

Chapter 1

Introduction

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The focus of this introductory chapter highlights the social, cultural, political, and economic contexts of social welfare history in the United States. That history has been marked by efforts to create greater opportunity and less oppression and discrimination in an increasingly diverse American society. The diversity in values, economic, and political ideologies has resulted in a complex web of social welfare policies and programs that have been implemented and reformed over time. Financial and social realities have continuously required policy compromises that challenge the centrality of the family in social welfare, tendencies toward nativism, and negative attitudes about dependency. All of these dilemmas are explored in this chapter.

CORE COMPETENCIES IN THIS CHAPTER

Competencies in bold are addressed significantly in this chapter.

Professional Identity	Ethical Practice	Critical Thinking	Diversity in Practice	Human Rights & Justice
Research Based Practice	Human Behavior	Policy Practice	Practice Contexts	Engage, Assess, Intervene, Evaluate

CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

- ∞ Students will develop an understanding of the factors which have affected social welfare policies over time.
- ∞ Students will develop an understanding of the role that economics plays in the politics of social welfare.
- ∞ Students will understand the conflicts between majority and minority groups and their influence on social welfare policies.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION PROMPTS

1. Pioneer social workers struggled between social change and individual adjustment. As a social work student, what does this statement mean to you? Can you think of a situation that you have already faced which challenged your personal beliefs and professional ethics?
2. The 20th century was proclaimed the Century of the Child, yet approximately one-fifth of US children live in poverty today. Why do you believe the United States seems to have failed its children? Which programs for children do you believe are the most controversial and why?
3. Why are Americans today so fearful of new immigrants? As a result, what measures have already been taken to address these fears? What new proposals are being discussed by current politicians?
4. Which view of human nature best describes today's approach to social welfare policy? Are more policies being proposed which are incremental or rational? Punitive or rewarding?
5. Why does the United States not have a comprehensive family policy? What policies are in place in the US which seem to address family issues? Are these existing policies sufficient?

SUGGESTED CHAPTER ACTIVITIES AND ASSIGNMENTS

1. Using the internet, find a comprehensive family policy for a European, Asian, African, and South American country. In small groups, have students review one of these policies. Have them identify and discuss aspects of their policy that they believe that Congress should consider if Congress were proposing a comprehensive US family policy. Discuss why they selected those aspects and their application to the US. Finally, have the whole class discuss why these other countries have a comprehensive family policy and why the US does not.
2. Have students find current US demographic data that highlights the percentage of individuals living at or below the poverty level. Focus on individuals aged 65 and older, children, single-parent and two-parent households, and individuals without children. Have students find the same information for any other developed country. What similarities or differences did they discover? What does this say about America?

3. Have students form small groups and discuss different public strategies already in place which provide assistance to persons aged 65 and older, to children, to single and to two-parent households. Have the groups propose strategies which can assist these groups to fill the gap in meeting their basic needs. How will these proposed strategies be funded? Who will be responsible for overseeing the program? What will be the criteria for eligibility? How long can one utilize the proposed program/strategy? What, if any, will be the consequences for fraud or not following the guidelines and expectations?