerable and corruptible in the absence of a husband, the state could logically justify its involvement in family life as surrogate guardian and protector.

The state justified its intrusion into family business also by way of its role as examiner. As keeper of the public treasury, the state had to ensure that public monies were supporting the values and kinds of homes that the legislature appropriated them for. But, again, since the objects of examination were women rather than men, cultural norms around gender enabled the state to penetrate further into recipient families headed by women. Unobstructed by such barriers as offending the father's manhood or weakening the male sense of propriety, the state was free to thoroughly scrutinize a recipient mother's daily habits, activities, and expenditures.

Although the spirit of the law allowed for total domination by the state of a woman's household, in most



localities mothers' pensions offices were so understaffed and underfunded as to make such close surveillance highly impractical. Moreover, though there were reports of over zealous and mean-spirited supervision, for the most part, case workers were not primarily interested in the controlling aspect of their work. Rather, they focused on the desperate need among these families for better health, nutrition, education, and housing. They viewed their job as putting these poor, often recently immigrated mothers on a program to help them build stronger families. It is important, therefore, to keep somewhat separate the potential in the law for domination and control and the actual implementation of the law by individual case workers.

Perhaps social workers advised the mothers along a course which, in the long run, reinforced their poverty and helplessness. Expanding, rather than restricting, recipient mothers' work opportunities, for example, would have served the purposes of women's independence and rise from poverty. However, social workers operated within the constraints of the mothers' pensions program and the confines of an established gender order, both of which saw women's proper place as in the home, firmly attached to children and household duties. Founders of the program were pledged to a gender system that was threatened by the ideas of day nurseries, wage-working mothers, independent women, and men

unconnected to families. Consequently, the relief system sacrificed the possibility of self-supporting, female-headed families to maintaining and strengthening the established male-headed family and patriarchal gender system.

## CHAPTER VI

# MOTHERS' PENSIONS: HISTORICAL, THEORETICAL, AND POLITICAL UNDERPINNINGS OF WOMEN AND THE WELFARE STATE

### Introduction

The critical claim of this dissertation is that the state has played a major role in shaping and enforcing particular patriarchal gender relations in American society. Through its early twentieth century welfare policy of mothers' pensions, I have argued, the state sharpened the cultural definitions of masculinity and femininity and institutionalized them in the law. Because mothers' pensions was the only relief available to poor families at the time, and because families had to structure their relationships and behaviors to meet the conditions of aid, the state's definition of proper family life penetrated the lower classes and ascended as the recognized model of the family.

The dissertation has presented the mothers' pensions program in two basic ways. First, mothers' pensions is presented as a historical documentation of the genesis of the modern welfare state and its relationship to women. Secondly, I have presented the mothers' pensions program as a case study of the social and political processes involved in the formulation and implementation of state policies towards women. In this concluding chapter, I move beyond the

particulars of mothers' aid and begin to develop a larger analytic framework from which to understand women and the welfare state.

To begin, I review and critique the major positions held by welfare historians writing from the liberal and class analysis perspectives. Building on the research and insights from these frameworks, I argue for a feminist analysis of welfare. After a brief summary of mothers' pensions, I offer a critical interpretation of the interrelationship of women, welfare, and dependence derived from the study of mothers' pensions and extended to the contemporary situation of women and the welfare system.

### The Liberal Framework

The findings of this study call for an analytic framework that can elucidate the state's role in promoting gender relations, one that can identify the processes that implicate the state in reproducing patriarchy. Such a framework requires two essential starting points: 1) the framework must recognize the state as an active, as opposed to neutral, force which supports established power relations in the social order; and 2) it must recognize the patriarchal (as well as race and class) structure of those power relations in American society.

Although writers of the liberal tradition have contributed much valuable research to the history of welfare in the United States, their framework limits the analytic usefulness of their work. It obscures from their view some fundamental dynamics in the development of welfare policy and the relationship between welfare and the social order. The chief weakness of the liberal perspective is its lack of a sufficiently sophisticated theory of power. Liberal histories are not organized around concepts of social and economic domination and in fact divert attention away from exploring such issues. As a result, liberal works have major limitations in their ability to help explain women's position in the welfare state.

First, the liberal framework sees the state as a neutral force in society. In this view, society is comprised of an aggregate of atomistic individuals and groups, each pursuing their own private interests. The role of the state in this scheme is to mediate conflicts that arise among competing interests. Rather than promoting any particular interest, in this sense the state stands "above" conflict.

Secondly, since liberals see society as an aggregate of atomistic, competing, self-interested individuals, their framework does not allow for an analysis of structures or systems of power. Politics and social change in their view follow the pluralist model, where social policy evolves from

the open competition among organized interest groups and individuals. Policy outcomes represent the compromises and negotiations among interested groups in what is seen as a profoundly "democratic" process. This perspective of politics is in marked contrast, for instance, to marxist theory where political and economic structures serve to support ruling class interests. Similarly, in feminist theory, established political and economic institutions serve to reinforce the power relations that uphold patriarchy.

Given its assumptions of the neutral state in a pluralist system, the liberal framework is blind to the ways in which the state has played a central historical role in shaping the patriarchal relations in American society. The state, as we have seen, was a very active force in the early twentieth century movement to restore particular gender roles in the family. Pensioned mothers were obstructed by law and "friendly visitors" from participating in regular, full time wage work in the factories and driven into the ghettoized, dead-end labor market of home and day work. The liberal framework obscures how this one peice of the mothers' pensions program fit into the larger gendered process of moving women out of the paid labor force and into the home. In this instance, the state actively helped shape the social order in the interest of promoting and preserving the patriarchal relations of society. The liberal theorist could

not arrive at this sort of insight into state relations and patriarchy.

Several common themes within the parameters of the liberal framework outlined above further identify the liberal perspective on welfare history and point up its shortcomings. A classic theme is the conviction that welfare policies are a manifestation of the humanitarian impulse in human nature. Seeing humanitarianism as the key driving force of welfare history requires denying the fundamental role of social conflict and power struggles in steering the course of human history.

Walter Trattner in his popular work, From Poor Law to Welfare State, is particularly explicit on the humanitarian theme. Citing examples from such notable historic figures as Hammurabi, Aristotle, and Cicero, and ancient religious writings including the Old Testament and the Talmud, he identifies early evidence of altruism that in his view guided welfare efforts from antiquity through the middle ages and into the present. "From the beginning of recorded time," he writes,

people have shown a concern for others; individually and collectively, they have tried to deal with insecurity and human need and to help those fellow men found unable to meet the minimum requirements of society.[1]

Implicit in this perspective is the notion that poverty is primarily the result of misfortune and not the

result of the inherent inequalities in the economic system. Thus, humanitarianism in liberal histories is viewed not only to be what happened to be the approach to relieving the poor, but is judged also to be the appropriate response to people in need.

A second theme repeated in many liberal works and articulated by Trattner is the linear, progressive view of the historical development of welfare. Lacking a developed theory of power, liberal authors characteristically see welfare history in terms of its chronological milestones rather than focusing on the struggles for social and economic dominance these milestones embody. Moreover, the history of welfare is seen as an increasingly responsible, increasingly generous response of society to those in need. Through the ages, claims Trattner, our methods of helping the poor have become more sophisticated and more comprehensive and, thus, more humane. The present welfare system represents the pinnacle of social welfare history, he suggests, as efforts have grown from a simple program of aid to the needy to a comprehensive, humanitarian system of social welfare for all.[2]

In A History of Social Welfare and Social Work in the United States, James Leiby pursues another identifiably liberal theme of highlighting the achievements of social workers. Since the state is neutral in the liberal paradigm,



and individuals rather than structures of class or sex are the unit of analysis, liberal histories typically focus on social reformers as the moving force in the development of welfare. In Leiby's work, social workers take center stage and the state is pushed back to a mere shadow in the wings. In his depiction of late nineteenth century industrializing America, the profession of social work stood above the deep and fragmenting ethnic and class divisions in society and functioned as the mediator of social conflict. The profession rose above the internal antagonisms and selfish rivalries among competing groups and articulated for the disparate parts their common interests. The special role of the social work profession, Leiby writes, was to "establish a common interest and aspiration in a society that often seemed too divided to act in its own behalf." [3] Not only, then, are social workers the prime movers in liberal welfare histories, but they move history not as representatives of any dominant group, but as enlightened, disinterested individuals, acting out of a sense of social duty for the betterment of all classes.

