The impact of the 1996 Welfare Reform Act on access to postsecondary education for temporary assistance to needy families recipients in Jackson, Mississippi in 2011

Charlette Brown
Clark Atlanta University

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ABSTRACT

AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDIES, AFRICANA WOMEN’S STUDIES
AND HISTORY

CHARLETTE BROWN       B.A. JACKSON STATE UNIVERSITY, 1998
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THE IMPACT OF THE 1996 WELFARE REFORM ACT ON ACCESS TO
POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION FOR TEMPORARY ASSISTANCE
TO NEEDY FAMILIES RECEIPTENTS IN JACKSON,
MISSISSIPPI IN 2011

Advisor: Dr. Josephine Bradley, Ph.D.
Dissertation dated July 2013

This study examines the extent to which the educational component of the 1996 Welfare
Reform Act impacted African-American TANF recipients’ access to postsecondary
education in Jackson, Mississippi in 2011.

This study was based on the premise that policies within the legislation restrict
opportunities for welfare recipients to pursue postsecondary education as a pathway to
self-sufficiency. For welfare recipients who often believe that college is inaccessible due
to financial means, access is especially important for them. Participants in this study
were thirty-two African-American women receiving TANF benefits from the State of
Mississippi who were either enrolled in a college program or participated in the job readiness training supported by the Mississippi Department of Human Services.

A qualitative research methodology was used to analyze the data. The data revealed that there is total consensus among the participants on the importance of postsecondary education as a measure of future economic well-being for themselves and their families. Findings specifically revealed that many of the participants strongly believe that policies associated with welfare reform have prevented or denied them full access to education and that some of the policies should be changed.

The conclusions drawn from the findings suggest that the 1996 Welfare Act impacted access to postsecondary education for TANF recipients in Jackson, Mississippi to some degree; and that after 15 years of stagnated welfare reform policies, specifically policies associated with work requirements, TANF recipients in Mississippi are longing for better educational opportunities that will allow them to enjoy a self-sustaining lifestyle.
THE IMPACT OF THE 1996 WELFARE REFORM ACT ON ACCESS TO
POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION FOR TEMPORARY ASSISTANCE
TO NEEDY FAMILIES RECIPIENTS IN JACKSON,
MISSISSIPPI IN 2011

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF CLARK ATLANTA UNIVERSITY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
DOCTORATE OF ARTS IN HUMANITIES

BY
CHARLETTE BROWN

DEPARTMENT OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDIES,
AFRICANA WOMEN’S STUDIES AND HISTORY

ATLANTA, GEORGIA

JULY 2013
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Foremost, I must thank God for giving me the spiritual strength and determination to start and finish this journey. I dedicate this dissertation to my sons and grandson, Jeffrey, Arthur and Jaylan. The three of you continuously show me what unconditional love is all about. I also dedicate this dissertation to my mother, Esperline and my beloved pet, China. Mother and China were with me when I started this journey, but they have since gone on to glory. I miss both of them more than they will ever know. I thank all of my family members for their immeasurable support and love throughout this and all other life journeys. I thank my friends who encouraged and inspired me to “continue in spite of” and to “not give up until the task is finished.” A special thank you is extended to my committee members, Dr. Henry Elonge and Dr. Sandra Taylor. Dr. Elonge, I thank you so much for helping me to compartmentalize my thoughts enough to develop a research topic that will be beneficial to welfare policymakers everywhere. Dr. Taylor, I thank you for supplying me with smiles of encouragement as well as providing invaluable input which helped to organize my ideas throughout this process. A special thank you is also extended to Dr. Josephine Bradley, my committee chair, whose tireless mentoring and sound thought processes helped me to create a stronger dissertation. Thank you to Ms. Vera Butler, Ms. Kimberly Knight and all of the TANF women who participated in this study. Finally, a sincere and special thank you is extended to Mr. William Pace who has truly kept me from falling throughout this entire educational experience.

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Higher levels of education have always been the traditional route to sustainable self-sufficiency in the United States. Yet, access to postsecondary education for women on welfare was dramatically restricted when the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) also known as the 1996 Welfare Reform Act was signed into law by President William J. Clinton on August 22, 1996. The Act, favoring the "work first" approach over the traditional "education" approach to obtain self-sufficiency became Public Law Number 104-193. Effects of the Act on college enrollment among the welfare population were immediate due to the strenuous and mandatory work requirements embedded within the law. Community colleges, universities and adult education programs saw dramatic declines among welfare participants.

