



The social welfare system should be designed to assist and support all people throughout their life.

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THE HISTORY OF SOCIAL WORK

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this chapter, you should be able to

1. Recognize the forces shaping the American social welfare system and social policy.
2. Describe the role of social welfare in early America.
3. Describe the role of social welfare during the Progressive Era and World War I.
4. Summarize how social welfare programs were influenced by the Great Depression and World War II.
5. Summarize how social welfare was affected by America's War on Poverty.
6. Describe the effect of Reaganomics on social welfare.
7. Characterize the current state of social welfare during an era of partisan gridlock.
8. Explain why social welfare policies that address people's immediate needs are inadequate for promoting social justice.

SANDEEP ADVOCATES WITH CLIENTS

Sandeep is a Bachelor of Social Work (BSW)-licensed social worker in a homeless shelter located in a large metropolitan area. On a daily basis, he works with clients as they transition from the temporary shelter to more permanent housing. Over time, Sandeep noticed that people often missed housing and service appointments, and he wondered why this was the case. By organizing a weekly meeting with clients and documenting their comments, Sandeep realized that reliable transportation was a pressing issue. With the documented comments in hand, shelter clients and Sandeep requested a meeting with the shelter's director and interdisciplinary service team. At the meeting, the clients presented their comments and solicited support for their plan to petition the city council to expand the public transportation system. Specifically, they intended to advocate for a bus route close to the shelter and surrounding service organizations and agencies.

The purpose of this chapter is to convince you that history and advocacy matter. Specifically, the characters, landmark decisions, and political environments that encompass the history of social welfare and the development of the social work profession support multiple educational purposes that extend beyond the memorization of facts, dates, and events. You will discover that the profession's history introduces you to social welfare policy and the practice of social work and to U.S. politics, diverse and marginalized groups, social reform movements, leadership strengths and weaknesses, and critical thinking. Perhaps most important, you will begin to consider how history can guide your development as an advocate for clients and causes, someone who challenges social injustices.

The historical context of U.S. social welfare policy is a progression of dynamic events, leading incrementally to an expanded role for government in the human pursuit of the things needed to survive and even thrive. Examining the history of social work will help you consider two key

points: (1) the influence of political, social, and economic forces on policy development and (2) the parallel development of social welfare policy and the social work profession.

TIME TO THINK 2.1

When reading about Sandeep's work in the homeless shelter, consider when you have advocated for change in your own life or in the lives of others. Are there currently small- and large-scale events happenings in your life and the world around you where you feel advocacy is needed? If so, take a moment to consider how advocacy and social change are intrinsically linked to you and others.

SOCIAL WELFARE

A critical concept in the history of social work is **social welfare**, or the array of governmental programs, services, and institutions designed to maintain the stability and well-being of society (Axinn & Stern, 2005). Social welfare requires both a common understanding and a formal arrangement between a government and its people. From this relationship, people have a sense of what they should receive for and contribute to their well-being. Social welfare reflects the beliefs and values of a nation. It involves the allocation of resources such as money, personnel, and expertise.

Take a moment to consider the services that citizens of the United States receive from the government. The list you generate might include education, transportation systems, national defense, and health care. All these services support people's well-being, and all could be considered social welfare. Despite this broad perspective, social welfare issues are hotly debated and central to local, state, and national politics. They are tied up with social trends, political ideologies, and notions of social control and social justice.

Social Welfare Policy

The services and programs made available to certain people for a specified period of time, based on established criteria, are the product of **social welfare policy**. Ever-changing social, economic, and political environments influence policy development and implementation, so the services associated with policy are constantly changing. Depending on events, the role of government in improving people's lives also expands and contracts. For example, during the 1960s, when the United States experienced considerable public unrest associated with urban migration, urban violence, persistent poverty, discrimination, and an increasingly unpopular war, there was a significant expansion of support to economically disadvantaged people and an increase in the civil rights of a large spectrum of the nation's population.

In the United States, social welfare policies are generally intended to provide a **safety net** for citizens, services that protect people from spiraling downward economically or socially and hitting bottom. Eligibility for safety net services depends on meeting specific criteria, or **means testing**. Means testing is assessing whether the individual or family possesses the means to do without a particular kind of help. If not, the government will provide assistance for a designated period of time. Unfortunately, this assistance often produces only a temporary bounce upward and does little to improve the person's or family's overall status in life.



U.S. citizens can benefit from social welfare programs that maintain the well-being and stability of society.

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Decisions regarding the direction of social welfare policy in the United States and around the world are always being made. Your conclusions on any given issue depend on your vision of society and sense of fairness in the redistribution of resources. How you think about policy issues reflects your political, social, religious, and economic ideologies. It is also likely to reflect your biases and values. Here are some current examples of policy-related questions for you to consider:

- Should we assist economically disadvantaged people through direct cash transfers or through services, through a combination of the two, or through a new approach that guarantees a universal standard of living?
- Which programs should be funded through local revenues, which through states, and which through federal revenues?
- What is the role of the faith-based community in providing social services?
- How do issues of race, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status impact policy decision making?
- How do social-economic factors such as recessions, pandemics, social movements (e.g., involving protests and boycotts), and wars influence policy creation and development?
- How do social welfare policies in the United States affect or influence the policies of other nations? How can the social welfare policies of other nations guide the United States?

For social workers, social welfare policy is extremely important. It defines the profession's clients, specifies what services will be made available to designated populations, describes how services will be delivered, outlines the duration of services, and indicates how intervention outcomes will be evaluated and measured.

CURRENT TRENDS

AID-IN-DYING

Oregon, Washington, Montana, Vermont, California, Colorado, and the District of Columbia are examples of where aid-in-dying has been legalized through legislation, referendums, or court cases. If additional states adopted aid-in-dying laws, advocates might actually want to bring a federal case that could establish constitutional protection in every state.

1. What does aid-in-dying legislation tell you about the citizens of states and possible political and the changing voter trends across the nation?
2. What are your thoughts on the aid-in-dying legislation?
3. What are the possible unintended consequences?

Conservative and Liberal Ideologies

In the United States today, political ideology has a great deal of influence on how people feel about the social safety net. People with **conservative** political leanings tend to favor personal responsibility for one's own well-being over any form of government support or federally sponsored relief. The underlying premise is that people in the top echelon of society have worked hard, made smart choices, and earned their lot in life; similarly, people in distress have caused their own problems and should "pull themselves up by their own bootstraps."

Conservative political platforms often take firm stances against taxation (federal income tax, Social Security taxes, inheritance taxes, state income taxes, and local levies), which is the revenue source for many social welfare programs. More specifically, many conservative politicians and their constituents are of the opinion that the nation's income tax system is counterproductive and



Soup kitchens offer sustenance to many clients served by social workers.

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undermines a free-enterprise, market-oriented economic system. Usually, conservatives oppose any form of graduated tax rates, which raise the percentage of taxes paid, or the tax rate, as a person's income increases. They think this so-called progressive program of taxation and the government intervention that goes with it place an unfair burden on businesspeople and entrepreneurs, who create economic expansion, employment opportunities, and the promise of subsequent wealth. Conservatives are also known for their support of wars and military conflicts, which have resulted in the buildup of a large military-industrial complex and profit-taking for the wealthy.