Leiby's work represents and helps clarify the liberal tradition in another important way. Since the liberal framewrok does not tie its thinkers to a materialist analysis of power, liberal thinkers can easily evade the role of social tensions and class conflict in the evolution of

welfare reform. Side-stepping the challenge from a marxist interpretation of social work, Leiby escapes into an idealist mode of analysis and explains the major developments in social welfare strictly in terms of their philosophical roots. Over the years, argues Leiby, the blend of the religious Christian tradition of sympathy and charity and the secular liberal tradition of self-help and individualism produced the modern system of welfare. He offers: "My interpretation is that the development of our welfare programs and professional social work institutionalized ... certain assumptions of a quasi-religious character in historic liberalism." [4] His philosophical insights are indeed interesting, but isolated from an analysis of power relations in society, they serve to divert attention from the material processes which have shaped the contours of welfare history.

A final theme that often characterizes liberal histories of welfare is a certain kind of moral critique. In this view, poverty is primarily a moral problem: "[P]overty is shameful, not only to those who suffer from it, but also to the society that allows it to exist." [5] Again, we are diverted from issues of power and domination and asked to view poverty as separate from the social and political relations of capitalism and patriarchy. The progress over the years in welfare reform from this perspective is

attributed to the generations of enlightened social critics who called society to account for its failings and irresponsibilities. Robert Bremner's classic work, From the Depths, is perhaps the best example of the moral critique. In Bremner's history, the artists, the journalists, and the social reformers whose life's calling was to awaken society to the suffering of the poor are the real heroes. These were the people of conscience who reminded society of its humanitarian roots and stirred people to action on that basis. "The heroes and heroines of the book are the 'do-gooders,'" he explains, "the responsible Americans in every generation who have heard and heeded the cry from the depths." [6]

In all of these liberal theories of welfare there is a kernel of truth. Indeed, the history of welfare has evolved through the ages into an increasingly comprehensive system of social welfare and, yes, reform efforts have been led by prominent social workers driven by humanitarian motives. However, these are pieces of larger historical movements which deal with the structuring and distribution of power throughout society. The development of the welfare system needs to be examined in terms of its role in maintaining the social order. The liberal framework does not center on this crucial dynamic.

## The Class Analysis Framework

Modern welfare historians originating in the marxist tradition have entirely different starting points than their liberal counterparts. Refuting liberal claims of the humanitarian motive in welfare development and the linear, progressive movement of welfare reform, leftist thinkers develop a theory of welfare policies based on a class analysis of power. The evolution of welfare reform, here, reflects ruling class efforts to guide and control social and economic policy in order to protect existing capitalist class relations.

In Regulating the Poor, Francis Fox Piven and Richard Cloward provide the most extended application of a class analysis to the history of welfare. In contrast to the liberal literature which depicts welfare as a historical process of giving and helping, Piven and Cloward argue that public relief has been used as a capitalist tool of control over the laboring class. Capitalist economic history, they claim, has been marked by alternating periods of depression and rapid modernization. Both periods are accompanied by civil unrest, mass unemployment, and disorganization. Unemployment, in particular, disrupts the social order, according to Piven and Cloward, not only because people depend on their paycheck to supply their physical needs, but also because work norms tie people to the larger socio-

economic system.

The regulation of civil behavior in all societies is intimately dependent on stable occupational arrangements. So long as people are fixed in their work roles, their activities and outlooks are also fixed; they do what they must and think what they must... But mass unemployment breaks that bond, loosening people from the main institution by which they are regulated and controlled.[7]

Relief practices in this view function to alleviate social tensions and restore order to the capitalist system by enforcing work among the poor. Welfare policies, according to this scheme, are uniquely capable of requiring particular work habits from the poor because these people depend on welfare for survival:

Any institution that distributes the resources men and women depend upon for survival can readily exert control over them: the occasion of giving vitally needed assistance can easily become the occasion of inculcating the work ethic, for example, and of enforcing work itself, for those who resist risk the withdrawal of that assistance.[8]

Another major genre of histories of welfare stemming from marxist theory identifies social welfare practices as mechanisms for controlling social deviance. Deviance, in this literature, is primarily deviance measured against the norms and relations constituting the capitalist class system. In his work, The Child Savers, Anthony Platt applies this theory to the origins of the juvenile court system in the Progressive Era. For Platt, the processes by which the

emergent juvenile justice system labeled certain youthful behaviors as deviant reflected the class interests which undergirded the system. Juvenile justice measures were meant chiefly to "achieve order, stability, and control while preserving the existing class system and distribution of wealth." [9] Criticizing the conventional liberal view that nineteenth century reformers were enlightened, humanitarian idealists struggling to overcome the injustices in the wake of unfettered capitalism, Platt claims, rather, that child saving reforms during the Progressive Era were part of a larger movement by the upper classes to adapt social institutions and deviant populations to the needs of the advancing corporate capitalist system:

The child saving movement was not a humanistic enterprise on behalf of the working class against the established order. On the contrary, its impetus came primarily from the middle and upper classes who were instrumental in devising new forms of social control to protect their power and privilege. [10]

Similarly, Andrew Scull uses the theme of deviance control in his work, Decarceration: Community Treatment and the Deviant, to explain the history of state institutions in western society. Historical changes in social welfare policy from incarceration of the deviant in the nineteenth century to decarceration in the mid twentieth century depended not, as the liberal view would have it, on innovative, progressive reform ideas to improve conditions for the needy. But,

rather, as Scull explains, on the "changing exigencies of domestic pacification and control" in market capitalist societies.[11] The purely market-based relations of capitalist society, according to Scull, destroyed the earlier community and family based systems of social control. Capitalism, he continues, "which did so much to undermine and destroy traditional social restraints," was extremely sensitive to social disorder. Thus, beginning with the workhouse, segregative state institutions were erected to control for deviance in a social order that had no "natural" means of doing so. An impending fiscal crisis and the growth of alternative welfare support systems--not humanitarian reform--accounted for the shift in the twentieth century to decarcerating the deviant. The state welfare apparatus, argues Scull, as modifier of the "inherently self-destructive tendencies of a pure market system," has been indispensable to the maintenance of the capitalist system.

Because leftist welfare historians analyze welfare through the lens of power relations and class divisions, they are able to see that the state plays a critical role in preserving the established social order. Unlike pluralist theories of the liberal tradition, class analyses regard welfare policies in terms of their effects on class privileges and class structures of power. The insights of this perspective are necessary for understanding the position

of women in the history of welfare, but not sufficient. Welfare historians need a more sensitive, sophisticated framework to explain the relationship of women and welfare, and thus, welfare and the social order.

### The Feminist Framework

Though the marxist theories are a great improvement over the liberal depiction of welfare history, a class analysis does not go far enough towards explaining the dynamics of welfare policy. A feminist analysis of relief practices exposes the patriarchal nature of state actions and the ways in which patriarchy fits into the state's goal of preserving the social order.

