

Despite these dramatic rises in the number of AFDC recipients, the program does not come close to reaching all those poor families who are categorically eligible—that is, children in families with a parent dead, absent from the home, disabled or, in some States, unemployed. For example, in 1965, 55 percent of those categorically eligible for AFDC did not receive assistance, and the number has risen since then.

What is perhaps even more significant is that these 8 million welfare recipients represent only approximately one-fourth of persons living in poverty, as it is currently defined. While the welfare population is a heavily dependent group—the aged, children and youth, the handicapped—the poor population at large has a different character. If we exclude the 5 million aged poor, the bulk of the 27 million nonaged poor live in families with a breadwinner who works at a job all or part of the year.

In 1965, 70 percent of nonaged poor families were headed by men of whom nearly 50 percent held full-time jobs and 86 percent worked at least part time. Thus, the typical poor family is not only headed by a man, but a family in which the man holds down a full-time job. The typical poor family, in other words, resembles the typical American family.

These able-bodied poor and their families have historically been excluded from public assistance programs. Thus, it should be clear that the present system is not broad enough to include a wide range of persons of great need. It should be equally clear that the present system also fails to meet adequately the needs of those who do participate.

Dissatisfaction with welfare, and especially with AFDC, is universal. For the people on welfare, it is demeaning, incentive destroying, and inadequate. The nonwelfare poor seem to have mixed feelings—both resentment and pride—because they do their best to make it and do not get any help from anyone. And many of the nonpoor seem to feel they are supporting the unworthy and undeserving in a shiftless way of life.

Society, on the other hand, is relatively generous in its financial aids to those it deems deserving, and proffers this aid without taint or stigma. Veterans' allowances, social security payments, income tax benefits, unemployment compensation and the like are regarded as rights to which beneficiaries are entitled, earned through the performance of service or through actual purchase, or because of some special status. There is no such legitimacy attaching to public welfare payments in the minds of most Americans.

The priorities of the Federal Government are reflected in the existence of categorical programs for the aged, blind, disabled, and dependent children, and the level of support for each. It is no coincidence that the aged, blind, and disabled have generally received higher cash assistance than those in the families with dependent children, because these groups are to some extent considered worthy. Children have been less well treated because some of those who are—or might be—eligible for assistance are needy for reasons which are apparently less acceptable to the majority of citizens or their representatives. These reasons mostly have to do with parents and not with children; for example, inability to earn a decent wage, unemployment, absence of the father for whatever reason—death, divorce, desertion; or because the children themselves were born out of wedlock.