Recognizing this educational thrust to be a phenomenal occurrence in welfare legislation; this study examines the educational component of the 1996 Welfare Reform Act to determine the impact of the "work first" approach on access to postsecondary education for African-American TANF recipients in Jackson, Mississippi in 2011.

Access to postsecondary education, for the purposes of this study, is defined as having applied for, entered into, continued with, or participated in any type of postsecondary education program. Specifically, this study examines the personal choices
of TANF recipients who participated in an education or a work readiness program to improve their ability to become economically self-sufficient.

Welfare statistics in the United States are undeniably overrepresented by single, under-educated mother only families who receive some level of public assistance. When most Americans consider the word “welfare,” they tend to think of women in one context or another. Either they think of black women, minority women or single women; nonetheless, women are most often the consideration when it comes to welfare. This alone makes it a women’s issue.

Research interest in women and poverty has heightened over the last decade as increasing numbers of women and children face economic disadvantages. The voices of welfare women, however, are inconspicuously missing in the discourse on social welfare policy. Dialogue attesting to whether or not welfare mothers should have easier access to higher education is limited. Voices of women who receive welfare and would like to have access to postsecondary education is also limited, and studies predicting future success or failures rates of single mothers on welfare who have access to postsecondary education is even less visible in the literature. This study expands and offers new regional knowledge about welfare reform and how it has affected higher education for welfare recipients since the passing of the Welfare Reform Act of 1996.

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The U.S. Census Bureau indicates that between 1990 and 2000, the percentage of African-American families with children under the age of 18 and headed by a female jumped from 1,904,029 to 2,308,270, rising approximately 11 percent.\textsuperscript{3} Moreover, research suggests that higher poverty rates among African-American female-headed households have risen faster than any other segment of the population. Children who are reared in such families are more likely to drop out of school, have children out of wedlock, continue generational welfare, and have difficulties in the labor market as young adults. In an effort to explain this phenomenon, much attention has been focused on the American welfare system.

However, Steve Teles, Associate Professor of Political Science at Johns Hopkins University, argues that “nearly every aspect of the welfare system is controversial - its standards of eligibility; level of benefits; federal structure; and obligations for receipt of assistance.”\textsuperscript{4} For decades Congress and legislators have tried to reform public welfare. A number of ideas to correct what are routinely described as the problems with welfare have been debated; nevertheless, a general agreement on how to correct the problems is yet to be formed. Consequently, welfare reform in the United States is perceived by many as a never ending discourse among policymakers, legislators, researchers, politicians and academicians.

\textsuperscript{3}U.S. Bureau of the Census. 2000. Household by Age of Householder by Household Type (including living alone) by presence of own children under 18 years (Black or African American alone householder) 31, http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/tableservices/isf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=DEC00SFIP020&prodType=table (accessed February 12, 2009).

On one hand, conservative ideology puts forward the belief that the poor are lazy and uninterested in working to improve their economic condition because the public assistance programs provide enough income to deter them from seeking work.\(^5\) On the other hand, liberal ideology suggests that structural barriers such as not enough jobs, low wages, not enough education, unequal opportunity, racism, and sexism prevent people who are poor from becoming self-sufficient.\(^6\) Moreover, critics of the welfare system claim that welfare produces dependency and creates a “culture of poverty” where the recipients share and pass on to their children a set of inferior behaviors, poor values, and atypical personality traits.\(^7\) Advocates strongly believe that welfare is essential as a safety net for the poor and impoverished.

As a response to overwhelming criticism about the national welfare system’s perpetuation of poverty and welfare dependency, Congress passed and former President William J. Clinton signed into law The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act on August 22, 1996. President Clinton’s campaign promise to “end welfare as we know it” began on that day. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 dramatically changed the conditions of welfare support for poor single-parent families in America.


