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PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY VERSUS GOVERNMENT RESPONSIBILITY:

WELFARE ATTITUDES POST-1996

by

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B.A. May 2002, The University of Virginia

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculties of
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ABSTRACT

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY VERSUS GOVERNMENT RESPONSIBILITY: WELFARE ATTITUDES POST-1996

Emily C. Ing
Old Dominion University and Norfolk State University, 2006
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The welfare system in the United States underwent a major overhaul in 1996, transforming Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) to Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). Since then, there has been little research conducted on attitudes toward welfare. This is still a topic worth investigating, as poverty and homelessness remain a problem in the United States.

This thesis hypothesized that attitudes about welfare would vary according to an individual's commitment to individualism, a hegemonic value in the United States. This thesis also hypothesized that welfare attitudes would vary according to an individual's education, gender, marital status, race, and religion.

Data from the 2000 National Election Study were used to investigate the following research questions: (1) To what extent, if any, is commitment to individualism and personal responsibility related to attitudes about welfare programs? (2) What demographic characteristics are also related to attitudes about welfare?

This thesis found that attitudes about welfare and Food Stamps, both means-tested programs, were much more negative than attitudes about Social Security, a contributory program. Commitment to individualism translated into negative attitudes about welfare programs. As commitment to individualism increased, support for welfare programs decreased. Unmarried individuals, minorities and non-Protestants were also more favorable towards welfare programs than married individuals, whites and Protestants. Finally, gender was significantly related only to attitudes about Social Security; females had slightly more positive attitudes about Social Security than males did.

Future research should include an investigation of the possible interaction between individualistic values and sociodemographic characteristics and how this, in turn, affects welfare attitudes. A qualitative study of welfare attitudes is also recommended to further investigate what guides such negative attitudes about these programs that assist the needy in the United States.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In 2004, 37 million people in the United States lived below the poverty line (United States Census Bureau 2005). Nearly 13 million of these individuals who live in poverty were children, 1.3 million of whom were also homeless (National Center for Children in Poverty 2005). According to the Institute for Research on Poverty (2005), blacks and Hispanics, on average, have a higher rate of poverty than any other race in the United States. Furthermore, female-headed families are more susceptible to living in poverty than other families. These numbers are sobering, considering the fact that the United States is one of the most industrialized and wealthiest nations in the world. It is clear that poverty is a problem in the United States, but no consensus exists on who is responsible for eradicating such poverty. Is it the responsibility of the government to improve the plight of the poor through programs such as welfare? Or, are individuals at the bottom rungs primarily responsible for

This thesis follows the format requirements of the *American Sociological Review*.

their poverty state and, therefore, responsible for improving their situation?

CAUSES OF POVERTY

Penner, Sawhill, and Taylor (2000) hold that there is no "smoking gun" explanation for the cause of poverty, but there are several plausible explanations that account for its existence. Some researchers, like William Julius Wilson (1987), argue that the lack of decent paying jobs has prevented individuals from moving out of poverty. The rise of globalization and improvements in technology in the 1990s have been pegged as more recent culprits for the lack of jobs and rise in poverty (Penner et al. 2000). Another explanation points to the decline in value of the already low minimum wage. The government provided few increases in the minimum wage after 1981 so that its 1996 value was still 15 percent less than its value in the 1970s. These are just a few explanations for the causes of poverty in the United States.

GOVERNMENT OR INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY?

There is no agreement overall on who is primarily responsible for the existence of poverty and its remedies. A number of researchers believe that the burden of reducing

poverty belongs more to the government than to individuals. In the recent literature, their suggestions focus on what the government can do to reduce poverty (Freeman 1999; Page and Simmons 2000). Some outline their plans for a new system of taxation, while others point out that the government can alter and improve the current social welfare programs. None of these plans include what individuals themselves can do to improve their social position or such social conditions.

However, other researchers believe that individuals are responsible for their low social status or living in poverty. The idea of a "culture of poverty" emerged during the 1950s and 1960s, and it lingers to this day. The culture of poverty thesis contends that the poor live in a subculture of their own, where the futility of success is emphasized, and hard work is, therefore, not highly valued (Banfield 1968; Lewis 1968). Charles Murray took a different approach and claimed that the poor and lower class live in a culture of dependency which directly resulted from the creation of the welfare state. In his oft-cited book *Losing Ground*, Murray (1984) argued that the distribution of welfare keeps the poor in a state of complacency and prevents them from becoming motivated to improve their situation. So instead of helping the poor,

the government is in fact hurting them (Murray 1984).

There are, then, very different views toward poverty and how it can be eliminated.

The question remains as to what the general public believes about the solution to these unsatisfactory social conditions. Welfare and poverty are important issues for several reasons. As the statistics indicate, millions of Americans now live in poverty even though the United States is one of the wealthiest nations in the world. Yet there is still much resistance to programs, such as welfare and Food Stamps, that are designed to aid the poor despite the great need for them. What do individuals believe the government should do about the poverty that persists? Previous research has found that many believe the government should help the poor and lower class, but their approval of programs wanes when it involves the government giving "hand-outs" (Shapiro, Patterson, Russell, and Young 1987). This opinion often stems from the commitment to individualism, a hegemonic value in American society.

THE ORIGIN OF WELFARE AS WE KNEW IT

Federal responsibility for welfare has existed since the presidency of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, when many Americans were living in poverty due to the Great

Depression. Those dire economic times emphasized the need for a nationwide assistance program. In 1934, Roosevelt established a Committee on Economic Security, which he mandated to devise a "Grand Design" that would ensure that no American would go "ill-housed, ill-clothed, or ill-fed" (Day 2003:277). This was a huge step in the direction towards government responsibility to see to the needs of its constituency.

While this "Grand Design" was supposed to benefit all Americans, the Committee and subsequent Social Security Act still differentiated between the deserving poor (those who had participated in the labor force prior to the Depression) and the undeserving, unworthy poor (those who had not been in the labor force). The Social Security Act (SSA) became law in 1935. The SSA established a social welfare program that provided social insurance for the deserving poor and public assistance for the undeserving poor. It was the original intent of the SSA for public assistance to be only a temporary program, but the prevalence of poverty throughout the 20th century kept the public assistance programs in existence to this day.

SOCIAL INSURANCE PROGRAMS

The programs that fit under the umbrella of "social welfare programs" can be categorized as either social insurance or public assistance. The social insurance programs are now referred to as OASDHI (Old Age, Survivors, Disability, and Medicare health insurance), and they are typically what the public calls Social Security. These programs are considered contributory, in that the only recipients are those who have participated in the labor market and contributed to the program through automatic deductions from their paycheck. Disability, commonly known as Supplemental Security Income (SSI), is the only social insurance program that is means-tested; the recipients must qualify for the benefits based on having a disability, such as blindness. Those with disabilities, though, are considered among the deserving poor since they are unable to work due to a disability beyond their control and not because of their own faults or laziness. The recipients of social insurance are predominantly of the working, middle and upper class.

PUBLIC ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

Public assistance programs are for the so-called undeserving poor. They include Temporary Assistance to

Needy Families (TANF), formerly known as Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), Medicaid, and Food Stamps. These programs are means-tested; in other words, the benefits are available those who qualify based on their financial need. This need is often determined based on the official poverty threshold. The recipients of these programs are predominantly the lower class and those who live in poverty (Hasenfeld and Rafferty 1989). Most of the studies summarized in the review of literature address attitudes toward means-tested welfare programs.

WELFARE REFORM

There have been several reforms to the social welfare system since its inception in 1936. While almost every program has experienced cutbacks in funding, the social insurance programs have typically been well received by the public. On the other hand, the public assistance programs have been heavily criticized. Much of the criticism was levied against unwed women with out-of-wedlock children (Day 2003:311). Many thought these women not only had lax sexual morals but also a lazy work ethic that made them unable to provide for their many children.

The backlash against public assistance and welfare mothers was particularly great during the Reagan and Bush

administrations. Both presidents made huge cuts to public assistance programs and enacted stricter work requirements. They wanted to push these dependent women off the welfare rolls and into the workforce, but many obstacles still remained. For example, some of the reforms required the women to participate in programs that provided job skills training, but there were not enough of these programs for all of the women who were eligible and they provided no assistance with childcare.

THE END OF WELFARE AS WE KNEW IT

When Bill Clinton became president in 1992, he promised to "end welfare as we know it" (Day 2003:409). Many thought that this meant changes that would actually help welfare mothers become self-sufficient, but ultimately a new welfare program was enacted that did more to hurt poor mothers than to help them. The Republican-controlled 104th Congress heavily pressured Clinton to sign their welfare bill into law, after he had vetoed it twice. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA) did indeed end welfare as the United States had known it since 1936.

There were two primary values underlying the PRWORA - personal responsibility and proper work ethic. Up to that

point, many in Congress did not believe that women on welfare were made to take personal responsibility for their actions. Legislators assumed that poor women had loose sexual morals and therefore were personally responsible for having children out-of-wedlock; hence, they were also personally responsible for their children going hungry and becoming dependent on the government for assistance (Day 2003:419). It was their own personal fault that they were not economically independent and successful. Furthermore, Congress also pushed for the women to acquire the proper work ethic to be able to support their families. Some legislators argued that poor women were not really pressured to work and could remain lazy and lackadaisical. One can see the heavy traces of individualistic values in the PRWORA. Welfare mothers were condemned as being lazy, unfit mothers who were personally responsible for perpetually living in poverty.