Liberal politicians also support a capitalist, free-market form of government, but they have a different view of the role of the federal government in social welfare. Liberals typically support a more robust safety net for economically disadvantaged people, one that attempts to address social issues through moderate or incremental forms of social intervention and change. Generally, liberals support various types of checks and balances within government, as well as regulatory and protective policies to help ensure fair competition in the marketplace.

As for taxes, liberals usually want a tax structure that rewards the work of people rather than the profits to be made through financial investment and manipulation. Liberal leaders also argue that the nation's tax code favors the wealthy through unique tax breaks and loopholes benefiting the rich. As a result, middle-class workers and families are seen as often paying proportionately higher taxes than do those from the upper class. Liberals generally want to help distribute more wealth, services, and resources to people toward the lower end of the nation's socioeconomic structure. And liberals tend to be skeptical of the buildup of a military-industrial sector and profit-taking from wars and conflicts.

Radicalism in the United States can lean toward a conservative or liberal perspective. For example, radical conservatism is often referred to as the radical right or as right-wing. In general, this perspective supports limited government at all levels, few regulations related to business, minimal taxes, and a powerful national defense system (Graham, 2020). Important also is the idea that radical conservatism suggests that individuals should be responsible for their well-being. Thus, radical conservatism assumes that people should be able to address their personal needs in a self-sufficient manner without reliance on the government. And the ability to profit from others, including those experiencing economic struggles, should not be restricted or regulated.

From a liberal posture, radicalism, or the so-called far left, is usually supportive of government regulations and services to provide for people who are economically disadvantaged in order to enhance overall social and economic equality. In some situations, members of the far left advocate for far-reaching changes, such as universal health care and tuition-free college (Viser, 2019). Advocating for higher taxes for those in the upper economic brackets is also associated with the far left, as are policies that ensure a standard of living throughout the life cycle.

SPOTLIGHT ON ADVOCACY

BARBARA MIKULSKI

Senator Barbara Mikulski, who retired in 2016, was the first woman to serve in both the House of Representatives and the Senate. The longest-serving woman in the history of Congress, the Baltimore native represented Maryland in the House of Representatives for 10 years, starting in 1977, and was first elected to the Senate in 1986. She began her career

as an elected official on the Baltimore City Council, where she spent 5 years before coming to Congress. Senator Mikulski is a graduate of the School of Social Work, University of Maryland, Baltimore, and has had a lifetime committed to services for children and women.

“Barbara Mikulski is among the fiercest advocates [for] women and families that Washington has ever seen,” said Stephanie Schriock, president of EMILY’s List, which works to get women into elected office and began its efforts by endorsing Mikulski some 30 years ago. “Barbara Mikulski’s legacy and the tremendous impact of her work will live on in the halls of Congress and across our country. The EMILY’s List community—now more than three million members strong—thanks her for her leadership and service” (Wagner & Johnson, 2015).

1. What does Senator Mikulski’s career tell you about possible political paths for social workers?
2. Is there a cause you feel strongly about? If so, what time, energy, and other resources are you willing to dedicate to see the outcome you desire?
3. What other advocates stand out in your mind, and why?
4. Read *Women in Politics* by Lynn Ford (2017). What would you expect to learn from this book, and why?

TIME TO THINK 2.2

Read through the definitions of the conservative, liberal, and radical political perspectives again. Where do you consider your political leanings to be, and why? What are the influences that point you in a particular political direction? What factors (e.g., age, ability, race, sexual orientation, ethnicity, social-economic status, religion) contribute to your political leaning?

Social Control

The nation’s social welfare system raises issues of **social control**, those policies and practices designed to regulate people and increase conformity and compliance in their behavior. Some people see social control as a motive embedded in social welfare policy (Trattner, 1999). They point out that many of the social welfare policies of the 1960s provided people in poverty with government housing, food stamps, and other kinds of relief in place of training and employment opportunities. Thus, reliance on the government increased while inequities in education and unemployment went unchecked (Trattner, 1999). Some would argue that these policies kept people socially controlled and regulated and separated from the rest of society, locked into unemployment, underemployment, and substandard living conditions (Harrington, 1962).

Social workers are in a position to build on individual and structural strengths while addressing inequality and connecting to larger-scale change. The involvement of social workers in the policy arena helps our society address individual needs and confront social control—and perhaps shift or redistribute economic and political power so that the economically disadvantaged and vulnerable can better help themselves.

Social Justice

Social workers share the common goal of **social justice**: the endless effort to protect human rights, address socioeconomic inequality and oppression from discrimination, and provide for

everyone's human needs, such as safety, housing, food, education, and health care, particularly for those in greatest need. The goal of social justice is what motivates social workers to be advocates. As you will learn, there are many forms of advocacy; however, here we are concerned with the advocacy that social workers undertake to challenge the "what is" in society with the "what should be" (Cohen et al., 2001). Although this form of advocacy reflects the political, economic, and social environment in which it is conducted, some goals are consistent among social advocates across time and circumstance:

- *Fairness*: All citizens have the right to access resources and opportunities.
- *Equality*: All people are entitled to human rights without regard to race, gender, age, economic or educational status, sexual orientation, ability, or other distinguishing features.
- *Freedom*: People share the need for independent thought and a sense of security.
- *Service*: The most socially and economically disadvantaged people of any society require the most commitment.
- *Nonviolence*: A peaceful approach to collaboration, mediation, or negotiation is more respectful of others' rights than is any form of violence.

If you choose to become a social worker, you will recontextualize many of these goals of social advocacy in response to your personal and professional experiences.

EARLY AMERICA

As the history of social welfare in the United States has unfolded, so has the history of the profession of social work. Social and environmental issues confronting various population groups in the United States (poverty, unemployment, discrimination, war, oppression, and the like) have helped shape human services and social programs, as well as the nature of social work as a profession.

At times, the United States has developed positive strategies to address specific social problems; consequently, some groups within the population have made tenuous social and economic gains. However, lasting change for the larger society has been limited when measured against complex problems of human need and social justice.

The history of social work and social welfare can be divided into a series of policy eras, designated by landmark policy decisions and initiatives. Considering history in this way integrates the development of social work with a series of political issues and environmental factors that have affected what the nation has been willing and able to do for its citizens' welfare. The advocacy of social workers has helped ensure a degree of social justice when the government has addressed social concerns.

Colonial America: 1607 to 1783

The early settlers who came to the United States carried with them the traditions, customs, and values of their countries of origin. Because the majority of the colonists were from England, they

conceptualized and sought to address social problems such as poverty as they would have in England.

In colonial America, welfare assistance took the form of **mutual aid**; colonists relied on one another in times of need. It was the community's responsibility to provide assistance when an individual experienced a hardship such as a disease or home fire. Relatives and neighbors responded with the necessary assistance until the crisis situation passed or was somehow resolved. As churches took root in the colonies, they too would offer assistance to needy people. Overall the public attitude toward poor and needy people was respectful and benevolent, particularly because the harsh living conditions of the colonies placed all the colonists potentially in harm's way.

Although the initial systems of colonial assistance were informal, the severe economic and environmental conditions experienced by the American settlers prompted a more complex system of welfare assistance. The colonists turned to the principles outlined in the **Elizabethan Poor Laws**, which were instituted in England in 1601 (Axinn & Stern, 2005). These laws were a response to social and economic forces associated with the breakdown of England's feudal system, the reduction of the labor force, and industrialization, which increased the need for healthy workers. Further, the laws stipulated that taxes would be levied to finance welfare assistance (Axinn & Stern, 2005).

