

## CHAPTER

# 2

## A Brief History of Social Work

### *From the English Poor Laws to the Progressive Policies of President Barack Obama*

**S**ocial work, social problems, and the organizations that were developed in an attempt to cope with those problems have had almost a parallel history. This chapter discusses the dual development of organizations and the profession of social work. The chapter also provides a timeline of the development of social welfare policies in the United States and many of the major people who helped develop more progressive attitudes and programs toward the poor, the mentally ill, the unemployed, and children at risk. As you will see in this chapter, many of the social welfare policies and programs we take for granted occurred quite recently in our history. Some of the following discussion is taken with appreciation from Tannenbaum and Reisch (2001).

### THE ENGLISH POOR LAWS: REGULATING THE POOR

The origins of American social welfare are found in the English Poor Laws. Although the laws were passed over a 400-year period and changed incrementally to reflect new thinking about poverty and work, a brief discussion of the poor laws follows with thanks to Peter Higginbotham (2004) for his wonderful website on the subject.

The poor laws evolved and changed between 1601 and the new act of 1834, but unlike the old poor laws of 1601, the new act of 1834 differentiated between the deserving and the undeserving poor by a simple test: “Anyone prepared to accept relief in the repellent workhouse must be lacking the moral determination to survive outside it” (Higginbotham, 2004). The other principle of the new act was that of “less eligibility” or “that conditions in the workhouse should never be better than those of an independent labourer of the lowest class” (Higginbotham, 2004). These same ideas about the treatment of the poor are still with us today, as the chapter on social work with clients in poverty will attest. InfoTable 2.1 gives a slightly edited version of the original 1536 draft of the poor laws defining poverty and what might be done about it.

**InfoTable 2.1****A Slightly Edited 1536 Draft of the Poor Laws Explaining Who Is Poor and Why They Need Help**

For as much as the king has full and perfect notice that there is within his realm a great multitude of strong valiant beggars [comprised of]: (1) vagabonds and idle persons, who might labor for their living but unlike your other loyal servants, live idly by begging, to the high displeasure of Almighty God, the hurt of their own souls, the evil example of others, and to the great hurt of the commonwealth of this realm; as are (2) the old, sick, lame, feeble and impotent persons not able to labor for their living but are driven of necessity to the charity of the people. And his highness (3) has perfect knowledge that some of them have fallen into such poverty (4) through sickness and other casualties, and some through their own fault, (5) whereby they have come finally to that point that they could not labor for any part of their living but are driven by necessity to live by the charity of the people. And some have fallen to such misery because they have been released from work by their employers because of sickness, leaving them without relief and comfort. Some have been neglected by friends and family and have developed idleness and the belief that they can live well without working. Some have even been taught to beg from childhood. And so for lack of good oversight in youth, many live in great misery as they age. And some have come to such misery through sloth, pride, negligence, falsehood and such other ungraciousness, whereby their employers, lovers and friends have been driven to forsake them until no one would take them to any service; whereby they have in process of time lain in the open streets and fallen to utter desolation. But whatever the reason is, charity requires that some way be taken to help them and prevent that others shall not hereafter fall into like misery. Therefore, his highness and the Parliament assembled [are asked to] provide certain remedies for the poor and miserable people, in the following manner . . . written by William Marshall (1536).

Under the 1601 Act, each parish (equivalent to a small county) was ordered to help the elderly and the infirm, to bring up needy children with a work ethic, and to provide work for others without a trade or those who were unemployed. The main objectives of the 1601 Act were:

The establishment of the parish as the administrative unit responsible for poor relief, with churchwardens or parish overseers collecting poor-rates and allocating relief.

The provision of materials such as flax, hemp, and wool to provide work for the able-bodied poor.

The setting to work and apprenticeship of children.

The relief of the "impotent" poor—the old, the blind, the lame, and so on. This could include the provision of "houses of dwelling"—almshouses or poorhouses rather than workhouses.

Any able-bodied pauper who refused to work was liable to be placed in a "House of Correction" or prison.

**SOURCE:** Reprinted with permission of Peter Higginbotham.

Much like current efforts to put those on welfare back to work, the workhouses were meant to stimulate a work ethic and to provide food, clothing, shelter, and medical care, but the reality of the workhouses was altogether different, as the description in InfoTable 2.2 indicates.



### **InfoTable 2.2** The Workhouses

Whatever the regime inside the workhouse, entering it would have been a distressing experience. New inmates would often have already been through a period of severe hardship. It was for good reason that the entrance to the Birmingham Union workhouse was through an arch locally known as the “Archway of Tears.” . . . The inmates’ toilet facilities were often a simple privy—a cess-pit with a simple cover having a hole in it on which to sit—shared perhaps by as many as 100 inmates. Dormitories were usually provided with chamber pots or, after 1860, earth closets—boxes containing dry soil which could afterwards be used as fertiliser.

**SOURCE:** Reprinted with permission of Peter Higginbotham.

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Under the 1834 act, illegitimate children were the responsibility of their mothers until they were 16 years old. If mothers were unable to support themselves and their children, they usually entered the workhouse whereas the father was free of responsibility for his illegitimate children, a notion that continues to this day in the United States and is felt to be responsible for the feminization of poverty, even among legitimate children and mothers who have child support decrees from the court that are all too often ignored by fathers. Fortunately, this 1834 law on illegitimate children was unpopular and was replaced with a subsequent act in 1844 (7&8 Vic. c. 101) allowing an unmarried mother to order the father to pay for maintenance of the mother and child, whether or not she was receiving poor relief.

The poor laws changed as times and the horrific conditions in the workhouses led the public to increasingly believe that the workhouses were shameful and that the British people deserved a much kinder and more humane approach to helping all people in times of economic and health concerns. InfoTable 2.3 provides a scathing criticism of the poor laws. As a result, Britain became one of the leading countries to institute free health care and other highly thought-of social services and became an important model for many social programs during President Roosevelt’s New Deal (1933–1945).



### **InfoTable 2.3** A Criticism of the Poor Laws Written in 1817

The clear and direct tendency of the poor laws, is . . . not, as the legislature benevolently intended, to amend the condition of the poor, but to deteriorate the condition of both poor and rich. . . . If by law every human being wanting support could be sure to obtain it, and obtain it in such a degree as to make life tolerably comfortable, theory would lead us to expect that all other taxes together would be light compared with the single one of poor rates. The principle of gravitation is not more certain than the tendency of such laws to change wealth and power into misery and weakness.