Evidence produced in this dissertation shows that leftist theorists have analyzed only a part of welfare history. What marxist writers have missed is that relief regulates the lives of men and women differently. Critical theorists generally examine the experience of men in the relief system and mistakenly generalize their conclusions to women's experience on relief. It is true, as Piven and Cloward and others claim, that the work ethic is critical to capitalist production and social stability, but the work ethic is central to shaping the relationship between the welfare state and men. The central issue defining the relationship between the welfare state and women--as we have



seen through this dissertation--is motherhood. Women's experience is lost in their analysis.

The marxist analysis is deficient not only because women's experience on welfare is lost, but also because it misses the significance of gender in the structure of the social order and in the formulation of relief policy. Lacking a theory of gender, the leftist analysis does not see that enforcing the work ethic in welfare policy supports the gender system in a similar way that it supports the class system. A male worker in the class system, for instance, is at the same time a male breadwinner embedded in a sexual hierarchy. Any useful analysis of welfare must incorporate a feminist perspective to see that the different constituent elements of welfare history are planted both in the class structure of society and in its patriarchal gender system. Relief is as interested in stabilizing and controlling patriarchy as capitalism.

Feminist histories of American welfare are few, but scholars such as Mimi Abramovitz, Eileen Boris and Peter Bardaglio, Ann Vanderpol, and Eli Zaretsky have begun the work of analyzing the origins of the welfare state from a feminist perspective.[12] Focusing on individual themes in this area, these writers stress the need for developing a theory on the impact of early state welfare policies on family relations. "The historical relationship among

families, the status of women, and the formulation of laws and policies for governing the household remains largely unexamined," offer Boris and Bardaglio.[13] "Identifying the role of the family ethic in social welfare policy," explains Abramovitz, "deepens our understanding of the welfare state." [14] Moreover, the study of the transformation of state/family relations deepens our understanding of patriarchy and the state's role in promoting it. It is crucial, claim Boris and Bardaglio,

to examine historically the ways in which the state has initiated social control over women, especially control over their labor power and sexuality, both in the family and outside of it.[15]

The feminist projects taken up by these historians begin to address the lack of scholarship in this area.

Because feminist theory seeks to understand how patriarchal gender relations are generated and perpetuated in society, it is capable of appreciating and comprehending the importance of the early twentieth century mothers' pensions program. To the liberal and marxist historians, mothers' pensions is only marginally significant and usually depicted --if at all--as a small piece of the early welfare state initiatives. From a feminist perspective, however, mothers' pensions is the critical beginning of a long, entangled relationship between women and the welfare state--a relationship that taps into the very core of women's existence. Welfare has continued to have a major impact on

women's lives through the century, and especially in these latest decades as women have become more and more dependent on services from the welfare state. The increasing feminization of poverty makes it ever more critical for women to understand the origins of their relationship to the welfare state and to question the state's potential for improving the quality of women's lives.

### Summary of Mothers' Pensions

In many ways, the mothers' pensions program fell short of its original sponsors' aims. Initially, reformers saw scores of single mothers unable to provide a suitable home life for their children. They envisioned a remedial program which distributed pension grants to poor mothers primarily on the basis of economic need. As the idea got closer and closer to implementation, however, moral and behavioral criteria increasingly crept into program design. In the end, mothers' aid was funneled toward the narrow category of white widows in good standing in the community. Other needy children of caring, capable mothers were excluded from the grant on the basis of their mothers' marital status or because their mothers did not meet the white middle class standards of home and child care.

A particularly conspicuous segment of poor mothers excluded from the mothers' aid grants were black women. Both

the racist attitudes of program administrators and the political considerations involved in winning legislative support for mothers' pensions factored into the abismal record of aiding blacks. Hardly newcomers to the world of discrimination, the black communities devised their own relief organizations and continued to rely on their own networks for support.[16]

Original campaigners also expected that the selected mothers would receive adequate grants that would allow them to stay home and devote themselves to child rearing and home making. Instead, most grants were shamefully small and the majority of mothers were forced into the low paying, unskilled, part-time job market. Because of the restrictions on women's work life written into state laws, mothers could not earn a decent wage to adequately supplement the grant. As long as mothers were allowed only 3 days a week of work, for instance, the only jobs available were homework and day's work. Consequently, the children were deprived of both good care and adequate support.

Architects of the mothers' pensions program had conceived of it as a partnership between the mother and the state. Like a soldier, claimed Ben Linsay of the Denver juvenile court, the mother was to be paid for her service to her country. However, in spite of reformers' hopes, the underlying philosophy of the welfare state in the United

States--characterized by a profound reluctance to offer assistance--ruled out any semblance of a partnership. Moreover, the realities of a patriarchal social and legal system precluded any real partnership arrangement. The doctrine of *parens patriae* provided the legal justification for the state to enter the private sphere of the home, in part to watch over the child's welfare. The state's ultimate purpose, however, was to ensure a social order based on particular gender relations, and it fashioned a policy that gave it control over that process. An equal partnership with mothers would have given women equal power in determining the relations of motherhood. State purposes of controlling patriarchal relations forbid any such arrangement.

Nevertheless, it is important to recognize the tremendous gain to selected poor families of the mothers' pensions program. It offered needy families aid in their own homes and an opportunity to keep families together who otherwise would have been dispersed. Unlike poor relief, aid was granted with some measure of dignity.

The care, devotion, and good will of mothers' pensions administrators also contributed to the positive aspects of the program. Mothers' aid case workers reached into the homes of mothers in poverty and put them in touch with public health programs, school scholarships, community educational groups and organizations that certainly upgraded

their quality of life. Social workers encouraged recreation, nutrition, and other healthy activity in those whose lives were in need of this kind of assistance. Administrators fought for increased appropriations, spoke out on behalf of their poorer sisters, and continually tried to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the program.

I do not wish to skip over these obvious benefits, nor slight the courageous and undying support given by the leaders in mothers' pensions administration. However, what is important here is the legal and administrative system of relief giving. It is crucial to understand how the state--in the form of laws and procedures--helped structure particular, patriarchal gender relations among the poor, and how it encouraged women to practice a certain model of motherhood.

#### Mothers' Pensions, Patriarchy, and the Perpetuation of Women's Dependence

The study of mothers' pensions has shown us that the state had a primary purpose in structuring particular gender relations among the poor. Responding to the early twentieth century fears of family break-down in the face of rapid modernization, industrialization, and immigration, the state acted to restore stable, well defined relations between men and women.

Moreover, the study reveals that the state exploited women's relatively vulnerable position in society to accomplish its purposes. By controlling women's primary associations and activities, the state was able to regulate the gender order without infringing on male rights or undermining the patriarchal system of authority. Mothers' pensions gave the state the prerogative to intrude on the homes of poor women and demand that recipient mothers rearrange their lives and patterns to conform to middle class American notions of motherhood. Furthermore, since the state's conception of motherhood equated women's mothering role with personhood, in its regulation of motherhood the state dictated the details of women's sex lives, work lives, and the way they managed their household affairs.

This is not to say that men were totally free from state influence over the way they conducted their private lives. The regulation of male behavior was implied in the mothers' pensions scheme. Laws and procedures in the program were designed to reign in irresponsible men and foster in them proper gender conduct. Refusing aid to deserted and divorced mothers, for example, functioned to discourage men from leaving their families. As well, prohibiting recipient women from full time lucrative wage work indirectly reinforced the male's role in society as provider. However, it is critical to recognize that though the laws and

procedures purposely touched men's lives, women's lives were directly regulated.

Patriarchy was further served by mothers' pensions in that it required state manipulation of women's lives that resulted in the intensification of women's powerlessness and dependence. Dependence is not a simple economic condition. For women in patriarchal society it is very much tied to their primary relationships with children, men, and wage-work. By sharpening the definitions of women's relationships with these three core associations in its specifications of a "fit mother", the state tied women more tightly to the traditional sources of their dependency.