To that end, the PRWORA changed Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) to Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). It first required each recipient to sign an Individual Responsibility Plan. By signing this contract, recipients agreed to send their children to school and immunize them, work with Child Support Enforcement to determine paternity and obtain payments

(some of which the women would pay back to the government for receiving welfare), and participate in available education, training, and job placement programs (Day 2003:416). These requirements were meant to instill recipients with the proper work ethic and take personal responsibility for their lives and their children.

The PRWORA also moved the administration of welfare from the federal level to the state level, and each locality set different work requirements for its welfare recipients. In addition, the PRWORA set strict time limits on the receipt of any type of welfare, including TANF and Food Stamps. Welfare was available only for a two year period instead of indefinitely. While the recipients could go on and off the welfare rolls until their time added up to two years, there was a five-year limit during which women could receive welfare. For example, a woman could start receiving TANF in 2000, but she could only receive two years of on and off again benefits between 2000 and 2005. Once she received her five years of welfare, she could never receive it again.

WELFARE ATTITUDES POST-1996

The welfare rolls declined by 53 percent between August 1996 and June 2004 (Day 2003:422). While these

steadily decreasing numbers have satisfied the welfare critics, little is known about what average Americans now think about welfare. A number of studies have found that commitment to a certain ideology, such as individualism, is correlated with lowered support for these programs.

Individualism places fault on individuals for their actions and subsequent consequences; it also focuses on an individual's own personal responsibility to improve his/her situation. Research on welfare attitudes has declined since the passage of the PRWORA in 1996. This thesis returns attention to this subject, important because poverty remains a problem and is increasing in the United States. The questions this thesis addresses are these:

(1) To what extent, if any, is commitment to individualism and personal responsibility related to attitudes about welfare programs? (2) What demographic characteristics are also related to attitudes about welfare programs?

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter first briefly outlines past perspectives on the function and responsibility of the government. It then discusses American Dream ideology and how it led to the emphasis on individualism in American society. The next section reviews earlier studies that emphasized the role of the individual in improving their position in society. Following this is a summary of past studies that found evidence of the shifting of responsibility away from the individual and the recognition of structural barriers that prevent social and income mobility. A review of studies that measured attitudes towards social welfare programs closes the review of literature.

PERSPECTIVES ON GOVERNMENT FUNCTIONS

A number of political theories surfaced around the English Civil War in the 1600s, a time of great social and political turmoil. Some of these theories now provide the theoretical foundation for the United States government and mandate that it has a responsibility to meet the needs of its constituency. Theorists like Thomas Hobbes and John Locke saw the maintenance of order as the primary function

of government. For Hobbes, it was a matter of life or death. He believed that man--the writers of this time all used sexist language--existed in a natural state of chaos, like animals, and needed a sovereign power to establish law and order. The ruler could use whatever force was necessary to maintain order, even if it ran contrary to what was in the best interest of society (Hobbes 1996 [1651]). Like Hobbes, John Locke believed that a ruler or government was necessary to maintain order, but he did not take as pessimistic a view as did Hobbes. He held that man's possession of reason prompted him to submit to a sovereign power, since he would rationalize that it was necessary for the preservation of his health and private property. However, man also had the right to overthrow any government that acted against the will or best interest of society (Locke 1952 [1690]). For both Hobbes and Locke, the role of government is to establish and maintain social order.

Laissez-Faire Perspective

On the other hand, theorists like Adam Smith believed in a *laissez-faire* approach to government, where less intervention is better. Smith was greatly concerned with the role of government in regulating the burgeoning

economy, and he held that the government should defer power to the "invisible hand" of the market (Smith 1976 [1776]). The wealth of the nation would grow quicker when the government let the market run its course, instead of trying to regulate it. Today, the *laissez-faire* approach applies to more than government intervention in the economy. Opponents of large bureaucracies cite *laissez-faire* principles when complaining about issues like the welfare system or involvement in foreign nations. The founding fathers of the United States incorporated a number of the ideas of Hobbes, Locke, and Smith when establishing the government (Page and Simmons 2000).

Utilitarianism

The philosophy of utilitarianism also courses through American political philosophy. In the 19th century, Jeremy Bentham argued the judge of a good government is whether or not it maximized the "greatest happiness of the greatest number" (Bentham 1970 [1789]). For Bentham, the role of the government is to create programs that promoted universal public interest and eliminate those that did not. Earlier theorists even conceded that doing so would help maintain social order. Hobbes noted that when inequalities were extreme, those with less would be more likely to riot

and revolt to obtain what they needed (Hobbes 1996 [1651]). Smith did not believe that any society could flourish when many in society are poor (Smith 1976 [1776]). One can see the presence of utilitarian principles throughout American history. The Declaration of Independence proclaimed that individuals have the unalienable rights of life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness, and that government was established to secure those rights. When the government "becomes destructive of these ends" (United States National Archives and Records Administration 2004b), the people have the right to overthrow this government and establish a new one. In the preamble of the United States Constitution, one of the purposes for establishing the Constitution listed is "to promote the general welfare" (United States National Archives and Records Administration 2004a). Lincoln, in the Gettysburg Address, stated the government was "for the people" (Institute for Advanced Technology in the Humanities 2004). Utilitarianism is yet another guiding theory of the function of government in the United States.

INDIVIDUALISM AND AMERICAN DREAM IDEOLOGY

While the principles of utilitarianism are evident in American political philosophy, another ideology runs

concomitantly that does not necessarily emphasize the role of the government in maximizing individual happiness and well-being. Individualism places responsibility on each person to work hard to improve his/her situation. This value became dominant in the United States due in large part to the promulgation of American Dream ideology.

The Protestant Ethic in the United States

The first settlers arrived in North America with the prospect of new opportunities and a better life. These European settlers were predominantly Protestant and brought with them their disciplined work ethic, which Max Weber (1958) described in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Weber sought to discover why capitalism flourished in some parts of the world, especially in areas where Protestantism was the dominant religion. It appeared that something drove Protestant individuals, particularly Calvinists, to make more and more money. Weber uncovered that such action was a means to an end; good acts in this life would lead to the ultimate reward in the next life. Calvinists believed in predestination, the idea that one's salvation was already determined. An individual had to look for signs of salvation through his/her life; one such sign was economic success. Thus, Protestants converted the

pursuit of wealth into a moral crusade. It was the performance of their calling and duty. In addition, they combined their accumulation of wealth with the practice of frugality and moderation. Protestants enjoyed life, but they did not over-indulge in luxuries despite their wealth. Weber held that these aspects of Protestantism formed a certain "spirit" of capitalism that increased its promulgation throughout areas where the religion was dominant. To Weber, Protestants rationalized their conduct and actions on the basis of a calling and search for salvation.

American Dream Ideology

The Puritan emphasis on individual hard work became firmly embedded into American culture and provided the foundation for American Dream ideology and individualism. People were personally responsible for their success in life based on their own effort and diligence. Eventually, the religious aspect of the work ethic waned as the economy flourished and individuals opted to enjoy their wealth instead of merely regarding it as a sign of salvation (McNamee and Miller 2000). Influential individuals, like Benjamin Franklin, still uplifted the value of hard work as the key to success, a vital component of individualism. In

The Way to Wealth, Franklin (1758) created the character, Father Abraham, who would help individuals who came to him with complaints about their life. Father Abraham would respond with oft-quoted adages like "God helps them that help themselves," "He that hath a trade hath an estate," "Keep thy shop and thy shop will keep thee," and "Sloth makes all things difficult; but industry all easy."

William McGuffey, a minister and writer, created *Readers* for American primary schools that incorporated Franklin's proverbs, as well as many Puritan principles. McGuffey's *Readers* emphasized over and over again to the early generations of the United States that "education, work, thrift, dedication, and a dash of good fortune will put an honest man in a position to thrive and prosper" (Jillson 2004:34). The commitment to the belief that individual effort determines economic success and social position continued to be reinforced in popular culture well into the 20th century.

EARLY RESEARCH ON INDIVIDUALISM AND POVERTY

Although the values of individualism are firmly embedded into the nation's system of values, the persistence of poverty casts doubt on its revered formula for success. While the United States is wealthier than any

other industrialized nation, it also has one of the greatest poverty rates (Jillson 2004). Early research found that people tended to blame those who lived in a state of poverty or had less money. Such beliefs seem to reflect a strong adherence to belief that an individual's own effort and work ethic determined his/her social position.

Some researchers studied how an individual's social position influenced acceptance or opposition to the dominant ideology, which in the United States revolves around individualism. Huber and Form (1973) hypothesized that the "higher their incomes, the more people believe that personal factors are responsible for wealth and income and the lower their income, the more people believe that social structural factors are causal" (Huber and Form 1973: 100). They collected data from a sample of three hundred and fifty-four individuals from the urban area of Muskegon, Michigan. To test their hypothesis, they asked two open-ended questions: "Why are rich people rich?" and "Why are poor people poor?" They coded the responses to reflect either individual causes, structural causes, or both (Huber and Form 1973). Their independent variables were income and race; individuals were identified by the researchers as poor, middle-income, or rich, and either white or black.