**SOURCE:** Ricardo (1817, pp. 35–40).

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## A Brief Overview and Timeline of the English Poor Laws

**AD 1300–1562** Large tracts of English land were set aside for sheep farming to produce wool. This dislocated many people who became an underclass of dispossessed poor wandering the countryside seeking work, settlement, and charity. A population increase of 25% and a series of famines led to increased poverty, which could not be dealt with using the old system of individual charity.

**1563–1601** In an attempt to provide a system of assistance to a growing number of impoverished citizens and because of concern that civil disobedience and chaos would result in civic deterioration, the English Poor Laws of 1563, 1572, 1576, 1597, and 1601 were created.

In 1563 the poor were categorized for the first time into deserving (*the elderly and the very young, the infirm, and families who occasionally found themselves in financial difficulties due to a change in circumstance*), who were considered deserving of social support, and the undeserving (*those who often turned to crime to make a living, such as highwaymen or pickpockets, migrant workers who roamed the country looking for work, and individuals who begged for a living*), who were to be treated harshly. The act of 1572 introduced the first compulsory local poor law tax, an important step acknowledging that alleviating poverty was the responsibility of local communities. In 1576 the concept of the workhouse was born, and in 1597 the post of overseer of the poor was created. The great act of 1601 consolidated all the previous acts and set the benchmark for the next 200+ years. (“A Brief Explanation of the Poor Law,” n.d., para. 4)

**1601–1834** During these years a system was devised and rules were developed that provided “poor relief” by local authorities and depended on legal residence in a locale with provisions to help determine whether someone would stay or leave the “protection” of the poor laws administrator. Emphasis was placed on work, apprenticeships, and other means to determine that one had become a contributing citizen. If character issues were noted that suggested a person was not deserving of help he or she could be removed from assistance.

**After 1834** The poor laws went from being a local administrative responsibility to a shared one where communities could band together to provide assistance. Workhouses rather than any assistance in kind (food, shelter, clothing, small money grants) became the primary way of assisting the poor. It was not until 1930 that the poor laws were finally abolished. The following rules and conditions (Bloy, 2002, para. 1) were standardized by the Poor Laws of 1834:

After the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act had been passed, the Poor Law Guardians had to provide accommodation for paupers. They did this by building “workhouses.” The aim of the workhouse was to discourage people from claiming poor relief, and conditions were to be made as forbidding as possible. Residents of poor houses were segregated by age and gender. Married couples, even the elderly, were to be kept apart so that they could not “breed.” The old, ill, insane, slightly unbalanced, and fit were kept together

both day and night with no form of diversion. Inmates simply sat and did nothing if they were not working. The daily schedule was as follows:

5:00 A.M.	Rising Bell
6:00 A.M.—7:00 A.M.	Prayers and Breakfast
7:00 A.M.—12 noon	Work
12 noon—1:00 P.M.	Dinner
1:00 P.M.—6:00 P.M.	Work
6:00 P.M.—7:00 P.M.	Prayers
7:00 P.M.—8:00 P.M.	Supper
8:00 P.M.	Bed

Meals were as dull, predictable, and tasteless as poor cooking and no imagination could make them. Often the quantity, quality, and lack of nutrition meant that workhouse inmates were on a slow starvation diet.

#### After 1930

Although the laws changed in England and the inhumane treatment of the poor gave way to the progressive changes in the way the society viewed poverty, many of the cruel ideas about the poor continue on in both England and America. Later in the book you'll read about compassionate conservatism (Chapter 25), where the writer (Magnet, 1999, para. 9) urges a change in the way we provide assistance to the poor:

Since some women will still have illegitimate children despite renewed stigma, Gov. Bush has just set up four pilot residential hostels for welfare mothers and their babies—tough-love institutions, not hand-outs for the irresponsible, that will focus on making sure the babies get the nurture they need to be able to learn and to succeed, something that young welfare mothers often don't know how to provide. Private groups run the hostels—including, thanks to the “charitable choice” provision in the 1996 welfare reform act, a church-related group. They are able to provide the clearly, enunciated moral values that their residents, like most social-service clients, need to live by.

Sound familiar? Some bad ideas apparently never go away.

## THE AMERICAN EXPERIENCE

Even before the American Revolution, services to the poor, to children, and to the mentally ill had been established in North America, many using the poor laws established in England to define who should receive services and the content of those services. By the early 19th century, states had begun providing relief through towns and counties. Because their efforts were often inadequate, private benevolent societies and self-help organizations began to supplement their efforts. These benevolent societies were the predecessors of modern social service agencies. InfoTable 2.4 provides a description of the condition of mental institutions, as they were called in the 19th century, and one woman's work in bringing about change. InfoTable 2.5 considers whether the condition in hospitals for the mentally ill have improved since the 19th century.



**InfoTable 2.4** Dorothea Dix and the Condition of American Mental Institutions in 1840

In March 1841, Dorothea Dix entered the East Cambridge, Massachusetts, jail, where she witnessed such horrible images that her life, from that point on, was changed forever. Within the confines of this jail she observed that prostitutes, drunks, criminals, retarded individuals, and the mentally ill were all housed together in unheated, unfurnished, and foul-smelling quarters (Viney & Zorich, 1982). When asked why the jail was in these conditions, she was told that the insane do not feel heat or cold.

Dix proceeded to visit jails and almshouses where the mentally ill were housed. She made careful and extensive notes as she visited with jailers, caretakers, and townspeople. Finally, she compiled all these data and shaped a carefully worded document to be delivered to the Massachusetts Legislature. After a heated debate over the topic, the material won legislative support, and funds were set aside for the expansion of Worcester State Hospital (Bumb, n.d.).



Dorothea Dix, early activist for the mentally ill.

SOURCE: Bumb (n.d.).



**InfoTable 2.5** Are We Doing Better Now?

In a report by the U.S. Justice Department in its 2005 review of California institutions treating the mentally ill, as cited by Lopez (2005, p. A1), it was noted that therapists and employees had been accused of sexually assaulting patients, patients were murdered by other patients, and “between January and June 20, 2003, one patient assaulted 20 other patients. Staff were afraid of this patient and failed to intervene to protect other patients.” The report described inadequate toilet facilities, patients dying for unknown reasons, unsupervised patients committing suicide, and, on the testimony of a physician, staff at one hospital bringing drugs to the facility in exchange for cash. One wonders how Dix would view the progress made in even the past 30 years since the publication of “On Being Sane in Insane Places” (Rosenhan, 1973), where researchers at a state hospital faked being mentally ill and observed the maltreatment and lack of professional conduct of the staff to such an extent and to such a public outcry that American hospitals for the mentally ill were largely emptied and people began changing their location of being warehoused from the hospital to the streets and inner cities of the United States.