A concept underpinning the Elizabethan Poor Laws, and the poor laws of colonial America, was the distinction between the **deserving poor** and the **nondeserving poor** (Tice & Perkins, 2002). The deserving poor included orphan children, older adults, and people with debilitating physical conditions, who could not provide for themselves through no fault of their own. In contrast, the nondeserving poor were able-bodied vagrants or drunkards, judged as lazy and unwilling to work for a living. Consequently, work and a person's capability or willingness to be self-sustaining through work became an integral part of the U.S. social welfare system.

Settlement laws were another feature of the Elizabethan Poor Laws. Designed to control the distribution of public assistance, the settlement laws were the domain of small units of government and specified a period of residence for the receipt of assistance. They were implemented throughout the 13 colonies as a standard requirement for receiving welfare assistance and as a method for localities to monitor the cost of such assistance.

The colonists adapted other forms of relief from Elizabethan Poor Laws. **Outdoor relief** provided assistance to the deserving poor in their own homes and communities; **indoor relief** provided assistance in institutions where the nondeserving poor were sent to work (Rothman, 1971). Other approaches to poverty involved auctioning poor people to wealthy families who were willing to care for them in return for labor and services and placing poor and sick individuals under the supervision of couples who were willing to assume responsibility for their care (Axinn & Stern, 2005).

The roots of the U.S. slavery system began with indentured servants who were brought from Britain as laborers. Some indentured servants agreed to work for at least 7 years in return for their passage to America. However, others were in debt or were deemed criminals and were forced to work as indentured servants to pay for their debts or crimes.

As colonial America began to develop and grow, so did the need for indentured servants, who were used for manual labor throughout the colonies. The cost of indentured servants escalated with demand, and servants were increasingly difficult to find. The first enslaved people were African indentured servants who were forced to be indentured servants for the rest of their lives. Thus, slavery was in colonial America as early as 1619.

Slavery in colonial America was integrally linked to profit. Specifically, tobacco required physical labor to plant a harvest, and using enslaved people as both planters and harvesters of tobacco translated to high profit yields at low costs. Colonists cultivated their land with minimal cost and high profits. Extending beyond the plantation system, the slave trade grew rapidly due to the demand for cheap labor.

TIME TO THINK 2.3

After reading the definitions of outdoor and indoor relief, consider examples of those service perspectives today. For example, what perspective does the Meals on Wheels program represent? What about a mental health or long-term care facility? Are you able to recognize the influence of the Elizabethan Poor Laws and colonial America on current issues in social policies and services?

Nineteenth-Century America: 1784 to 1890

During the 1800s, the U.S. population expanded westward. In the new settlements, mutual aid remained the main source of help to those in need. An example of this expansion is the orphan trains that ran from about 1853 to the early 1900s, transporting more than 120,000 children, who were often abandoned and alone, from urban centers to 45 states across the country, as well as to Canada and Mexico. This controversial and unusual social experiment marked the beginning of the foster care concept in the United States.

However, the 1800s also saw the rise of advocacy on behalf of people who were economically disadvantaged, who had recently immigrated to the United States, or who were challenged on the basis of physical or mental ability. These people often faced unjust, inhumane, and harsh treatment. The early advocates were often trying to change conditions that had been created by local and governmental policies, ordinances, and rules. Dorothea Dix, for example, was a social activist who lobbied state and federal governments in the mid-1800s to create asylums for those who had mental health challenges, especially those who had no other homes (Ezell, 2001, p. 20).

Advocacy also occurred as social workers became politically active and promoted legislation to protect children from oppressive labor practices and adolescents from severely punitive juvenile court systems. Activism by social workers eventually extended to the advancement of the rights of children, workers, women, older adults, people of color, and LGBTQ individuals.

Advocacy measures did not often apply to enslaved people. In 1808, under the terms of the Constitution, the importation of enslaved people to the United States ended. However, what emerged was a domestic trading industry of enslaved people built on the sale of children and kidnapping of free Black people. When enslaved people escaped from this system, Southern slave traders and slaveholders could not count on Northern law enforcement to assist them. The Fugitive Slave Acts of 1850 were passed to add provisions regarding runaway slaves and to levy punishments for interfering in their capture. The Fugitive Slave Acts were among the most controversial laws of the early 19th century.

The life situation of Black Americans was highlighted in the *Dred Scott v. Sandford* case of 1857, popularly known as the Dred Scott case. Scott claimed that he, his wife, and his two daughters should be granted freedom as a result of living for 4 years in Illinois and the Wisconsin Territory, where slavery was illegal and slaveholders gave up their rights to enslaved people who resided in the region for an extended period.

The United States Supreme Court decided 7–2 against Scott, finding that neither he nor any other person of African ancestry could become citizens of the United States. Chief Justice Roger

B. Taney had hoped the case would settle issues related to slavery and Congressional authority. What actually occurred was public outrage, tensions between the Northern and Southern states, and the onset of the U.S. Civil War. The Dred Scott decision was eventually nullified by President Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation in 1863 and the 13th, 14th and 15th amendments to the Constitution.

THE PROGRESSIVE ERA AND WORLD WAR I

As the nation moved into a new century, immigrants came to the United States in search of opportunities and to build communities in the developing cities across the country. Immigrants also fled their countries of origin because of political strife and war. Eventually, the international turmoil resulted in the United States' involvement in World War I.

The Progressive Era: 1890 to 1920

By the end of the 1800s, the nation was rapidly urbanizing. There was an enormous influx of immigrants, and the economy had begun shifting from agriculture and resource based to industry based. These massive social disruptions led to the economic crisis of the 1890s. There was growing awareness in the United States of the value of social reform.

Some of the reformers of this era astutely recognized that documentation of human need through written records was a vital component of advocacy for new policies, practices, and laws. They realized that the general public and government decision makers could be influenced by numbers, categorizations, and qualitative accounts and descriptions of social phenomena. Importantly, they laid the foundation in social work practice for modern data-collection systems, comprehensive community needs assessments, and precise descriptions of human conditions.

At the same time, two new social welfare movements—the Charity Organization Society and the settlement movement—emerged for dealing with dependency (Reisch, 1998). Each offered a significant contribution to the development of the social work profession.

The **Charity Organization Society (COS)** was imported from England to the United States in 1877. The COS focused on the individual factors related to poverty, such as alcoholism, poor work habits, and inadequate money management. In general, the COS asked a family in need of relief to fill out an application, which was investigated to ensure a level of need. Then a **friendly visitor**, a volunteer committed to helping COS clients, was assigned to the family and asked to conduct regular home visits. Friendly visitors would attempt to address individual character flaws and encourage clients to gain independence and live moral lives (Chamber, 1986). The direct exchange of cash was strictly avoided.

In light of the growing need for a trained staff, charity organizations developed the paid position of “agent” to visit indigent persons and families and to investigate applications for charity. These agents were the forerunners of professional social workers (Chamber, 1986). Mary Richmond of the Baltimore and Philadelphia COS and Edward T. Devine of the New York COS were early leaders in training agents. In 1898, Devine established and directed the New York School of Philanthropy, which eventually became the Columbia School of Social Work, the first school of social work in the United States.