It should be noted that there were no rich blacks in their study. Huber and Form (1973) found that 72 percent of rich whites, 35 percent of middle-income and poor whites, 29 percent of middle income blacks, and 17 percent of poor blacks attributed wealth to favorable personal characteristics. Regarding the causes of poverty, 62 percent of rich whites, 41 percent of middle-income whites, 19 percent of middle-income blacks, 30 percent of poor whites, and 17 percent of poor blacks attributed poverty to deficient personal characteristics. Huber and Form (1973) concluded that, as income increased, the emphasis on personal characteristics and the blame on the poor increased. This reflected a strong commitment to the hegemonic values of individualism for those who experienced economic success.

Feagin (1972) researched how strongly an individual's adherence to economic individualism affected attitudes toward the poor. In collaboration with the National Opinion Research Corporation in Princeton, New Jersey, Feagin conducted forty-five minute interviews with 1,017 individuals throughout the United States. Respondents were asked to assess the importance of a list of reasons about why people are poor. This list included individualistic, structural, and fatalistic explanations. Feagin found that

a majority cited individualistic factors as "very important reasons for poverty" (Feagin 1972:103). He also analyzed the effect of socioeconomic and demographic factors on these attitudes. Feagin (1972) found that those who gave the most priority to individualistic explanations included white Protestants and Catholics, individuals over 50 years old, those in the middle-income group, and those with middle levels of education. Those who placed more emphasis on structural explanations were black Protestants and Jews, individuals under 30 years old, the poor, and those with lower levels of education (Feagin 1972:104). Feagin (1972) concluded that adherence to economic individualism greatly influenced attitudes toward the causes of poverty, but certain socioeconomic and demographic factors could change the degree to which this was the case.

Kluegel and Smith (1986) also investigated how much emphasis individuals placed on personal characteristics versus structural barriers as the cause of poverty and what determined their responses. They conducted telephone interviews with 2,212 individuals in the United States. They sought to answer this question: "Does the American public generally look on the poor as victims of environmental limitations or as personally responsible for their own condition?" (Kluegel and Smith 1986:75).

Overall, "the average proportion responding "very important" across individualistic items is 50 percent, while for structuralist items it is 34 percent" (Hunt 1996:300). In general, Kluegel and Smith (1986) found that people placed more importance on individual factors than structural factors when accounting for poverty. They conducted regressions to determine the relationship between explanations for poverty and sociodemographic variables. With regards to explanations about poverty, females, non-whites, those with lower income and lower education, and the younger respondents favored structural explanations over individual explanations. The researchers found that respondents who were male, white, and of higher income did not greatly support individual explanations for poverty, but this still did not translate into their greater support for structural explanations. Kluegel and Smith (1986) suggested that, although the dominant ideology of individualism was still present, structural explanations had begun to challenge it as the cause of poverty.

Summary

Early research indicated that many individuals placed greater emphasis on individualistic explanations than structural explanations when accounting for the causes of

poverty. This strong adherence to the values of individualism was associated with more negative attitudes toward the poor. The studies, however, found that certain groups exhibited more commitment to this ideology than others. Those who were white, Protestant, had a higher income and more education showed the most support for individualistic explanations. People who were non-white, non-Protestant, younger, with a lower income and less education also tended to show support for individualistic explanations, but they also recognized structural explanations for the causes of poverty. In summary, during the 1960s and 1970s, the emphasis was more on blaming individuals for living in a state of poverty than blaming structural barriers.

THE DECLINING SIGNIFICANCE OF INDIVIDUALISM

More recent studies investigated the trend towards structural explanations as the cause of poverty, as opposed to individual explanations. Lee, Jones, and Lewis (1990) researched attitudes about the causes of urban homelessness. One question asked the respondents, "Is homelessness, like generic poverty, most often explained in individualistic fashion?" and another question asked, "How are causal beliefs about homelessness organized at the

intrapersonal level?" Lee et al. (1990) gathered data through telephone interviews with 293 individuals in Nashville, Tennessee. To ascertain what individuals believed were the causes of poverty, they offered the respondents six options: personal choice, aversion to work, alcoholism, mental illness, bad luck, and structural forces. Lee et al. (1990) found that almost three-fifth of the respondents believed poverty was caused by structural forces; the vast majority (90 percent) believed that there were actually multiple causes for poverty. Lee et al. (1990) analyzed the relationship between these explanations and the personal characteristics of the respondents. They used variables for sex, age, race, education, and region of birth; they also included variables for political orientation and self-described religiosity. From OLS regressions, the authors found that education and political orientation had the strongest relationship with causal attitudes; the tendency to explain homelessness based on personal deficiencies decreased as education and liberalism increased. Individuals who were black and born outside the South also increased the likelihood of support for structural causes. Those who described themselves as "very religious" were more likely to favor individual causes. Lee et al. (1990) concluded that individuals tend to

combine both individualistic and structural explanations for the causes of poverty, instead of only individualistic explanations.

Hunt (1996) similarly examined beliefs about the causes of poverty, and he particularly focused on the effect of race/ethnicity on such beliefs. He hypothesized that "race/ethnic minorities, compared with whites, will exhibit more structuralist outlooks, but will not differ significantly in individualistic outlooks" (Hunt 1996:295). He also hypothesized that the differences along racial lines would be further affected by other demographic variables like income, education, and age. Using data collected during telephone interviews with 2,628 individuals from five counties in southern California (Los Angeles, Orange, San Bernardino, and San Diego), Hunt (1996) was able to create two scales for individualism and structuralism. Regarding the causes of poverty, Hunt asked the respondents whether they thought each reason was "very important," "somewhat important," "not very important," or "not at all important." On the individualism scale, Hunt (1996) found that Latinos ranked highest, followed by blacks and whites. On the structuralist scale, blacks and Latinos ranked higher than whites. However, Hunt (1996) found support that blacks and Latinos were more likely to

possess a "dual consciousness" than whites, in that they endorsed a combination of individualist and structuralist explanations. Within each racial group, Hunt (1996) found that attitudes were further affected by sociodemographic factors. Among whites, women, those of lower income, and those with higher education showed more support for structuralist explanations. Among blacks, a higher income actually increased support for structuralist explanations. Among Latinos, individuals with higher education decreased support for individualist explanations. Hunt (1996) concluded that explanations for poverty varied by race, and these explanations were further affected by the sociodemographic characteristics of an individual.

Bobo (1991) argued that an individual's attitudes toward the poor are determined by the degree of their commitment to the values of individualism and social responsibility. The latter is "a cluster of beliefs that endorse limitations to economic inequality, an obligation to meet the basic needs of all people in society, and a duty to redress unfair social inequality" (Bobo 1991:74). People who place more emphasis on social responsibility believe that the government and society as a whole should bear the burden of improving the situation of, and providing opportunities for the poor. Bobo (1991)

hypothesized that an individual's emphasis on individualism or social responsibility will vary according to his/her race and socioeconomic status; individuals who are black and of lower socioeconomic status will show more support for social responsibility. Using data from the 1984 General Social Survey, Bobo (1991) first conducted a factor analysis on 18 items that described beliefs about the causes of poverty and economic inequality. The factor analysis resulted in two factors for economic individualism and social responsibility, which he converted into scales for regression analysis. The regressions supported Bobo's (1991) hypothesis that blacks and those of lower socioeconomic status would be more committed to social responsibility than economic individualism. He also found that whites, older individuals, and those with higher incomes were more committed to economic individualism. Bobo (1991) concluded that social responsibility is a vital component to beliefs about poverty, commitment to which depends on an individual's race and socioeconomic position. He did not deny the continuing significance of individualism as a hegemonic value, but he argued that this may be due to the fact there is the lack of political influence of those who are more committed to social responsibility. Bobo (1991) found support for his

hypotheses that individuals who are minorities, younger, and with lower incomes would more likely be committed to the values of social responsibility over the values of individualism

Summary

Researchers who conducted their studies during the 1980s and 1990s found that a shift occurred away from individualistic towards structural explanations for poverty. This did not, however, completely eliminate the significance of individualism. In fact, these researchers found evidence of dual explanations, with many people attributing poverty to both individual and structural causes. The emphasis on these explanations varied according to the personal characteristics of the respondents. Minorities, females, younger individuals, and those with lower incomes gave greater priority to structural causes over individual causes. Whites, males, Protestants, older individuals, and those with higher incomes leaned more towards individualistic explanations. Education was the only factor that was not consistent with earlier studies that found that higher education yielded stronger support for individualistic explanations. The more recent studies found that higher education increased

support for structural explanations. In summary, there has recently been a growing recognition of structural explanations, in addition to individualistic explanations, for the reasons for poverty.

ATTITUDES ABOUT WELFARE PROGRAMS

The research summarized above demonstrates how attitudes about poverty have increasingly shifted responsibility for poverty away from the individual. There are segments of society who recognize that there are structural barriers, such as a lack of jobs and affordable housing, inferior schools, and racial and gender discrimination, all of which can prevent those in the lower class and poverty from improving their situation, regardless of how hard they work. With the growing recognition of structural barriers, the focus now turns to what individuals think about the programs that the government has enacted to aid those in need.