One of the cornerstones of the legislation was the establishment of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program which replaced several longstanding federal entitlement programs such as Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC); AFDC administration; the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Program (JOBS); and the Emergency Assistance (EA) program. The TANF program provides cash assistance and other supportive services to families in need; thereby helping them to achieve economic self-sufficiency. The program also transferred or devolved responsibility of all welfare programs to states by placing welfare funds in one pool and awarding funds to states in block grants that are based on client participation in work related activities. According to PRWORA, the goals for TANF are to:

- Provide assistance to needy families so that children may be cared for in their own homes or in the homes of relatives;
- End the dependence of needy parents on government by promoting job preparation, work and marriage;
- Prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies and establish annual numerical goals for preventing and reducing the incidence of these pregnancies;
- Encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families.\(^8\)

The new program’s focus was on work and responsibility and on providing states with the flexibility to be innovative in addressing the pressing issues unique to each state. Conversely, the goal of AFDC was to provide aid to all children whose mothers lacked

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the support of a breadwinner, no matter how they got to that position.\textsuperscript{9} AFDC, an outcome of the Social Security Act of 1935, was created as a social insurance grant program. The program was designed as a federal/state partnership in which both costs and rulemaking authority were shared. Federal guidelines required states to provide cash assistance to all eligible families. Working within federal limitations, states administered the program, established the income levels which families qualified for in their state, and set the level of benefits that eligible families would receive in their state. The federal government monitored the states' administration and matched state funds for the program. The rationale for the creation of AFDC was to reduce the negative consequences of lost income to needy children who had been deprived of parental support or care because their father or mother was absent from the home, incapacitated, deceased, or unemployed.\textsuperscript{10}

Additionally, AFDC was a federal entitlement program that guaranteed cash assistance to all recipients whose income and resources were below state-determined eligibility levels.\textsuperscript{11} In contrast, under the rules and regulations of TANF, there were no guarantees that all eligible individuals would receive any assistance. Unlike AFDC, the entitlement program without time limits and open to anyone who qualified based on their level of poverty, TANF is a block grant to the states, with time limits and work


requirements. One of the major concerns with TANF is that families are only eligible to receive benefits for a maximum of two years at a time, with a lifetime limit of 60 months (5 years). After the 60 months are exhausted, families are not eligible to receive any further cash aid from the government.

Under TANF guidelines, recipients are required to participate in work activities to qualify for continued benefits. TANF required work activities include:

- Unsubsidized employment;
- Subsidized private sector employment;
- Subsidized public sector employment;
- Work experience (including work associated with the refurbishing of publicly assisted housing) if sufficient private sector employment is not available;
- On-the-job training;
- Job search and job readiness assistance;
- Community service programs;
- Vocational education training (not to exceed 12 months with respect to any individual);
- Job skills training directly related to employment, in the case of a recipient who has not received a high school diploma or a certificate of high school equivalency;
- Satisfactory attendance at a secondary school or in a course of study leading to a certificate or general equivalence, in the case of a recipient who has not completed secondary education or received such a certificate; and
- The provision of child care services to an individual who is participating in a community service program.\(^{12}\)

States were mandated by federal law to have at least one-quarter of their welfare recipients engaged in a work related activity in the first year with participation rates to increase by 5% each year as shown in Table 1.1 below.

Specifically, by 2002, states were to have at least one-half of their welfare clients engaged in an allowable work activity a minimum of 30 hours per week.\textsuperscript{13}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Minimum Participation Rate</th>
<th>Minimum Number of Hours per Week in Work or Work Related Activity</th>
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<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>1999</td>
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<td>2000</td>
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<td>30</td>
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<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002 or after</td>
<td>50</td>
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Source: Section 407, Mandatory Work Requirements – 1996 Welfare Reform Act

Reauthorization for the TANF program was to have taken place in 2002; but because the U.S. House and U.S. Senate had given the measure little priority and had not agreed on how to reauthorize the program, it was funded by a series of short-term extensions.\textsuperscript{14} The Communication Workers of America's website reported the following on the reauthorization to extend TANF under the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act. The report states:

The contentious multi-year battle to craft a fair and equitable welfare reauthorization bill came to an end on February 6, 2006 with the passage of S. 1932, the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005. The bill was signed into law by President George W. Bush on February 8, 2006. This highly debated omnibus budget reconciliation bill contained ten distinct Titles. Included as Title VIII- TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families), is legislation from the House Committee on Ways and Means, the Work,


Marriage, and Family Promotion Reconciliation Act of 2005. This section of Public Law 109-171 the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 reauthorizes the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA), the law that created a new Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. Recently passed TANF legislation reauthorizes the program through the year 2010.15

