THE WELFARE RIGHTS MOVEMENT: FIGHTING STEREOTYPES TO GAIN EQUALITY

Abbie Perry

> Dear Senator Long:
> The working New Yorkers are growing bitter at the welfare situation which is getting way out of hand. That these career welfare clients had the unmitigated gall to travel to Washington using relief money that is supposed to be used for food, etc, and then claim that they were using their own money for this purpose is beyond belief…I am a working woman and can't afford a trip to Washington, but taxes are withheld from my salary – much of it going for this and other welfare handouts to many loafers, demanding undesirables, and just plain trash. The trash being those who have illegitimate children every year by different men. And to think that they are now organized is the last straw! Such organization means one thing – more and greater demands…
> Respectfully yours,
> Anonymous[1]

[1] "Anti-NWRO Letters to Senator Russell Long," in *Welfare: A Documentary History of U.S. Policy and Politics,* ed. Gwendolyn Mink and Rickie Solinger (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 269.

Following a Senate Finance Committee hearing in September 1967, several members of the American public were writing their congresspersons to share their outrage that welfare mothers were organizing. Members of the National Welfare Rights Organization marched on Washington in 1967 and presented testimony before the U.S. Senate to relay their grievances about the inadequacies in welfare policy. As above letter indicates, some members of the public believed that welfare mothers were not entitled to question policies, that they should be grateful for their access to assistance as well as be ashamed that they were not employed tax payers. We can also assume that part of this outrage stemmed from views that the American public held about welfare mothers. The public had a clear image of who these ungrateful and immoral welfare recipients were and what they represented. Arguably, these stereotypes of welfare mothers resulted from a long history of racism, discrimination, and perceptions of America's poor. Realizing their opposition, welfare mothers found that obstacles to reform welfare policy would not just be overcome by exposing the inadequacies of policymakers, but also reforming the public's opinion of who they were.

The period of the 1960s and 70s in the United States marked an exciting and chaotic time. The 1960s witnessed the end of McCarthyism red-baiting and the height of the Civil Rights Movement. Groups from all walks of life, now less intimidated by the threat of a communist label, organized and engaged in social movements that challenged government policy and societal standards that functioned as roadblocks to equality and financial success. Prior labor organizing and Civil Rights activism served as models to challenge the status quo. The Welfare Rights Movement began in the early 1960s and by 1966 it evolved into a nationally organized social movement that challenged racism, sexism, and economic inequalities. The Welfare Rights Movement composed a unique organizing effort: groups emerged in local communities, sometimes without the knowledge of other groups with similar agendas. In 1966, George Wiley founded the National Welfare Rights Organization (NWRO), which supported the needs of the myriad of welfare groups in various regions. Although NWRO never acquired the membership numbers of other major social movements, it proved extraordinarily successful in persuading the government to reform many nutritional and assistance programs.

Some of these nutritional programs such as "Women, Infants and Children" (WIC) were instituted as a direct result of the welfare mother's activism. WIC was established as a separate program than welfare, giving needy mothers (of infants and young children) protein-rich essential food vouchers to help reduce their food expenses and eliminate malnutrition in young children. Welfare, in contrast, was instituted as a program that gave mothers with children cash assistance to cover any expenses a family would need. Welfare initially began as the Mother's Pension program in 1911, and led to the disbursement of a small payment designated to widows with children.[2] During its two decades of existence, the program qualified a miniscule number of mothers and "good" behavior was a condition of obtaining and maintaining eligibility. The Mothers' Pension program was federalized in 1935 and expanded its benefits to allow women to remain at home rather than work to supplement their income in addition to the small pension; this was the beginning of Aid to Dependent Children (ADC), later termed as Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), and commonly referred to as welfare.[3]

The original framers of welfare policy intended for assistance to be very exclusive, constituting a privilege and not a right, which made determining eligibility all the more discriminatory. The Welfare Rights Movement was enacted to address the obstacles to receiving aid and receiving enough to realistically cover the needs of a struggling family. The movement was very unpopular, and consequently was not well known during its existence. Therefore, the Welfare Rights Movement has lacked attention from scholars of modern U.S. history. Part of this is the due to the fact that it was short-lived, did not receive the media attention that other major movements did, and its membership numbers were very small. Most historians of the American welfare system have typically researched the major events in the movement. Scholarship on welfare rights written from 1976-1981 detailed the movement's economic and political goals.[4] The early welfare rights' scholarship comprised straightforward social histories that revealed the narrative of welfare and the details of the

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[2] Michael Katz, *The Price of Citizenship: Redefining the American Welfare* State (Philadelphia: University of Press, 2008), 60.

[3] Ibid, 61.

[4] Susan Hertz Handle, *The Welfare Mothers Movement: A Decade of Change for Poor Women?* (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1981). Lawrence Neil Bailis, *Bread or Justice* (Lexington: Lexington Press, 1974).

movement. Many scholars have looked at gender and poverty to argue that motivations for welfare organizing stemmed from the discrimination activists faced due to these factors.

During the era of Reagan, scholarship centered more on a conservative backlash towards welfare recipients, motivated by national politics that stressed personal responsibility and calls for a decrease in welfare spending. [5] Welfare discourse from the early 1980s to 1996 neglected the experience of the welfare mothers; most of the scholars detailed the arguments of welfare opponents. Many scholars attempted to fill the void in the literature by conducting case studies and used those samples to group all welfare activists into a collective experience. Researchers have specifically analyzed the experience of white welfare mothers, and I argue that ethnic welfare mothers had a strikingly different experience with welfare than their white counterparts. [6]

Following the elimination of AFDC in 1996, the public became increasingly aware of the welfare debate. In modern scholarship, we see more scholars taking advantage of the lack of research directly related to experience of the welfare activists.[7] More recently, historical scholarship (grouped together to include those published from 1996-2005) has focused on creating an ideological division between the Welfare Rights Movement and the Women's Movement (specifically the National Organization for Women).[8] Scholars have distinguished welfare organizing from women's equality groups because of the economic differences that plausibly created different visions for both groups. Yet, welfare organizing took inspiration from

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[5] Mimi Abramovitz, *Under Attack, Fighting Back; Women and Welfare in the United States* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1996). Catherine Pelissier Kingfisher, *Women in the American Welfare Trap* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996). Michael B. Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse: A Social History of Welfare in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1986).

[6] The use of the word "ethnic" in regards to welfare mothers generally refers to black welfare mothers. All the secondary sources used in this analysis proclaim that black women made up most of the activists during the movement. Yet, there were also Latino, Asian, Native American, and white women activists involved in the Welfare Rights Movement. My argument focuses on racism that led to welfare discrimination, therefore I focus on the experience of the black welfare activists.

[7] Premilla Nadasen, Welfare Warriors: The Welfare Rights Movement in the United States (New York: Routledge, 2005). Annelise Orleck, Storming Caesars Palace: How Black Mothers Fought Their Own War on Poverty (Boston: Beacon Press, 2005). Kenneth Neubeck and Noel Cazenave, Welfare Racism: Playing the Race Card Against America's Poor (New York: Routledge, 2001).