In a comprehensive review of American's policy preferences from the 1930s to the 1990s, Page and Shapiro (1991) emphasized that attitudes towards unequal social conditions and the economic welfare of society are "highly sensitive" to how the policies are described in surveys (Page and Shapiro 1991:126). Individuals are more

receptive to policies and programs that provide jobs to all who really want to work or provide housing or food to those who cannot afford it. They are more supportive of programs that aid the poor but much less supportive of anything related to welfare or the reduction of the gap between the rich and poor. Page and Shapiro (1991) report that individuals in the United States are very generous but still idealize individualism and hard work.

Feagin's 1972 research was addressed earlier in the chapter, and the portion of his study that investigated attitudes toward welfare programs is now discussed. Feagin (1972) asked the 1,017 respondents in his survey to evaluate seven statements regarding welfare programs and those who receive them. These statements included "There are too many people receiving welfare money who should be working," and "Many women getting welfare money are having illegitimate babies to increase the money they get" (Feagin 1972: 107). Feagin (1972) found that a majority of respondents took an anti-welfare position and that most of these respondents were quite certain that their beliefs about welfare were true. He then examined the impact of socioeconomic and demographic characteristics on these beliefs and found that there were many differences among each group. White Protestants and white Catholics were

very anti-welfare, while Jews and black Protestants were less so. Age and income were directly related to anti-welfare attitudes. Feagin's findings about education are interesting; those with a seventh through twelfth grade education were the most anti-welfare, while those with a college education were only slightly less anti-welfare. People with a sixth grade education or less were the least anti-welfare. Feagin (1972) also compared his findings on the causes of poverty with attitudes toward welfare. Of those who favored individual causes for poverty, 45 percent were very anti-welfare. Of those who favored structural causes, only 18 percent were anti-welfare. Feagin (1972) concluded that anti-welfare beliefs closely mirrored attitudes about the causes of poverty.

AuClaire (1984) analyzed how attitudes toward welfare varied over a six year period. Using data from the 1976, 1978, 1980, and 1982 General Social Surveys, AuClaire (1984) found that a majority consistently thought that the government was spending too much money on welfare programs. He then investigated how attitudes differed according to sociodemographic characteristics. AuClaire (1984) found that there was less opposition to welfare among the youngest respondents (30 years old or younger) and the oldest respondents (65 years old and older). Education and

income were directly related to opposition to welfare. Women and non-whites were more supportive of welfare spending than males and whites. Finally, AuClaire (1984) found that Democrats were less opposed to welfare spending than Republicans. AuClaire (1984) concluded that, while a majority held negative views about welfare spending, an analysis of sociodemographic factors revealed that these views differed significantly by group.

Hasenfeld and Rafferty (1989) examined variations in attitudes toward social welfare programs. They noted that, between 1930 and 1975, about seventy percent of the American public approved of the government's responsibility to aid the needy and unemployed (Hasenfeld and Rafferty 1989). However, public support was high for welfare programs that assisted the elderly, disabled, and children or involved Social Security or health care. Public support was much lower for programs that were typically associated with welfare, such as Aid to Families with Dependent Children and Food Stamps. Hasenfeld and Rafferty (1989) first hypothesized that support for welfare programs would vary by type of programs, whether they were contributory (Social Security and unemployment assistance) or means-tested (AFDC and Food Stamps). They then hypothesized that a number of factors would determine support for welfare

programs, particularly socioeconomic status, beliefs about government intervention, economic individualism, images of the poor, perceptions about American citizen's rights to government-provided entitlements, and perceptions about the government's responsibility to avoid unnecessary expenditure and waste. Using data collected from a 1983 survey of adults in Detroit, Hasenfeld and Rafferty (1989) found that support for contributory welfare programs was stronger than support for means-tested welfare programs, but support for the latter was still fairly great. As for the determinants of support for the welfare state overall, they found that individuals who had lower incomes, were non-white, female and younger showed stronger support for welfare programs. The same was true for individuals who supported government intervention and social rights, had lesser commitment to economic individualism, and did not perceive the government to be wasteful. Hasenfeld and Rafferty (1989) concluded that individuals who were more economically and socially vulnerable were more likely to support social welfare programs. In addition, individuals who favored government intervention, had a positive perception of the government, and believed in the social rights of United States citizens held similar beliefs.

Feldman and Zaller (1992) investigated the role of ideology in determining beliefs about social welfare programs. They hypothesized that individuals are committed to a combination of certain ideologies, but rarely limit their commitment to any single one, like individualism. They also hypothesized that liberals will show more conflict in reconciling their ideological commitment to their support of social welfare policies, while conservatives more often attribute their policy preferences to specific cultural values. Feldman and Zaller (1992) used data from the pilot study for the 1987 National Election Study. They focused on the answers to two open ended questions which probed the respondent's opinion on the government's responsibility to provide jobs and a decent standard of living, and whether or not the government should increase its spending on such programs. They found that many individuals referred to some value or principle, individualism being the most frequently invoked. Individuals also showed a great deal of compassion for the poor, but there were also strong feelings of limited government intervention. Individuals also mentioned specific social welfare programs when answering both questions, revealing that they were rather knowledgeable about the services the government provides to assist the

needy. Feldman and Zaller (1992) also found support for their hypothesis regarding the value conflict experienced by liberals and the almost unanimous endorsement by conservatives of individualism when discussing social welfare policies and the size and scope of the government. Feldman and Zaller (1992) concluded that the American public generally possess a great deal of ambivalence towards social welfare programs, perhaps because they are bombarded by some political rhetoric that pushes individualism and personal responsibility, while other political rhetoric calls for compassion for the poor and government intervention in improving such social ills.

Gillens (1995) researched how whites' beliefs about racial groups, particularly blacks, affected their attitudes toward social welfare programs. He believed that previous studies either ignored the potential impact of racial attitudes or downplayed their significance. Gillens (1995) chose to focus on the racial attitudes of white individuals because they tended to be overwhelmingly more opposed to social welfare programs. He hypothesized that whites' negative perception of blacks greatly influenced their opposition to social welfare programs. Gillens (1995) also compared the influence of racial attitudes with the influence of non-racial factors such as commitment to

individualism and/or egalitarianism, economic self interest, and sociodemographic variables. Using data from the 1986 National Election Study, Gillens (1995) created a scale which included the items that dealt with spending on Food Stamps and warmth towards people on welfare as the indicator for welfare support. He used eleven items on racial attitudes, focusing solely on the responses of whites, and inserted them into a factor analysis and discovered that they created four significant factors. The first factor focused on explanations for racial inequality, either focusing on individual or structural reasons. The second factor focused on the traditional explanation for racial inequality, the belief that blacks are an innately inferior race. The third factor focused on the government's responsibility to ensure equal opportunity for blacks. Finally, the fourth factor reflected attitudes towards affirmative action. When Gillens (1995) conducted a regression analysis on these factors and his welfare scale, he found that stronger beliefs in black's lack of effort elicited greater opposition to welfare, more so than any other factor. As for comparing the effect of racial attitudes with non-racial attitudes, Gillens (1995) found that racial attitudes toward blacks were the strongest predictor of preferences towards social welfare programs.

Gillens (1995) concluded that, despite some researchers' argument that race is no longer significant in sociological and political issues, racial attitudes seem to be very significant and worthy of future study.

Summary

Previous research has found that there are many variations in attitudes toward welfare programs. Overall, there is limited support for welfare, but support seems to have increased in recent years. This could coincide with the lessening commitment to individualism and the increasing emphasis on structural causes for poverty. These attitudes vary greatly by several factors, such as income, gender, education, and attitudes about blacks. Past research typically found that females, non-whites, and those with lower incomes had more favorable opinions regarding welfare. The findings on education were more mixed; researchers like AuClaire (1984) found that education was directly related to opposition to welfare. Others, like Feagin (1972), found that those with a seventh to twelfth grade education were the most anti-welfare. While these studies are very insightful, they were all conducted prior to the massive welfare reforms of 1996, which strongly emphasized that welfare recipients need to

take personal responsibility for their actions. Many of the studies on welfare attitudes, including the ones highlighted in this literature review, also did not devote much investigation to the relationship between individualism and such attitudes, but rather focused on the effect of demographic characteristics. It is the task of this thesis to investigate the current attitudes about welfare since the overhaul of the welfare system and whether and how commitment to individualism affects those attitudes.

SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

This thesis addresses the following research questions: (1) To what extent, if any, is commitment to individualism and personal responsibility related to attitudes about welfare programs? (2) What demographic characteristics are also related to attitudes about welfare programs? The research focuses on both means-tested social welfare programs, like TANF and Food Stamps, and contributory programs, like Social Security. Studies have found that means-tested programs tend to incite more controversy in public opinion than do contributory programs. The previous research found that many individuals have given less priority to individualism with

regards to their attitudes about the poor and welfare.

This thesis investigates whether this trend has continued.

In examining the relationship between individualism and welfare attitudes, this thesis also investigates the relationship between welfare attitudes and several demographic factors. Much of past literature included gender, race, and education in the research, and this thesis does so as well. Education is a particularly intriguing factor, since the findings were not always consistent. Some found that a higher education led to more favorable attitudes toward the poor and welfare; others found the opposite effect. This thesis also investigates the effect of religion and marital status. Religion has moved to the forefront in a number of political and societal issues, instead of remaining a largely private issue. Individuals allude to religion when talking about issues like stem-cell research and homosexual marriages. Other societal changes have occurred in the past two decades. Female-headed families comprise the majority of families that live in poverty. Furthermore, the rising divorce rates, as well as the factor that many individuals are waiting longer to be married, suggest that there are probably many who are currently single and dependent on their own income. Because of these societal changes, this

thesis investigates the effects of religion and marital status on welfare attitudes, in addition to the effect of gender, education, and race. The next chapter details the methodology that will guide the investigation of the research questions.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the research design to investigate how an individual's commitment to the values of individualism affects his/her attitudes towards welfare programs. This thesis addresses the questions: (1) To what extent, if any, is commitment to individualism and personal responsibility related to attitudes about welfare programs? (2) What demographic characteristics are also related to attitudes about welfare programs? This chapter contains a description of the data and justification for using these particular data, as well as a summary of the variables and statistical procedures used for data analysis.