SOURCE: Undated portrait of Dorothea Dix, 19th-century advocate for the rights of the mentally ill. Courtesy of University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, <http://www.learnnc.org/lp/multimedia/11751>

Those who worked or volunteered in benevolent societies were often upper-class women and men, often known as “friendly visitors,” who used moral persuasion and personal example as helping devices. While I was a student social worker in the MSW program at the University of Washington in 1963, my field placement in the Seattle public schools still used the term *friendly visitor* to designate who we were and what we did. How little things change.

As social work became more interested in the conditions that created social problems, “organizations such as the Association for the Improvement of the Condition of the Poor and the Children’s Aid Society began investigating social conditions in areas such as tenement housing and child welfare” (Tannenbaum & Reisch, 2001, para. 3).

## THE ORIGINS OF MODERN SOCIAL WORK

In the half-century after the Civil War, economic depressions, racism, and drastic increases in immigration from southern and eastern Europe prompted an awareness of the need for social programs and helping organizations to assist millions of people who were experiencing economic and social displacement. The recognition of serious social problems following the Civil War led to what was then called “scientific charity,” an attempt to use concepts common to business and industry to cope with larger social problems. Tannenbaum and Reisch (2001) note that although many clients receiving help from the first of these scientific charities, such as the American Charity Organization organized in Buffalo, New York, in 1877, benefited, many preferred the more personal approaches offered through self-help groups and community mutual aid. This distinction between large-scale efforts to resolve social problems and a more individualized approach set the stage for the earliest notions of the helping process in social work—one that combines a personalized service with an understanding that environments and social policies need to be improved if individuals are to be truly served.

A more highly personalized approach to helping is noted in the development of the settlement house movement, begun in 1886 with the Neighborhood Guild in New York City and made famous by the best known of the settlement houses, Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Starr’s much-admired Hull House in Chicago. Settlements focused on the causes of poverty and expanding jobs for the poor. See InfoTable 2.6 for a more complete description of Hull House. They also “conducted research, helped develop the juvenile court system, created widow’s pension programs, promoted legislation prohibiting child labor, and introduced public health reforms and the concept of social insurance” (Tannenbaum & Reisch, 2001, para. 8). By 1910, the settlement house movement had more than 400 individual settlements, many serving newly immigrated groups, which led to the creation of national organizations such as

the Women’s Trade Union League, the National Consumers’ League, the Urban League, and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Settlement leaders were instrumental in establishing the Federal Children’s Bureau in 1912, headed by Julia Lathrop from Hull House. Settlement leaders also played key roles in the major social movements of the period, including women’s suffrage, peace, labor, civil rights, and temperance. (Tannenbaum & Reisch, 2001, para. 9)



The settlement movement put much of its efforts into what we now call macrosystem change. Macrolevel change reflects change at the community, state, and even national level. We would now call the approaches used by the settlement movement “group work” and “community organization.” The Charity Organization Society (COS) began to focus on individual work, or what became known in the profession as casework with individuals, families, and groups. Casework developed areas of specialization including medical, psychiatric, and child casework and led to the development of a formal training program created by the New York COS in 1897 in partnership with Columbia University. By 1919, there were 17 schools of social work identifying themselves collectively as the Association of Training Schools of Professional Social Work, the precursor of today’s Council on Social Work Education (CSWE).

During and after World War I, the American Red Cross and the U.S. Army gave social workers an opportunity to work with populations who were not impoverished but were suffering from war-related problems, including what was then called shell shock or what we now call posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This new population of clients led to social workers interacting directly with individuals and families. By 1927, social workers were practicing in more than 100 guidance clinics with primarily middle-class clients in teams composed of social workers, psychiatrists, and psychologists. At the same time, social workers were employed in Community Chest, the organization that led the way to the United Fund and its health and welfare councils.



#### **InfoTable 2.6** Hull House

The Hull House community believed that poverty and the lack of opportunity bred the problems of the ghetto. Ignorance, disease, and crime were the result of economic desperation and not some moral flaw in the character of the new immigrants. Jane Addams promoted the idea that if afforded a decent education, adequate living conditions, and reliable income, any person could overcome the obstacles of the ghetto; furthermore, if allowed to develop his skills, that person could not only make a better life for himself but contribute to the community as a whole. Access to opportunity was the key to successful participation in a democratic, self-governing society. The greatest challenge and achievement of the settlement was to help people help themselves.

SOURCE: Jane Addams Hull House Association (2009).

## **THE GREAT DEPRESSION AND THE NEW DEAL**

In October 1929, the stock market crashed, wiping out 40% of the paper value of common stock. Four years later, a common stock, if it were still negotiable, was equal to one fifth of its worth before the Great Crash. Although politicians continued to issue optimistic predictions about the nation’s economy, the Depression deepened, confidence evaporated, and many lost their life savings. Businesses closed their doors, factories shut down, and banks failed. Farm income fell by 50%, and by 1932, one out of every four Americans was unemployed.



In 1933, Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR) introduced the New Deal, a social and economic program of recovery using the government as an instrument of change, an approach familiar to many Europeans for more than a generation. The New Deal ended laissez-faire capitalism and introduced the regulation of business activities, banking reform, and the ability of labor to organize and apply collective bargaining in its pursuit of fair wages and working conditions through passage of the National Labor Relations Act of 1935.

By 1933, millions of Americans were out of work, and bread lines were a common sight in most cities. An early attempt to reduce unemployment came in the form of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), a program to reduce unemployment in young men aged 18 to 25 years. Paid a dollar a day, 2 million young men took part in the CCC during the decade, participating in a number of conservation projects that affect us today: planting trees to combat soil erosion and maintain national forests; eliminating stream pollution; creating fish, game, and bird sanctuaries; and conserving coal, petroleum, shale, gas, sodium, and helium deposits.