The **settlement movement** turned attention to the environmental factors associated with poverty. In 1889, Jane Addams, along with Ellen Gates Starr, founded Hull House in an economically disadvantaged Chicago neighborhood where immigrants lived in overcrowded conditions. Hull House was not the first settlement house in the United States; however, it pioneered



Jane Addams founded Hull House, a settlement house in an economically disadvantaged Chicago neighborhood, in 1889.

Cox/Five College Archives & Manuscript Collections/Creative Commons via Wikimedia Commons

advocacy roles in social welfare. Its staff collected information about Hull House's clients and the residents of the surrounding area and then used this information to influence legislation and social policy (Dolgoft et al., 1993, p. 278). In response to the poverty that surrounded Hull House, the settlement house also offered day care for children, a club for working women, lectures, and cultural groups (Axinn & Stern, 2005).

Included in the settlement movement were people who advocated for the rights of Black Americans, such as Lillian Wald, who addressed racial integration as director of the Henry Street Settlement in New York City, and Mary White Ovington, a settlement house worker. In 1908, after race riots in Springfield, Illinois, Ovington joined with Oswald Garrison Villard, grandson of abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison, and organized other progressives and key Black leaders such as W. E. B. Du Bois to form the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1909. This organization gave Black Americans a movement for fighting segregation in a mobilized and organized fashion (Blau & Abramovitz, 2004).

Ida Wells-Barnett, editor of *Free Speech and Headlight*, a Black newspaper in Memphis, Tennessee, helped with the development of Black women's clubs. In 1896, she assisted in establishing the National Association of Colored Women and became an early member of the NAACP. Wells-Barnett used her journalistic expertise to advocate against lynching and white supremacy. As an early suffragist, Wells-Barnett promoted the right to vote

through fiery rhetoric and community organizing efforts.

As a result of these efforts, settlement houses and their staff, along with other advocates, contributed community organization, social action, and social group work to the nascent social work profession. However, although Addams, Wald, Ovington, and many others in the settlement movement recognized the existence of class conflict as a reality in the U.S. economic system, they did not build a mass political organization. Consequently, they did not effectively confront social class differences on a national level and failed to challenge the overall distribution of the nation's resources (Galper, 1975). Instead, settlement house workers supported labor unions, lobbied city officials for sanitation and housing reforms, and fought discrimination in employment practices.

With the rare exception, those involved in the social movements of the Progressive Era were not attuned to the needs of racially diverse populations, especially Black Americans (Blau & Abramovitz, 2004). Most reformers took the second-class citizenship of Black Americans for granted and did little to challenge racial barriers and assumptions.

With social movements of the Progressive Era came the notion of a helping profession oriented toward social action—in other words, social work. In 1917, Mary Richmond wrote the first social work book, *Social Diagnosis*, which introduced a methodology and common body of knowledge for the practice of social work. Importantly, Richmond embraced assessment and understanding of human relations, social situations and surroundings, neighborhood conditions, and economic realities. Richmond's second book, *What Is Social Case Work?* (1922), used six cases from industrialized urban areas to illustrate her definition of social case work. Thus, the case method of working with individuals and families provided an orderly process of practice with individuals, with an emphasis on documenting both needs and social conditions to advocate for social change and reform.

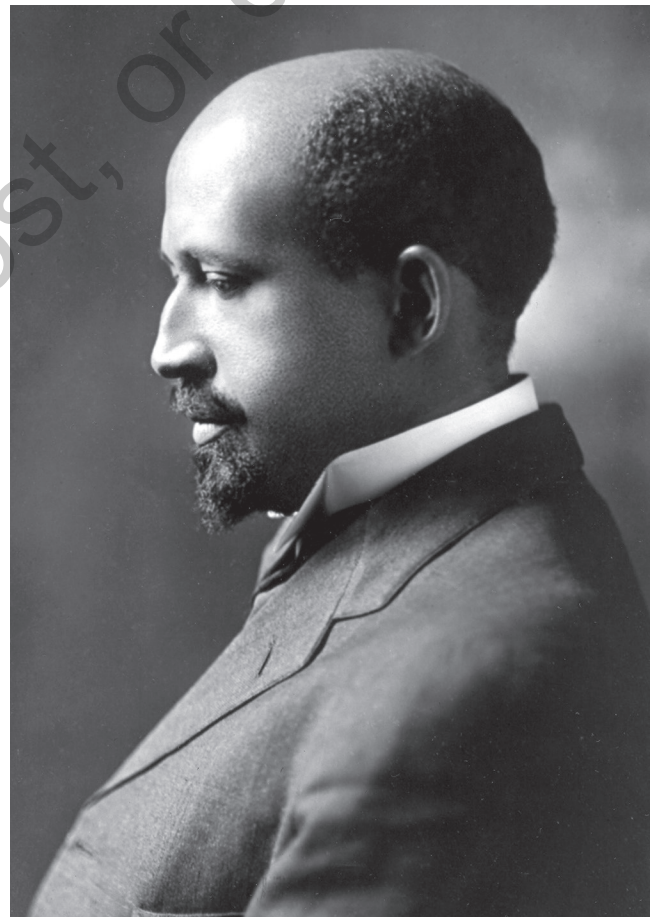
World War I: 1914 to 1918

The political environment of the United States in the years before and following World War I supported the development of social work as a profession but marked a drastic change in its focus. The 1917 Russian Revolution caused a heightened fear of communism, “radicals” were under attack in the United States, and social workers retreated from reform to avoid the political arena and persecution. This turn was recognized at the 1928 Milford Conference, an annual meeting of social work leaders. It was here that Porter Lee, the director of the New York School of Social Work, reported that social workers had shifted their professional attention from **cause to function**—from a concern with politics to a concern with the efficient day-to-day administration of a social welfare bureaucracy (Blau & Abramovitz, 2004, p. 249).

The turn toward the “function” of social work gave rise to an expansion of practice settings for the profession, to include private family welfare agencies (as most charity organizations were then called), hospitals, schools, mental health facilities, guidance centers, and children's aid societies. The American National Red Cross employed social workers to provide case work services to families of servicemen and disaster victims in cities, small towns, and rural areas.

The United States remained a segregated society. Nevertheless, there were many Black American men willing to join the nation's military. As the United States entered the war in Europe, Black Americans were still being turned away from military service.

It is important to note that throughout this time period, segregation within the social work profession continued. The National Urban League was developed by African Americans in response to their exclusion from much of mainstream social work services and settings.



W. E. B. Du Bois established the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1909.

National Portrait Gallery, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

Changes in the development of social work were also seen in the number of schools joining the American Association of Schools of Social Work, founded in 1919. The association standardized curricula and promoted a master's degree in social work. Both undergraduate and graduate programs became members of the association (Ginsberg, 2001).

THE GREAT DEPRESSION AND WORLD WAR II

The United States went through a significant transformation during the Great Depression and World War II. During the Depression, the nation was on the brink of economic disaster, with approximately 25% of the workforce unemployed. However, after World War II, the nation was considered an international superpower thanks to its military strength, booming industrial base, and diplomatic presence.