[8] Abramovitz, 194.

the Civil Rights Movement, the Women's Movement, and Black Feminist groups; members involved in welfare organizing also had stakes in other organizations. Recent historical scholarship makes connections between the broad goals of welfare activists and other movements, yet emphasizes that specific agendas in welfare activism differed. Welfare mothers had different ideals (yet similar tactics to other groups) on how to deal with poverty, racism, sexism, and exploitation.

All three groups included in welfare scholarship looked at the official goals of the activists. Mainly the how, when, and why the movement emerged and the reasons it did not last. Yet, scholars have failed to look at the cultural goals of the activists and the recipients through the language they used. The language of the activists revealed the tactics they used to accomplish their formal goals, which prior scholarship has ignored. This analysis contributes a missing link to the scholarship of the Welfare Rights Movement by answering the following questions: How did welfare mothers of the Welfare Rights Movement portray their plight? How did welfare mothers perceive the negative stereotypes about them? And, how they countered these stereotypes.

The journal published by the National Welfare Rights Organization, *The Welfare Fighter,* contributed the most significant data for this analysis. This analysis refers to three volumes of the journal from 1969, 1971, and 1972. It reveals the differences in the movement's agenda as time progressed. The publication was intended for national circulation and included personal stories from activists throughout the U.S. Therefore, the journal supplements the activists' stories where the secondary sources composed of case studies left off. Additionally, the testimony of Johnnie Tillmon in magazine articles, recorded interviews, and other publications are immensely useful to this essay. Tillmon's activism in welfare organizing began long before the NWRO organized and remained long afterwards. Tillmon's ideals and objectives stayed consistent with the larger organization throughout the changes in the welfare movement (1960s-1970s), and therefore, her thoughts and statements confirmed other sources, adding to the historical context. Tillmon was a leader in several welfare rights groups and served as a spokesperson for other mothers. Her documented testimonies represented the cultural and informal aspirations of the activists.

Addressed in this analysis are the social links that enabled the women to organize. The women individually had grievances with their experiences with welfare. In their local communities, their interactions with each other enabled them to identify their shared discontent, serving to establish an ideology and agenda for the movement. Throughout the mothers' organizing efforts they established that negative stereotypes about them had constituted justifications for their treatment, while their informal agenda countered those stereotypes. Through their interactions, welfare mothers learned that racial disparities existed in welfare policy. The mothers argued that they were no different from white women, and therefore, should enjoy the same privileges that all other women enjoyed. While a fundamental aspect of their organizing related to breaking the cycle of poverty, their goals also centered on ensuring their children's access to greater equality.

Welfare mothers saw themselves as "'victims'" of structures that kept their socioeconomic group in poverty, in order to provide the menial labor force of the nation.[9] Their plight, feeling imposed upon them, afforded little to no room to make improvement, unless they could successfully question and challenge government policy and policymakers. Their impasse, the welfare mothers believed, was partly due to their race, gender, class, and economic backgrounds. These factors made them the lowest priority in government policy and the most despised by others who resented supporting them. As a minor political concern, they had few advocates to improve their plight. Those who did not understand their dilemma encouraged welfare mothers to assimilate into society, without offering them the tools to accomplish that means. As welfare mother Ossie Guffy remarked in regards to outsiders in her community attempting to reform it, "It wasn't that these experts wasn't experts…it was just that they wasn't poor and they didn't live in poverty every minute of every day of their lives, and they didn't really understand it. They didn't work with poor people, they worked with charts full of number that stood for poor people."[10]

During the 1960s welfare spending reached critical proportions and became an issue that concerned everyday American taxpayers.

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[9] Robert B. Semple, "The Poor Protest Across Country," *New York Times*, July 1, 1967, nation section.

[10] Ossie Guffy, *Ossie: The Autobiography of a Black Woman* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1971), 219.

While examining the problem, policy makers and the public failed to grasp the magnitude of the historical economic inequalities that ethnic welfare mothers faced. Viewing the problem in a different light, Daniel Patrick Moynihan remarked in *The Negro Family*, "In the beginning, the number of AFDC families in which the father was absent…was less than a third of the total. Today it is two-thirds."[11] Policymakers viewed dysfunctional family structures as the origins of economic crisis for welfare recipients and due to this, welfare cost taxpayers dearly. Total payments for AFDC climbed from $6.3 billion a year in 1966 to $14.3 billion in 1970.[12] Welfare reformers and policymakers faced demands from American taxpayers to reform government spending. Welfare mothers became the scapegoats to the economic crisis in social services. Conservatives blamed the morality and work ethic of ethnic welfare mothers, which quickly led to negative stereotypes of them. In the eyes of the larger society, ethnic welfare mothers became, or arguably always constituted the undeserving poor. Scholars have argued that the motivations to organize among the mothers resulted from an economic backlash that the mothers endured due to the crisis. Prior to the predicament (which will be discussed later), ethnic welfare mothers had to overcome racial and cultural hurdles for aid.

Resenting societal images of them, as the exploitative root of the economic crisis, welfare mothers took matters into their own hands. They attempted to dispel the stereotypes they felt did not represent them and undermined their opportunities. They thought if the larger public actually understood the reality of their existence they would sympathize with them, drop the negative stereotypes, and work towards reforming welfare policy to eliminate the nation's poverty. The welfare mothers sought to counter negative stereotypes, taking on the label of victims, and arguing that receiving public assistance constituted a fundamental right. Through countering stereotypes they proclaimed that they possessed sufficient capabilities in mothering and gender specific duties, demanding treatment no different than middle-class white women.

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[11] Daniel Patrick Moynihan, "The Negro Family," in *Welfare: A Documentary History of US Policy and Politics,* ed. Gwendolyn Mink and Rickie Solinger, 229.

[12] "The Real Welfare Crisis," in *Welfare Mothers Speak Out: We Ain't Gonna Shuffle Anymore,* ed. Thomas Howard Tarantino and Reverend Dismas Becker (New York: W.W. Norton, 1972), 22.

Racism in the 1960s remained a very present and undeniable part of American society, posing the most obvious obstacle to ethnic welfare mothers' access to economic equality. Ethnic welfare mothers believed that disparities in public policy afforded white women (the deserving poor) more welfare benefits because of underlying racism. In the system, Ruby Duncan (a mother of five of the Las Vegas Welfare Rights Organization explained, that her initial motivation for joining the movement resulted from learning from a white coworker (who had only two children) that the white women received almost twice the amount of benefits that Duncan did.[13] Movement activists demanded, "Fair and equal treatment, free from discrimination based on race…The First and Fourteenth Amendments to the United States Constitution guarantee that all citizens are supposed to be treated equally…[And that] different amounts of grants cannot be given to welfare recipients because of race."[14]

As mentioned previously, welfare was not established to necessarily meet the needs of ethnic welfare mothers; it originated as a measure to assist the most desperate white women. Researchers have elaborated on the origins of racial inequalities in welfare policy, claiming that from the beginning of federal assistance programs (under the establishment of Mother's Pensions in 1935) gendered racism and the controlling images it fostered, invoked stereotypes of black women that harkened back to slavery; such stereotypes rendered black mothers' homes unstable by definition.[15] Social understanding towards black women lacked precedence, increasingly forcing black welfare recipients to endure discrimination, while being portrayed as "licentious" and "disreputable."[16]