The New Deal years were characterized by a belief that greater regulation would solve many of the country's problems. With new agricultural policies in place, farm income increased by more than 50% between 1932 and 1935. Only part of the reason for the increase can be explained by new federal programs, however. A severe drought affected the Great Plains states, significantly reducing farm production. Violent dust storms hit the southern area of the Great Plains from 1935 to 1938 in what became known as the Dust Bowl. Crops were destroyed, cars and machinery were ruined, and people and animals were harmed. Approximately 800,000 people left Arkansas, Texas, Missouri, and Oklahoma during the 1930s and 1940s. Most headed farther west to the land of milk and honey, California.

One of the most widely heralded programs of the New Deal was the creation of the Social Security Act, which provided a safety net in the form of a small pension for workers who contributed to the program. Although it was never intended to provide a complete pension, many workers failed to save enough to be fully retired. InfoTable 2.7 describes the remaining problems with Social Security today.



**InfoTable 2.7** Problems Remain for the Social Security of Americans

We cannot be satisfied with the Social Security protection now provided to Americans. Retirement benefits in our old age and survivors' insurance systems supply only one third as much income, or less, to the workers no longer able to work as that enjoyed by older people still in employment. Although the benefits under state laws to unemployed and injured workers are greater, our unemployment insurance and workmen's compensation laws also are very much in need of liberalization and improvement. None of our social insurance programs is as broad in coverage as it should be. Great risks, like early disability and prolonged sickness, lack all governmental protection; and the voluntary forms of insurance we have, although most valuable, do not protect many of those who most need protection. The great objective of Social Security—assurance of a minimum necessary income to all people in all personal contingencies of life—has not been attained even in this great country in which the common man fares better than in any other (Witte, 1955).

The Works Progress Administration (WPA) provided work rather than welfare to the nation's unemployed. Under the WPA, buildings, roads, libraries, airports, courthouses, city halls, and schools were constructed. Actors, painters, musicians, and writers were employed through the Federal Theatre Project, the Federal Art Project, and the Federal Writers' Project. The National Youth Administration provided part-time employment to students and unemployed youth. By the time it was abandoned in 1943, the WPA had helped 9 million people.

Prior to the Great Depression, the social welfare system was a combination of local public relief agencies with some modest help from charitable organizations. Because the public now saw poverty as the result of economic problems rather than personal shortcomings, the Depression defined government's role in helping people whose economic situation was troubled. This change in the role of government prompted numerous government programs under the Roosevelt administration, which ultimately led to our present social welfare system. Social workers such as Harry Hopkins and Frances Perkins, who were part of the Roosevelt administration, enhanced the status of the social work profession.

The most significant program, and the centerpiece of dozens of social welfare programs that comprised the Roosevelt administration's New Deal, was the Social Security Act of 1935. It gave recipients a social welfare net that provided retirement income and protection against catastrophic economic problems. As a result of the New Deal, social welfare went beyond relief to the poor to include housing, electricity, roads and dams for rural problem areas, health programs, child welfare programs, and many forms of social insurance for all Americans. This system of social programs comprises what is often referred to as the social welfare net, which protects all Americans in times of serious social and economic upheavals. These programs led to a significant expansion of the profession and an increased role for social work in the many programs created by government. The number of social workers doubled from 40,000 to 80,000 within a decade and led to improved salaries and the need for increased educational requirements.

## PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT'S ECONOMIC BILL OF RIGHTS

The following comes from a speech given by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1944 that outlines the thrust of the New Deal legislation on economic security that continued throughout his presidency (1933–1945). Roosevelt believed that economic security meant the following:

The right of a useful and remunerative job in the industries, or shops or farms or mines of the nation;

The right to earn enough to provide adequate food and clothing and recreation;

The right of every farmer to raise and sell his products at a return which will give him and his family a decent living;

The right of every business man, large and small, to trade in an atmosphere of freedom from unfair competition and domination by monopolies at home or abroad;

The right of every family to a decent home;

The right to adequate medical care and the opportunity to achieve and enjoy good health;

The right to adequate protection from the economic fears of old age, sickness, accident and unemployment; [and]

The right to a good education.

This Economic Bill of Rights is the recognition of the simple fact that, in America, the future of the worker and farmer lies in the well-being of private enterprise, and the future of private enterprise lies in the well-being of the worker and farmer.

Our Economic Bill of Rights—like the sacred Bill of Rights of our Constitution itself—must be applied to all our citizens, irrespective of race, creed, or color. The United States must remain the land of high wages and efficient production. Every full-time job in this country must provide enough for a decent living. And that goes for jobs in mines, offices, factories, stores, and canneries—and everywhere men and women are employed.

## WORLD WAR II AND THE RISE OF SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

During World War II, many social workers were involved in war-related assignments, including work with war-impacted communities. As social work began to become a profession with a coherent and logical set of professional practices and objectives, there was a movement to standardize agency practices and create core MSW curricula. This movement to improve standards and increase the educational component of social work practice led to the formation of the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) in 1952 and the establishment of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) in 1955.

Other changes during this period were the development of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) in 1953 and a shift from programs for the poor to programs serving middle-income White workers in the 1950s. This shift in who was served by social welfare programs caused the United States to lag behind other Western industrialized nations in the degree of social provision. “In a hostile political environment, social activism declined and openly anti-welfare attitudes reemerged” (Tannenbaum & Reisch, 2001, para. 22).

## THE “WAR ON POVERTY” AND THE “GREAT SOCIETY”

However, by the early 1960s, Americans rediscovered poverty as a social problem and the troubling fact that more than 40 million people, one third of them children, lived lives that had been bypassed by modern economic and social progress. The shift in attention to the poor led to new types of social service organizations, such as Mobilization for Youth in New York, and resulted in President Lyndon Johnson’s proclamation of an “unconditional war on poverty” in January 1964.

The War on Poverty used the Economic Opportunity Act (EOA), which included the Job Corps, Upward Bound, the Neighborhood Youth Corps, Community Action, Head Start, Legal Services, Foster Grandparents, and the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO). In 1965, the health programs Medicare and Medicaid were passed by Congress, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) was created, numerous services for the aged through the Older

Americans Act were enacted, and the Food Stamp Program was created under the auspices of the Department of Agriculture. To equalize funding to less affluent schools, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act directed federal aid to local schools. In 1966, the Model Cities Act provided comprehensive services to certain urban areas and stressed the idea of community control. Social workers played major roles in many antipoverty and community-action programs and helped train volunteers in newly formed organizations such as the Peace Corps and Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA).