The mother's proper relationship to her child was a central piece in the mothers' pensions program. The version of the mother/child relationship promoted by mothers' pensions characterized the child as an anchor that held the mother to her proper sphere. Though women were responsible for child care before the advent of mothers' pensions, the program demanded that a fit mother center her whole life around the child and the home. Through both its laws and the individual casework, mothers' pensions was an important instrument for disseminating the home-based, maternal centered middle class standard of childrearing. By facilitating the realization of this ideal, mothers' pensions helped lock women into a severely circumscribed mothering



role and one that further isolated women from the public world of men.

Secondly, the ideal of the fit mother that informed mothers' pensions policy also relied on women maintaining particular relations with men. The state was interested in preserving the sexual hierarchy in the family and society and to that purpose drew up an official, precise set of relational standards from which to judge the eligibility of applicant mothers. Although a gender based moral code of conduct guided relations between women and men prior to mothers' pensions, the laws and procedures of mothers' aid were an organized, formalized presentation of this code with rewards and penalties attached to ensure conformance. The conditions for aid, then, exerted formidable pressure on women (and men) to shape their relationships to mirror the patriarchal model put forth by the state.

Lastly, the peculiar limitations and restrictions mothers' pensions laws placed on women's work life virtually guaranteed their continued dependent status. The limits on hours and the type of work insured that women were excluded from the security, protections, and decent wages offered by jobs in the trades and the factories. As another strategy to keep women home minding the children, work restrictions drove a deeper wedge between the responsibilities of mothering and the responsibilities of support. During a period of economic

flux, industrial advancement, and women's changing role in relationship to home and wage-work, the work restrictions in mothers' pensions helped steer the uncertain course of women's labor history. By formulating and institutionalizing this very circumscribed relationship of women to wage-work, mothers' pensions helped forge the sharply delineated sexual division of labor that characterizes modern twentieth century patriarchal relations and keeps women dependent.

Thus, state control of women's relationship to children, men, and wage-work sought to establish a gender order based on women's connection to the home and childrearing. Similar campaigns around the regulation of homework and protective labor legislation for women joined mothers' pensions during this time period in the struggle to sanctify and uphold the ideal of motherhood. Focusing on the presumed contradiction between mothering and wage-work, these struggles strove to relieve (or prohibit) women from the burden of earning the family support.[18]

From a historian's standpoint, mothers' pensions played a significant role in the evolution of women's position in American society. Unfortunately, however, elements of the mothers' pensions program which at face value seemed to positively effect women's position pale as we regard them on a deeper level. The mothers' pensions debates, for instance, made the relations of motherhood a

highly visible object of public attention, giving a measure of recognition and dignity to the private and often unacknowledged efforts of women in the home. As well, some of the less "rational" and "individualistic" qualities associated with motherhood, such as nurturance, sensitivity, and mutual dependence, were held up as legitimate models for human interaction. The impact of mothers' pensions in this regard was problematic, however, in that the models were exclusively applied to women and used as the basis for the exclusion of women from the more "rugged" public sphere.

Similarly, mothers' pensions played a double-edged role regarding the problem of dependence. Mothers' aid constituted no minor victory for poor women who, for economic reasons alone, had been forced to break up their homes and give up their children to institutions. A study of mothers' pensions in the 1920's showed that poor widows in Chicago received greater allowances from the mothers' aid program than they did while dependent on private agencies. Another study revealed that 59% of a group of 180 pensioned widows "were distinctly better off as to income than during the father's lifetime." [19] Comparatively speaking, then, mothers' pensions offered women economic benefits of great consequence. Whatever the relative significance of the financial aid, however, the social purposes behind the program inhibited any meaningful movements of women towards

independence. As we saw above, the prescribed relations between women and children, men, and wage-work mediated any limited steps by pensioned mothers towards self-sufficiency.

The quality of state attention also represented mixed gains for dependent mothers. The mothers' aid program was revolutionary in that the state announced that the problems of single mother families should not be experienced as individual, private problems, but rather were problems that called for social solutions. Through mothers' pensions, the state acknowledged that women as mothers had special needs and deserved public notice. The state's definition of those special needs, however, directed the policy in ways that aided mothers, but exacerbated their problem of dependency.

Because the state measured the special needs of dependent mothers in terms of a strict gender code and a romanticized ideal of motherhood, the mothers' pensions program denied women's real role in family support. It focused almost exclusively on cultivating women's maternal qualities and home-making skills and insufficiently addressed single mothers' more pressing problems and concerns about support. Single mothers' daily experience taught them a more comprehensive sense of responsibility for family care than the model promoted by social workers which saw breadwinning and mothering as separate activities. Very few mothers could rely on the amount or permanence of their mothers' pension to

support their family. The vast majority had to supplement their grant. Yet, there was no attention in the mothers' pensions program given to jobs or day care programs or other support systems that acknowledged single mothers' real responsibilities that spilled over their artificially sexually assigned tasks. Ironically, then, the range and nature of mothers' pensions services inhibited rather than facilitated single mothers' ability to adequately care for their families.

If there is a final assessment of the mothers' pensions program, it is that mothers' pensions put poor women in a bind. Though mothers' pensions rescued (some) families of dependent mothers from total destitution, it did not give women enough money to support their families nor did it allow women to earn enough money to make up for the inadequate grant. Consequently, pensioned mothers had little control over the extent and quality of care and support they could provide for their children.

To do justice to the complex processes and changes involved in the evolution of welfare policy from the mothers' pensions program to the present Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program would require a separate research effort. However, if we were to look broadly at the modern welfare system in light of the history of mothers' pensions, we could ask the question: Does welfare put women

in this same sort of bind?

Today, women still comprise the overwhelming majority of welfare recipients because it is as mothers that they claim AFDC benefits. As in the past, welfare grants across the country are inadequate for a woman to raise a family on. In fact, over the years (for complicated reasons having to do with the changed racial composition and marital status of mothers receiving welfare), grants have been awarded more begrudgingly and have increasingly been intended to supply only partial family support. As a policy decision, AFDC grants do not even approximate the income expected to lift a family from poverty. Currently, no state allows a family's assistance package--including cash or in-kind benefits--to bring them up to the official poverty level (\$9,862 for a nonfarm family of 4 in 1982).[20] By contrast, the mothers' pensions grants, at least in principle, sought to provide enough income to maintain a decent standard of living for the mother and her children. Modern welfare grants, then, represent even less economic security for poor mothers than did mothers' pensions.

As was the case for mothers' pensioners, the fact that today's welfare mothers and their children cannot survive on the size of the welfare grant alone, is compounded by the restrictions placed on recipient women's ability to earn money to supplement the grant. Though welfare mothers

of children over the age of six are now required to work, the system places ceilings on the amount of income a mother can earn and still be eligible for welfare. Compelling disincentives to work are built into the modern welfare system just as restrictions on kinds and hours of work were a central piece of the earlier mothers' pensions program. In both programs, recipient women are trapped in a system that does not provide them with enough assistance and at the same time does not enable them to earn the additional support necessary to attain a decent standard of living.

Now as in the earlier part of the century, welfare plays into the labor market system that perpetuates women's dependence. Welfare programs function, in effect, to subsidize the low wage, women-dominated industries. By providing supplemental income to women workers, who primarily fill the secondary labor market jobs, welfare encourages the payment of low wages in these industries. In turn, because of the income ceilings in the welfare eligibility requirements, recipient women are channeled into these low-paying, dead-end jobs which offer minimal or no fringe benefits, and are often non-union or seasonal jobs. The insecure nature of these jobs, then, force poor women to depend on welfare. As a result, welfare ensnarls recipient women in an interlocking system of work structures and relief programs predicated on their dependence.