Throughout their writings, welfare mothers complained about how policymakers' views justified their treatment while simultaneously perpetuating negative stereotypes about them to the public. In these writings welfare mothers made assumptions on others' perceptions of them, complaining that people called them "the monkeys on welfare," further arguing, "[to them] we're not human

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[13] Orleck, 201.
[14] Anonymous, "Explanation of the Bill of Welfare Rights," *Welfare Mothers Speak Out: We Ain't Gonna Shuffle Anymore*, 181.
[15] Neubeck and Cazenave, 45.
[16] Nadasen, 52.

beings, we're just animals."[17] This reference to monkeys could have had a double meaning to ethnic welfare mothers. First, blacks were viewed as mentally and physically inferior to whites. It connoted a long held racial assumption, which associated blacks with savages, closer to animal rather than human. This belief came from popularized Darwinism; civilization constituted an explicitly racial concept.[18] Dominant perceptions held that human races evolved from savagery, through violent barbarism, to advanced and valuable civilization. Yet, in terms of popularized Darwinism only the white race had, as of yet, evolved to the civilized stage.[19] Secondly, welfare mothers could view the monkeys at a zoo representing something of cultural and educational significance; whites' perceptions of poor, black women in America would translate into something silly and ridiculous, like a derogatory caricature of a black woman displaying apelike qualities.

Welfare mothers felt that these racist characterizations of them became rationalizations to classify them as the undeserving poor, further excluding them from access to resources that would have improved their economic situation. Ethnic welfare mothers endured a different standard than white women on welfare. People viewed white mothers as poor, destitute, and especially single victims through no fault of their own; whereas, in many cases it was an economic impossibility for a black woman to marry the father of her child, which outsiders did not understand. The view that white women were victims of abandonment originated from historical context; in regards to welfare, this view derived from the intended purposes of original welfare policy: to assist mothers who were widowed or deserted. Additional criteria for eligibility hinged on moral fitness standards, which left the duty of determining eligibility completely up to the discretion of the caseworker. Determining eligibility, a subjective process, generally favored white women because they abided by societal standards that remained along the lines of their personal cultural beliefs. In the eyes of the caseworker they deserved aid. In contrast, ethnic welfare mothers' moral fitness standards represented images of ethically lax, promiscuous perpetrators that wanted to

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[17] Betty Niedzwiecki, "At War with the War on Poverty," *Welfare Mothers Speak Out: We Ain't Gonna Shuffle Anymore*, 41.

[18] Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the U.S.,1880- 1917* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 25.

[19] Ibid.

exploit government resources. These negative images have led scholars to argue that ethnic welfare mothers suffered from confining stereotypes of them as incapable of being adequate caregivers and thus unworthy of assistance.[20] The origins of this policy began with Mother's Pension (the precursor to AFDC); in 1931, when 96 percent of the mothers receiving aid constituted white women, black women only made up 3 percent, revealing the difficulty for black mothers to qualify for aid.[21]

In looking at the difficulties for ethnic welfare mothers to receive aid, the mothers asserted that they suffered from victimization. Political and capitalist structures violated their dignity and provided obstacles in welfare policy. This symbolized an assault by the government against welfare mothers. Expressions of victimization revealed discontent over exploitation. Welfare mothers recalled feeling manipulated, used like "political footballs," and "urban prostitutes." They felt like "statistics" used to exert more money for those in power.[22] Johnnie Tillmon, former chairperson of NWRO, proclaimed that welfare fraud constituted an act that policymakers performed to control welfare recipients. She stated, "What's 'welfare?' Welfare's when the government passes a law to give aid to the poor and then tries to keep the poor from getting it."[23] Welfare activists felt money for the War on Poverty went in directions that served the interests of politicians, but made welfare mothers scapegoats for their high spending. According to the activist Catherine Jeremy, "The taxpayers were told that the 1968-69 cost of welfare program had increased 25% over the cost of the 1967-68 welfare programs but the tax payer is NOT told the increase in money paid to recipients in the adult aid programs of welfare increased only 4% and there has been no increase in AFDC since 1957."[24]

The argument that welfare mothers were used as political ploys overlapped into other social concerns. They alleged that government-controlled interests affected the existence of welfare mothers in regards to the armed services, the manipulation of resources, and the

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[20] Neubeck and Cazenave, 45.
[21] Ibid., 44.
[22] Catherine Jeremy, "Excerpts from Speech in Las Vegas," in *Welfare Fighter* 1, no. 2 (1969): 5. Johnnie Tillmon, ed. Tarantino and Becker, 37. Johnnie Tillmon, "Welfare is a Women's Issue," *Ms* Magazine, 1972.
[23] Johnnie Tillmon, "Welfare Fraud," *Welfare Mothers Speak Out: We Ain't Gonna Shuffle Anymore,* 46.
[24] Catherine Jeremy, "Excerpts from Speech in Las Vegas," 5.

efforts for eugenics. The nature of the abuse towards ethnic welfare mothers changed with the political climate. For instance, from the language of some sources, the reader identifies the Vietnam War as a subject of welfare mothers' perceived assault from the government. A contributor to the *Welfare Fighter* remarked, "You don't wanna give this little boy beans and bread but the moment he turns 18 you wanna give him a gun and send him somewhere to kill people with."[25] In another quote from an anonymous mother that spoke in reference to inadequate welfare benefits of the War on Poverty, "This [is] the beginning of the planned extermination movement of the poor and what the rich consider no longer useful to their system." She continued in reference to the military drafting of the Vietnam War, "They insist that the poor, the black and the brown don't know what they need, keep them fighting, it's their obligation to our country." Lastly, this mother commented on birth control (the Women's movement), stating that, "planned parenthood is good because that also makes poor people scarce, and best of all those that have not died in vain on the combat fields of Vietnam will never have to eat. Extermination of poor people is now in effect."[26]Additionally, historians have argued that welfare activists linked all those who attacked them as a unitary group with the homogenized characteristics.[27] Welfare mothers' perceptions of politicians described them as rich men that served the interests of other rich men and vice versa.[28]

As a result of their shared grievances, welfare mothers organized in local communities across the nation to remove obstacles to receiving aid that were crafted by the men who controlled the nation's policies and capital. Prior to 1966, early forms of organizing entailed welfare mothers first sharing their situation with each other in their local communities and strategizing forms of resistance. They learned from their interactions that they had rights that caseworkers kept from them. Mildred Calvert, chairperson of her local WRO chapter stated, "I was afraid that the welfare department would say I

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[25] Johnnie Tillmon, Interview by Sherna Berger Gluck. February 1984. Women's History: Welfare Mothers, Welfare Rights, *The Virtual Oral/Aural History Archive,* California State University, Long Beach, Interview 1c, segment 2 (0:00-6:59), Segkey: a4738, November 2, 2008, http://www.csulb.edu/voaha (accessed May 15, 2008).

[26] Anonymous, "Letter to the Editor," in *Welfare Fighter* 1, no. 4 (1969), 5.

[27] Kingfisher, 75.

