**Lecture Notes for Chapter 2: The History of Social Work**

The history of the social work profession is intertwined with the history of social policy development. Political, social and economic forces have a strong impact on policy development. Approaches to social welfare have changed over the past few centuries of American life, and the social work profession has evolved alongside those changes. However, despite improvements in many realms of life, the problems to which social welfare responds have remained. Social welfare policies to address people’s immediate needs are generally inadequate for promoting social justice.

**Social Welfare**

Social Welfare includes the array of governmental programs, services and institutions designed to maintain the stability and well-being of society. It involves the allocation of resources such as money, personnel and expertise.

**Social Welfare Policy** – An individual’s political, social, religious and economic ideologies impact how that person thinks about policy issues. In the United States, social welfare policies are generally intended to provide a **safety net** for citizens, services that protect the person from spiraling downward economically or socially and hitting bottom. Eligibility for “safety net” services depends on meeting specific criteria, or **means testing**. Means testing is assessing whether the individual or family possesses the means to do without a particular kind of help. Social welfare policy determines who is eligible for services, describes how services will be delivered, outlines the duration of services, and indicates how intervention outcomes will be evaluated and measured.

* **Conservative and Liberal Ideologies** - People with **conservative** political leaningstend to favor personal responsibility for one’s own well-being over any form of government support or federally sponsored relief. The underlying premise is that people in the top echelon of society have worked hard, made smart choices, and earned their lot in life. Similarly, people in distress have caused their own problems and should “pull themselves up by their own bootstraps”. **Liberals** typically support a more robust safety net for poor people, one that attempts to address social issues through moderate or incremental forms of social intervention and change. Liberals generally want to help distribute more wealth and resources to people toward the lower end of the nation’s socioeconomic structure.
* **Social Control** - policies and practices that are designed to regulate people and increase conformity and compliance in their behavior. The involvement of social workers in the policy arena helps our society address individual needs and confront social control—and perhaps shift or redistribute economic and political power so that the poor and vulnerable can better help themselves.

**Social Justice** - effort to protect human rights and to provide for human needs like housing, food, education and health care for everyone, particularly for those in greatest need. The goal of social justice is what motivates social workers to be advocates. Some goals of advocacy may include:

* Fairness: all citizens have the right to access resources and opportunities
* Equality: people all have human rights without regard to race, gender, economic or educational status, or other distinguishing features
* Freedom: People share the need for independent thought and a sense of security
* Service: The most needy of any society require the most commitment
* Nonviolence: a peaceful approachto collaboration, mediation or negotiation is more respectful of others’ rights than any form of violence.

**The Intertwined History of Social Welfare Policy and Social Work**

**Colonial America: 1607–1783** – The colonists incorporated the concept of **mutual aid,** which was the concept that it was the community’s responsibility to provide assistance when an individual experienced a hardship like a disease or a home burning. The poor laws of Colonial America were similar to the Elizabethan Poor Laws, and included a distinction between the **deserving poor** and the **non-deserving** **poor.** The deserving poor included orphan children, elderly individuals, and people with debilitating physical conditions, who could not provide for themselves through no fault of their own. The non-deserving poor were able-bodied vagrants or drunkards, judged as lazy and unwilling to work for a living. There was also the concept of **outdoor relief**, whichprovided assistance to the deserving poor in their own home and community, and **indoor relief,** which provided assistance in institutions where the non-deserving poor were sent to work.

**Origins of Social Advocacy: The 1800s** – During the 1800s, the U.S. population expanded westward. **Orphan trains** transported more than more than 120,000 children, who were often abandoned and alone, from urban centers to 45 states across the country as well as Canada and Mexico. This is considered the beginning of the foster care concept in the United States. **Dorothea Dix**, was a social activist who lobbied state and federal governments in the mid-1800s to create asylums for those who were mentally ill, especially those who had no other homes. Additional activism by social workers included the advancement of the rights of children, workers, women, the elderly, and racial and sexual minorities.

**Progressive Era: 1890–1920** - The end of the 1800s was characterized by an increase in immigrants and a shift from agriculture to urbanization. There was a greater awareness of the need for social reform.