We would have to say, then, that present welfare policies do indeed put women in a bind of dependency much as the earlier mothers' pensions program did. The welfare system, however, is not totally responsible for creating these circumstances. The real problem lies in the larger social and economic system. Welfare policies are lodged in a system that does not afford women good, well-paying jobs and the kinds of flexible work and child-care structures that would enable them to lead independent lives. Behind the barriers to these sorts of support systems is a commitment to a gender system that devalues women's work--as mothers, as home-makers, as wage-earners. There have been some recent gains in the areas of work opportunities and support systems, though they mainly benefit middle class women. Attitudes towards women and parenting appear to be changing; however, as in the earlier part of the century, there are constant reactionary fears over gender instability and women's supposed abandonment of the home.

Welfare policies need to be re-examined from a feminist perspective. Reforms need to be based on women's needs, not the state's need for a particular gender order. The history of mothers' pensions has taught us to look critically at how welfare policies control women's lives in order to stabilize disruptive trends in gender relations and the social order. It points out the linkages between the



state, welfare, and women's oppression. Beyond explaining the dynamics of the past, then, a feminist analysis of the history of welfare expands our understanding of the present and clarifies our visions of future alternatives to the welfare state.

## FOOTNOTES

### Chapter I

1. The most extensive study to date is Winifred Bell's piece on mothers' pensions in her book, Aid to Dependent Children, (NY: Columbia University Press, 1965).
2. My thinking about historical gendered processes was much enriched by Cynthia Enloe's Does Khaki Become You? The Militarization of Women's Lives, (Boston, Mass: South End Press, 1983), especially Chapter 8.
3. Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex," in Rayna Reiter, ed., Toward an Anthropology of Women, (NY: Monthly Review Press, 1975).
4. Mary P. Ryan, Womanhood in America: From Colonial Times to the Present, (NY: New Viewpoints, 1975), p. 5.
5. For two good selections of articles articulating the political content of the concept of patriarchy see: Zillah R. Eisenstein, ed., Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism, (NY: Monthly Review Press, 1979); and Lydia Sargent, ed., Women and Revolution: A Discussion of the Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism, (Boston, Mass: South End Press, 1981).
6. Nancy Chodorow, "Mothering, Male Dominance, and Capitalism," in Eisenstein, p. 86.
7. See especially Paul Boyer, Urban Masses and Moral Order in America: 1820-1920, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1978).
8. Walter Trattner, From Poor Law to Welfare State, (NY: The Free Press, 1979), p. 49.
9. These statistics were compiled in Barbara Brenzel, Daughters of the State, A Social Portrait

of the First Reform School for Girls in North America, 1856-1905, (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1983).

10. See for instance: Dorothy Becker, "Exit Lady Bountiful: The Volunteer and Professional Social Worker," Social Service Review, (March 1968); Thomas Bender, Toward an Urban Vision: Ideas and Institutions in Nineteenth Century America, (Lexington, KY: Press of Kentucky, 1975); Barbara I. Berg, The Remembered Gate: Origins of American Feminism: The Woman and the City, 1800-1860, (NY: Oxford University Press, 1978); Robert Bremner, American Philanthropy, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960); Barbara Leslie Epstein, The Politics of Domesticity: Women, Evangelism and Temperance in Nineteenth Century America, (Middletown, Conn: Wesleyan University Press, 1981); Estelle Freedman, Their Sisters' Keepers: Women's Prison Reform in America, 1830-1930, (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 1981); Clifford Griffin, Their Brothers' Keepers: Moral Stewardship in the United States, 1800-1856, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1965); Kathleen McCarthy, Noblesse Oblige: Charity and Cultural Philanthropy in Chicago, 1849-1929, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); David Pivar, Purity Crusade: Sexual Morality and Social Control 1868-1900, (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1973); Mary Ryan, "The Power of Women's Networks: A Case of Female Moral Reform in Antebellum America," Feminist Studies, 5, (Spring 1979); Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, Religion and the Rise of the American City: The New York City Mission Movement, 1812-1870, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1971).

11. See Trattner, p. 53; Brenzel, p. 8; and David Rothman, Discovery of the Asylum: Social Order and Disorder in the New Republic, (Boston: Little Brown, 1971), p. 105.

12. Anthony Platt, The Child Savers: The Invention of Delinquency, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), p. 28-36.

13. Christine Stansell, "Women, Children, and the Uses of the Streets: Class and Gender Conflict in New York City, 1850-1860," Feminist Studies, 8, (Summer 1982), p. 16.

14. Trattner, p. 98; Platt; Mason P. Thomas, "Child

Abuse and Neglect: Historical Overview, Legal Matrix, and Social Perspectives," North Carolina Law Review, vol. 50, (February 1972), p. 302.

15. For more detail on the kinds of authorities and influence these boards had, see Trattner, p. 75-77.

16. Ann Vanderpol, "Dependent Children, Child Custody, and the Mothers' Pensions: The Transformation of State-Family Relations in the Early 20th Century," Social Problems, vol. 29, (February 1982), p. 224-26; Thomas, p. 306.

17. This point is developed in Brenzel and also in Elizabeth Weiz-Buck, "The Public Economy of Motherhood: The Development of Social Policy Towards Poor Mothers and Their Children in Chicago, 1891-1928," (paper prepared for delivery at the 1983 Annual Meeting of the Organization of American Historians).

18. Weiz-Buck, p. 5.

19. Brenzel, p. 78.

20. For exceptions to these assumptions see Brenzel; Freedman; and Steven Schlossman and Stephanie Wallach, "The Crime of Precocious Sexuality: Female Delinquency in the Progressive Era," Harvard Educational Review, 48, (February 1978).

21. See for instance, Mrs. L.R. Warner, "Girls in Reformatories," Proceedings, National Conference of Charities and Corrections, (1879), p. 178.

22. For analyses and histories of gender ideology in this period, see G. J. Barker-Benfield, The Horrors of the Half-Known Life: Male Attitudes Toward Women and Sexuality in Nineteenth Century America, (NY: Harper & Row, 1976); Ruth Bloch, "American Feminine Ideals in Transitions: The Rise of the Moral Mother," Feminist Studies, 4, (1978); Mary Ryan, Womanhood in America, (NY: New Viewpoints, Division of Franklin Watts, 1975); Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," American Quarterly, 18, (Summer 1966); and Sarah Eisenstein, Give Us Bread But Give Us Roses: Working Women's Consciousness in the United States, 1890 to the First World War, (Boston, Mass: Routledge & Kegan

Paul, 1983), for a particularly well-written account of this era's dominant ideology. On the uniqueness of females, see Rosalind Rosenberg, "In Search of Women's Nature: 1850-1920," Feminist Studies, 3, (Fall 1975). On the fallen woman, see Freedman.

23. Henry Lord, "Dependent and Delinquent Children," PNCCC, (1878), p. 181-2.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 186.

25. Josephine Shaw Lowell, "One Means of Preventing Pauperism," PNCCC, (1879), p. 189.

26. Henry Lord, p. 181.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 179.

28. Sophonisba Breckinridge and Edith Abbott, The Delinquent Child and the Home, (NY: Russell Sage, 1912), p. 38.

29. Brenzel, p. 81.

30. Freedman, p. 14.

31. Brenzel, p. 39-41.

32. Lord, p. 184.

33. "Discussion on Reformatories," PNCCC, (1889), p. 308.