[28] Ibid.

was a bad mother and try to take my children from me, I was afraid of being accused of neglect and fraud…Because I didn't know I had a legal right to these things...Until you become involved in Welfare Rights and really learn that welfare is your right, you'll be that way."[29]

Withheld information of the rights of welfare recipients is evidence that ethnic welfare mothers' participation in government assistance programs was resented. In an interview Johnnie Tillmon reported that her first experiences with welfare activism began with her neighbors angrily sharing their experiences with each other. Tillmon reported that, "there [was] a lot of interest. Many women [were] troubled by their situation, [and] a lot wanted to do something and didn't really know what they could do."[30] Tillmon recalled her own feelings, "it just wasn't right [what was happening], and I wanted to do something about it."[31] Tillmon and other mothers in the Nickerson Gardens housing projects in Watts, California went door-to-door recruiting welfare mothers to start organizing locally. They created the Aid to Needy Children (ANC) – Mothers Anonymous of Watts. ANC first served as a form of support group that encouraged mothers in similar situations to join, went with each other to the welfare department for moral support, and also educated each other on their rights as welfare recipients; ANC would later become a part of NWRO. By coming together and talking about their grievances amongst one another, welfare mothers agreed that the stereotypes about them served to deny them their constitutional rights. The welfare mothers worked to counter stereotypes that portrayed all ethnic welfare mothers as lacking work ethic. Scholars have argued that stereotypes of blacks as lazy remained credible for many white Americans, a stereotype traced to the justifications for slavery.[32]

Being labeled morally deficient and wasteful of government resources struck welfare mothers at their very core. Welfare mothers struck back, accusing those who created the stereotypes, of attempting to exploit their poverty, using their difficult situation to keep them working in positions in agriculture and domestic work, in what they

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[29] Mildred Calvert, "Welfare Rights and the Welfare System," in *Welfare Mothers Speak Out: We Ain't Gonna Shuffle Anymore,* 28.
[30] Tillmon Interview, Interview 1d, segment 1.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Neubeck and Cazenave, 10.

called "slave jobs."[33] Historians have argued that the activists' claims had some validity, asserting that capitalism is traditionally an exploitative economic structure.[34] In order to survive, members of the subordinate class, predominately ethnic minorities were forced to sell their labor power.[35]

The welfare mothers' labor was subject to exploitation under regulations of the 1970s that asserted that all adult recipients of welfare must work or be placed in jobs, without exceeding the maximum income allowable to maintain aid. In the eyes of welfare mothers, federal programs that forced them to work lacked creditability because the programs did not train or place them into professional, high-skilled employment to allow them economic independence. An upset activist wrote that the goal was, "FORCING people into dead end low paying jobs…PUSHING people into inadequate training programs."[36] The women felt that employment positions prescribed in federal programs would continually leave them in poverty. As Louise Brookins protested, "'Welfare recipients are not going to scrub floors and clean kitchens at slave wages.'"[37] Never making enough to get ahead, they would basically work for free. The wealthy would continue to get rich, while the welfare mothers would remain in the same predicament, and welfare mothers viewed this unequal relationship as slavery. From the opinion of a welfare mother struggling with trying to work to provide for her family without having to resort to welfare, Ossie Guffy remarked, "From the time of slavery, the black woman was separated from her man, and the only thing she was taught was housework. Later, when she wasn't a legal slave no more and she had to get work 'cause her man couldn't, she set right out and did what she was trained for – housework."[38]

To many welfare mothers, work did not present a problem. Many wanted employment, but did not see the point in working if they continually came up short each month. Activist Louise Brookins

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[33] Anonymous, "Welfare Recipients Protest Stiffening of Rules in Bill," *New York Times*, November 22, 1967, nation section.

[34] Neubeck and Cazenave, 24.

[35] Paraphrasing historians Carter Wilson, Cazenave and Neubeck argue that this capital accumulation process dictated by racially oppressive social arrangements have rendered the labor of people of color particularly subject to exploitation.

[36] Anonymous, "Help Fight 'Workfare,'" in *Welfare Fighter* 1, no. 1 (1969), 8.

[37] Louise Brookins, "In Protest of WIN," in *Welfare Fighter* 1, no. 2 (1969), 15.

[38] Ossie Guffy, *Ossie: The Autobiography of a Black Woman* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1971), 223.

remarked, "'if we are going to be forced to work, then we want an adequate income of at least $6,500 a year.'"[39] Without an income that met the minimum costs of living, a single, working mother could face more financial burden than if she remained on welfare. Another activist in agreement with Brookins wrote, "'[Working for low wages is] basically slavery if you work and don't get any money because you spend it all on daycare and transportation.'"[40] Hardships caused by the inconsistencies and disparities in forced work policy, resulted in activism that centered on exposing the flaws in welfare-work policy and demands for reform that would give ethnic welfare mothers more egalitarian alternatives to gain economic independence. A *New York Times* reporter summed up the strategies of the activists, "[They] began their campaign to close down state employment centers to protest referral of 'employable' welfare recipients to what they called 'slave jobs'."[41]

Allegations that ethnic welfare mothers lacked a work ethic accompanied other derogatory stereotypes that claimed the mothers suffered from immorality and abused assistance resources. As part of discrediting ethnic welfare mothers, opponents of welfare criminalized the mothers, believing that they bore multiple illegitimate children or presented someone else's children as their own to increase their welfare grants. Activist June Waldheim explained her outrage, "I got very perturbed over a statement about mothers exchanging children and getting double benefits."[42] This vicious stereotype of ethnic welfare mother as promiscuous parasites derived from the 1960s and '70s, culminating in the term "welfare queen" used by President Reagan in his assault on welfare mothers.[43]

Welfare mothers responded to accusations by actively engaging in the movement. They went to great lengths to deny the myth that they bore children for profit. Activist Ellen LaSalle asserted, "[There were] legislators in St. Paul who claimed people were trading children and getting more benefits. Anybody with two ounces of sense would know this is an impossibility. We kind of wanted to refute some of

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[39] Louise Brookins, "In Protest of WIN," *Welfare Fighter* 1, no. 2 (1969), 15.
[40] Anonymous, "Welfare Recipients Protest Stiffening of Rules in Bill," *New York Times*, November 22, 1967, nation section.
[41] Ibid.
[42] June Waldheim, *The Welfare Mothers Movement*, ed. Susan Handley-Hertz (Washington DC: University Press of America, 1981), 35.
[43] Nadasen, 217.

these charges."[44] As Johnnie Tillmon further stressed, "People still believe that old lie that AFDC mothers keep on having kids just to get a bigger welfare check. On average, another baby means another $35 a month – barely enough for food and clothing. Having babies for profit is a lie that only men could make up, and only men could believe."[45]

Welfare mothers believed the intent of the lies was to control their bodies and lives by imposing restrictions on welfare benefits of the women who would not consent to sterilization, tube tying, or abstaining from premarital sexual relations. In an interview Johnnie Tillmon recalled her shock at the claim that black people had more babies to get welfare; she condescendingly remarked that, "in 1963, you only got a $6 increase in check per child."[46] In 1972 she added that, "on AFDC you're not supposed to have any sex at all. You give up control of your own body. It's a condition of aid. You may even have to agree to get your tubes tied so you can never have more children just avoid being off welfare."[47]