## THE 1970s

In 1972 and 1973, Congress passed the State and Local Fiscal Assistance Act and the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA), which established the concept of revenue sharing and direct aid to local communities for many social welfare programs. It also led to the dismantling of the OEO, which had by then become unpopular with many people for providing the poor with maximum feasible participation in many Great Society social welfare programs. Moynihan (1969), for example, portrayed the involvement of the poor in the governance of social programs as a chaotic adventure in radical democracy and called it a “maximum feasible misunderstanding,” arguing that what sounded good in language had led to a form of radical activism in the late 1960s and early 1970s that resulted in social protests and the disruption of agencies providing services under OEO programs.

One of the more novel attempts to change the nature of poverty by developing a guaranteed annual income was introduced by Piven and Cloward (1971) in their attempt to destroy the public welfare system by encouraging everyone who qualified to apply. Only 25% of those in poverty were applying to an already overcrowded and badly functioning system in New York City. And although the increases in applications were modest, Piven and Cloward were nearly able to make the welfare system stop functioning. The public welfare system, perhaps a little wiser because of the experience, was thought to be more efficient and less discriminatory as a result of their efforts.

A significant social policy accomplishment of the Nixon administration was the Social Security Amendments of 1972, which standardized aid to disabled people and low-income elderly and provided cost-of-living increases to offset the loss of income caused by inflation. Food stamps, child nutrition, and railroad retirement programs were also tied to cost-of-living increases. Title XX of the Social Security Act in January 1975 reinforced the idea of federal “revenue sharing,” providing states with the flexibility to provide social services. Under Presidents Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter, Title XX focused attention on welfare dependency, child abuse and neglect, domestic violence, drug abuse, and community mental health.

Most social reforms stagnated by the mid-1970s because of a belief that many of the social programs of the Great Society had created social unrest in America. Despite a growing conservative and antigovernment attitude, there were significant changes in the social work profession. These changes included multicultural and gender awareness, which prompted new course content and minority recruitment; multidisciplinary joint degree programs with schools of urban planning, public health, public policy, education, and law; the BSW as the entry-level professional degree; and the growth of private practice among social workers.

## THE CONSERVATIVE REACTION: 1975 TO 2008

Because of the increasing unpopularity of government intervention in the lives of people, even to help those who needed help, and an emphasis on cutting taxes, the Reagan years were a time when social welfare was placed on the back burner. Entire social welfare programs were reduced, frozen, or eliminated. “Consequently, during times of overall prosperity poverty rates soared, particularly among children, young families, and persons of color. By the early 1990s, the number of people officially listed as ‘poor’ had risen to 36 million” (Tannenbaum & Reisch, 2001, para. 29). This cutback in social welfare funding came at a time when the United States was experiencing serious problems with crack cocaine, the start of the AIDS epidemic, homelessness, domestic violence, and a crime epidemic from 1983 to 1994 among juveniles that would produce the highest crime rates ever experienced in this country. Lack of attention to the changing needs of Americans and the desire to cut taxes and social programs had serious consequences that remain with us today.

## THE CLINTON YEARS

Because of the antiwelfare sentiment that had become prominent in the 1980s under Presidents Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush, the emphasis under President Bill Clinton was on limiting welfare to reduce what people were now calling welfare dependence, or the option to live off welfare benefits rather than work. The idea of welfare creating laziness is still prominent in American social welfare thinking, as is the notion that large bureaucracies serving the poor do a very ineffective job. These two ideas led to a welfare reform bill in 1996 that replaced Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) with block grants to states that included time limits and conditions on the receipt of cash assistance (now called Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, or TANF). The legislation also increased the roles of private-sector and faith-based organizations in program implementation.

Under President Clinton, increasing numbers of social workers were affected by the decision to contract with agencies providing managed care to social work clients. The managed care movement came at a time when Americans believed that the private sector could do a better job of providing services than the government, and although the book is not closed on whether this concept has led to better social services and more effective social work practice, the unpopularity of managed health care is an indication that managed care may have run its course and that new ways of providing services may be evolving that place creative solutions in the hands of localities and states.

## THE BUSH YEARS

President George W. Bush left a very poor social welfare legacy. Medicare is in its worst shape since inception with fears that the system will either run out of money soon or have to severely cut back on services. Reimbursements for Medicare have been cut so that thousands of doctors no longer accept Medicare patients. President Bush’s attempt to privatize Social Security, had it been successful, would have meant an actual loss in invested funds by Social Security members of almost 50% as a result of the stock crash in late 2008, a crash that to date has not resulted in full restoration of

retirement investments for most people 2 years later. Although Medicare Part D, which offers low-cost medicine to the poorest older Americans, was completed on President Bush's watch, the government failed to get price concessions from the drug companies, and Americans continue to pay much higher prices for drugs than citizens of any other modern country. All in all, President Bush had one agenda: keeping the homeland safe. In that he seemed not to care about the internal safety of Americans when health, jobs, adequate housing, and other social indicators of safety were considered. Many people feel that he failed to actually make us safer at all.

Madland (2008) reports that President Bush presided over the worst annual job creation record of any president since Herbert Hoover. Most presidents in the 20th century created jobs at an annual rate of between 2% and 4%. President Bush created jobs at an annual rate of only 0.4% through the end of November 2008. With unemployment at almost 10% in 2010, or 5% higher than when Bush took office, the lack of job creation put even more people at risk of unemployment.

Bush's record on wages and income inequality is even worse than his record on jobs, according to Madland (2008). Under Bush, wages and income for most Americans were essentially flat, and income inequality rose to extreme levels. Under President Bush, income inequality, as measured by the ratio of the average income of the top 10% of the population to the average income of the bottom 90%, rose from 6.8% in 2001 to 7.9% in 2006, the most recent year for which data are available. These periods of high income inequality sharply contrast with the period of 1942 to 1987, when the ratio of top incomes to the incomes of most Americans never exceeded 5. Figure 2.1 shows the difference in economic performance between the liberal

policies of President Clinton and the conservative policies of President Bush.

