

Columbia University
Department of Political Science

Political Science W4226
American Politics and Social Welfare Policy

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The American welfare state is often described as a “weakling” and a “laggard” compared to other developed countries. The United States was among the last industrial countries to adopt national policies to protect its citizens against many of the risks of modern life — poverty, unemployment, old age, sickness and disability — policies in these areas remain less comprehensive in the United States than elsewhere. From minimal beginnings, the American welfare state went through a period of explosive growth in the middle of the twentieth century, from the New Deal of the 1930s to the War on Poverty of the 1960s and beyond. The last thirty years, however, have been a period of retrenchment and reform as the economic and political foundations of American social policy have been unsettled.

This course will examine the politics of American social policy, with particular emphasis on explaining *why* the American welfare state is the way it is and *how* it got that way. We will explore the history and development of welfare policy in the United States as well as contemporary dilemmas and debates, including the issues surrounding the passage of the 1996 welfare reform act as well as current debates over Social Security, Medicare, and other issues.

There are no prerequisites for the course, although basic familiarity with American government and twentieth-century American history will help.

Books and Readings

The following five books have been ordered at Labyrinth Books, 536 West 112th Street:

Martin Gilens, *Why Americans Hate Welfare: Race, Media, and the Politics of Antipoverty Policy*

Jacob S. Hacker, *The Divided Welfare State: The Battle over Public and Private Social Benefits in the United States*

Gwendolyn Mink and Rickie Solinger, eds., *Welfare: A Documentary History of U.S. Policy and Politics*

Theda Skocpol, *Social Policy in the United States: Future Possibilities in Historical Perspective*

William Julius Wilson, *When Work Disappears: The World of the New Urban Poor*

Some readings are available on the Web; where this is so, the URL is listed and links are provided. The readings that are neither on the Web nor in the available books are collected in a course reader, which is available at the Village Copier, 2872 Broadway (between 111th and 112th Streets). All reading is on reserve at Lehman Library, on the third floor of the International Affairs Building.

In addition to the reading on the syllabus, students should read a major daily newspaper that covers national politics extensively— preferably the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, or the *Washington Post*.

Writing

A further aim of this course is to encourage clear and concise writing about politics, free of cant, obfuscation, and other nonsense. Bad writing, in fact, usually reveals muddled thinking. Written work will be evaluated not only for quality of ideas but also for clarity and economy of expression. Flawless grammar and correct spelling are *minimum* requirements for acceptable writing.

The standard for matters of grammar and style in this course is *The Elements of Style*, by William Strunk Jr. and E. B. White. Everyone who writes in English should be familiar with this book. Copies are available at Labyrinth Books and elsewhere. If you do not already own this book, you should buy it. Read it. Read it again. Put it under your pillow at night. If you use it wisely your writing will almost certainly improve (for which your teachers will thank you).

You should also consider reading some nonfiction essays by masters of the genre. Some authors to consider are George Orwell, E. B. White, Joseph Mitchell, John McPhee, David Remnick, and Philip Gourevitch. Above all, read Orwell's essay, "Politics and the English Language," which is both a beautifully written model of tight construction and sound argument and a caution against the common pitfalls of writing about politics. You will find this and other essays by these writers entertaining as well as instructive.

Course Requirements

Regular attendance and reading

Participation in four discussion sections (out of six to be offered) OR four short (2 pp. maximum) papers on course readings (10% of final grade)

Take-home midterm examination, passed out in class 20 October; due in class 27 October (20%)

Paper, 6-8 pp., due in class 13 December (30%)

Final examination (as scheduled by the Registrar) (40%)

Course Outline and Required Readings (dates are approximate)

Introduction (8 September)

George Orwell, "Politics and the English Language," (available on many sites on the Web, including <http://www.k-1.com/Orwell/index.cgi/work/essays/language.html>)

The Welfare State: Definitions and Dilemmas (13-15 September)

Jacob S. Hacker, *The Divided Welfare State*, Introduction to Part I and chapter 1

Origins of the Welfare State (20-29 September)

European Roots

Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*, chapters 6-9

T. H. Marshall, "Citizenship and Social Class," in *Class, Citizenship, and Social Development*

American Patterns

Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, *Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare*, chapter 1

Theda Skocpol, *Social Policy in the United States*, chapter 1

Gwendolyn Mink and Rickie Solinger, eds., *Welfare*, chapter 1

The Development of American Social Policy (4-27 October)

Beginnings to the Progressive Era

Skocpol, *Social Policy in the United States*, chapters 2-3

Mink and Solinger, eds., *Welfare*, chapters 3-4, 7-16

The New Deal and its Aftermath

Skocpol, *Social Policy in the United States*, chapters 4-5

Mink and Solinger, eds., *Welfare*, chapters 18-21, 28, 31, 37, 42, 48, 52-53

Robert C. Lieberman, *Shifting the Color Line: Race and the American Welfare State*, chapter 2 and pp. 91-117

Virginia Sapiro, "The Gender Basis of American Social Policy," in Linda Gordon, ed., *Women, the State, and Welfare*

The Great Society and the War on Poverty

Skocpol, *Social Policy in the United States*, chapter 6

Mink and Solinger, eds., *Welfare*, chapters 55, 57, 60, 66, 72

Piven and Cloward, *Regulating the Poor*, chapter 9

From the War on Poverty to the War on Welfare

Mink and Solinger, eds., *Welfare*, chapters 75, 82, 86-87, 109-111, 129

Martin Gilens, *Why American Hate Welfare*

Race, Poverty, and the Roots of Welfare Reform (3-17 November)

Mink and Solinger, eds., *Welfare*, chapters 56, 69-70, 106-7, 115-16

Lieberman, *Shifting the Color Line*, chapter 4

Charles Murray, *Losing Ground: American Social Policy, 1950-1980*, chapters 12-13, 16-17

William Julius Wilson, *When Work Disappears*
David K. Shipler, *The Working Poor: Invisible in America*, chapter 2

The Politics of Welfare Reform (22 November – 13 December)

Mink and Solinger, eds., *Welfare*, chapters 139-41, 160, 172-74

R. Kent Weaver, "Ending Welfare as We Know It," in *The Social Divide: Political Parties and the Future of Activist Government*, ed. Margaret Weir (<http://www.columbia.edu/cgi-bin/cul/resolve?clio4248632>)

Hacker, *The Divided Welfare State*, Parts III and IV (skim Part II)

The Century Foundation, *The Basics: Social Security Reform*
(<http://www.socsec.org/facts/basics/index.htm>)