The Great Depression: 1929 to Early 1940s

The stock market crash of 1929, followed by a far-reaching economic depression, brought the United States to the brink of economic disaster. Social service agencies were unprepared to address the mounting needs of not only the indigent but also members of the working class. In time, after listening to the narratives of their clients, social workers began to focus on individual deficits, with a growing appreciation for the social and economic factors associated with dependency and need (Axinn & Stern, 1988). Social workers rekindled the “cause” orientation that had been abandoned in the 1920s and lobbied the government to provide an adequate standard of living for all people in the United States in this time of extraordinary need (Trattner, 1999).

In 1932, the governor of New York, Franklin D. Roosevelt, was elected the nation's 32nd president. He called for bold government action and instituted a large federal relief program for the needy. The vast majority of social workers endorsed President Roosevelt's New Deal, which included unemployment insurance and a social security system to deal with the financial insecurity experienced by older persons, dependent children, and individuals with physical challenges. Harry Hopkins, a social worker, was appointed head of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration. This was the first federal program to provide relief to the nation's citizens on a major scale since the years following the Civil War (Trattner, 1999).

Black Americans sustained significant economic despair, often being displaced from unskilled jobs usually overlooked by white workers before the Great Depression. Unemployment rates for Black workers reached 50% or more, compared to 30% for whites. Further, Black wages were approximately 30% below those of white workers, who themselves were struggling at a survivor-level existence (Sustar, 2012).

The New Deal provided additional employment opportunities for social workers, who were responsible for state and local public relief. The funds came from a combination of local and federal agencies. Unfortunately, the relief measures neglected to address racial discrimination; minority groups experienced more economic hardship than other people in the United States.

The Rank-and-File Movement

In the 1930s, progressive social workers organized the rank-and-file movement and began analyzing and criticizing aspects of the New Deal. More specifically, as new social service programs appeared, social workers were hired to administer the programs and serve people in need. The social workers themselves realized they suffered as workers; they earned very low wages, faced massive caseloads, and had living standards that were barely better than those of



President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the Social Security Act on August 14, 1935.

Courtesy of the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division

their own clients. Consequently, large numbers of progressive social workers joined the rank-and-file movement to build labor unions at relief agencies. Additionally, they organized study groups on capitalism and socialism, established a newspaper called *Social Work Today*, and formed labor unions at relief agencies all over the country. Some core leaders of the movement joined socialist and communist groups and connected their efforts as social workers to a broader movement of economically disadvantaged people and workers to fight for a more just economic system.

The relief programs of the New Deal helped Roosevelt connect with Black Americans. However, fearing alienation of the Southern states, he did not aggressively promote civil rights. More sympathetic to Black Americans and their causes, First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt helped facilitate Marian Anderson's performance at the Lincoln Memorial after the singer was denied the right to perform at Constitution Hall because of her race.

After the United States entered World War II, President Roosevelt quickly moved to shore up African American support and silence foreign propaganda about the treatment of the "negro" in the United States. He ordered the justice department to not only pass anti-lynching laws but to finally begin enforcing long-standing anti-peonage laws aimed at ending forced labor in the South.

The Great Depression and the New Deal had a lasting effect on the nation's social welfare system—most notably, enactment of the Social Security Act of 1935. Table 2.1 details the major programs that were part of the act, which was the result of noisy political compromise. Whatever faults may be found in the legislation, the Social Security Act widely expanded welfare activities and advanced services and programs for economically disadvantaged persons. It helped prevent destitution and dependency. The fact that it provided cash benefits to recipients was a major step toward enhancing human dignity and personal freedom (Axinn & Stern, 1988; Trattner, 1999).

TABLE 2.1 ■ Programs Instituted With the Social Security Act

1935: President Franklin D. Roosevelt signs the Social Security Act, the foundation of the nation's social welfare system, in response to widespread economic insecurity during the Great Depression.

1936: The U.S. Postal Service distributes applications for Social Security. More than 35 million people apply for the benefit, and distribution of the Social Security card begins.

1939: Social Security expands to include children, survivors of workers, and retirees.

1940: The first monthly retirement check is issued for \$22.54. About 222,400 people receive Social Security benefits.

1950: President Harry Truman signs an amendment to the Social Security Act to provide a cost-of-living adjustment to offset inflation.

1950s: Social Security benefits expand to include farmworkers, domestic workers, and self-employed people. Cash benefits are added for workers with varying abilities. Early retirement, with reduced benefits, is approved for women at 62 years old.

1961: President John F. Kennedy approves amendments that allow male workers to select early retirement benefits at 62 years old, with reduced benefits.

1965: The Medicare program is enacted, partially funded through Social Security payroll taxes.

1980s: To address signs of future insolvency in the Social Security Trust Fund, from which benefits are paid, Congress enacts an increase in the self-employment tax, partial taxation of benefits to early retirees, and a gradual increase in the retirement age.

2000s: Amendments to the Social Security Act are discussed, but all reform efforts fail. By 2010, the system is paying out more than it receives in payroll taxes, putting its future at risk.

Source: Adapted from Annenberg Classroom (n.d.).

World War II: 1939 to 1945

World War II placed the United States squarely on the global scene and provided near full employment for most people in the United States. So during this time, issues of poverty were not on the national agenda or in the forefront of social work. Still, throughout the war, social workers were involved in services to the armed forces and their families. In addition, the gains in jobs and income did not apply evenly across races, although President Roosevelt did issue Executive Order 8802 prohibiting discrimination in the defense industries, a significant advancement toward civil rights in the workplace (Skocpol, 1995; Trattner, 1999).

President Roosevelt signed legislation creating the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps (WAAC), allowing up to 150,000 women to enlist (Y. A. Miller, 2020). WAAC was reserved for Black women—designed to reflect the share of the U.S. population that was Black at the time. This decision reflects the lobbying efforts by Mary McLeod Bethune, the founder of the National Council for Negro Women, and a relentless advocate for the rights of Black women.

World War II and the prosperity that followed victory changed the nation's political climate. But the Great Depression and the New Deal had lasting effects on the social work profession. There were new jobs for social workers, a deeper understanding of human needs in urban and rural areas, and a renewed interest in reform efforts. Private and public welfare agencies acknowledged the social work profession as both a "cause" and a "function" within various fields of practice. The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) formed in 1955, helping unite the profession through guidelines and a code of ethics that defined roles and responsibilities associated with social work practice.

AMERICA'S WAR ON POVERTY: 1960 TO 1967

The 1960s were a time of social unrest and political change in the United States. With the Vietnam War escalating, students and like-minded individuals protested the war across the country. Other movements formed to protest the lack of rights for women, people with physical and mental challenges, LGBTQ individuals, and people of color. It was the civil rights movement that educated people in the United States on the extent of prejudice and discrimination in society and its costs. Books such as Michael Harrington (1962) *The Other America* made the issue of poverty a public concern and a rallying point for citizen protests.

President John F. Kennedy advocated for equality through the civil rights movement. He demonstrated this commitment by appointing Black Americans to his administration and by appointing Thurgood Marshall to the Second Circuit Court of Appeals in New York. In 1963, Kennedy delivered a televised address, in which he outlined comprehensive plans for new civil rights legislation. Included in the plans were equal access to voting and public facilities, plus support to desegregate schools. Sadly, President Kennedy was assassinated before many of his plans became enacted.

When Lyndon B. Johnson was sworn in as president, he advanced the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, in honor of President Kennedy's memory. The 1965 Voting Rights Act was also passed during the Johnson administration. These two laws abolished Jim Crow and addressed racist immigration restrictions.

