

## RESEARCH REPORTS

Reviews of new research at public agencies and private institutions

### "The Work Alternative: Welfare Reform and the Realities of the Job Market."

Urban Institute Press, 2100 M St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20037. (Distributed by University Press of America, 4720-A Boston Way, Lanham, Md. 20706.) 218 pp. \$24.95  
Editors: Demetra Smith Nightingale and Robert H. Haveman

Should America now seek, in the words of President Bill Clinton's 1992 campaign promise, to "end welfare as we know it"? No, says Nathan Glazer, a sociologist at Harvard University and co-editor of the *Public Interest*, the neoconservative policy journal. There has been no quantum leap in knowledge about how to make the welfare system work better, nor any welfare crisis urgently demanding action, he argues, since the welfare system was overhauled in the Family Support Act of 1988.

Although the number of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) cases increased between 1989 and '93 by 1.2 million to 5.5 million, it is unclear, Glazer says, "what was driving these in-

creases, aside from the worsening economy," and thus equally unclear what changes in policy should be made. At \$13 billion in 1992, federal AFDC expenditures represented a smaller proportion of the federal budget than the \$5 billion spent in 1975.

"Whatever the numbers and costs of AFDC, these are not motivating welfare reform today," Glazer says. "Rather the issue has become what welfare symbolizes, not what it is. Welfare has come to stand for the rise of a permanent dependent population cut off from the mainstream of American life and expectations, for the decay of the inner cities, for the problem of homelessness, for the increase in crime and disorder, for the problems of the inner-city black poor."

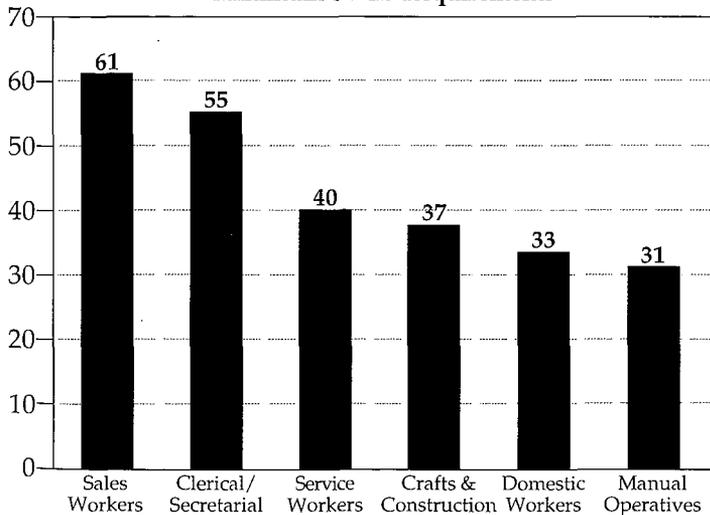
Welfare reform now offers the illusion of some relief from these problems.

The 1988 legislation, which obliged states to turn AFDC into a jobs-oriented program, reflected the consensus among many liberals and conservatives that welfare mothers able to work should be required to do so, and, if necessary, given education, training, and other help. The Family Support Act, Glazer says, went about as far as national legislation could—and, as would be true of any welfare reform, it wasn't very far.

More than half of adult AFDC recipients are ordinarily exempt from the act's JOBS (Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training) program because of illness, incapacity, old age, the need to care for a child under three or an ill family member, pregnancy, or other conditions. Of the AFDC recipients not exempt, only about 16 percent were taking part in the work program in 1992—which exceeded the goal for 1992-93 of 11 percent.

The extreme modesty of the goals for participation that were set by the 1988 act, Glazer says, reflects the difficulty of setting up various training, education, and placement programs and of moving large numbers of AFDC recipients into them. The results of even the best welfare-to-work programs, studies by the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation show, are only

Percentage of AFDC Recipients not Meeting Minimum Skills Requirements



Source: *The Work Alternative*

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a little better than no program at all. One reason is that many of those on welfare get off it on their own initiative within a few years. Overall, half of all spells on welfare last less than two years. If the aim is to get people off welfare, Glazer points out, then "for a large proportion of the welfare population . . . it hardly matters what we do."

For the rest, he and other contributors believe that a well-administered program can lead many welfare recipients to jobs. But given the low levels of education, skills, and motivation characteristic of most AFDC recipients, the income from the jobs is unlikely to match welfare payments. Even after one or two years of steady employment, says

Rebecca M. Blank, an economist at Northwestern University, a woman still may be unable either to find a job providing health insurance or to fully cover her child-care expenses.

Insisting that welfare recipients work is the right course, Glazer says. The need now is "to elaborate the *administrative structures* that put the requirement into effect."

### "Molding the Good Citizen: The Politics of High School History Texts."

Praeger Publishers, 88 Post Rd. West, Westport, Conn. 06881. 187 pp. \$55; \$17.95 (paper)

Authors: Robert Lerner, Althea K. Nagai, and Stanley Rothman

A 1987 study of the historical knowledge of 17-year-old Americans found that more of them were able to identify Harriet Tubman than Winston Churchill or Joseph Stalin. Three out of four knew that women worked in factories during World War II—but only 61 percent knew when the U.S. Constitution was signed. Rothman and his colleagues, all of the Center for the Study of Social and Political Change at Smith College, believe that politically engineered history textbooks are largely responsible for this skewed state of knowledge.

They performed a content analysis of the portrayal of historical figures in the leading high school history textbooks from the 1940s through the 1980s. In the three '80s books, they found a great deal of what they call "filler feminism": minor historical characters and events are accentuated at the

expense of major ones. Thus, in *America, Its People and Values* (1985), by Leonard C. Wood et al., a 19th-century astronomer who discovered a comet and happened to be a woman is treated extensively, while physicist Enrico Fermi, one of the chief architects of the nuclear age, is barely mentioned. The '80s textbooks, the authors say, present feminists and the feminist movement in a uniformly favorable light, do not take any female opponents of the feminist cause seriously, and portray America, past and present, as a sexist society.

The effort in recent decades to include blacks in the textbooks also has resulted in some distortions, the authors say. For example, in terms of her impact on the course of American history, Tubman, an escaped slave and "conductor" on the Underground Railroad, was a far less important figure than Harriet Beecher Stowe, the author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

(1852). "Yet since the 1960s, history books give Tubman at least as much, and sometimes more, coverage than they give to Stowe."

The political correctness in the '80s textbooks also extends to the American Indians. Their virtues, real and imagined, are emphasized, as are the vices of the encroaching white settlers. In *Rise of the American Nation* (1982), Lewis Paul Todd and Merle Curti claim that Europeans brought the practice of slavery to North America; in historical fact, however, slavery existed as an indigenous institution in many tribes.

The rewriting of American history to bring it into line with the "progressive" prejudices of the present "has been going on for some time in the schools," Rothman and his colleagues say. Despite what they believe to be its contribution to the decline in educational achievement, they expect the political rewriting to continue.