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The Welfare Reform as an Ineffective Approach to Poverty

In 1996, Bill Clinton signed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act into law (page 236). It was commonly referred to as the Welfare Reform. This legislation was aimed at redirecting federal funds towards assisting the poor. Among other provisions, the bill incorporated workforce development as a major component of welfare legislation (page 236-237). This was aimed at encouraging and promoting employment among the poor. It also established the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program as well as the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training Program. As much as the Welfare Reform was aimed at ending poverty, overwhelming evidence supports that it was not the right approach to poverty.

Statistics from various scholars and agencies reveal that the Welfare Reform heightened poverty rather than reducing it. According to Voegeli (2010), the number of households in the United States living on less than \$2 per person per day has continued to rise since the beginning of the Welfare Reform. Between 1996 and 2011 for example, the number of these households has risen from 636,000 to 1.46 million. This represents a 130 percent increase in the number of people living below the poverty standard between 1996 and 2011 (page 246). In addition, the number of children in the United States living in extreme poor conditions has doubled from 1.4

million in 1996 to 2.8 million in 2011 (Covert, 2014). This has largely been attributed to the Welfare Reform which has often been described as a big failure.

Mencimer (2009) claims that the level of extreme poverty among the groups that were severely affected and targeted by the welfare reform has worsened. She believes that instead of helping in poverty eradication, the Welfare Reform doubled the rate of extreme poverty. According to her, the replacement of the Aid to Families with Dependent Children with the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families was a big blunder (page 251-252). Under this program, a large number of men, women and children who meet the condition of no or low income are entitled to financial assistance. However, it is evident that this financial assistance is minimal and the application process is degrading and cumbersome (page 245).

Statistics reveal that the number of poor households meant to benefit from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program has continued to increase years after the Welfare Reform. A large percentage of these families miss these benefits. During the inception of the program in 1996, only 28 percent of the poor families eligible for the financial assistance missed the benefits. In 2012, this percentage had skyrocketed to 74 percent (Covert, 2014).

Mencimer (2009) provides the best argument regarding the ineffectiveness of the Welfare Reforms. In her article, she proves how the application process for the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program is degrading and impaired by a number of challenges (page 248). A large number of eligible households miss the assistance every year (page 252). This significantly contributes to the increasing rates of poverty in the United States. Many States strive to reduce the number of TANF eligible mothers using a number of deceptive means.

According to Mencimer (2009), less than 2,500 adults in Georgia currently receive the TANF assistance as compared to 28,000 adults who received the assistance in the same state in

2004. This is a staggering 90 percent decline in just a few years. The numbers are worrying in other states as well. For instance, Illinois, Louisiana, and Texas have each recorded more than 80 percent drop in the number of adults who receive TANF assistance (page 247-248). This is also the case with the number of children living below poverty line who receive TANF assistance. There are also increased unemployment rates as well as growths in other poverty programs such as food stamps. These are clear indications that the Welfare Reform was not the right approach to poverty (page 249).

In conclusion, the Welfare Reform has proved to be an ineffective way of eliminating poverty. Since its beginning in 1996, poverty levels in the United States continue to rise. This is proven by the skyrocketing number of people who are eligible to TANF but still miss out. Statistics reveal that the number of mothers and children who live below the poverty line continues to increase (page 253). Thus, the Welfare Reform has failed in its role of fighting poverty.

Works Cited

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