Losing control of their bodies to guarantee survival posed a real threat to welfare recipients. During the 1960s the heated issue over what authority the government had over a woman's body ensued. The public argued over whether the government could use the occasion of a welfare mother's minor infraction of the law to mandate sterilization. Welfare activists demanded agency over their bodies and families, defining sexual freedom not only as access to birth control, but complete control over their sexual reproduction, including the right to oppose sterilization and bear children.[48]

Ossie Guffy, who faced a real threat of losing control of her body, remembered in her autobiography a county hospital obstetrician who attempted to pressure her into having her tubes tied. Guffy defensively claimed, "Nobody was going to do anything like that to me. It said in the bible that even a fallen woman wasn't a whore if she populated the earth, and besides, what he said about my not being able to take care of the kids, no matter how many I had, just wasn't true."[49] This obstetrician might have agreed with political analysts

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[44] Ellen Lasalle, *The Welfare Mothers Movement*, 35.
[45] Johnnie Tillmon, "Welfare is a Women's Issue," *Ms* Magazine, 1972.
[46] Interview with Johnnie Tillmon, Interview 1a, segment 1.
[47] Johnnie Tillmon, "Welfare is a Women's Issue," *Ms* Magazine, 1972.
[48] Nadasen, 217.
[49] Guffy, 127.

who argued for the cost effectiveness of family planning through forced sterilization, estimating how much money could be saved on welfare, social services, and medical care.[50] From the language in Guffy's statement, she, like many other welfare mothers felt it an honor or even a religious duty to experience motherhood. She resented someone telling her how she should handle her body or questioning her mothering abilities. Guffy further stated, "I knew that the reason I kept having babies wasn't because I didn't know how to prevent them, it was because I didn't not believe in having them."[51]

Government control over a woman's body served to prevent recipients from abusing the system by bearing illegitimate children for profit. It was presumed that the ethnic welfare mother partook in this practice and it was one of several stereotypes welfare recipients had to cope with in their interactions with the welfare department and caseworkers. These interactions, intended to represent working relationships in order for the caseworker to provide a public service and the recipient to receive assistance, suffered from long-held assumptions towards the other by both parties. Government policy was enforced by the welfare department and the caseworkers constituted the direct line of communication and enforcement between recipients and government policy. Historians have pointed out that politicians and opponents of welfare looked at the loss of traditional family structures as the root of all other societal ills; they blamed the decline of society's morality on diversion from the patriarchal concept of family.[52] Ethnic welfare mothers departing from societal standards of having children in sanctioned marriages threatened the stability of the patriarchal family in America. Caseworkers in their interactions with recipients burdened clients by putting the weight of the fears of society on the recipient.

Historians have claimed that welfare policymakers pushed to uphold the family ethic, linking eligibility for AFDC (subjectively determined by the caseworker) to compliance with certain standards of marital childbearing and parenting behavior, penalizing women who departed from prescribed roles as wife and mother.[53] With this outcome, caseworkers whose additional duties extended into preserving patriarchal standards with economic coercion became the

[50] Nadasen, 217.
[51] Ibid., 193.
[52] Abramovitz, 34.
[53] Ibid.

perpetuators of recipients' oppression. Caseworkers bore most of the hostilities of the recipients because they were disproportionately responsible for excluding ethnic mothers from eligibility based on family and cultural standards.

The most heatedly discussed violation against the welfare recipient by the caseworker was the inspection of recipients' homes to discover a male at the residence. According to welfare policy during the 1960s, any able-bodied man living in the house automatically disqualified the family for welfare. The man-in-the-house rule (apart of the suitable home provisions), faced challenges asserting that the prerequisite served to reduce the number of blacks on welfare and curb the sexuality of unmarried ethnic women.[54] Administering this rule appears to have been the most dehumanizing aspect of this welfare law. Activists targeted home inspections as a violation of recipients' privacy. The mandate proclaimed that even if the man in the home was the legitimate father of the mother's children and actively seeking work and unable to find it, no matter how great the needs of the family amounted to, they would not qualify for any benefits. Johnnie Tillmon wrote, "…the families on AFDC aren't really families…99 percent of them are headed by women. That means there is no man around. AFDC says if there is an 'able-bodied' man around, then you can't be on welfare. If the kids are going to eat, and the man can't get a job, then he's got to go. So his kids can eat."[55] Ethnic welfare recipients felt that this man-in-the-house rule was an attack on the stability of the welfare family, a method to keep them in a subordinate position. The mandate put welfare families in a difficult position and broke up the black family. In many cases, the man had to desert his wife and children in order to ensure the family's survival. If the man continued to stay and the family struggled, they risked losing their children. The welfare department would deem them unfit to care for their children. Johnnie Tillmon remarked on how the government controlled the stability of the family, "You trade in a man for the man. But you can't divorce him if he treats you bad. He can divorce you, of course, cut you off anytime he wants. But in that case, he keeps the kids, not you."[56]

Caseworkers bore the resentment of welfare recipients because their job entailed enforcement of the-man-in-the-house rule. As

[54] Katz, 260.
[55] Johnnie Tillmon, "Welfare is a Women's Issue," *Ms* Magazine, 1972.
[56] Ibid.

Johnnie Tillmon complained, "The neighbors were always talking about caseworkers. Look all in the clothes closet, empty the clothes [in the hamper] lookin' for men's clothing. If so they wouldn't get another check."[57] These visits, termed midnight raids, literally constituted inspections of the homes of welfare recipients that took place in all hours of the night and early morning. These surprise inspections served to determine any fraud on the part of the recipient. Detection of fraud usually could be assumed if the recipients lived a lifestyle that denoted the family's stability, indicated by nice furnishings, material items, an abundance of food, and/ or a male living at the home. Justification for these invasive inspections correlated with the stereotypes of ethnic welfare mothers' characteristics as immoral and therefore capable of fraud.

Asserting that they were not fraudulent but held to an unfair standard, Johnnie Tillmon and others recalled that a large part of the women's motivation to organize stemmed from the mothers relayed the normalization of sharing their horror stories and complaints about caseworkers. They claimed the women lived in constant fear of having a boyfriend or husband found in their home.[58] An activist remarked, "Leaders of the protest [against man-in-the-home rules] presented a 10-point program to supervisors urging an increase in general relief, improvement in social workers' attitudes toward recipients and an end to practices that they said encouraged unemployed fathers to leave their families."[59] Welfare recipients resented the home inspections as an assault on their privacy, a control of their romantic lives, an aspect of paternalism that minorities had long resented, while making criminals and liars of welfare recipients. In an essay, Ruby Duncan remarked, "You see, I hated welfare. I hated it. Because I hated the social workers coming in to my house snooping and looking. It was ugly."[60] In August of 1969, a court abolished the invasive inspections of recipients' homes in *James v Goldberg*. The decision to restrict the abuses of home inspections directly affected the recipients in the state of New York, and Welfare Right Movement leaders published information to inform other state