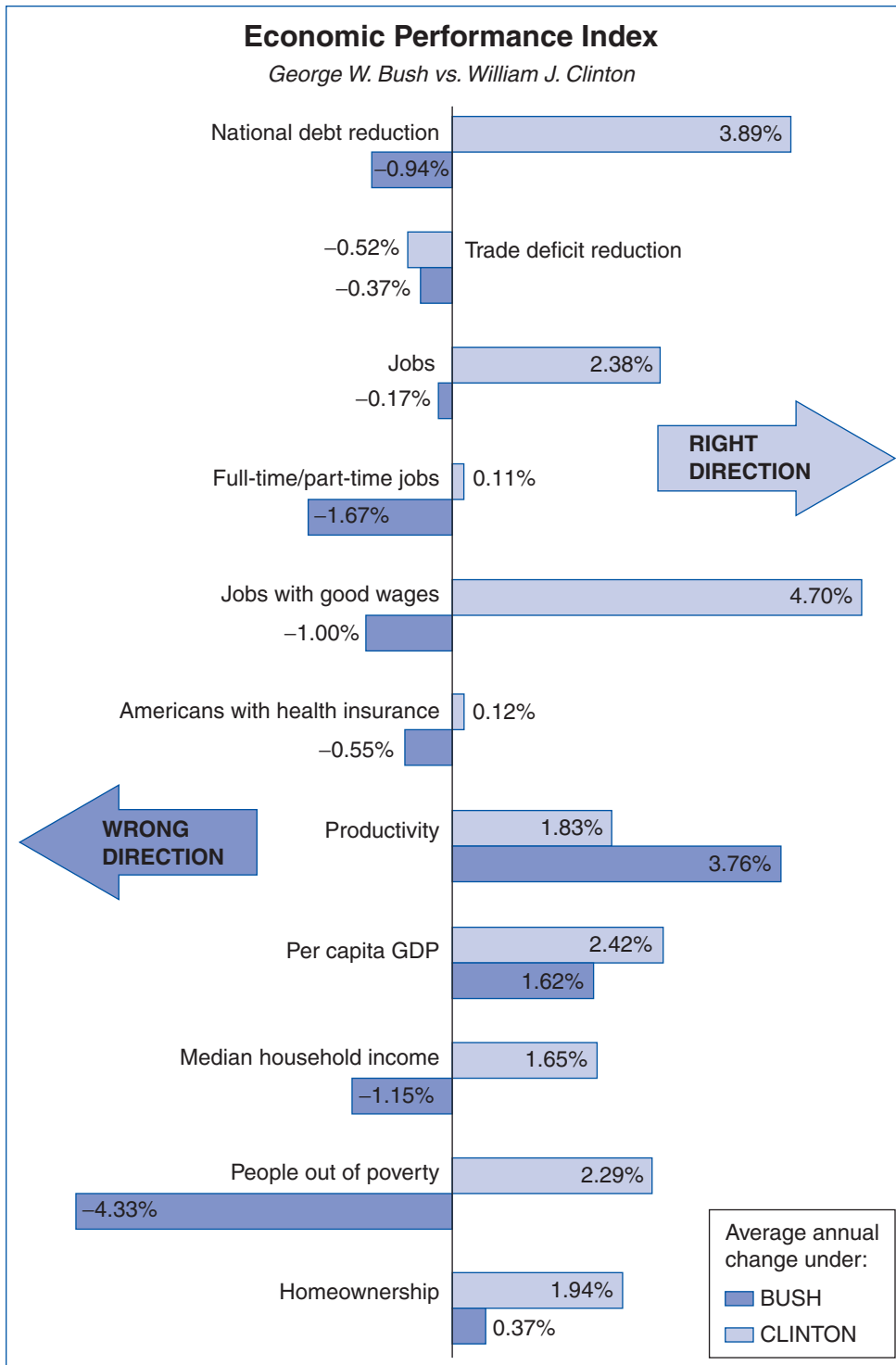
## THE OBAMA PRESIDENCY

Just as Franklin Roosevelt came to power in the midst of the Great Depression, Barack Obama came to the presidency in the midst of serious economic difficulties including a housing bubble that burst causing massive numbers of foreclosures and a banking system on the verge of collapse. Because of the crisis in the American economy, Obama has had to deal with a variety of very unpopular rescues of the banking and financial system that have greatly increased an already huge deficit left from the Bush presidency. His social welfare policies have been clearly articulated and include extended unemployment benefits, more money to education, federally backed funding for college and technical training and low-rate loans to students, help in reducing the number of defaults on home mortgages, help to cities and states so that employment of laid-off public workers can be increased, an already passed health reform bill and



Source: Official presidential portrait of Barack Obama. Courtesy of ARSPUBLIK, <http://www.arspublik.com/official-obama-portrait/>

Figure 2.1 Economic Performance Index of Presidents Clinton and Bush



SOURCE: Atkinson & Hutto (2004).

further work toward universal health care, concerns for the environment, and an improvement in the country's response to global warming. Many of these progressive policies, particularly Obama's health care plan, have been challenged by the opposition party and by the Tea Party on the basis of increasing the debt and because they believe policies that increase government involvement will lead to socialism and a loss of freedom. A badly divided population and increased threats of civic violence from extreme right-wing groups suggest that further attempts to promote progressive social policies will be met with strong opposition. To Mr. Obama's credit, he has taken these challenges in stride and continues to advocate for a number of progressive social policies and programs to help poor and middle-class citizens in the coming years.

## REMAINING SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Problems that remain unattended are increases in the number of people living in poverty, a rising juvenile crime rate, housing that is unaffordable for many working middle-class and poor people, a serious backlash against illegal immigration, laws to protect us against terrorism that often limit our social liberties, and a potential shortfall in Social Security and Medicare funding. Although these challenges remain, social work continues to follow the lead set by the NASW Code of Ethics that we work to meet basic human needs of all people and that special attention should be given to empowering the vulnerable, the poor, and the oppressed.

President Obama believes that a number of problems remain to be resolved. I've chosen several that represent his positions:

**Education:** At this defining moment in our history, preparing our children to compete in the global economy is one of the most urgent challenges we face. We need to stop paying lip service to public education, and start holding communities, administrators, teachers, parents and students accountable. We will prepare the next generation for success in college and the workforce, ensuring that American children lead the world once again in creativity and achievement. (On the Issues, 2009a)

**Families:** If we're serious about reclaiming that dream, we have to do more in our own lives, our own families, and our own communities. That starts with providing the guidance our children need, turning off the TV, and putting away the video games; attending those parent-teacher conferences, helping our children with their homework, and setting a good example. It starts with teaching our daughters to never allow images on television to tell them what they are worth; and teaching our sons to treat women with respect, and to realize that responsibility does not end at conception; that what makes them men is not the ability to have a child but the courage to raise one. It starts by being good neighbors and good citizens who are willing to volunteer in our communities—and to help our synagogues and churches and community centers feed the hungry and care for the elderly. We all have to do our part to lift up this country. (On the Issues, 2009b)