President Kennedy's New Frontier and President Johnson's Great Society programs were federal responses to issues of socioeconomic disparity and oppression. Both administrations spoke of poverty and instituted a variety of new social welfare initiatives, including Head Start, a program providing preschool education for disadvantaged children; Medicaid, health care for people who were economically disadvantaged; Medicare, health care for older persons; and the Food Stamp program, a food purchasing program for people with low income. Table 2.2 lists some of the programs from this era that have had a lasting effect on social welfare.

As these programs were established, a greater number of baccalaureate-level social workers was needed to fill the increasing demand for trained staff. The NASW and the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) began accepting the BSW as the entry-level professional degree in the field.

Under President Johnson, the war in Vietnam escalated. According to Johnson, the goal for the nation's involvement in Vietnam was not to win the war but for U.S. troops to support defenses until South Vietnam could take over. By entering the Vietnam War without a clearly stated goal to win, Johnson set the stage for future public and troop disappointment when the United States found itself in a stalemate with the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong (Rosenberg, n.d.). Tired of civil turmoil and the Vietnam War, people in the United States turned politically conservative and embraced the conservative ideals and concern with civil order promised by Republican President Richard Nixon (1969–1974). President Nixon left the presidency after his participation in the cover-up of the Watergate scandal, a breaking-and-entering scheme at the headquarters of the Democratic National Committee in the Watergate Hotel in Washington, DC. Vice President Gerald Ford became president (1974–1976) and eventually lost his election bid to one-term Democratic President Jimmy Carter.

Although President Carter (1977–1981) promoted social programs and showed compassion for people who were disenfranchised in the United States, his administration was marred by high inflation rates, spiraling gas prices, and an international crisis involving the taking of U.S. hostages in Iran. These events contributed to President Carter's political demise and failure to gain reelection, while setting the stage for the election of President Ronald Reagan.

TABLE 2.2 ■ New Frontier and Great Society Programs**NEW FRONTIER, PRESIDENT JOHN F. KENNEDY, 1961 TO 1963**

- 1961: The Peace Corps is established by Executive Order 10924 to promote world peace and friendship.
- 1961: The Area Redevelopment Act provides \$394 million in benefits to “distressed areas” to confront chronic unemployment in impoverished cities and rural areas by increasing their levels of economic growth.
- 1962: The Rural Renewal program provides technical and financial assistance for locally initiated and sponsored programs aimed at ending chronic underemployment and fostering a sound rural economy.
- 1962: The Aid to Families with Dependent Children program replaces the Aid to Dependent Children program, as coverage is extended to adults caring for dependent children.
- 1963: The Community Mental Health Act provides assistance in improving mental health through grants for the construction of community mental health centers and for other purposes.

GREAT SOCIETY, PRESIDENT LYNDON B. JOHNSON, 1963 TO 1969

- 1964: The Community Action Program is founded by the Economic Opportunity Act to fight poverty by promoting self-sufficiency and depending on volunteer work.
- 1964: The Job Corps is formed to provide free vocational training and education to young adults.
- 1964: The Office of Economic Opportunity is created by the Economic Opportunity Act to oversee a variety of community-based antipoverty programs.
- 1964: The Food Stamps Act is designed to alleviate hunger and malnutrition of low-income families and individuals by providing the ability to purchase food.
- 1965: The Medicare part of the Social Security Act is enacted to provide federal funding for many of the medical costs of older adults.
- 1965: The Medicaid part of the Social Security Act is enacted to provide medical care for families and individuals with low income and resources.
- 1965: Volunteers in Service to America is founded as the domestic version of the Peace Corps, designed to fight poverty (incorporated into AmeriCorps in 1993).
- 1965: The Teacher Corps is established by the Higher Education Act to improve teaching in predominantly low-income areas.
- 1965: Head Start is established to provide early childhood education, health, nutrition, and parent-involvement services to low-income children and their families.
- 1966: The Model Cities Program is established to develop antipoverty programs and alternative forms of local government.

It is important to consider some actions President Carter took to address racial discrimination. Namely, he introduced the Black College Initiative, giving historically Black colleges and universities additional federal support. He also tried to close the wealth gap between whites and people of color by developing financial initiatives for businesses owned by people of color. Finally, President Carter named Black Americans to his cabinet. Wade H. Mc-Cree served as solicitor general, Clifford L. Alexander was the first Black secretary of the army, Mary Berry was the top official in Washington on educational matters prior to the establishment of the Department of Education, Eleanor Holmes Norton chaired the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, and Franklin Delano Raines served on the White House staff.

REAGANOMICS: 1981 TO 1989

In 1980, the Republican presidential candidate, Ronald Reagan, beat the incumbent President Carter with a conservative platform that emphasized individual responsibility for one's own problems rather than the reform of existing systems for social welfare. Reagan called for a smaller federal government, a safety net for only the truly needy, and a lifetime limit on social services. He also embraced **trickle-down economics** (a version of classical economic theory also known as supply-side economics). The underlying idea was that reducing the tax obligations of the rich would stimulate them to spend more on the consumption of goods and services. In theory, the prosperity of the rich would “trickle down” to middle-class and people who were economically disadvantaged via the creation of new industries and jobs. There was, however, nothing to prevent the rich from simply holding on to their profits, purchasing existing enterprises, or investing in enterprises overseas.

President Reagan's administration was largely successful in implementing his vision. It shrank government and social welfare programs and services at the federal level through budget cuts and the implementation of means-tested programs and services. It also curtailed programs sanctioned and funded by the Social Security Act, such as Medicaid, food stamps, loans for higher education, and legal assistance for people who were economically disadvantaged. To offset these federal reductions and maintain some programs and services, many states and communities increased taxation.

After President Reagan's two terms in office, the 1988 election of his vice president, George H. W. Bush, to the presidency continued Reagan's conservative approach. President Bush focused his energy on international affairs, showing little inclination to address social issues or domestic policy. Responsibility for social programs shifted from the public to the private sector. President Bush promoted a “thousand points of light” campaign, where communities would develop and often privately fund services and programs to address local needs. Impoverished rural and urban communities had few resources to dedicate to such points of light, however.

Pushback against the nation's conservative era came by way of the election of William Jefferson Clinton. President Clinton (1993–2001) was the first Democratic president since Franklin D. Roosevelt to win a second term of office. In revamping the welfare system, Clinton engaged in political compromise. One result was the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, which reversed 6 decades of federal policy guaranteeing at least a minimum level of financial assistance, or a safety net, for people with little or no financial security.

President Clinton introduced the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act, a lengthy crime control bill. Its provisions implemented a “three-strikes” mandatory life sentence for repeat offenders, money to hire 100,000 new police officers, funding for prisons, and an expansion of death penalty–eligible offenses. It also dedicated funds for prevention programs; however, the bulk of the funds were dedicated to programs considered punitive rather than rehabilitative or preventative.

PARTISAN GRIDLOCK: 2000 TO THE PRESENT

After a two-term Clinton presidency, Republican George W. Bush won the 2000 election. It was one of the closest and most controversial presidential elections in history and was ultimately decided in the Supreme Court. A prior governor of Texas, President Bush described his political philosophy as “compassionate conservatism,” a view that combined traditional Republican economic policies with concern for the underprivileged. His administration targeted education and



A soldier greets his family after coming home.

iStock.com/MangoStar_Studio

volunteerism within faith-based and community organizations as a way of providing social services to the needy.