DATA

The data for this thesis were obtained from the 2000 National Election Study (NES), conducted by the Center for Political Studies of the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor, under the general direction of Nancy Burns, Donald R. Kinder, Steven J. Rosenstone and Virginia Sapiro (Burns, Kinder, Rosenstone and Sapiro 2000). The NES has been conducted twenty-six

times throughout the United States in presidential and midterm election years. It is a cross-section sample of all United States citizens, excluding those living in Alaska and Hawaii, who were eighteen years or older on or before November 7, 2000. The 2000 NES has a total case base of 1,807 respondents. This thesis uses a sub-sample from the 2000 NES of the 898 respondents who met with the interviewer face-to-face and were asked numerous questions, including that for variable 615, the respondent's self-placement on a scale regarding government and individual responsibility, which serves as one of the independent variables under investigation.

Justification for Data

This thesis uses data from the 2000 NES for a few key reasons. As a reliable national survey, it has a very large scope and case base and is one of the more recent, national samples of the United States. The NES probes attitudes and opinions towards several social issues, including welfare programs. Unlike the General Social Survey, which only asks the respondents about welfare and Social Security, the NES provides the opportunity to examine the opinions regarding welfare in general, a means-tested welfare program (Food Stamps), and a contributory

welfare program (Social Security). Attitudes toward welfare programs have not been widely researched since 1996, the year in which President Clinton pledged to "end welfare as we know it" (Day 2003:409). The 2000 NES is highly suitable for this thesis, the purpose of which is investigating the current attitudes toward social welfare programs.

Limitations of the Data

There are a couple of minor limitations of this data set. Much of the literature focused on Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). Although the NES does not ask the respondents about these specific welfare programs, it does ask about "welfare" which is commonly assumed to refer to AFDC/TANF (Burns et al. 2000). Hence, this thesis uses the welfare question to gauge opinions about welfare programs in general, not specifically AFDC/TANF. The NES does include a variable about Food Stamps, which is a means-tested program similar to AFDC/TANF. Like AFDC/TANF, Food Stamps primarily benefit the poor and tend to be viewed negatively by the public. Gillens (1995) also used a Food Stamps variable to reflect attitudes about welfare. This thesis compares the Food Stamps variable with the Social

Security variable to investigate the different opinions about means-tested and contributory welfare programs.

Another limitation of the data is that they were collected before the economic downturn that began in late 2000 and before the attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001. Since then, much national attention has turned from domestic issues to defense and national security. The 2000 NES does not gauge the attitudes toward welfare since those events, however, neither does it suffer from opinions being skewed by the events and aftermath of 9/11.

DEPENDENT VARIABLES

This thesis addresses the following questions: (1) To what extent, if any, is commitment to individualism and personal responsibility related to attitudes about welfare programs? (2) What demographic characteristics are also related to attitudes about welfare? The 2000 NES provides the opportunity to investigate attitudes about welfare and attitudes about a means-tested and a contributory welfare program via a series of questions that probed the respondent's opinion about the federal government's expenditure on certain programs. The interviewer asked the following question, "Should federal spending on [specific

program] be increased, decreased, or kept about the same?" (Burns et al. 2000). The respondents were asked about welfare programs (without referring specifically to a means-tested or contributory program), Food Stamps (a means-tested welfare program), and Social Security (a contributory welfare program). For this thesis, the variables 676 (renamed WELFARE), 679 (renamed FOOD STAMPS), and 681 (renamed SOCIAL SECURITY) have been coded to indicate that spending should be either "decreased" (coded 1), "kept about the same" (coded 2) or "increased" (coded 3).

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

This thesis analyzes the effect of adherence to individualism on welfare attitudes. Variable 615 was used to indicate the degree of one's commitment to individualism, renamed INDIVIDUALISM for this thesis. The interviewer asked the respondent, "Where would you place yourself on this scale?" At point 1 on the scale was the statement, "Government should see to jobs and a standard of living." At point 7 on the scale was the statement, "Government should let each person get ahead on own" (Burns et al. 2000). The respondents then placed themselves on the scale between 1 and 7. A higher score reflects a

stronger commitment to individualism. This was the most appropriate variable from the 2000 NES that could capture a respondent's commitment to individualism, albeit it is a limited indicator of this.

This thesis also investigates how certain demographic characteristics are related to welfare attitudes, particularly education, gender, marital status, race, and religion. The NES variable 913 indicates the level of education that the respondent has attained. The original variable for education has eight possible responses but has been recoded into the dummy variable MORETHHS so that individuals with a high school degree or less are the reference category (high school degree or less = 0, more than a high school degree = 1). It was recoded this way for the purposes of multivariate analysis.

Gender is measured using the NES variable 1029. It has been recoded into the dummy variable FEMALE, with males as the reference category (male=0, female=1).

To measure marital status, variable 909 from the NES is used. Recoded into the dummy variable UNMARR, this thesis examines the difference between respondents who are married and respondents who are unmarried. Married is the reference category (married = 0, unmarried = 1). The unmarried category includes individuals who were previously

married and individuals who have never been married. Coding was done in this way to measure the difference between those who are married and may have the luxury of a double income, and those who are unmarried and must rely on only themselves for subsistence.

Race is measured using the NES variable 1006a, which has been dichotomized into the dummy variable MINORITY with white as the reference category (white = 0, minorities = 1). Ideally, this thesis would investigate the difference among racial and ethnic groups, as was done by Hunt (1996). However, the overwhelming majority of respondents are white (75.5 percent) and the sample size makes it difficult to sustain a breakdown of racial minorities for multivariate analysis. Thus, this thesis coded the race variable to compare the opinions of whites to minorities.

The NES variable 882 records the religious affiliation of the place of worship the respondent attends. This variable has been recoded into the dummy variable NONPROT to compare Protestants with non-Protestants. Protestant is the reference category (Protestant = 0, non-Protestant = 1). This thesis compares Protestants to other religious affiliations since Protestants consistently have stronger commitment to the values of individualism, whereas the research is divided on other religious affiliations.

STATISTICAL PROCEDURES

This thesis investigates the questions: (1) To what extent, if any, is commitment to individualism and personal responsibility related to attitudes about welfare programs? (2) What demographic characteristics are also related to attitudes about welfare programs? In order to investigate the research questions, this thesis uses the crosstabulation and ordinal regression statistical procedures in SPSS. Such procedures are sufficient to explore the relationship between commitment to individualism and welfare attitudes, as well as demographic characteristics on such attitudes. Chapter Four summarizes the findings of the crosstabulations and ordinal regression.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This chapter presents the results of the data analysis investigating the following research questions:

(1) To what extent, if any, is commitment to individualism and personal responsibility related to attitudes about welfare programs? (2) What demographic characteristics are also related to attitudes about welfare? First, descriptive statistics of the sub-sample are summarized. Then the results of the investigation of the research questions are presented.

DESCRIPTION OF THE SAMPLE

This thesis uses a sub-sample from the 2000 NES of the 898 respondents who met with the interviewer face-to-face and were asked the question for variable 615, respondent's self-placement on a scale regarding government and individual responsibility. The demographic characteristics of the sub-sample are shown in Table 1. The 898 respondents surveyed were eighteen years or older, on or before November 7, 2000. The respondents ranged in age from 18 to 96, with the mean age being about 47 years old. The majority (58.7%) possessed a high school degree

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Sub-Sample
Taken from the 2000 National Election Study.

Variable	N	Percentage
<u>AGE</u>		
Mean	= 46.94	
Range	= 18-96	
SD	= 17.16	
<u>EDUCATION</u>		
High School or Less	526	58.7
Junior College	96	10.7
Bachelor's Degree or Higher	274	30.5
<u>GENDER</u>		
Male	411	45.9
Female	486	54.1
<u>MARITAL STATUS</u>		
Married	469	52.2
Previously Married	217	24.3
Never Married	212	23.5
<u>RACE</u>		
White	677	75.5
Black	109	12.1
Hispanic	55	6.1
Asian	15	1.7
Other	41	4.6
<u>RELIGION</u>		
Protestant	265	29.5
Catholic	186	20.7
Jewish	17	1.9
Other	429	47.8

or less, while about 30% had a bachelor's degree or higher. Over one-half (54%) of the respondents were female, and 46% were male. The majority of respondents were married (52.2%), while 24.3% had been previously married and 23.5% were unmarried. Almost 30% of the respondents identified their place of worship as Protestant, and about 21% as Catholic, and 1.9% as Jewish. Nearly 48% of the respondents identified that their place of worship was of an affiliation different than Protestant, Catholic, or Jewish. Finally, an overwhelming majority of respondents were white (75.7%). Of the remaining respondents, 12.1% were black, 6.1% were Hispanic, and 1.7% were Asian; 4.5% identified themselves as "other."