**Jobs:** It's time to turn the page for all those Americans who want nothing more than to have a job that can pay the bills and raise a family. Let's finally make the minimum wage a living wage. Let's tie it to the cost of living so we don't have to wait another 10 years to see it rise. Let's put the jobless back to work in transitional jobs that can give them a paycheck and a sense of pride. Let's help our workers advance with job training and lifelong education. Let's invest in infrastructure, broadband



lines, and rural communities and in inner cities. Let's give jobs to ex-offenders—because we believe in giving a second chance to people. And let's finally allow our unions to do what they do best and lift up the middle class in this country once more. (On the Issues, 2009c)

**Values:** The promise of America says each of us has the freedom to make of our own lives what we will, but we also have the obligation to treat each other with dignity and respect. It's a promise that businesses should live up to their responsibilities to create American jobs, look out for American workers, and play by the rules of the road. Ours is a promise that says government cannot solve all our problems, but it should do what we cannot do for ourselves—protect us from harm and provide every child a decent education; keep our water clean and our toys safe; invest in new schools and new roads and new science and technology. Our government should work for us, not against us. It should help us, not hurt us. It should ensure opportunity not just for those with the most money and influence, but for every American who's willing to work. That's the promise of America—the idea that we are responsible for ourselves, but that we also rise or fall as one nation. That's the promise we need to keep. (On the Issues, 2009d)

## SOME IMPORTANT DATES IN SOCIAL WORK AND SOCIAL WELFARE

The following dates are important ones in the history of social work and social welfare.

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- 1536** The first draft of the English Poor Laws is published. It subsequently became the model for dealing with poverty, illness, and unemployment in England and later in America through the 19th century.
  - 1841** Dorothea Dix begins her campaign for adequate services to the mentally ill after viewing horrible conditions in a hospital for the mentally ill in Cambridge, Massachusetts.
  - 1865** The Civil War ends, and the Freedmen's Bureau, a government agency created to help former slaves in the South migrate to the North to leave the oppression of anti-Black sentiment and discrimination in the South, is initiated.
  - 1877** American Charity Organization is organized in Buffalo, New York, as one of the first attempts to help people with severe social problems in an organized and logical way.
  - 1889** Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Starr's much-admired Hull House in Chicago is established. Settlements focused on the causes of poverty and expanding jobs for the poor. They also "conducted research, helped develop the juvenile court system, created widow's pension programs, promoted legislation prohibiting child labor, and introduced public health reforms and the concept of social insurance." Unions begin to grow in America representing the rights of workers for fair wages and better working conditions.
  - 1898** Columbia University becomes the first school of social work in the country.
  - 1912** More than 400 guilds and settlement houses exist serving the poor and helping millions of new immigrants settle successfully in America. Fires in sweatshops in New York create a strong demand for safe working conditions, and unions begin to flourish.
  - 1914–1918** During World War I social work is first used to help people with combat fatigue (PTSD) and war injuries.
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- 1917** Mary Richmond writes one of the defining books of social work, *Social Diagnosis*, in which she lays the foundation for social work as a profession with a mission and a theoretical belief system.
- 1920** The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) is formed, the Child Welfare League of America is formed, women exercise the right to vote, and an early form of the Council on Social Work Education is formed, calling itself the Association of Training Schools of Professional Social Work. The stock market begins to rise, and speculation leads to conditions that cause the Great Depression.
- 1929** Overspeculation and manipulation of the stock market throw the country into the Great Depression, which lasts almost to the start of World War II in 1941. Millions are unemployed, and many businesses fail. The Dust Bowl, covering the Midwest, adds to problems, and many people leave failing farms.
- 1933** The New Deal, a liberal set of social welfare programs, is begun by newly elected president FDR and his liberal cabinet including social worker Frances Perkins, who became secretary of labor.
- 1933** A series of social programs help provide employment for unemployed men and women and begin the notion of the safety net, including the Social Security Act, which allows older adults to receive a pension after the age of 65.
- 1941–1945** America’s involvement in World War II requires the use of social workers to help soldiers and their families cope with war injuries and medical problems. There is full use of social workers in the Veterans Administration, an organization begun with only a few social workers in 1926.
- 1952** The Council on Social Work Education is formed and begins its work to create high standards among existing and new schools of social work.
- 1954** The Supreme Court rules on *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education*, which begins the end of segregation in public schools.
- 1955–1956** Montgomery bus boycott leads to the end of Jim Crow laws that discriminated against African Americans.
- 1956** The National Association of Social Workers is formed, the profession’s primary organization, with a mission to help and to create a better society and world.
- 1964** Civil Rights Act is passed; Title II and Title VII forbid racial discrimination in “public accommodations” and race and sex discrimination in employment. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission provides oversight and coordination of all federal regulation practices and policies affecting equal employment opportunity.
- 1965** The War on Poverty in which President Johnson pledges to overcome poverty helps to pass the Voting Rights Act, which makes discrimination in voting a federal crime; passes affirmative action, which helps discriminated-against groups gain entry into schools, employment, housing, and other areas of American life in which discrimination is common; passes the Older Americans Act, which provides needed services to older adults; and creates the Administration for Children and Families to focus on the needs of children and to bolster the strength of families.
- 1966** The National Organization for Women (NOW) is founded.
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- 1966–1972** A series of civil protests begin across American cities in which many lives are taken, with the Watts Riots being the most widely known. These civil protests focus on frustration of minority communities with the conduct of the police and the lack of services and job opportunities available to people in the inner cities. Out of the riots begins to develop a conservative approach to social welfare, which some people call the “benign neglect of the poor.” There is a series of campus protests against the escalating war in Vietnam and a demand for more power by students to shape curriculum and to include minorities in higher education. (This may have led to the election of Richard Nixon as president and a further drawing back of liberal social welfare programs.)
- 1972** The break-in at Watergate occurs, and the turmoil in the presidency forces Nixon out of office.
- 1975–1992** During this generally conservative time social welfare programs are cut back, and a conservative agenda moves the country away from concerns about civil rights and poverty. There is a significant rise in juvenile crime from 1982 to 1993, and this is a period in social work where concerns are raised that social work is irrelevant and even unloved because we have moved away from social action and social change and become too comfortable with small system change rather than large changes in the society.
- 1992–2000** Bill Clinton is elected president but, after an attempt to change our health care system, gives up and generally uses a conservative approach to social welfare programs; he limits public assistance to 2 years, encourages retraining, and is thought to have “out-Republicaned” the Republicans.
- 1999** NASW adopts the current Code of Ethics.
- 2000** The election of George W. Bush begins a period of downgrading the social welfare net, a decrease in health care coverage, and a war in Iraq with thousands of deaths and injuries. Social work helps with care of men and their families.
- 2005** A series of natural disasters tests the country’s ability to cope with crisis and finds us badly unprepared. Decades of making poverty invisible show us that it is still pervasive as thousands of residents of New Orleans await help as a horrified nation watches after dikes break, leaving the city under water.
- 2008** A deep recession begins in the fall caused by the bursting of the real estate bubble and massive numbers of foreclosures, and a failure in the banking system causes large amounts of unemployment and deflation. Unemployment in May 2010 still stands at 9.7%.
- 2008** With the election of President Barack Obama progressive social welfare policies return.
- 2010** The Health Care Reform Bill is historically passed.