TANF goals under the reauthorization bill continued to focus on ending the dependence of needy families on government benefits by promoting job preparation, work and marriage, reducing the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies, and encouraging two parent families.16

PRWORA’s enactment represented a paradigm shift in the federal government’s responsibility to the poor. Fiscal responsibility for managing state and local welfare agencies was transferred to the states.17 States would now have sole discretion over all cash assistance programs for the needy as long as they were in accordance with specifically defined federal guidelines. Essentially, this shift, commonly referred to as the “new federalism,” drastically reduced federal spending to the poor and required all states to take an active role in providing for the poor through work or a work related activity.18


Philosophically, the general principal behind the 1996 Welfare Reform Act is work first. In other words, TANF recipients are required to find work in order to receive benefits. TANF emphasized the need for recipients to gain quick entry into the labor force. The underlying assumption of “work first” is the expectation that most recipients are capable of finding work and presumes that the best way to succeed in the labor market is to join it. The “work first” viewpoint suggests that advances on the job and/or higher wages come from work experience rather than from building skills through education and other forms of human capital. Hence, rapid entry into the labor force, the overall goal and expectation of welfare reform, had little or no regard for the reality that the only job to be found may be one that pays minimum wage with no healthcare benefits.

The urgency to move recipients off welfare and into jobs as quickly as possible significantly lessens the options of poor women who receive welfare to choose postsecondary education as their path to self-sufficiency. Those on welfare, particularly African-American women, may find it difficult if not impossible to choose higher education when blocked by barriers designed to move them off welfare as quickly as possible. Furthermore, research suggests that because caseworkers, for the most part, are insufficiently monitored for practices of discrimination and since African-American women are disproportionately represented on public assistance, it is likely that African-

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American women may not get the referrals from caseworkers to higher education programs that could possibly assist them in becoming self-sufficient. Gordon Hurd found “this to be especially true in states with aggressive ‘work first’ policies.”

This reality began to emerge as a growing number of African-American women on public assistance sought to tell “their stories” about the conduct of caseworkers, as well as the second class treatment they received from some of the same caseworkers. For example, Peggy Khan and Valarie Polakow followed three single African-American mothers on public assistance at two universities in Michigan, documenting their experiences through cumulative opened-ended interviews. Their findings pinpointed the obstacles confronting African-American welfare recipients struggling to become self-sufficient while pursuing postsecondary education. All of the recipients reported that they were consistently coerced by caseworkers into attending mandatory work first orientations and harassed to find employment in the low wage service sector.

Moreover, they suggested that continuing pressure exerted by caseworkers on student mothers to find low wage work for twenty hours or more per week frequently undermined their academic success and capacity to stay in school. Susan Gooden reported similar patterns by caseworkers. She found that caseworkers recommended

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white recipients much more often to postsecondary education paths than recipients of color.\textsuperscript{23}

Thus, these reports and suggestions indicate that welfare recipients of color are less likely to be enrolled in higher education than white recipients because of the harassment from caseworkers and because caseworkers refer them less often to continuing education programs. Consequently, it may be concluded that African-American women will remain in poverty longer than their counterparts.

Statement of the Problem

The image of single mothers on welfare in the United States rarely portrays the stories and voices that might represent a realistic view of their experiences. With the downturn of the U.S. economy in the 1990s, hard times have surfaced for many people. Massive job layoffs, increased fuel prices and an escalation in the national poverty rate have prompted policymakers to take a closer look at the plight of the poor. The rise in single mother households and the high rate of poverty among these families have accounted for an abundance of social science research attempting to explain why the poor are poor as well as barriers to economic independence for poor women. The research, however, has mainly focused on single mothers in the general population rather than single mothers in the welfare population. For example, the National Council for Research on Women Fact Sheet reports that there is a strong relationship between the level of education and life-long economic security. For low income women and single

mother heads of households, access to educational opportunities increases their ability to move out of poverty and it provides greater income and resources to their families.\textsuperscript{24}

Moreover, Marilyn Gittell argues that

\begin{quote}
\begin{center}
in American society we have a long and honored tradition of regarding education as a means to achieve material security and social status. Access to higher education has been extended to certain groups who were regarded as especially disadvantaged or deserving, such as war veterans and minority groups, in the expectation that it would improve their life chances. Yet we have persistently ignored the potential of education to enable welfare recipients to attain similar goals. Instead we have strained to separate the domains of education and welfare at all levels of public debate and policy making.\textsuperscript{25}
\end{center}
\end{quote}