However, it was not domestic issues that marked the Bush administration. On September 11, 2001, terrorists attacked the World Trade Center towers in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, DC, by flying passenger jets into them. A fourth suicide flight, en route to the White House or the Capitol building, was thwarted by its passengers. All in all, some 3,000 people died. The event, now referred to as 9/11, defined Bush's tenure. He declared a "war on terror" and launched two wars in the Middle East. He also established the Department of Homeland Security, a vast bureaucracy charged with preventing any attack on the United States in the future.

At the same time, he maintained his pledge to reduce taxes. The result was a huge national debt, an economic recession, and a national and worldwide credit crisis.

The effect of many of Bush's social initiatives was dwarfed by the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the fight against terrorism, a faltering economy, and the global war on terror.

The 2008 election was remarkable for the victory of Democrat Barack Obama, the first Black president. During the campaign, Obama had proposed a platform of change and reform in Washington, with domestic policy and the economy as central themes. In the midst of a downward spiral in the national economy, which became known as the Great Recession, he had several serious domestic and international issues to address: the transgressions of Wall Street, the financial district of the United States, and the damage to the world economy; burgeoning, and suspect, foreclosures on U.S. homeowners; a dysfunctional and unfair health care system; costly wars in Iraq and Afghanistan; increasing dissatisfaction with immigration policy; and increasing signs of global climate change. The Obama administration experienced intransigent pushback on nearly every issue from the Republican members of the House of Representatives and the Senate, who were committed to a smaller federal government and a reduction in the national debt.

The Obama administration's signature social welfare policy was the Affordable Care Act (ACA), signed into law on March 23, 2010. A controversial piece of social welfare policy because it expanded the role of the federal government, the ACA enacted comprehensive reforms to improve access to affordable health coverage and to alter insurance company practices. Ideally, the ACA would decrease the nation's health care costs and make insurance companies more accountable for how premiums are spent.

The ACA primarily impacted health care coverage in three ways: through health exchanges, which went into effect in 2014; by expanding Medicaid coverage; and when states would decide to create their own basic health programs. In each case, social workers would help people navigate the new systems of health care to ensure that they would receive proper coverage and benefits. Further, the expanded health care provisions addressed mental or behavioral health, which represents another significant service area where social workers play a vital role.

Donald J. Trump shattered expectations on November 9, 2016, with an election-night victory over Hillary Clinton that revealed deep antiestablishment anger among U.S. voters. President Trump achieved one of the most improbable political victories in modern U.S. history, despite a series of controversies that would easily have destroyed other candidacies, extreme policies that drew criticism from both sides of the aisle, and a lack of conventional political experience.

Why did Trump win the election? It appears as though key groups of voters overlooked his personal character and political shortcomings and instead embraced him as an agent of change against corrupt government officials, who seemed to pay more attention to the economically disadvantaged than to the middle class. Additionally, the Clinton campaign appeared to focus on traditional urban issues and problems, with little attention given to the working class and the ongoing economic difficulties of people in rural America. Trump was also a proven and engaging businessperson unentrenched in Washington politics.

To keep his campaign promises, President Trump highlighted several key issues in his administrative agenda that changed policy and budgetary allocations, including the following:

- Rebuilding the military to give the United States a firmer footing in pursuing peace through strength
- Withdrawing from the Trans-Pacific Partnership and renegotiating the North American Free Trade Agreement
- Proposing a moratorium on new federal regulations, along with an order that heads of federal agencies and departments identify regulations that challenge employment opportunities
- Attempting to deport illegal immigrants with violent criminal records
- Safeguarding Second Amendment protections regarding gun rights
- Pulling the United States out of environmental protection efforts and accords (e.g., withdrawal from the Paris Agreement)
- Advancing policies to restrict benefits from social programs for programs like Meals on Wheels and food stamps (SNAP)
- Providing programs and policies in support of farmers
- Signing an order for historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs)

Initially, one of President Trump's biggest challenges involved the ACA, which he vowed to repeal and replace. When he took office, approximately half the population was covered by employer-sponsored health insurance, with the other half covered by Medicare, Medicaid, and individual private insurance (S. Miller, 2016). As President Trump approached the 2020 presidential election in an attempt to gain a second term in office, he considered changes to the ACA, including the following:

- Opening a national health insurance marketplace to lower premiums and encourage competition



The 44th and 45th presidents of the United States, Barack Obama and Donald Trump, exchange thoughts.

Pete Souza, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

- Simplifying Medicaid and giving administrative powers back to individual states
- Providing more transparency in terms of how premiums are calculated
- Possibly lowering tax incentives that low-income families could use to get breaks on their health insurance premiums
- Educating consumers about Health Savings Accounts (HSA) and reminding people of this tax-free option

It should be noted that under the Trump administration, two key features from the ACA remained. The first was the availability of health insurance for people who have preexisting conditions, such as diabetes and cancer. Further, the current ACA allows children 26 years of age or younger to remain on their parents' health insurance.

Table 2.3 outlines some of the major policies or issues advanced under President Trump's administration.

As you review the table, try to consider how the political worldviews of Democrats and Republicans differ. For example, in general, Democrats support marriage and legal rights for

TABLE 2.3 ■ President Trump's Policy Initiatives

LGBTQ community	In March 2017, the Trump administration rolled back key components of the Obama administration's workplace protections for LGBTQ people. However, on June 15, 2020, the U.S. Supreme Court issued a landmark ruling, saying that Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 protects gay and transgender workers from employment discrimination.
Climate	In June 2017, Trump announced withdrawal from the Paris Agreement, making the United States the only nation in the world to not ratify the agreement.
Taxes	In December 2017, Trump signed the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017, which cut the corporate tax rate to 21%, lowered personal tax brackets, increased the child tax credit, doubled the estate tax exemption to \$11.2 million, and limited the state and local tax deduction to \$10,000.
Immigration	In April 2018, Trump enacted a "zero-tolerance" immigration policy that temporarily took adults illegally entering the United States into custody for criminal prosecution and forcibly separated children from parents, eliminating the policy of previous administrations, which had made exceptions for families with children.
Abortion	Trump favored modifying the 2016 Republican platform opposing abortion, to allow for exceptions in cases of rape, incest, and circumstances endangering the health of the mother. He said he was committed to appointing pro-life justices.
Second Amendment	Trump supported a broad interpretation of the Second Amendment and said he was opposed to gun control in general.

Source: Adapted from <https://www.whitehouse.gov/people/donald-j-trump>

members of the LGBTQ community. Democrats also support policies that address climate change and advocate for changes to the immigration system whereby people have a pathway to citizenship. The majority of Democrats argue that every woman should have access to quality and affordable reproductive health care. Indeed, the party concludes that abortion is a woman's choice.

The political divide between the Democrats and Republicans, often referenced as a blue-versus-red division in the United States, was highlighted on December 18, 2019, when the Democratically controlled House of Representatives approved articles of impeachment charging President Trump with abuse of power and obstruction of Congress. Because the framers of the Constitution intentionally made it difficult for Congress to remove a sitting president, only two other presidents had previously been impeached, Andrew Jackson (in 1868) and Bill Clinton (in 1998). Although President Trump was acquitted, the impeachment process underscored the deep political party divide and set the stage for a rousing 2020 presidential election.