34. Breckinridge and Abbott, p. 35.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

36. Sarah F. Kelley, "Reform Work for Girls," PNCCC, (1892), p. 180.

37. Brenzel, p. 196.

38. Platt, The Child-Savers; Rothman, The Discovery of the Asylum.

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1. See Homer Folks, "The Care of Delinquent Children," Proceedings, National Conference of Charities and Corrections, (1891).
2. Proceedings of the Conference on the Care of Dependent Children, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1909), p. 9. [Hereafter referred to as the White House Conference.]
3. Mark H. Leff, "Consensus for Reform: The Mothers'-Pension Movement in the Progressive Era," Social Service Review, 47, (September 1973), p. 217.
4. Rev. D.J. McMahon, "Family Influence," White House Conference, p. 94.
5. Ibid., p. 95.
6. Winifred Bell, Aid to Dependent Children, (NY: Columbia University Press, 1965).
7. Leff, "Consensus for Reform."
8. Susan Tiffin, In Whose Best Interest? Child Welfare Reform in the Progressive Era, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982).
9. Ann Vanderpol, "Dependent Children, Child Custody, and the Mothers' Pensions: Transformation of State-Family Relations in the Early 20th Century," Social Problems, 29, (February 1982).
10. Linda Gordon, "'Child-Saving' and the Single Mother: A View from the Perspective of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, Boston, 1880-1920," (unpublished manuscript, University of Massachusetts, Boston, 1983).
11. June Axinn, Social Welfare: A History of the American Response to Need, (NY: Harper & Row, 1975), p. 116.
12. Ibid., p. 117.

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14. Walter Trattner, From Poor Law to Welfare State: A History of Social Welfare in America, (NY: The Free Press, 1979), p. 134-5.
15. Ibid., p. 135.
16. Ibid., p. 136.
17. Paul Boyer, Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820-1920, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1978), p. 123.
18. Robert Hunter, Poverty, (NY: Macmillan Co., 1904), p. 56-78.
19. Ibid., p. 29.
20. As relayed in James T. Patterson, America's Struggle Against Poverty, 1900-1980, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 8.
21. Axinn, p. 118.
22. Arthur W. Calhoun, A Social History of the American Family From Colonial Times to the Present, Volume III, (Cleveland: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1919), p. 226.
23. Linda Gordon, Woman's Body, Woman's Right: A Social History of Birth Control in America, (NY: Penguin Books, 1977), p. 138.
24. See Edward Berkowitz and Kim McQuaid, Creating the Welfare State: The Political Economy of 20th Century Reform, (NY: Praeger Publishers, 1980), especially Chapter 1; and Harvy Wasserman, Harvy Wasserman's History of the United States, (NY: Harper & Row Publishers, 1972), especially Part II.
25. See James Leiby, A History of Social Welfare and Social Work in the U.S., 1815-1972, (NY: Columbia University Press, 1978), especially Chapter 8.
26. Boyer, p. 150.

27. Boyer, p. 150. For a discussion on "Science and the Ascent of the Experts," see Barbara Ehrenreich and Diedre English, For Her Own Good: 150 Years of the Experts' Advice to Women, (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press, 1979), Chapter 3.
28. Leiby, p. 139.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid., p. 142.
31. For an analysis of government commissions investigating homework and factory conditions in New York as they relate to working women, see Cynthia R. Daniels, "Working Mothers and the State," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Massachusetts, 1984).
32. For a provocative study of the emergence of social engineering, social "experts," and the kinds of institutional support these experts commanded during the pre-World War I years, see John F. McClymer, War and Welfare: Social Engineering in America, 1890-1925, (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1980), especially Part I.
33. Charles N. Glaab and A. Theodore Brown, A History of Urban America, (NY: The Macmillan Company, 1967), p. 224. See especially Chapter 9 for a discussion of the different ways Americans examined life in the city during this period. See also McClymer, Chapter 2.
34. Trattner, p. 104.
35. American Unitarian Association, A Practical Platform for Social Progress, by Charles F. Dole, Social Service Series, Bulletin No. 25, (1914), p. 1-2.
36. Eldon R. James, "Some Implications of Remedial and Preventive Legislation in the U.S.," Proceedings of the 7th Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Society, (Boston, Mass., December 1912), p. 173.
37. Ibid., p. 173.
38. Axinn, p. 125. Some milestones in regulatory legislation were the 1906 Hepburn Act which permitted the



state to fix the rates of railroads, the 1910 regulation of telephone and telegraph companies, and the 1914 Clayton Anti-Trust Act passed to control monopolies. See Axinn, p. 123-5.

39. Ibid., p. 126.

40. David Moses Schneider, The History of Public Welfare in New York State, 1867-1940, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1941), p. 158.

41. As a partial list of works on Progressive Era reforms, see Joseph L. Castrovinci, "Prelude to Welfare Capitalism: The Role of Business in the Enactment of Workmen's Compensation Legislation in Illinois, 1905-12," in Frank R. Breul and Steven J. Diner, eds., Compassion and Responsibility: Readings in Social Welfare Policy in the United States, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); Galen Crantz, The Politics of Park Design: A History of Urban Parks in America, (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1982); Cynthia R. Daniels, "Working Mothers and the State"; Richard Hofstadter, Age of Reform: From Bryan to FDR, (NY: Knopf, 1955); Susan Tiffin, In Whose Best Interests?; James Weinstein, The Corporate Ideal in the Liberal State: 1900-1918, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969).

42. Quoted by Judge Ben B. Lindsey in White House Conference, p. 216.

43. See Ehrenreich and English, Chapter 6; Ellen Key, The Century of the Child, (NY: G.P. Putnam, 1909).

44. James S. Bossard, Editorial Forward, The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, Child Welfare, Vol. xcvi, No. 187, (November 1921), p. v-vi.

45. See Sheila M. Rothman, Women's Proper Place: A History of Changing Ideals and Practices, 1870 to the Present, (NY: Basic Books, 1978).

46. Vanderpol, p. 227-8. For a more extensive discussion of the legal history of child custody and how it reflects changes in patriarchal relations in the family, see Carol Brown, "Mothers, Fathers and Children: From Private to Public Patriarchy," in Lydia Sargent, ed., Women and Revolution: A Discussion of the Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism, (Boston: South End Press, 1981).

47. Sarah Eisenstein's research on working women's consciousness suggests that the lower classes, too, incorporated the evolving ideology of motherhood into their lives. See Sarah Eisenstein, Give Us Bread But Give Us Roses: Working Women's Consciousness in the United States, 1890 to the First World War, (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983). I do not take this up in this paper because the subject of working class women's attitudes and beliefs is too complex and too important a topic to treat lightly here. However, I think it can be fairly presumed that the early twentieth century ideas of motherhood and the home emerged as positive, core values in the fabric of American working class as well as middle class lives over the early decades of this century.
48. Rosalind Rosenberg, "In Search of Woman's Nature, 1850-1920," Feminist Studies, (Fall 1975).
49. See Ehrenreich and English, Chapter 5.
50. Rosenberg, p. 144.
51. Ibid., p. 144.
52. For different manifestations of this problem, see Tiffin, Chapter 5; William O'Neil, Divorce in the Progressive Era, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967); John Modell and Tamara Hareven, "Urbanization and the Malleable Household: An Examination of Boarding and Lodging in American Families," in Michael Gordon, ed., The American Family in Social-Historical Perspective, (NY: St. Martin's Press, 1978).
53. W. Norton Grubb and Marvin Lazerson, Broken Promises: How Americans Fail Their Children, (NY: Basic Books, 1982).
54. O'Neil, p. 1.
55. U.S. Bureau of the Census, Marriage and Divorce 1867-1906, (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1909), as found in Tiffin, p. 28.
56. Ibid., p. 111.
57. O'Neil, p. 25.

