

Module 10: How Will Historians Treat Richard Nixon?

Evidence 5: Welfare: Address to the Nation on Domestic Programs, August 8, 1969

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Question to Consider

- How does the evidence below refute or support the views of the three historians outlined in the Conclusion of this module?

Document

Whether measured by the anguish of the poor themselves, or by the drastically mounting burden on the taxpayer, the present welfare system has to be judged a colossal failure. Our States and cities find themselves sinking in a welfare quagmire, as caseloads increase, as costs escalate, and as the welfare system stagnates enterprise and perpetuates dependency. What began on a small scale in the depression 30's has become a huge monster in the prosperous 60's. And the tragedy is not only that it is bringing States and cities to the brink of financial disaster, but also that it is failing to meet the elementary human, social, and financial needs of the poor. It breaks up homes. It often penalizes work. It robs recipients of dignity. And it grows...The present system creates an incentive for desertion. In most States a family is denied welfare payments if a father is present--even though he is unable to support his family. Now, in practice, this is what often happens: A father is unable to find a job at all or one that will support his children. And so, to make the children eligible for welfare, he leaves home--and the children are denied the authority, the discipline, the love that come with having a father in the home. This is wrong. The present system often makes it possible to receive more money on welfare than on a low-paying job. This creates an incentive not to work, and it also is unfair to the working poor. It is morally wrong for a family that is working to try to make ends meet to receive less than a family across the street on welfare. This has been bitterly resented by the man who works, and rightly so--the rewards are just the opposite of what they should be. Its effect is to draw people off payrolls and onto welfare rolls--just the opposite of what government should be doing. To put it bluntly and simply--any system which makes it more profitable for a man not to work than to

work, or which encourages a man to desert his family rather than to stay with his family, is wrong and indefensible...

That is why tonight I, therefore, propose that we will abolish the present welfare system and that we adopt in its place a new family assistance system. Initially, this new system will cost more than welfare. But, unlike welfare, it is designed to correct the condition it deals with and, thus, to lessen the long-range burden and cost. Under this plan, the so-called "adult categories" of aid--aid to the aged, the blind, the disabled--would be continued, and a national minimum standard for benefits would be set, with the Federal Government contributing to its cost and also sharing the cost of additional State payments above that amount. But the program now called "Aid to Families with Dependent Children"--the program we all normally think of when we think of "welfare"--would be done away with completely. The new family assistance system I propose in its place rests essentially on these three principles: equality of treatment across the Nation, a work requirement, and a work incentive...

Thus, for the first time, the government would recognize that it has no less an obligation to the working poor than to the nonworking poor; and for the first time, benefits would be scaled in such a way that it would always pay to work. With such incentives, most recipients who can work will want to work. This is part of the American character. But what of the others--those who can work but choose not to? Well, the answer is very simple. Under this proposal, everyone who accepts benefits must also accept work or training provided suitable jobs are available either locally or at some distance if transportation is provided. The only exceptions would be those unable to work and mothers of preschool children. Even mothers of preschool children, however, would have the opportunity to work, because I am also proposing along with this a major expansion of day-care centers to make it possible for mothers to take jobs by which they can support themselves and their children...

A guaranteed income establishes a right without any responsibilities; family assistance recognizes a need and establishes a responsibility. It provides help to those in need and, in turn, requires that those who receive help work to the extent of their capabilities. There is no reason why one person should be taxed so that another can choose to live idly.

Source:

Obtained courtesy of John Woolley and Gerhard Peters at The American
Presidency Project, University of California at Santa Barbara,
<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu>.