The sample's responses to the questions regarding individualism and welfare are presented in Table 2. The individualism scale, represented by the variable INDIVIDUALISM, ranges from 1 to 7, with higher scores indicating stronger adherence to individualistic values. A majority of respondents (57.2%) ranked themselves as either five, six, or seven on the scale, indicating stronger adherence to the belief that the government should let people get ahead on their own. Over one-fifth (23.6%) ranked themselves as either one, two, or three on the scale,

Table 2. Individualism and Welfare Questions.

Variable	N	Percentage
<u>INDIVIDUALISM</u>		
<i>(Government should see to Jobs and a Standard of Living)</i>		
1	73	8.1
2	46	5.1
3	93	10.4
4	171	19.1
5	187	20.8
6	193	21.5
7	134	14.9
<i>(Government Should Let Each Person Get Ahead on Own)</i>		
<u>WELFARE</u>		
<i>(Should Federal Spending on Welfare be...)</i>		
Increased	140	15.8
Kept about the Same	392	44.1
Decreased	356	40.1
<u>FOOD STAMPS</u>		
<i>(Should Federal Spending on Food Stamps be...)</i>		
Increased	122	13.9
Kept about the Same	472	53.6
Decreased	285	32.5
<u>SOCIAL SECURITY</u>		
<i>(Should Federal Spending on Social Security be...)</i>		
Increased	546	4.8
Kept about the Same	295	33.4
Decreased	42	61.9

showing a commitment to the belief that it is the government's job to provide jobs and a decent standard of living.

Overall, the respondents held moderate, but somewhat unfavorable, attitudes about spending welfare and Food Stamps. Concerning welfare, 40.1% of the respondents favored decreased spending, 44.1% favored keeping spending about the same, and 15.8% favored increasing spending. The opinions about Food Stamps are similar. While 32.5% of respondents supported decreased spending and 53.6% wanted to keep spending about the same, while only 13.9% supported increased spending.

The respondents report more favorable attitudes about spending on Social Security. The majority (61.9%) believed spending on Social Security should be increased. Only 4.8% wanted to decrease spending on Social Security and 33.4% wanted to keep spending the same. There appears to be a significant difference between opinions about Food Stamps, a means-tested program, and Social Security, a contributory program; the opinions about Social Security are more positive and supportive. The respondents also appear to associate a negative connotation with the word, "welfare," as the percentage of those who have more favorable attitudes about welfare is similar to the percentage of

those who have similar sentiments about Food Stamps. Although the term "welfare" encompasses both contributory and means-tested programs, the general public appears to associate "welfare" with means-tested programs such as Food Stamps.

RESULTS OF INVESTIGATING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This thesis investigates the research questions: (1) To what extent, if any, is commitment to individualism and personal responsibility related to attitudes about welfare programs? (2) What demographic characteristics are also related to attitudes about welfare? First, crosstabulations were conducted to examine the strength of association between the three dependent variables regarding attitudes about welfare programs (WELFARE, FOOD STAMPS, and SOCIAL SECURITY) and these independent variables: commitment to individualism, education, gender, marital status, race, and religion. Then, ordinal regressions were conducted to further test the relationship between the welfare variables and the six independent variables.

Crosstabulations

Crosstabulations of WELFARE and the independent variables are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Crosstabulation of WELFARE and Independent Variables.

<i>(Should Federal Spending on Welfare be Increased, Decreased or Kept about the Same?)</i>			
	Increased	Kept Same	Decreased
<u>COMMITMENT TO INDIVIDUALISM</u>			
1	29.2%	36.1%	34.7%
(N=72)	21	26	25
2	23.9%	52.2%	23.9%
(N=46)	11	24	11
3	28.3%	45.7%	26.1%
(N=92)	26	42	24
4	14.8%	55.6%	29.6%
(N=169)	25	94	50
5	14.1%	50.3%	35.7%
(N=185)	26	93	66
6	10.9%	34.4%	54.7%
(N=192)	21	66	105
7	7.6%	35.6%	56.8%
(N=132)	10	47	75
gamma = -.290			
p = .000			
<u>EDUCATION</u>			
<i>High School Degree or Less</i>			
(N=521)	16.3%	44.5%	39.2%
	85	232	204
<i>More than a High School Degree</i>			
(N=366)	15.0%	43.4%	41.5%
	55	159	152
gamma = -.045			
p = .444			

Table 3. Continued.

<i>(Should Federal Spending on Welfare be Increased, Decreased or Kept about the Same?)</i>			
	Increased	Kept Same	Decreased
<u>GENDER</u>			
Male	14.3%	44.1%	41.6%
(N=406)	58	179	169
Female	17.0%	44.2%	38.8%
(N=482)	82	213	187
gamma = .065			
p = .260			
<u>MARITAL STATUS</u>			
Married	11.7%	45.0%	43.3%
(N=462)	54	208	200
Unmarried	44.0%	42.9%	36.7%
(N=422)	86	181	155
gamma = .172			
p = .003			
<u>RACE</u>			
White	12.3%	44.4%	43.3%
(N=669)	82	297	290
Minority	26.5%	43.4%	30.1%
(N=219)	58	95	66
gamma = .305			
p = .000			
<u>RELIGION</u>			
Protestant	10.3%	43.0%	46.8%
(N=263)	27	113	123
Non-Protestant	18.1%	44.6%	37.3%
(N=625)	113	279	233
gamma = .206			
p = .001			

Commitment to individualism has a negative association with WELFARE, and that relationship is statistically significant ($\gamma = -.290$, $p < .05$). Of the respondents who ranked themselves as a 7 on the individualism scale, thus having the strongest commitment to individualism, about 57% supported decreased spending on welfare and only 7.6% support increased spending. Of the respondents who ranked themselves as a 1 on the individualism scale, indicating the strongest commitment to government responsibility, 34.7% favored decreased spending on welfare, and 29.2% favored increased spending. It appears that there is an inverse relationship between commitment to individualism and favorable attitudes toward welfare; as individualistic values increase, support for increased welfare spending decreases.

Race has the strongest, statistically significant association with WELFARE ($\gamma = .305$, $p < .05$). Overall, the crosstabulation indicates that whites favored welfare spending decreases or the same spending more than did minorities. Of the white respondents, 43.3% supported decreased welfare spending compared to 30.1% of the minorities. Only 12.3% of whites were in favor of increased welfare spending, while 26.5% of minorities support this.

Religion and marital status are the only other independent variables that have statistically significant associations with WELFARE. The strength of association between religion and WELFARE is slightly higher than that of commitment to individualism ($\gamma = .206$, $p < .05$). A higher percentage of Protestant respondents (46.8%) supported decreased welfare spending than non-Protestants (37.3%). In contrast, a higher percentage of Non-Protestants (18.1%) than Protestants (10.3%) favored increased welfare spending.

Finally, marital status has the weakest association with WELFARE, but that association is still statistically significant ($\gamma = .172$, $p < .05$). Of the married respondents, 43.3% favored decreased spending on welfare, and only 11.7% favored increased spending on welfare. Of the unmarried respondents, 36.7% supported decreased spending, and 20.4% supported increased spending. Neither education nor gender has a statistically significant relationship with WELFARE.

Next, crosstabulations of FOOD STAMPS and the independent variables were conducted. The results of the crosstabulations are summarized in Table 4. Of the six independent variables, commitment to individualism has the strongest association with FOOD STAMPS, which is both

Table 4. Crosstabulation of FOOD STAMPS and
Independent Variables.

(Should Federal Spending on Food Stamps be Increased, Decreased or Kept about the Same?)			
	Increased	Kept Same	Decreased
<u>COMMITMENT TO</u>			
<u>INDIVIDUALISM</u>			
1	37.0%	38.4%	24.7%
(N=73)	27	28	18
2	19.6%	47.8%	32.6%
(N=46)	9	22	15
3	25.8%	49.4%	24.7%
(N=89)	23	44	22
4	16.0%	58.3%	25.8%
(N=163)	26	95	42
5	10.4%	65.6%	24.0%
(N=183)	19	120	44
6	4.7%	54.7%	40.6%
(N=192)	9	105	78
7	6.8%	43.6%	49.6%
(N=133)	9	58	66
gamma = -.293			
p = .000			
<u>EDUCATION</u>			
<i>High School Degree or</i>			
<i>Less</i>			
(N=517)	14.1%	53.8%	32.1%
	73	278	166
<i>More than a High School</i>			
<i>Degree</i>			
(N=361)	13.6%	53.5%	33.0%
	49	193	119
gamma = -.019			
p = .756			

Table 4. Continued.