58. Ibid., p. 24. For statistics on college educated women and marriage during this period, see Linda Gordon, Woman's Body, Woman's Right, p. 139.
59. O'Neil, p. 25; Gordon, Woman's Body, Woman's Right, p. 134.
60. Gordon, Woman's Body, Woman's Right, p. 154
61. Grubb, p. 20.
62. Ibid., p. 20.
63. Gordon, Woman's Body, Woman's Right, p. 203.
64. Professor E.A. Ross, in a report on the Annual Meeting of the Sociological Society, Survey, Vol. 21, (1908-09), p. 665.
65. Daniels, p. 44.
66. Calhoun, p. 92-3.
67. Hannah K. Shoff, "A Childless Wife," National Congress of Mothers Magazine, Vol. II, No. 8, (April 1908), p. 189. Linda Gordon, in Woman's Body, Woman's Right, cites the article to which Hannah Shoff was responding. The article was entitled "Why I Have No Family," signed by "A Childless Wife." Gordon's point here is that the challenge to motherhood of this perspective was so risky that women defending this condition of "childlessness" did not sign their names. "Indeed," Gordon notes, "I have found no signed article that discussed this issue from a personal standpoint." Note 53, p. 435.
68. National Congress of Mothers, Address to the First International Congress in America on the Welfare of the Child, Washington, D.C., March, 1908, by President Theodore Roosevelt, p. 15-6.
69. Quoted in Grubb, p. 22.
70. Ehrenreich and English, Chapter 5.
71. Sophinisba Preston Breckinridge, "Neglected

Widowhood in the Juvenile Court," American Journal of Sociology, Vol. 16, (July 1910), p. 61.

72. Boyer, p. 193.

73. Lela B. Costin, Two Sisters for Social Justice: A Biography of Grace and Edith Abbott, (Urbana, Ill: University of Illinois Press, 1983), p. 90.

74. Boyer, p. 191-95.

75. Ibid., p. 198. See also "Are Low Wages Responsible for Women's Immorality?" Current Opinion, Vol. 54, (May 1913).

76. Mrs. G.H. Robertson, "The State's Duty to Fatherless Children," Child Welfare Magazine, Vol. VI, No.5, (1911), p. 159.

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1. Charles E. Faulkner, "Twentieth Century Alignments for the Promotion of Social Order," President's Address, Proceedings, National Conference of Charities and Corrections, (1900), p. 2.

2. Edward A. Hall, "Destitute and Neglected Children: The Relations Between their Care and Education in the Home and in the Institution," PNCCC, (1899), p. 179.

3. Edmond J. Butler, "The Causes of Poverty," PNCCC, (1903), p. 275.

4. See note 42 in Chapter 2.

5. Mary E. Richmond, "The Family and the Social Worker," PNCCC, (1908), p. 79.

6. President Theodore Roosevelt, President's Message to Congress, Proceedings of the Conference on the Care of Dependent Children, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1909), p. 5. [Referred to hereafter as the

White House Conference.]

7. See Homer Folks, The Care of Destitute, Neglected, and Delinquent Children, (NY: Macmillan Co., 1907), p. 134; and George B. Mangold, Problems of Child Welfare, (NY: Macmillan Co., 1914), p. 425.
8. Report of this study found in Mangold, p. 425.
9. Joseph C. Logan, "A Social Policy for Dealing with the Recreant Husband and Father," PNCCC, (1911), p. 402.
10. Linda Gordon, "'Child-Saving' and the Single Mother: A View from the Perspective of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, Boston, 1880-1920," (unpublished manuscript, University of Massachusetts, Boston, 1983), p. 8.
11. Katharine Susan Anthony, Mothers Who Must Earn, (NY: Survey Associates, 1914), p. 153.
12. New York, Report of the New York State Commission on Relief for Widowed Mothers, (Albany, NY: J.B. Lyon Company, Printers, 1914), p. 57-74. [Hereafter referred to as New York Commission.]
13. Massachusetts, Report of the Commission on the Support of Dependent Minor Children of Widowed Mothers, (Boston: Wright & Potter Printing Company, State Printers, 1913), p. 13. [Hereafter referred to as Massachusetts Commission.]
14. Edith Abbott, "Public Pensions to Widows with Children," American Economic Review, Vol. 3, (June 1913), p. 474.
15. Gordon, p. 3-4.
16. Sophinisba Preston Breckinridge, "Neglected Widowhood in the Juvenile Court," American Journal of Sociology, Vol. 16, (July 1910), p. 57-9.
17. Documented in Margaret O'Brien Steinfelds, Who's Minding the Children? The History and Politics of Day Care in America (NY: Simon & Schuster, 1973), p. 52.

18. Robert W. Smuts, Women and Work in America, (NY: Schocken Books, 1971), p. 52.
19. Mary E. Richmond and Fred S. Hall, A Study of Nine Hundred and Eighty-five Widows Known to Certain-Charity Organizations Societies in 1910, (NY: 1910), p. 13.
20. Ibid., p. 13.
21. Smuts, p. 52.
22. Ibid., p. 54.
23. Judge Ben B. Lindsey, Address, White House Conference, p. 218.
24. William E. Baldwin, "The Present Status of Family Desertion and Non-Support Laws," PNCCC, (1911), p. 406.
25. Logan, p. 401.
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27. Miss Minnie F. Low, Discussion on Desertion and Non-Support, PNCCC, (1911), p. 413.
28. White House Conference, p. 9-10.
29. See Mark H. Leff, "Consensus for Reform: The Mothers'-Pension Movement in the Progressive Era," Social Service Review, 47, No. 3, (September 1973).
30. For the development of this, see Gordon.
31. Leff, p. 254-5.
32. "Editorial Comment on the Congress of Mothers," Child Welfare Magazine, Vol. VI, No. 1, (1911), p. 31.
33. See Elizabeth Weiz-Buck, "The Public Economy of Motherhood: The Development of Social Policy Towards Poor Mothers and Their Children in Chicago, 1891-1928," (paper prepared for delivery at the 1983 Annual Meeting of the Organization of American Historians).
34. Leff, p. 256.

35. Ibid., p. 257.
36. Literally hundreds of articles appeared in journals and newspapers across the country over the years. See for instance the following journals: American Economic Review, American Journal of Sociology, American Labor Legislation Review, American Political Science Review, Child, Child Welfare Magazine, Colliers Weekly, Delineator, Independent, Literary Digest, Outlook, Survey, and World's Work.
37. Quoted in Leff, p. 254.
38. T.J. Emonds and Maurice B. Hexter, "State Pensions to Mothers in Hamilton County, Ohio," Survey, Vol. 33, (December 1914), p. 290.
39. John Modell and Tamara K. Hareven, "Urbanization and the Malleable Household: An Examination of Boarding and Lodging in American Families," in Michael Gordon, ed., The American Family in Socio-Historical Perspective, (NY: St. Martin's Press, 1978).
40. Massachusetts Commission, p. 13.
41. Florence Kelley, "The Family and the Woman's Wage," PNCCC, (1909), p. 121.
42. Documented in Smuts, p. 51.
43. As quoted in New York Commission, p. 45.
44. See for example Mary Richmond, "Motherhood and Pensions," Survey, Vol. 29, (March 1913), p. 775; and Edward Devine, Report to the Executive Committee, New York Commission, p. 43. These two pieces are taken up later in this chapter.
45. Anthony, p. 199.
46. See Anthony, p. 59; Breckinridge, p. 59; Kelly p. 122.
47. Anthony, p. 57.