Demographics for single mother households indicate that in 1960, there were 4,422,000 single mother households in the United States; however, by 2008 the number had increased to 14,404,000.\textsuperscript{26} While analyzing data to determine what could be done to reduce poverty among single mothers, Gittell found that minimal earning capacity, inadequate enforcement of child support laws and low public benefits are all contributing factors to the economic insecurity of poor single mothers.\textsuperscript{27} An added factor, referred to less often in poverty research, is human capital and the investment in higher education as a mechanism for escaping poverty. This factor is especially important for welfare


\textsuperscript{26} U.S. Census Bureau. Households by Type 1940 to Present, http://www.census.gov/population/socdemo/hh-fam/hh..xls (accessed October 17, 2009).

\textsuperscript{27} Gittell, http://www.howardsamuelscenter.org/reports/HumCapWelf93.pdf (accessed March 6, 2010).
recipients because it provides an opportunity to acquire additional skills that would increase earning potential.

Since passage of the PRWORA, each state has developed its own specific plan for implementing new welfare legislation. The Act itself provided general guidelines for state welfare plans resulting in some common threads across the state plans. Nevertheless, it also allowed greater flexibility for states to develop their own specific rules and regulations to implement welfare reform. However, social science researchers suggest that as recipients began to receive benefits, the work first philosophy of the PRWORA surfaced and states began to direct recipients to quickly transition into low paying jobs in order to help them to become self-sufficient. Mimi Abramovitz, a strong advocate for welfare rights, argues that pushing welfare women into low paying jobs does little or nothing to help them escape poverty or become self-sufficient.²⁸

Postsecondary education in the context of welfare reform was significantly modified within each state's plan. The frequency with which welfare participants are referred to programs which include continued education, the length of stay in educational programs, and the course of study vary from state to state. The 1996 federal law limited educational assignments to a maximum of 20% of the total number of participants completing work assignments. Parameters for the educational assignments were one-year in length and were restricted to vocational programs. States were required to include in the educational assignment numbers, teenage parents who were enrolled in high school,

leaving little room under many states' cap for those in postsecondary education. Facing financial penalties for failure to meet work requirements guidelines under the PRWORA many states were hesitant to include pursuance of postsecondary education in their welfare reform initiatives.29

The TANF program for the State of Mississippi is administered by the Mississippi Department of Human Services (MDHS). Its goal, according to the MDHS website, is to promote self-sufficiency, overall well-being, and personal responsibility for all Mississippi welfare recipients by preparing them for jobs, by helping them with job readiness training, job skills training, vocational training, other educational training programs and assisting them in finding and keeping a job.30 Yet, the Mississippi State Plan for TANF 2008-2010 reports that “in spite of dramatic results since the passing of the 1996 Welfare Reform Act, there are still individuals in Mississippi not working or in entry level jobs with incomes that are too low or too erratic to raise their families above poverty.”31 Raising families above the poverty level has been a constant problem for the state of Mississippi. Statistics show that Mississippi is ranked as the poorest state in the nation and has been for the past several years. Hinds County alone had a poverty rate in


2007 (include Jackson city) of 18.0% for adults 18 and over.\textsuperscript{32} Data from the 2005-2007 American Fact-Finder showed that 23% of Mississippi's population between the ages of 18-24 does not have a high school education.\textsuperscript{33} This consideration would greatly impact the ability of welfare recipients to move from welfare to self sufficiency.

Documented evidence shows that education is effective in reducing poverty. Despite the fact that Mississippi allows TANF recipients to use postsecondary education as a work related activity, relatively few recipients are taking advantage of this formal support mechanism to obtain sustainable self-sufficiency. More importantly, the Mississippi State Plan for TANF recipients suggest that long-term success of the program depends on the ability of recipients to not only find a job, but also to obtain stable and full-time employment. Postsecondary education is increasingly viewed as a necessity for success in today's global economy. Using postsecondary education as a tool to move recipients into stable and full-time employment has the potential to play a part in the success of the TANF program's commitment to the overall well-being of recipients in the state of Mississippi.