[57] Interview with Johnnie Tillmon, Interview 1a, segment 5.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Anonymous, "100 Protest on Coast" in *New York Times*, July 1, 1967, nation section.
[60] Ruby Duncan, *The Politics of Motherhood,* ed. Alexis Jetter, Annelise Orleck, and Diana Taylor (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1997), 122.

recipients of their rights which they felt caseworkers would maliciously fail to disclose to recipients:

> There are several ways in which you can try to make your state obey this new rule:
> 1. You can talk to the state and local welfare directors. Tell them about *James v. Goldberg*…
> 2. Demonstrate against the invasion of privacy when caseworkers force their way into people's homes or cut off welfare.
> 3. Organize welfare recipients.
> 4. Refuse to admit caseworkers to your homes. If the welfare department tries to cut checks, ask for a fair hearing. If you lose the fair hearings, sue the welfare department in the same way New York did.[61]

Feeling violated in their homes, recipients made accusations that assaults on them continued at the welfare department. At the welfare office, the recipients entered the caseworkers' domain, and recipients who challenged the caseworkers could suffer in a multitude of ways. The most common complaint by welfare recipients related to the exorbitant amount of time they waited in the welfare department to have their cases processed and the extended amount of time it took for a case to be approved. Quick processing in determining a family's eligibility often times equated to a matter of survival for food, clothing and shelter. A concerned recipient commented, "It is in their first contact with Welfare Departments, then, that most poor people are denied their rights. States must act within thirty days on a person's application for welfare and must provide a fair hearing to those who are to be denied it. Yet Welfare Department practice makes a mockery of the federal laws."[62]

Welfare recipients' frustrations with the welfare department related to activists' views that those who held responsibility to alleviate welfare recipients' plight did not understand their problems because they did not have to live in poverty. Betty Niedzwiecki, a welfare recipient suggested, "The Welfare Department should be turned over to people who know how to handle problems. It should be

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[61] Anonymous, "No More Home Visits," in *Welfare Fighter* 1, no. 1 (1969), 2.
[62] Anonymous, "Welfare Fraud," in *Welfare Mothers Speak Out: We Ain't Gonna Shuffle Anymore*, 51.

set up that when a person comes in, it should have his case opened and him out of there in an hour and a half. No more of this ninety-two copies of everything: that's a bunch of bull."[63] The assumption that caseworkers lacked qualifications to handle the plight of the poor had many causes; first, recipients assumed that caseworkers did not have the experience necessary to sympathize with the poor, and second, caseworkers' misconceptions of the characteristics of recipients prevented them from seeing needy welfare recipients in an unbiased way. The language in welfare-rights' writings signaled a desire for control over government agencies that represented the poor, which has also been attributed to the language used in the War on Poverty. The community action programs created during the antipoverty campaigns of the War on Poverty defined powerlessness as one key source of poverty and created direct links between local activists outside established urban political structures and the federal government.[64] Activists argued that caseworkers only understood recipients in terms of the deserving poor or the undeserving poor, and in no other measure did caseworkers understand the links between the conditions of poverty. Activists demanded control over the agencies that caseworkers ran incompetently. Caseworkers' failings and classifications of the recipients could have a major impact on the recipients' eligibility and the speediness of their benefits, which represented a major obstacle to recipients' wellbeing.

Aside from the crucial vulnerable material needs of the recipients, welfare recipients resented the entire experience at the welfare department, especially the psychological degradation they claimed to have experienced due to the presence of armed policemen. Policemen at the welfare department gave the impression that welfare mothers posed a threat and related to the criminal image of the welfare recipient. In an effort to counter this stereotype, welfare activists demanded removal of policemen and treatment granted to clients not criminals. An interviewed activist claimed, "Two of the group's demands are that policemen be removed from welfare offices and that [the welfare departments treat them like clients by placing them] on the boards that make decisions about welfare problems."[65]

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[63] Betty Niedzwiecki, "At War with the War on Poverty," in *Welfare Mothers Speak Out: We Ain't Gonna Shuffle Anymore*, 42.
[64] Katz, 267.
[65] Anonymous, "45 Stage Boston Rally," *New York Times*, July 1, 1967, nation section.

Policemen added to the group's experience at the welfare department. They, like the caseworkers, attacked the welfare mothers, made assumptions about them, and deprived them of dignity befitting a human being. Activist Betty Niedzwiecki explained, "There are cops at the Welfare Department…And they don't work too hard either, because you don't need much to tell poor people to shut up, and get out, and stop raising that ruckus because you didn't get your check three or four days ago when you should have and your kids are starving."[66] The whole experience at the welfare department involving caseworkers, policemen, and plenty of red tape, appeared to recipients as an attack on their character and evidence of government's disdain for them.

Ethnic welfare mothers felt they were misunderstood, and therefore their experiences with the welfare agency and personnel signified a viewpoint that they were different from other women in society and should be treated as such. Welfare mothers in the 1960s wanted the same rights and privileges as middle-class white women. They sought to fulfill the traditional duties of womanhood. Yet, their progress was hampered as Mary Childers, a welfare recipient professed, "One's identity as a woman could be shaken by realizing that being a lady is not an option."[67] Part of the aspirations of welfare mothers in the realm of womanhood included the desire to stay home and raise their children. Johnnie Tillmon affirmed, "Being important means being middle class… an AFDC mother learns that being a 'real woman' means being all the things she isn't and having all the things she can't have.…It doesn't apply to all women. If you're a society lady…and you spend all your time sitting on your prosperity…well that's okay."[68] Welfare mothers felt that middle-class values as well as gender aspirations remained out of their reach due to restrictions imposed by larger structures. Childers elaborated, "Class somehow means being classy, and one is classy by acting like a lady. It is not lady-like to fight with the landlords for heat, eat rice with vegetable oil three days in a row, and pad your shoes with newspaper. But who

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[66] Betty Niedzwiecki, "At War with the War on Poverty," *Welfare Mothers Speak Out: We Ain't Gonna Shuffle Anymore*, 42-43.

[67] Mary Childers, Statement in *The Politics of Motherhood*, ed. Alexis Jetter, Annelise Orleck, and Diana Taylor (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1997), 98.

[68] Johnnie Tillmon, "Welfare is a Women's Issue," *Ms* Magazine, 1972.

wants to admit to not being a lady after watching the young Katherine Hepburn."[69]

Enjoying the realm of womanhood included enjoying the option to stay home and raise their children. The argument to stay at home versus work intensified following government policies that asserted welfare mothers drained government resources and that they should contribute to society by acquiring employment and carrying their weight. A defensive activist remarked, "The belief that welfare mothers can work assumes that they are not working now. The work of raising a family, of household tasks, is not considered worthy of even an unjust wage; scrubbing floors, preparing meals, changing bed linens, sewing, caring for the sick, budgeting, and helping to educate and discipline children – all of this is very hard work, as every woman knows."[70]

Welfare mothers believed that white homemakers received credit for assuming their gender specific responsibilities, whereas, an ethnic welfare mother was harshly criticized if she wanted to devote the same energy into taking care of her family. In Welfare Rights' writings, a caricature of a white woman caring for the children of a black working woman sums up the contradictions in the regulations of requiring welfare mothers to work. In the cartoon, a man comments on the white volunteer's contributions to the daycare facility, "I think you Service Club women are marvelous, the way you give your time to take care of children of working mothers!" The white woman responded, "It's the least we can do!" The man went on to ask, "But don't you have your own responsibilities? How do you manage to get away?" She answered, "I had to hire a MAID to take care of MY child while I'm here!" The man complimented her, "That's very admirable of you, I must say! By the way, I see you're particularly attached to those three little girls [referring to three black children the woman tended to]!" She responded, "Oh, I am! And with good reason!" "They're my MAID"S CHILDREN!" This caricature conveyed that the volunteer had to hire a maid to tend to her home and children so that she could assist in the daycare facility. The message that welfare activists conveyed was that it would better suit society if all mothers had the option to take care of their own families.