## SUMMARY

This chapter discusses the history of social work and the social problems dealt with from the English Poor Laws to the current more progressive views of social welfare by President Obama. Many of the earliest attitudes about and the earliest social problems that resulted from poverty are still with us today in our social policies and in the existence of what John Edwards called the two Americas: one for the wealthiest among us and the other for the rest of us. Major topics

covered in the chapter include the English Poor Laws; the impact of the English Poor Laws on American social and welfare policies; the history of social work, social welfare policies, and social welfare organizations in the United States; current attitudes toward social welfare policies; and the social welfare timeline with important dates, organizations, and people in the United States.

## INTERNET SOURCES

Peter Higginbotham's discussion of the English Poor Laws contains links to many interesting facets of the laws. Professor Dan Huff's social work history station has links to speeches, significant laws and people, and a train ride through social work history.

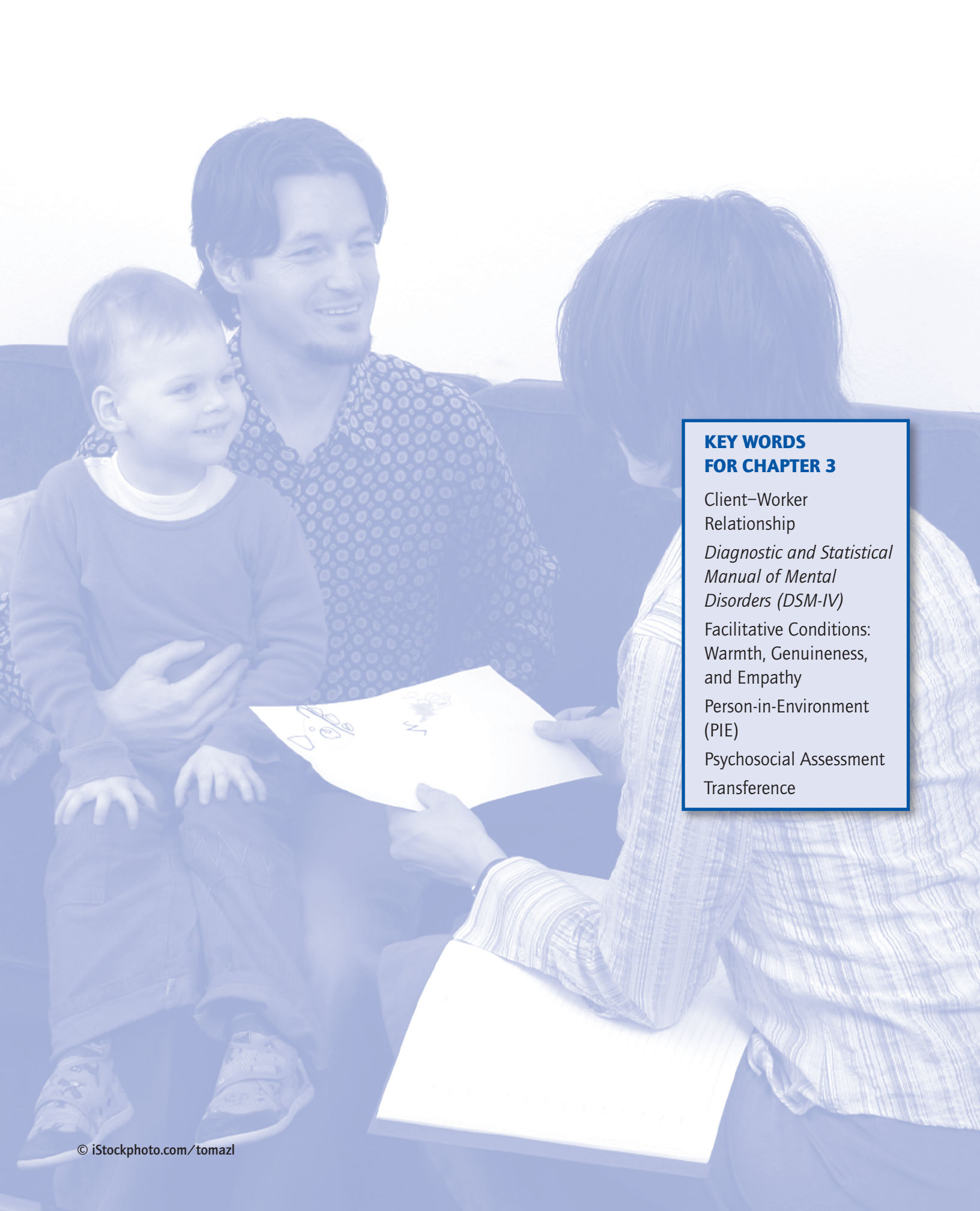
1. Higginbotham, P. (2004). *The 1834 poor law amendment act*. Retrieved August 5, 2010, from <http://www.workhouses.org.uk/index.html?poorlaws/1834intro.shtml>
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## PODCAST

**Women in Social Work:** <http://socialworkpodcast.blogspot.com/2007/04/interview-with-dr-edward-sites-women-in.html>





**KEY WORDS  
FOR CHAPTER 3**

Client–Worker  
Relationship

*Diagnostic and Statistical  
Manual of Mental  
Disorders (DSM-IV)*

Facilitative Conditions:  
Warmth, Genuineness,  
and Empathy

Person-in-Environment  
(PIE)

Psychosocial Assessment  
Transference