When the 1981 Mississippi legislature ignored educational reforms for the state, Governor William Winter spent an entire year organizing groups, businesses and


education groups to lobby legislators on behalf of education. In a passionate and personal speech to the legislature in 1982, Governor Winter expressed the following:

We are here to put the most creative thoughts we have into the solution to problems that are not going to go away and that cry out for this legislature to address. We keep looking for easy answers. We keep trying not to rock anybody’s boat. Well, I want to tell you it is boat rocking time in Mississippi. It’s time to get off our backsides and decide that we are not going to let anything or anyone or any circumstances keep us from making this state competitive. And if we are not willing to take that approach, then we haven’t got any business being here.34

Similarly, Pete Walley, an economic analyst from Mississippi, warns “if Mississippi does not change the numbers, it will permanently become No. 50 in income, health, education and the economy.35 This concept, with all of its implications, would lower the quality of life for all Mississippians.

Focus of the Study

The study examined the educational options of thirty two (32) female TANF recipients in Jackson, Mississippi, specifically African-American female recipients, to understand what personal choices shaped their decision to participate or not participate in an allowable educational program under the 1996 Welfare Reform Act that could improve their ability to become economically self-sufficient. Postsecondary education, albeit in a limited capacity, is an allowable work activity under the Mississippi State Plan for TANF recipients. For policy makers, understanding why certain individuals chose


not to participate in programs intended to increase the possibility of successful transition from welfare to self-sufficiency is critical. It is critical because in order to understand how to break the cycle of dependency and how to prevent continuous poverty in the lives of impoverished people, one must have a fair understanding of the circumstances of the people involved. Moreover, if higher education is the part of the equation that decides our long-term economic success, then unequal access to higher education makes long-term poverty or continuing poverty even more likely.

According to Vivyan Adair, "the passage of welfare reform legislation in 1996, coupled with a failure on the part of educators to respond to the unique needs, challenges, and strengths of this population, has forced poor, single-mother students from colleges and universities in droves." As a result they are prevented from accessing the knowledge, skills, and credentials that would otherwise allow them to lift their families out of poverty on a productive and permanent basis.

As part of the initial research for this investigation, Warren Yoder, Executive Director of the Public Policy Center in Jackson, Mississippi and long time advocate for welfare rights, was interviewed by the researcher to discuss ways in which this research could contribute to the state of Mississippi. When asked the question – would a research study investigating the lack of access to postsecondary education by Mississippi welfare clients be a good one? His response was “this kind of study is long overdue for the State of Mississippi as Mississippi’s pattern has been to ignore the voices of the poor. Maybe

it’s now time for them to be heard.” The guiding assumption for this investigation is that postsecondary education will fundamentally change the opportunities available to single mothers and their families in the state of Mississippi and elsewhere.

Significance of the Study

African-American women on welfare in the state of Mississippi encounter problems that are rarely discussed in welfare literature. It has been a pattern in Mississippi history to ignore problems that affect the lives of economically deprived individuals. For instance, Clare Nolan reported in an online newspaper article that “because of Mississippi’s history of stingy spending on social programs, the state came under particular scrutiny when Congress began to devolve authority to the states.”

Likewise, a study undertaken by the Urban Institute and written by Gretchen Kirby, et al reported that “Although Mississippi’s economy has boomed in recent years, State expenditures on social programs remain controlled by a political system that does not rank social programs as a high priority.” Consequently, access to postsecondary education as a viable option to long term self-sufficiency by welfare mothers in the State of Mississippi can be considered a problem and the problem has been ignored far too long.

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37 Warren Yoder, interview by author, Jackson, Mississippi, November 23, 2009.

Unlike the 1999 study by Sarah Brauner and Pamela Loprest which dealt with how welfare leavers fared since leaving the system\textsuperscript{39} or the 2000 investigation by Richard Murnane which explored ways to increase welfare mothers earning potential\textsuperscript{40}, this study is significant in several ways. First, it examines a state higher education policy within the framework of a federal welfare policy. Moreover, through the voices of the women, learning how their lived experiences contribute to their perceptions of higher education offer a humanitarian recognition of them not as marginalized people, but people with potential for success if given the appropriate opportunities.

Second, this study is important because it contributes to the academic discipline of African-American Studies and Africana-Women Studies by providing a format for academicians to engage students in scholarly dialogue about women on welfare and by providing an opportunity for professors and academics to familiarize students with the experiences of other groups within society.