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[69] Childers, 98.

[70] Anonymous, "Welfare Mythology," in *Welfare Mothers Speak Out: We Ain't Gonna Shuffle Anymore*, ed. Thomas Tarantino and Rev. Dismas Becker (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1972), 72.

In order to remain home to raise their children, welfare rights activists fought for an adequate annual income for mothers who wanted to stay home. Mothers on welfare in the 1960s faced a losing proposition because welfare benefits fell well below the federal guidelines of poverty. An activist stated, "The proposed Family Assistance Plan, will force mothers with children on welfare to accept jobs of the minimum wage and place their children in inadequate daycare facilities."[71] The majority of the 1960s welfare rights writings communicated the desire of mothers to stay at home, but struggled to make ends meet on welfare alone. In this predicament, many welfare mothers worked for wages under-the-table. Tillmon commented that, "If the government was smart, it would start calling AFDC Day and Night Care, create a new agency, pay us a decent wage for service work we are now doing, and say that the welfare crisis has been solved because welfare mothers have been put to work."[72] Welfare policy presented many contradictions: policymakers wanted the women to work, but the ones who remained on welfare could not work as a condition of their aid. Ossie explained her frustration with welfare policy, "She's not allowed to work out of the home. It don't make sense, 'cause it makes liars and cheats out of some women who work and don't admit it, and wrecks out of the others who try to live on their aid and end up with barely enough to keep their body and soul together."[73]

Part of the reasoning about the necessity of assuming the role of a stay-at-home mother was that welfare mothers generally lived in rough and dangerous "ghettos." Societal ills such as crime accompanied poverty and to protect their children from these ills, welfare mothers regarded constant supervision of their children as key to minimizing this threat. A concerned mother remarked, "There is a direct relation between child delinquency and poverty…Most children who are subjects of the juvenile courts are fighting for their survival."[74] In an effort to deter their children from becoming victims of their environments, many welfare mothers wanted to stay home and monitor their children to keep them from "getting out of control."[75] In

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[71] Anonymous, "Endorse Children's March," in *Welfare Fighter* 3, no. 2 (1972), 6.
[72] Johnnie Tillmon, "Welfare is a Women's Issue," *Ms* Magazine, 1972.
[73] Ossie, 121.
[74] Anonymous, "Poverty and the Juvenile Delinquent," in *Welfare Fighter* 3, no.2 (1972), 2.
[75] Niedzwiecki, 40.

many respects, welfare mothers felt the government should assume the obligation to help them financially, so they could raise their children properly at home and not be forced to work. They believed that raising their children like middle-class white women would level the playing field in regards to their children's futures. A mother remarked that, "The government owes me because I am raising two boys that I am sure they'll be taking into their armed services one of these days to fight their damn wars."[76]

Welfare mothers' aspirations of being responsible caregivers were severely damaged beginning in 1969. In that year, President Richard Nixon proposed the Family Assistance Plan (HR-1/ F.A.P.), a conservative bill that sought to reduce spending in social services and eliminate welfare by requiring all able-bodied adults on AFDC to work. Welfare mothers and activists considered this bill the greatest attack on their character thus far. In the opinion of an activists, it would worsen a situation already deeply flawed, commenting that "HR-1 is philosophically and structurally unsound. It is based on the worst myths about welfare and welfare recipients."[77] The requirement to work was criticized in the 1950s when staying home was seen as a benefit to children.

Yet at the close of the 1960s, a shift in middle-class white women's desires corresponded with a changed in welfare activists' aspirations, and led more welfare mothers to legitimize wishes to work outside of the home. Historians have debated the significance of the Women's Movement to black females' social struggles. For instance, Premilla Nadasen emphasizes that the brand of feminism that the National Organization of Women offered did not meet the goals of the activists of NWRO, and therefore, a detachment occurred between middle-class woman's organizing and poor black women's organizing.[78] Yet, Kimberly Springer (who specializes in black women's social movements) differs from Nadasen; Springer argues that many of the major players in the Black Feminist Movement actively participated in the Women's Movement. Black feminists transferred leadership skills and philosophies from the women's

[76] Niedzwiecki, 98.
[77] Anonymous, "FAP passes House, Senate struggle ahead," in *Welfare Fighter* 3, no. 5(1972), 1.
[78] Nadasen, xviii.

movement to black feminist organizations.[79] Springer argues that N.O.W. influentially contributed to the black feminist movements as much as the Civil Rights Movement did.[80] There was a strong correlation between black feminist and N.O.W. discourse, especially in regards to demands for access to better, higher paying jobs.

In the 1970s the issue of welfare activists' aspirations focused on the mothers' desires to work. They fought against limitations to low-paying, domestic, and agricultural work that inhibited them from economic independence. In addition to better paying jobs and proper job training they also demanded help in finding employment, such as clothing grants and adequate day care. An activist who commented on the insufficient training programs said, "People are being forced to accept training for dead end jobs instead of being helped to develop their potential, where people are being used to do dirty work under the name 'training' and where people are forced into jobs with substandard wages and unfair working conditions."[81] A poem by an activist published in the *Welfare Fighter* criticized the inadequacy of government regulated job training:

> They say they'll give me work- befitting a man- but here
> I am just cleaning the 'can.'
> They say, 'go get a job- It's the American Way!' -But they
> don't give me minimum pay!
> They tell all mothers 'Go get a job. Don't stay at home-
> And be a lazy slob!
> You can leave your children- with a day-care mother-
> She takes that job because she can't do no other![82]

Both women who wanted to work and those who wanted to stay home criticized the availability of jobs. Patsy Ruth Oliver, a welfare mother, proclaimed that she wanted to get a good job to move her family out of the ghetto and to buy a home. Oliver like many activists, pointed to the limitations for black women in her area, "If you didn't teach or preach you were a domestic."[83] Another mother who

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[79] Kimberly Springer, *Living For Revolution: Black Feminist Organizations, 1968-1980* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 33.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Anonymous, "Activism against WIN," in *Welfare Fighter* 1 no.1 (1969), 8.
[82] Anonymous, Song Lyrics/ Chorus, in *Welfare Fighter* 3, no. 5 (1972), 9.
[83] Patsy Ruth Oliver, *The Politics of Motherhood,* 56.