The Biden Election

The year 2020 was a formidable one for the United States. It marked the year when President Trump and Vice President Pence ran for reelection against former Vice President Joe Biden and California Senator Kamala Harris. It was also the year when COVID-19 caused a worldwide pandemic, resulting in the death of hundreds of thousands of people in the United States and millions of deaths worldwide. COVID-19 and the nation's response to the pandemic were especially critical to the presidential campaign, as were the nationwide civil unrest associated with the killings of numerous Black Americans, the confirmation of Amy Coney Barrett to the Supreme Court following the death of Ruth Bader Ginsberg, and the future of the ACA.

Due primarily to the pandemic, a record number of ballots were cast early and by mail. President Trump and others contended the possibility of voter fraud. The possibility became a perceived reality to Trump when Biden and Harris were declared winners in November 2020. However, Trump refused to accept the election results. On January 6, 2021, Trump spoke to a huge crowd in Washington, DC. Some of those in attendance stormed the U.S. Capitol, leading to the deaths of five people and leaving a wake of destruction.

Joe Biden, the oldest and 46th president, and Kamala Harris, the first woman of color to be vice president, were inaugurated on January 20, 2021. President Biden began immediately signing executive orders to begin to dismantle the Trump administration's policies. Examples of these orders included the following:

- Rejoining and committing to the Paris Agreement on climate control
- Revising immigration enforcement policies
- Banning discrimination on the basis of gender identity or sexual orientation
- Pausing federal student loan payments
- Strengthening deferred action for childhood undocumented arrivals
- Expanding access to COVID-19 treatments
- Promoting a data-driven response to COVID-19

As President Biden was directing agencies to reexamine policies regarding the ACA to help ensure coverage for preexisting conditions, former president Trump was proceeding through a

second impeachment trial in the Senate. He was being charged with culpability for inciting the attack on the Capitol on January 6.

The actions by the newly elected president and the actions taken against a former president demonstrate the power vested in the U.S. Constitution and the three branches of government—legislative, executive, and judicial. Exploring the role and power of the government is vital to understanding the U.S. political system and how it affects our lives.

TIME TO THINK 2.4

In your mind, what seems to drive the development of social welfare policy? Is there a point in this history that you find particularly interesting? Why? What significant events in the development of the social work profession spark your interest in the profession?

THE LIMITATIONS OF SOCIAL WELFARE

Although social reforms have enriched the lives of millions of people in the United States (Jansson, 1999), they sometimes fail to meet stated or ideal goals. Consider how the notion of the “deserving poor” has affected the provision of social welfare. Our belief in supporting children and older people has characterized U.S. society since colonial times. This fact sends a strong social signal to families that they should be responsible for their own.

Most of the social services that target young and old age categories are crisis interventions rather than preventions. For instance, policies such as the Social Security Act and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families provide a safety net for children and older adults. However, the basic needs of food, housing, health care, and clothing are met in a modest fashion under the guise of cost containment. In such an environment, clients live with uncertainty, and the practice of social work is restricted.

Although the United States is a rich country, many people are working hard every day but living from paycheck to paycheck. Far too many people in the United States live in poverty, relying on social programs to help address their most basic needs. Ideally, changes in social policy would give these underprivileged groups greater access to jobs that pay a **living wage** and equip them with the tools needed to raise their status in society, such as a good education. However, the nation’s social welfare system does little to move working-class and economically disadvantaged people from their current socioeconomic class.

Tellingly, some rural and urban communities experience persistent poverty and social inequality. In the United States, these groups are often the victims of racism. There are no policy examples and few social service programs that draw from and honor the cultural backgrounds and personal experiences of people of color. How can the effects of racism be challenged by the profession of social work? The history of social welfare policy suggests the need to address the root causes of social, economic, and political inequality. The 1963 March on Washington, followed by the 1964 Civil Rights Act, demonstrated that organizing people and taking united action can change the course of a nation.

For a more recent example of how movements for social justice can change society, consider the evolution of issues of gender, gender identity, and sexual orientation. History illustrates a long, hard struggle for women and LGBTQ individuals striving for equality in all spheres of life in the United States. Individually and collectively, groups of people dedicated to these causes have been actively involved in civil rights. Through resilience and resourcefulness, this

broad-based population has tackled barriers to its own growth, rights, recognition, and participation in society. Subsequently, political institutions, U.S. corporations, families, some progressive faith organizations, and other major U.S. entities have worked to challenge and change power arrangements to ensure a greater degree of gender-based equality and rights.

TIME TO THINK 2.5

What social issues concern you? Do you have student loans or pay taxes? What are your concerns about the environment, racial discrimination and oppression, affordable health care, voting rights, military engagement, immigration, legalization of marijuana, economic inequality, or LGBTQ rights?

SUMMARY

The response to societal issues historically reflects economic ups and downs, wars, political shifts from conservative to liberal and radical perspectives, and attitudes toward individual responsibilities. All these factors have influenced the development of the social welfare system. Approaches to social welfare have changed over the past few centuries of life in the United States, and the social work profession has evolved in tandem. However, despite improvements in many realms of life, the problems to which social welfare responds have remained, specifically those that intersect economic disparities and social inequality.

As you come to understand the role of social work in the context of policy and practice, you will begin to learn how the profession's core values influence advocacy strategies to assist those in need. Consider how the social work profession is diverse, challenging, and one of the few careers that enables you to stand up for social justice.

TOP 10 KEY CONCEPTS

conservative
deserving poor
liberal
means testing
nondeserving poor

radicalism
safety net
social control
social justice
social welfare policy

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Think about your political leanings and beliefs and where they came from throughout your lifetime. Do they align with your parents' beliefs? Is this an issue? Why or why not? What experiences formed your opinions on social welfare services and social work? How do your family members and friends align with a social movement such as Black Lives Matter, and why?
2. As you read through the history of the development of social work, what period of time most captured your attention? What is it about this time that piques your interest?

3. Define the current political scene, environmental conditions, human needs, and social justice issues in the United States or your country of origin. How have these factors contributed to debate on a policy issue and a specific social welfare policy?
4. Take time to review Table 2.1, the Social Security Act timeline. Discuss the issues and actions you think have been the most effective in helping the needy.

EXERCISES

1. Learn more about various political parties and their stances on social welfare by going to their websites. In addition to the Democratic and Republican parties, seek information about the Libertarian Party, the Green Party, the Progressive Party, the Constitution Party, or others that run candidates in your locale. Focusing on the issue of social welfare, locate the parties on a spectrum from most liberal to most conservative.
2. Read an editorial from one of the nation's leading newspapers or news websites. What political perspective does the editorial reflect, and how did you reach this conclusion?
3. Role-play a situation in which you must ask for public assistance. How did you feel about being in need and asking for help?
4. Create a policy timeline using the periods of the Elizabethan Poor Laws, colonial America, the Progressive Era, the Great Depression, the War on Poverty, the Great Society, Reaganomics, the period of reforming the welfare state, the Obama presidency, and the Trump administration. Select one landmark event from each period and read about the relevant political situation, environmental factors, human needs, and social justice issues of the time.
5. Choose a social welfare service available in your community. Gather the history of this agency. In what ways do its history and development compare to and align with what you read in this chapter?