Theoretical Framework

Theory, explains Sonya Andermahr "is speculative insofar as it goes beyond practical and empirical knowledge, to order and make sense of what is known, and to give direction to empirical and significant investigations. Moreover, in any given discipline, theory consists in the systematic framework of interrelated concepts which


govern a given field of knowledge." To further explain a theoretical framework, Michelle McGriff states that "it is a process of identifying a core set of connectors within a topic and showing how they fit together in some way to the subject."

When dealing with the welfare population, many things have to be considered. One area to be considered is whether or not a theory which examines or studies human behavior can truly be relied upon to determine an individual's economic well-being. An abundance of theoretical literature which correlates higher education to higher earnings goes unquestioned because, with few exceptions, individuals obtaining advanced degrees usually earn higher wages. Conversely, theoretical discourse which explains why an individual chooses not to invest in their own abilities to become economically self-sufficient, cannot, so easily, be explained. In reality, however, efforts to link theories of why and why not continue to be of interest to researchers. For example, research showing why there is a relationship between women, poverty, and educational attainment continues to crystallize into present day as it seeks to investigate particular phenomena concerning females and their experiences with poverty.

Theories used to frame this study include Black Feminist Theory, Human Capital Theory and the Culture of Poverty Theory, notably three separate but related theories when applied to this study. However, Black Feminist Theory will serve as the guiding theory for this study.

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Black Feminist Theory

Black Feminist Theory emerged as a social theory during the early 1970s to address discrimination faced by marginalized black women due to their race and gender. Primary concerns of Black Feminist Theory are self-identity (deconstructing negative images of Black women), consciousness (recognizing race, class and gender as intersecting parts of oppression) and empowerment (providing a voice for the voiceless by incorporating the experiences of Black women). It is essential that Black women understand the advantage bestowed upon them, due to their experience of marginalization within society. This perspective given to Black women provide them the space to critique racism, sexism, and classism and thus legitimize Black women’s experiences. Patricia Hill Collins suggests that the experiences must be analyzed through intersectional paradigms such as race, class and gender to get an accurate depiction of the lived experiences. Centering on Black women’s experiences produces not only new knowledge but new ways of thinking about such knowledge. Therefore, intersectionality constitutes an interpretive framework that can be seen as one outcome of such centering.


Black Feminist Theory is premised on the belief that all humans have equal worth and equal intelligence. It recognizes that the personal and lived experiences of all individuals are manifestations of society's ideologies, in one way or another. From a theoretical perspective, it is understood that individual values, beliefs and opinions are shaped by the society that they live in and that individuals come to share many basic perceptions which form the way people think about issues. As suggested by Collins, often individuals evaluate the world according to various ideologies. These ideologies represent the systems of domination and subordination and are most often propagated through the media and/or public policy. Groups unequal in power, such as welfare recipients, are unequal in their access to the resources necessary to implement their desire to improve their position outside their particular group.46 Black Feminist Theory aims to analyze the position of women in society with the purpose of using the knowledge gained to better the lives of women. Moreover, suggests Collins, oppressed women, such as women receiving public assistance, are often positioned as outsiders-within. They should be treated as subjects that social systems are meant to serve; instead, they are treated as objects of programs developed by the system. In spite of their involvement in social programs, they will, more than likely, remain as outsiders and their experiences with or concerns about the programs are not acknowledged.47


Black Feminist Theory is rooted in black movements of the 1960s. Such movements focused on the liberation and development of black women, particularly their upward mobility in areas of education, wage earnings, equality, welfare rights, reproductive rights and other issues that affect the lives of black women. Bell Hooks discussion of Black Feminist Theory cast responsibility for upward intellectual mobility for African-American women on the need to include education as a primary goal of black feminist thought. She maintains that:

Women of color need to develop intellectually. While we need not be ashamed of not having certain educational skills, we need to assume responsibility for urging and helping one another combine organizational and practical skills with intellectual expertise. Our goals were and are to become economically self-sufficient and to find ways to assist other women in their efforts to better themselves economically. We need to examine why there are so few images of intellectual women who are non-white. Encouraging women to strive for education, to develop intellectually, should be a primary goal of any feminist movement.48

Welfare policies that disproportionately disadvantage African-American women’s ability to develop intellectually will likely affect their ability to become self-sufficient.  