commented on the lack of work and need of welfare remarked, "Welfare for many should be a stop gap, a means of income while seeking gainful employment. However, there are no jobs…the past 2 months nearly 100 welfare recipients have applied for jobs in this area (Virginia) and only 1 received a job."[84] An activist with similar sentiments wrote, "In central Seattle, a predominantly black area, the unemployment figure runs up to 48%...meat has become a luxury that few can afford even once a week."[85]

Unemployment, a real concern during the 1970s, coupled with the pressure from those controlling welfare to push women to work, made recipients feel like victims because they claimed they wanted to work and actively sought work, but the jobs did not exist. The stay-at-home mothers, probably feeling less as victims like the ones wanting to work, argued that in the midst of the economic instability, their efforts proved best served by staying at home, especially since day-care wasted resources. As a mother from Milwaukee County remarked, "In order for welfare mothers to have jobs, someone must take care of their children, so daycare centers will be provided. Then everyone should be satisfied – until the bill for the cost of running the daycare centers hits the taxpayer."[86]

For those who wanted to work came demands of proper daycare facilities as well as assistance with effects like clothing for professional job interviews. Duncan of Las Vegas WRO commented on the needs of job seeking welfare mothers, in addition to childcare the mothers needed "to have decent clothes to wear to look for a job. We didn't want them to buy us a whole wardrobe. Just something decent."[87] Welfare activists did not want their options of whether they should stay home or work controlled. They wanted the decision to be left in their hands, to decide what fit best for their families' needs. Beulah Sanders former chairperson of NWRO remarked, "no government has the right to tell people whether they can look after their kids or not," but in either case (welfare or work), they wanted more money to fulfill their aspirations of middle-class status.[88]

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[84] Anonymous, "Welfare Mandatory," in *Welfare Fighter* 3, no. 1 (1972), 17.
[85] Anonymous, "Unemployment in Washington," in *Welfare Fighter* 1, no. 1 (1969), 4.
[86] Anonymous, "Welfare Mythology," in *Welfare Mothers Speak Out: We Ain't Gonna Shuffle Anymore,* 40.
[87] Ruby Duncan, *The Politics of Motherhood*, 124.
[88] Beulah Sanders, "Welfare Recipients Protest Stiffening Of Rules in Bill," *New York Times*, November 22, 1967, nation section.

Middle-class aspirations for welfare recipients served to promote a better future for their children. It meant being afforded all the same rights and privileges that middle-class white women had, including having the luxury of deciding to work or not, providing a safe, comfortable home in an area away from urban crime, giving their children a good education and the proper tools to succeed in life, having a nuclear family, and satisfying personal needs and desires. Issues of proper job training, adequate daycare facilities, countering derogatory stereotypes, demand for safe and comfortable housing, an adequate income, demands to end the man-in-the-home rule, and others all hinted at self-interest but primarily served toward gaining a more prosperous and successful future for the children, correlated with middle-class values and income.

The formal goals of the movement sought to address the civil liberties of children and bolster the character of mothers and became an informal tactic for improving the children's chances for success. An activist stated, "Children and youth are subhuman. The rights guaranteed adults under [the] Constitution are practically non-existent for [the] young. No groups civil liberties are more abused [than the] children."[89] Ramon Trujillo of the Pueblo WRO wrote, "Children, who through no fault of their own are compelled to live in environments reeking of poverty. To these children hunger and sometimes lack of sanitation is a way of life. Some feel it is punishment for something they don't understand."[90] In order to break the cycle of poverty, which the government half-heartedly intended to do, welfare activists looked to the source of success and prosperity in American society and fought for things that would improve their children's educational experiences. An activist expressing the desire for the children of members of NWRO claimed, "Opportunities for their children was the members' fundamental concern, since many believed it was too late for them."[91]

Interestingly, welfare activists did not directly attack the educational system as an obstacle to children's deliverance from their mother's plight. Activists did not believe the hurdles of their children's education rested in failing teachers or school administrators; the failure was blamed on welfare policy that did not allocate enough resources essential to a child's education. A concerned mother found,

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[89] Anonymous, "Children & Rights," in *Welfare Fighter* 3 no.2 (1972), 6.
[90] J. Ramon Trujillo, "Mommy," in *Welfare Fighter* 1 no. 4 (1969), 5.
[91] Pope, 133.

"They deny lunches to children who are eligible; they make children who receive the lunches stand in separate lines, eat separate lunches, use different lunch cards; they make poor children work for their free school lunches."[92] Outraged participants attacked welfare policymakers for their disregard of poor children. Activists' demands included money for school clothing and free lunch/breakfast programs. Poor children came to school hungry and unable to concentrate and compete educationally with their peers. An advocate of welfare reform wrote, "Hunger and malnutrition cause distance, alienation, withdrawal, frustration, apathy, and listlessness…Teachers report children who come to school without breakfast are too hungry to learn and in pain that they must be taken home."[93]

In order to attend school, a basic necessity was proper clothing sufficient to accommodate children's needs in respect to the elements. Especially during the winter months in areas prone to extremely cold weather, destitute mothers claimed that their children could not attend school or attend comfortably because they did not have adequate clothing. An advocate of children's rights complained, "The mothers were getting $25 per person quarterly clothing allotments for the kids – until the punitive state legislature eliminated all special allowances to welfare families. Now they get nothing...*The Amsterdam News* revealed that the average [American] parent spends at least $200 a season for the minimal amount of clothing necessary to send a child to school properly attired."[94] As Mrs. Nettie McQueen remarked, "welfare recipients are ready to go to jail rather than allow their children to attend school in rags."[95]

The demands for the needs of children served to help the children of recipients to enjoy more opportunities, without having to repeat and endure hardships their mothers faced. Welfare mothers' formal goals centered on attaining middle-class status. To them, a middle-class lifestyle denoted opportunity and access to the American dream. Welfare mothers challenged negative stereotypes that misrepresented how the mothers viewed themselves and inhibited progress for themselves and their children. The mothers also used

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[92] Anonymous, "FREE School Lunches…Phase Two," in *Welfare Fighter* 1 no.1 (1969), 7.
[93] Anonymous, "H.R. 1 to Starve Children, Says Report," in *Welfare Fighter* 3 no. 2 (1972), 6.
[94] Anonymous, "Why They Picket," in *Welfare Fighter* 1 no. 2 (1969), 5.
[95] Anonymous, "Clothing Demands," in *Welfare Fighter* 1 no. 1 (1969), 2.

techniques such as arguing that, "every woman is one step away from welfare. Anyone's man could leave without leaving any money."[96] The appeal for sympathy and tactics to relate to all women arguably served to appeal for more advocates. The activists viewed their plight as a restriction imposed on their equality that served to benefit financially those who controlled the nation's capital. The mothers professed that they were victims suffering from discrimination primarily because of their race. They viewed the negative stereotypes about them as fabricated myths used to convince taxpayers that they were nuisances who should carry their weight, working in industries requiring low skills and menial labor. They countered the stereotypes about them in order to convince policymakers and other Americans would be discontented in their situation, and that with assistance they could reverse their plight. The mothers took control of their own labels demanding to be recognized as intelligent victims of structures beyond their control and as caring, hardworking, women and mothers.

[96] Interview with Tillmon, Interview 1b, segment 6.