48. New York Commission, p. 37.
49. Anthony, p. 107.
50. New York Commission, p. 37.
51. Max Mitchell, Remarks, White House Conference, p. 50.
52. Sophinisba Breckinridge and Edith Abbott, The Delinquent Child and the Home, (NY: Russell Sage, 1912), p. 96.
53. Breckinridge, p. 54.
54. Breckinridge and Abbott, p. 96.
55. Ibid., p. 96. It is interesting to note here that, standing alone in the social work community, the Massachusetts Commission studying the state's relief to widows disagreed with this commonly held contention. Aware of the statements from authorities in other states claiming that the working mother caused delinquency, the Commission was compelled to take objection: "...from the records examined and the information secured it is apparent that the widowhood of mothers is not an important factor in producing delinquency among children in Boston, and that the absence of widowed mothers from the home, at work, is a still less important factor." Massachusetts Commission, p. 163.
56. Breckinridge, p. 61.
57. As quoted in New York Commission, p. 41.
58. Breckinridge, p. 64-5.
59. Judge Julian Mack, Presidential Address, PNCCC, (1912), p. 3.
60. Marie Van Kleeck, Testimony before the Commission, New York Commission, p. 42.
61. Richmond, "Motherhood and Pensions," p. 775.
62. Ibid., p. 775.



63. Devine, p. 43.
64. New York Commission, p. 47.
65. James F. Jackson, Address, White House Conference, p. 44.
66. Rabbi Emil G. Hirsch, "The Home Versus the Institution," White House Conference, p. 93.
67. Cynthia Daniels' work shows that during this same time period, reformers on different fronts were establishing claims about women's inferior physical strength and endurance which were used to justify protective labor legislation for women. The point here is that, from a number of angles, based on their presumed primary identification as mothers, women were being discouraged from working. See Cynthia R. Daniels, "Working Mothers and the State," (Ph.D dissertation, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, 1984), especially p. 105-114.
68. G.E. Howe, "The Family System," PNCCC, (1880), as quoted in Anthony M. Platt, The Child Savers: The Invention of Delinquency, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1977), p. 63.
69. Rev. William McMahon, Remarks, White House Conference, p. 53.
70. President Theodore Roosevelt, Address, *ibid.*, p. 36.
71. George L. Sehon, Remarks, *ibid.*, p. 53.
72. Mitchell, *ibid.*, p. 49.
73. Michael J. Scanlan, Address, *ibid.*, p. 42, quoting C.E. Faulkner's paper read at the National Conference of Charities and Corrections, 1904.
74. Steinfelds, p. 50-53. Schneider and Deutsch argue that a primary motivation behind private agencies' establishing day nurseries was to stave off the threatening, publicly administered mothers' pensions reform. David Schneider and Albert Deutsch, The History of Public Welfare in New York State, 1867-1940, (Chicago: University of Chicago

Press, 1941), p. 183.

75. As quoted in *ibid.*, p. 51.

76. See Steinfelds, p. 49.

77. *Ibid.*, p. 50.

78. M.H. Burgess, "Day Nursery Work," PNCCC, (1892),  
p. 424.

79. N.S. Rosenau, "Day Nurseries," PNCCC, (1894),  
p. 334.

80. Judge Julian Mack, Remarks, White House Conference, p. 51.

81. See Lela B. Costin, Two Sisters for Social Justice: A Biography of Grace and Edith Abbott, (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1983), p. 90.

82. Judge Merrick Pinckney, "Public Pensions to Widows: Experiences Which Lead Me to Favor Such a Law," The Child: A Monthly Journal of Child Welfare, Vol .1, No. 5, (July 1912), p. 44-5.

83. James Jackson, Address, White House Conference,  
p. 44.

84. Mack, p. 51-2.

85. See Mary Richmond, "The Family and the Social Worker," for an explication of "the first great, practical syllogism" of father, mother, child.

86. Mary Conyngton, How to Help: A Manual of Practical Charity, (NY: The Macmillan Company, 1909), p. 125.

87. *Ibid.*, p. 125.

88. Mary White Ovington, "The Negro Home in New York," Charities, XV, (October 1905), found in Robert H. Bremner, Children and Youth in America: A Documentary History, Vol. II, 1866-1932, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1977), p. 45.

89. Ibid., p. 45.
90. Richmond, "The Family and the Social Worker,"  
p. 80.
91. See Gordon.
92. Ben B. Lindsey, "The Mothers Compensation Law of  
Colorado," Survey, 29, (February 1913), p. 716.
93. New York Commission, p. 22.
94. Boston, Overseers of the Poor Annual Report,  
Boston City Documents, Vol. II, Document No. 21, 1915.
95. New York Commission, p. 21.
96. As quoted in Gordon, p. 21.
97. As quoted in Gertrude Vaile, "Administering  
Mothers' Pensions in Denver," Survey, 31, (February 1914),  
p. 674.
98. Ibid., p. 675.
99. Ibid.
100. Schneider, p. 182.
101. See Judge Julian Mack, in White House Conference,  
p. 51-2, for a supporter of pensions to illegitimate mothers.
102. As quoted in Ada Eliot Sheffield,  
"Administration of the Mothers' Aid Law in Massachusetts,"  
Survey, 31, (February 1914), p. 645.
103. Ibid., p. 645.
104. New York Commission, p. 21.
105. Vaile, p. 675.
106. Judge Merrick Pinkney, "Public Pensions to  
Widows; Experiences and Observations Which Lead Me to Favor  
Such a Law," in Edna D. Bullock, ed., Selected Articles on  
Mothers' Pensions, (White Plains, NY: H.W. Wilson Company,

1915), p. 148.

107. See Sarah Eisenstein, Give Us Bread But Give Us Roses: Working Women's Consciousness in the United States, 1890 to the First World War, (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983), p. 43-47, for a very helpful discussion on how to understand the relationship between dominant groups' values and subordinate groups' consciousness. Eisenstein builds on Frank Parkin's theory that subgroups' relation to the dominant ideas of the society is neither a simple process of acceptance or rejection, but rather a process of negotiation.

#### Chapter IV

1. U.S. Department of Labor, Children's Bureau, Laws Relating to "Mothers' Pensions" in the United States, Denmark and New Zealand, Publication No. 7, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1914), p. 34.

2. Elizabeth Haywood Milchrist, State Administration of Child Welfare in Illinois, (Chicago: The University of Chidago Press, 1937), p. 5-6.

3. Julian W. Mack, "Legal Problems Involved in the Establishment of the Juvenile Court," in Appendix I, in Sophonisba Breckinridge and Edith Abbott, The Delinquent Child and the Home, (New York: Russell Sage, 1912), p. 187. See also Julia Lathrop, "Introduction," *ibid.*, p. 1-5.

4. Mack, p. 186.

5. See Hastings H. Hart, "Distinctive Features of the Juvenile Court," Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, Vol. xxvi, No. 1, (July 1910), p. 57.

6. For a full treatment of the development of the juvenile court system, see Robert Mennell, Thorns and Thistles: Juvenile Delinquency in the United States 1825-1940, (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1973); Anthony Platt, The Child Savers: The Invention of Delinquency, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977); and Steven L. Schlossman, Love and the American Delinquent: The

theory and Practice of "Progressive" Juvenile Justice, 1825-1920, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977).

7. Merrick Pinckney, Testimony given before the Cook County, Illinois Civil Service Commission, November, 1911, in Breckinridge and Abbott.

8. Platt, p. 139.

9. Mack, p. 181. See also Hart, p. 60 and Mason Thomas, "Child Abuse and Neglect Part I: Historical Overview, Legal Matrix, and Social Perspectives," North Carolina Law Review, Vol. 50, (February 1972).

10. See, U.S. Children's Bureau, The Legal Aspects of the Juvenile Court, by Bernard Flexner and Reuben Oppenheimer, Publication No. 99, (1922).

11. Mack, p. 185.

12. Homer Folks, "Juvenile Probation," Proceedings, National Conference of Charities and Corrections, (1906), p. 117.

13. Walter I. Trattner, From Poor Law to Welfare State: A History of Social Welfare in America, (NY: The Free Press, 1979), p. 185; Mack, p. 185.

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