<i>(Should Federal Spending on Food Stamps be Increased, Decreased or Kept about the Same?)</i>			
	Increased	Kept Same	Decreased
<u>GENDER</u>			
Male	13.6%	52.7%	33.7%
(N=404)	55	213	136
Female	14.1%	54.5%	31.4%
(N=475)	67	259	149
gamma = .039			
p = .511			
<u>MARITAL STATUS</u>			
Married	7.9%	56.3%	35.8%
(N=458)	36	258	164
Unmarried	20.4%	51.1%	28.5%
(N=417)	85	213	119
gamma = .248			
p = .000			
<u>RACE</u>			
White	11.0%	54.5%	34.4%
(N=662)	73	361	228
Minority	22.6%	51.2%	26.3%
(N=217)	49	111	57
gamma = .245			
p = .000			
<u>RELIGION</u>			
Protestant	10.7%	54.4%	34.9%
(N=261)	28	142	91
Non-Protestant	15.2%	53.4%	31.4%
(N=618)	94	330	194
gamma = .103			
p = .111			

negative and statistically significant ($\gamma = -.293$, $p < .05$). Of the respondents who placed themselves as a 7 on the individualism scale, 49.6% were in favor of decreased spending on Food Stamps, and only 6.8% were in favor of increased spending. Of the respondents who placed themselves as a 1 on the individualism scale, 24.7% supported decreased spending on Food Stamps and 37% supported increased spending. The results of the crosstabulations suggest that the relationship between commitment to individualism and attitudes about Food Stamps mirrors the results found for WELFARE. There again appears to be an inverse relationship; as adherence to individualism increases, support for spending on Food Stamps decreases.

Marital status has the next strongest, statistically significant association with FOOD STAMPS ($\gamma = .248$, $p < .05$). A very small percentage of married respondents (7.9%) supported increased spending on Food Stamps, versus 20.4% of unmarried respondents. Regarding decreased spending, 35.8% of married respondents and 28.5% of unmarried respondents support this action.

Race has a strong association with the welfare variable, FOOD STAMPS; this association is statistically significant ($\gamma = .245$, $p < .05$). Whites tended to have

more negative attitudes about spending on Food Stamps. Of the white respondents, only 11% favored increased spending, compared with the 22.6% of the minority respondents. More whites (34.4%) also wanted to decrease spending on Food Stamps than did 26.3% of minorities. The remaining independent variables, religion, education and gender, are not significantly related to FOOD STAMPS.

The last crosstabulations tested the relationship between SOCIAL SECURITY and the independent variables. Table 5 presents the results of the crosstabulations. All the independent variables have statistically significant relationships with this variable. It is worth noting that, regardless of the independent variable, the attitudes towards spending on Social Security are considerably more favorable than those regarding Food Stamps and welfare programs in general. Across all the independent variables, only very small percentages support decreased spending on Social Security. The following paragraphs, therefore, only focuses on those who have favorable attitudes toward Social Security and supported increased spending on this program.

Commitment to individualism has a strong, negative association with SOCIAL SECURITY ($\gamma = -.259$, $p < .05$). Most of the respondents (87.7%) who strongly adhered to beliefs in government responsibility supported increased

Table 5. Crosstabulation of SOCIAL SECURITY and
Independent Variables.

*(Should Federal Spending on Social Security be Increased,
Decreased or Kept about the Same?)*

	Increased	Kept Same	Decreased
<u>COMMITMENT TO</u>			
<u>INDIVIDUALISM</u>			
1	87.7%	12.3%	0.0%
(N=73)	64	9	0
2	82.6%	15.2%	2.2%
(N=46)	46	7	1
3	64.1%	32.6%	3.3%
(N=92)	59	30	3
4	65.1%	30.7%	4.2%
(N=166)	108	51	7
5	58.9%	36.2%	4.9%
(N=185)	109	67	9
6	50.0%	44.1%	5.9%
(N=188)	94	83	11
7	55.6%	36.1%	8.3%
(N=133)	74	48	11
gamma = -.259			
p = .000			

EDUCATION

High School Degree or

Less

(N=516)

68.8%	27.3%	3.9%
355	141	20

More than a High School

Degree

(N=366)

51.9%	42.1%	6.0%
190	154	22

gamma = -.322

p = .000

Table 5. Continued.

(Should Federal Spending on Social Security be Increased,
Decreased or Kept about the Same?)

	Increased	Kept Same	Decreased
<u>GENDER</u>			
Male	55.7%	37.9%	6.4%
(N=406)	226	154	26
Female	67.1%	29.6%	3.4%
(N=477)	320	141	16
gamma = .235			
p = .000			
<u>MARITAL STATUS</u>			
Married	57.0%	38.2%	4.8%
(N=461)	263	176	22
Unmarried	66.8%	28.4%	4.8%
(N=419)	280	119	20
gamma = .183			
p = .005			
<u>RACE</u>			
White	57.6%	37.4%	5.0%
(N=665)	383	249	33
Minority	74.8%	21.1%	4.1%
(N=218)	163	46	9
gamma = .342			
p = .000			
<u>RELIGION</u>			
Protestant	55.1%	40.7%	4.2%
(N=263)	145	107	11
Non-Protestant	64.7%	30.3%	5.0%
(N=620)	401	188	31
gamma = .169			
p = .016			

spending, versus 55.6% of the respondent with strong individualistic values. The crosstabulation suggests that there is still an inverse relationship between individualism and favorable attitudes toward this welfare program. As commitment to individualism increases, support for increased spending on Social Security decreases. However, even respondents with the highest commitment to individualism still favor increased spending on Social Security.

Unlike with WELFARE and FOOD STAMPS, education and gender have statistically significant associations with SOCIAL SECURITY. Education has a negative, statistically significant association with SOCIAL SECURITY ($\gamma = -.322$, $p < .05$). Of the respondents with a high school degree or less, 68.8% favored increased spending on Social Security, whereas 51.9% of the respondents with more than a high school degree were in favor of this. Gender has a positive, statistically significant association with SOCIAL SECURITY ($\gamma = .235$, $p < .05$). A slightly higher percentage of females (67%) than males (55.7%) supported increased spending on Social Security.

Marital status has one of the weaker associations with SOCIAL SECURITY ($\gamma = .183$, $p < .05$), with unmarried respondents being a little more favorable towards

increased spending than married respondents. Two-thirds (66.8%) of the unmarried respondents supported increased spending versus 57.0% of the married respondents.

Race has the strongest association with this variable ($\gamma = .342$, $p < .05$). Minorities tended to be more supportive of spending on Social Security than are whites. Of the minorities, 74.8% were in favor of increased spending, whereas 57.6% of the white respondents were in favor of this.

Finally, religion has the weakest association with SOCIAL SECURITY, but this association is still statistically significant ($\gamma = .169$, $p < .05$). Non-Protestants were more supportive of increased spending on Social Security than Protestants, but not by a huge margin; 64.7% of the non-Protestants approved of increased spending, and 55.1% of the Protestants had similar opinions.

Summary of Crosstabulations

The crosstabulations revealed that commitment to individualism has a negative, statistically significant association with the welfare variables, regardless of whether or not the variable gauged attitudes toward a means-tested (Food Stamps) or contributory program (Social

Security); as commitment to individualism increases, support for increased spending on welfare programs decreases. However, important differences exist between welfare and Food Stamps and Social Security, with more than one-half of those highly committed to individualism still favoring increased Social Security spending while less than 10% of them favored increased spending on Food Stamps or welfare.

Race is consistently strongly associated with the welfare variables; minorities typically are more approving of increased spending on the three programs than are whites. Marital status and religion have weaker associations with all three welfare variables, but the associations are still statistically significant. There are slightly varying levels of support for the welfare variables between the married and unmarried respondents and the Protestant and Non-Protestant respondents. Finally, education and gender have a statistically significant association only with SOCIAL SECURITY. There are small differences in support between males and females and those with a high school degree and those with more than a high school degree.

Ordinal Regressions

This thesis used ordinal regression to further assess the effects of the independent variables on attitudes towards welfare spending. First, ordinal regression was conducted on WELFARE and the six independent variables. Table 6 shows the odds ratios for the potential correlates of favoring increased spending on welfare programs in general. The ordinal regression shows that the model only explains about 9.6% of the variation in favoring or opposing increased spending on welfare. Three out of the six independent variables are statistically significant: commitment to individualism, race, and religion. Each unit increase in the individualism scale, indicating a stronger commitment to individualistic values, is associated with a 21.4% reduction in the odds of favoring increased welfare spending. For minorities, there is an 84.7% increase in the odds of favoring increased spending. For non-Protestants, there is a 45.3% increase in the odds of favoring increased spending on welfare. Education, gender, and marital status are not statistically significantly related to favoring increased welfare spending.

Next, ordinal regression was conducted on FOOD STAMPS and the independent variables. Table 7 shows the odds ratios for the potential correlates of favoring increased

Table 6. Ordinal Regression Model Predicting Favoring Increased Spending on Welfare.

	<u>Exp (B)</u>
Commitment to Individualism	0.786*
Education (More than High School)	1.116
Gender (Female)	1.054
Marital Status (Unmarried)	1.254
Race (Minority)	1.847*
Religion (Non-Protestants)	1.453*
Nagelkerke r-square	0.096

*significant at $p < .05$

spending on Food Stamps. The model explains 9.1% of the variation in favoring or opposing increased spending on Food Stamps. Commitment to individualism, marital status, and race are the independent variables that are statistically significant. There is a 22.5% reduction in the odds of favoring increased spending on Food Stamps for each unit increase on the individualism scale. The odds of unmarried individuals favoring increased spending on Food Stamps are 54.6% more likely than married individuals. For minorities, there is a 57.4% increase in the odds of favoring increased spending. The ordinal regression analysis found that education, gender, and religion are not associated with these opinions regarding Food Stamps.