* **Charity Organization Societies** - focused on the individual factors related to poverty such as alcoholism, poor work habits, and inadequate money management. A **friendly visitor** was assigned to the family and asked to conduct regular home visits. Friendly visitors would attempt to address individual character flaws and encourage clients to gain independence and live a moral life. These visitors were the forerunners of professional social workers.
* **Settlement Movement** - turned attention on the environmental factors associated with poverty. In 1889, Jane Addams, along with Ellen Gates Starr, founded **Hull House** in a poor Chicago neighborhood where immigrants lived in overcrowded conditions. Services included day care for children, a club for working women, lectures and cultural programs, and a meeting place for neighborhood political groups.
* **Early Social Work Training** - Mary Richmond of the Baltimore and Philadelphia Charity Organization Society, along with Edward T. Devine of the New York COS, were early leaders in training social workers. In 1898, Devine established and directed the New York School of Philanthropy, which eventually became the Columbia School of Social Work, America’s first school of social work. In 1917 Mary Richmond wrote the first social work book, *Social Diagnosis,* whichintroduced a methodology and common body of knowledge for the practice of social work. Importantly, Richmond embraced assessment and understanding of human relations, social situations and surroundings, neighborhood conditions, and economic realities.

**World War I Era: 1914–1918** – Social workers shifted their professional attention from “cause” to “function” – from a concern with politics to a concern with the efficient day-to-day administration of a social welfare bureaucracy. The turn toward the “function” of social work gave rise to an expansion of practice settings for the profession, to include private family welfare agencies (as most charity organizations were now called), hospitals, schools, mental health facilities, guidance centers and children’s aid societies.

**The Great Depression: 1929–Early 1940s** – Following the stock market crash, Social workers rekindled the “cause” orientation that had been abandoned in the 1920s and lobbied the government to provide an adequate standard of living for all Americans. President Roosevelt’s New Deal, a large federal relief program for the needy, included unemployment insurance and a Social Security system to deal with the financial insecurity experienced by older persons, dependent children, and individuals with physical challenges. Harry Hopkins, a social worker, was appointed head of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA). The Social Security Act of 1935 widely expanded welfare activities and advanced services and programs for poor persons. It helped to prevent destitution and dependency.

**World War II Era: 1939–1945** – During World War II there was near full employment for most Americans, so during this time issues of poverty were not on the national agenda or in the forefront of the social work. The Depression and the New Deal had lasting effects on the social work profession. There were new jobs for social workers, a deeper understanding of human needs in urban and rural areas, and a renewed interest in reform efforts. The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) formed in 1955, helping to unite the profession through guidelines and a code of ethics that defined roles and responsibilities associated with social work practice.

**America’s War on Poverty: 1960–1967** - The Civil Rights movement educated Americans on the extent of prejudice and discrimination in our society and its costs. Other movements formed to protest the Vietnam War, as well as rights for women, people with physical and mental challenges, gay people, and people of color. President John Kennedy’s New Frontier and President Lyndon Johnson’s Great Society programs instituted a variety of new social welfare initiatives, including Head Start, a program providing preschool education for disadvantaged children; Medicaid, health care for the poor; Medicare, health care for older persons; and Food Stamps, a food purchasing program for needy people.

**Reaganomics: 1981–1989** - The Republican presidential candidate, Ronald Reagan, beat the incumbent President Carter with a conservative platform that emphasized individual responsibility for one’s own problems rather than the reform of existing systems for social welfare. Reagan embraced “**trickledown economics**” – the idea that reducing the tax obligations of the rich would stimulate them to spend more on the consumption of goods and services. In theory, the prosperity of the rich would “trickle down” to middle class and poorer Americans via the creation of new industries and jobs. There was, however, nothing to prevent the rich from simply holding onto their profits, purchasing existing enterprises, or investing in enterprises overseas. The conservative approach continued with President George W.H. Bush’s “**Million Points of Light**” campaign, where communities were expected to develop and often privately fund services and programs to address local needs. However, impoverished communities had few resources to dedicate to such points of light.

**9/11 and Beyond: 2000–Present** - The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the fight against terrorism, and the Global War on Terror took precedence over social welfare initiatives. In 2010 the Affordable Care Act expands the role of the federal government, improves access to affordable health coverage, and reforms insurance company practices. Coverage for mental and behavioral health is included. Social workers help people navigate the new systems of health care to insure proper coverage and benefits.

**The Limitations of Social Welfare** - Although social reforms have made a difference to millions of Americans, they sometimes fail to meet stated or ideal goals. Most of the social services that target young and old age categories are crisis interventions rather than prevention (e.g. Temporary Aid to Needy Families and Social Security Act). The social welfare system does little to move working class and poor people from their current socio-economic class – low social mobility remains. There are communities that continue to experience persistent poverty and social inequality, especially where there are people of color. The history of social welfare policy suggests the need to address the root causes of social, economic and political inequality. The 1963 March on Washington, followed by the 1964 Civil Rights Act, demonstrated that organizing people and taking united action can change the course of a nation.