Finally, ordinal regression was conducted on SOCIAL SECURITY and the six independent variables. Table 8 shows the odds ratios for the potential correlates of favoring increased spending on Social Security. This model explains 11% of the variation in favoring or opposing increased spending on Social Security. There are four independent variables that are statistically significant: commitment to individualism, education, gender, and race. For each unit increase on the individualism scale, there is a 20.5% reduction in the odds of favoring increased spending on Social Security. The odds of individuals with more than a

Table 7. Ordinal Regression Model Predicting Favoring Increased Spending on Food Stamps.

	<u>Exp (B)</u>
Commitment to Individualism	0.775*
Education (More than High School)	1.169
Gender (Female)	0.991
Marital Status (Unmarried)	1.546*
Race (Minority)	1.574*
Religion (Non-Protestants)	1.151
Nagelkerke r-square	0.091

*significant at $p < .05$

high school degree favoring increased spending are 41.6% less likely than individuals with less than a high school degree. For females, there is 52.9% increase in the odds of favoring increased spending. Lastly, there is a 72.8% increase in the odds of minorities favoring increased spending on Social Security.

Summary of Ordinal Regressions

The results of the ordinal regressions demonstrate that commitment to individualism and race are consistently related to the welfare variables even when controlling for education, gender, marital status, and religion. The findings show that those with stronger commitment to individualism are less likely to support increases on any type of welfare program, including Social Security. This suggests that individualistic values contribute to more negative attitudes about welfare or any type of government assistance. The findings on race showed that minorities are more likely to support increased spending on welfare programs. The only statistically significant relationship that religion has is with WELFARE. The ordinal regression found that marital status is significantly associated with attitudes about Food Stamps and Social Security. Finally, education and gender are only significantly related to

Table 8. Ordinal Regression Model Predicting Favoring
Increased Spending on Social Security.

	<u>Exp (B)</u>
Commitment to Individualism	0.795*
Education (More than High School)	0.584*
Gender (Female)	1.529*
Marital Status (Unmarried)	1.184
Race (Minority)	1.728*
Religion (Non-Protestants)	1.261
Nagelkerke r-square	0.113

*significant at $p < .05$

attitudes about spending on Social Security.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Several research studies and national polls have been conducted to gauge the general public's attitudes about welfare. However, since the welfare reforms of 1996, the research on public attitudes towards welfare has declined although poverty itself remains persistent. In the United States, the number of people living in poverty has steadily increased over the past ten years (United States Census Bureau 2005). The present investigation attempted to assess where the general public now stands on the issue of welfare. It sought to discover how several factors are related to welfare attitudes.

The study utilized data from the 2000 National Election Study (NES). The data analysis focused on the following research questions: (1) To what extent, if any, is commitment to individualism and personal responsibility related to attitudes about welfare programs? (2) What demographic characteristics are also related to attitudes about welfare programs? This chapter summarizes the results of the data analysis and offers suggestions for future research on the subject of welfare.

REVIEW OF THE RESULTS

Overall, this study investigated how welfare attitudes varied according to several factors, including commitment to individualism and other demographic characteristics. The 2000 NES offered the opportunity to further examine how these attitudes differed according to whether or not the welfare program was contributory or means-tested.

Commitment to individualism was significantly related to all the welfare variables, regardless of whether the welfare program was contributory or means-tested. It appears that there is an inverse relationship between commitment to individualism and support for welfare spending, though there is less opposition to spending for Social Security than for Food Stamps and welfare. As commitment to individualism increased, support for greater spending on welfare decreased. The literature review indicated that greater individualistic values often yielded more negative opinions about poverty and welfare.

Race had a consistently strong and statistically significant association with the welfare variables. This study examined the difference between whites and minorities. Whites appeared to hold more negative attitudes towards all welfare programs, whereas minorities held more favorable attitudes about them.

Whether an individual was married or not appeared to influence his/her attitudes towards spending on Food Stamps. Those who were currently unmarried at the time of data collection seemed to have slightly more favorable attitudes about welfare. They were more likely to support increased spending on welfare programs, both contributory and means-tested. Marital status is a characteristic that several previous studies did not investigate. It is logical that people who are unmarried do not benefit from another income in the household and so would be more supportive of the welfare safety net for times of financial emergencies.

An individual's religious affiliation was also related to welfare attitudes. There was a higher tendency among Protestants to support decreased spending on welfare than non-Protestants, although the results were not significant for Food Stamps or Social Security. The results are consistent with those summarized in the literature review. It is not surprising that this would be the case, as the Protestant religion places greater emphasis on individualism and personal effort. It would be interesting to investigate the differences among Protestants, such as Methodists and Baptists and between Protestants who do and who do not identify themselves as Evangelicals, to see if

some Christian denominations are more individualistic and negative towards welfare than others.

The results on education and on gender were mixed. They were not statistically related to attitudes about spending on welfare and Food Stamps, but they were related to attitudes about Social Security spending. Those with a high school degree or less were more supportive of increased spending on Social Security than individuals with more than a high school degree. The literature review indicated inconsistencies in the findings about education. The impact of educational attainment might be better evaluated by using questions that probe into more specific details about welfare and its recipients. With respect to gender, females held more favorable attitudes about increased spending than males did. These findings are also consistent with previous research.

IMPLICATIONS, CONTRIBUTIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This investigation found that commitment to individualism and several demographic characteristics are associated with welfare attitudes. While these findings come from a recent, pre-existing data set, it is important to remember that the data were collected prior to the events of September 11, 2001 and the more recent hurricane

events of September 2005. Those traumatic events had the potential to greatly influence opinions about government spending generally and the programs the government should allocate more of its funds to specifically.

Through this study, three consistent findings regarding welfare attitudes emerged: (1) commitment to individualism was a strong predictor of negative attitudes toward welfare, (2) minorities were more likely to favor increased spending on welfare programs than were whites, and (3) support for Social Security, a contributory program, was greater than support for Food Stamps and programs fitting under the blanket term "welfare," both regarded as means-tested programs.

Despite the concern that commitment to certain American values may change over time, it still appears that many in the United States uphold the value of individual effort and personal responsibility. This investigation found that these individualistic values translated into very negative attitudes toward spending on welfare programs, especially those that are means-tested. Overall, there was more support for Social Security, a contributory welfare program. Many people assume that individuals can only receive Social Security if they have contributed to it through automatic payroll taxes. It is probably because of

this that Social Security does not carry the stigma that is attached to Food Stamps and the term "welfare." In addition, anyone with an older relative knows about Social Security and likely understands that it is an important contributor to financial stability among retired persons. In contrast, means-tested programs are held in a negative, sometimes hostile light because their recipients are deemed as the lazy, undeserving poor who do not work to better themselves. As the current debate over Social Security continues, it is possible that recipients of contributory program will be similarly recast into a more negative light, perhaps as "greedy geezers" who care more about their own retirement than their children's and grandchildren's future. Should such an attempt be successful, support for Social Security may fall.

The current study attempted to fill some of the void that has existed in research on welfare since 1996, but there is still much that needs further investigation. This study discovered that several factors, such as commitment to individualism, race, and marital status, are associated with welfare attitudes and those attitudes can vary by the type of welfare program. More can be learned, though, about how each factor affects welfare attitudes. For example, this thesis could only examine the difference

between whites and non-white. This researcher would have liked to see if there were differences among the minority races, such as Asians and Hispanics, but the data did not allow for this.

Included in future research should be a further examination of race and commitment to individualism, as both of these independent variables were consistently statistically significant throughout this thesis. Minorities held much more favorable attitudes toward welfare than whites. Those with a stronger commitment to individualism were less likely to support increased spending on welfare programs. It could be that minorities are more likely to have favorable welfare attitudes because they have historically been more susceptible to falling into poverty and homelessness than whites. It would also be interesting to see if there is a relationship between race and commitment to individualism. Are white individuals more likely than blacks and other minorities to adhere to traditional American values such as individualism and personal responsibility? This could shed light on why whites show much less support for welfare programs.

This study, as well as much of the research summarized in the literature review, utilized quantitative methods to investigate welfare attitudes. More qualitative research

needs to be conducted on welfare attitudes, since this subject is a complex issue. It is known that means-tested (or public assistance) welfare programs are widely disliked and their recipients are regarded with disdain. More could be learned, though, about the reasons such negative opinions exist and the conditions under which they change.

What guides these unfavorable attitudes toward welfare? This researcher surmises that if welfare attitudes were investigated further, it would be discovered that many people's beliefs about welfare result from conservative political rhetoric, racial, class, or gender stereotypes, and lack of knowledge about welfare and the causes of poverty. There would probably be very few who would be knowledgeable of many of the facts about people who live in poverty. There are many reasons why people live in poverty and need welfare as a safety net for a short period of time. Many women find themselves in poverty because they escaped an abusive relationship, where the batterer prevented them from working or having any money of their own. Further, the decline in wage and benefit standards means that many people are working full-time but are still poor. The tragedy in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast region showed how quickly millions of American can become destitute and poverty-stricken due to

reasons beyond their control, not because they were lazy or lacked the proper work ethic. More research needs to be done to unearth the reasons why many in the general population are so negative about welfare and the poor. This could guide advocates on what specifically they need to do to educate and increase public awareness about the reality of poverty. If this is not done, welfare faces the risk of being reduced further or eliminated completely, and millions of individuals who are in genuine need of assistance will find that there is none.

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