*Human Capital Theory*

The theory that most effectively explains the role of postsecondary education in obtaining self sufficiency for welfare recipients is the Human Capital Theory as detailed by Theodore W. Schultz. Human capital is defined as the productive capacities -- knowledge, understanding, talents and skills -- possessed by an individuals or society; and investments in human capital refers to expenditures on education, health and other

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activities that augment these productive capacities. The inclusion of education in the Human Capital framework is largely based on the work of Theodore W. Schultz, commonly referred to as the father of the Human Capital Theory.

The theory suggests that in order for genetic potential to be developed into demonstrated ability and proper credentials, one must have access to relevant experiences, education, and/or training. One of the salient doctrines within the theory is that characteristics of individuals shape their economic development and their economic outcomes. Economist Gary Becker describes this as developing one’s “human capital,” a resource which can be exchanged for attractive wages in the marketplace. Similarly, V. Lapp Rawlins and Lloyd Ulman note:

the theoretical elaboration of the human capital doctrine views education as an investment and suggests that such investment is guided by wage differentials between individuals with different levels of education in society. The work in this field shows that the rate of return on an investment in higher education is at least as high as on investment in physical capital; and so, the popular political interest in the role of education as a vehicle for economic growth and as a key factor in international economic competition was given support through an academic doctrine that holds that education makes an important contribution to economic progress.

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50 Morris and Williamson, Poverty and Public Policy, 35.


Schultz argues that both knowledge and skills are a form of capital, and capital is a product of "deliberate investment."53 Seen from this perspective, the concept of human capital implies an investment in individuals and that education and training would open up opportunities and choices that otherwise would be unavailable to many individuals. To advance Schultz’s argument and that of Becker, Rawlins and Ulman, one could advocate that the differences in earnings between people correlate to the differences in access to education. For example, if an African-American welfare recipient seeks employment, she may experience barriers that arise from her lack of education, i.e., lack of human capital – which could, in turn, keep her in a constant state of poverty. Lack of education is a key predictor of poverty; in fact, there may not be another individual factor more closely linked to persistent poverty.54

Moreover, human capital as a theory, has been argued for and against in many studies that rely on educational approaches to increase economic potential. Substantial literature on poverty, education, and welfare policy emphasize the human capital theory. For instance, John Handler and Yeheskel Hasenfeld recognized that women with higher levels of education have fewer bouts in poverty, spend less time on welfare, earn more, and have better jobs than those without a high school diploma.55 Brauner and Loprest also reported that various levels of human capital such as work experience, basic skills,


and educational levels, act as a predictor of long-term employment and short-term spells of welfare stays and poverty.\textsuperscript{56}

The importance of human capital development has been brought out in many studies on economic and intellectual growth. Michael Paulsen and Howard Bowen have identified some of the private and public benefits of human capital development. Paulsen acknowledged the public (societal) benefits as adaptability, political awareness, social awareness, less criminal activity, lower public assistance expenditures, social returns, economic returns to the country, productivity, and greater citizenship.\textsuperscript{57} Bowen recognized the private (individual) benefits as personal development, life enrichment, development of knowledge and skills, monetary benefits, cognitive growth, emotional awareness, moral development and practical competence.\textsuperscript{58} The argument for human capital investment has been widely accepted in social science research, but few have associated its relevance to the welfare population.

\textit{Culture of Poverty Theory}

In addition to human capital theory, the culture of poverty theory on welfare participation has received considerable attention from social scientists over the past several decades. The culture of poverty theory gained its momentum in 1959 after anthropologist Oscar Lewis wrote the book, \textit{Five Families: Mexican Case Studies in the}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Brauner and Loprest, "Where Are They Now? What States’ Studies of People Who Left Welfare Tell Us".
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Culture of Poverty. The basic premise of the theory suggests that perhaps the poor live in a persistent state of poverty because their culture is different from the rest of society. It further suggests that the poor develop behaviors and self-defeating strategies which enable them to cope with feelings of marginalization, dependency, helplessness and inferiority.

These behaviors and self-defeating strategies, including dependence on government assistance and low educational attainment, supposedly prevent them from improving their own conditions. In essence, if this is to be believed, then it can be assumed that individuals who live in the culture of poverty are unprepared for college or the workforce. A further assumption would be that their instability along with their lack of education and skills would make them poor students, poor employees and lazy workers.

Behavioral perspectives, such as the aforementioned, often result in victim blaming. For this reason, the culture of poverty theory fell in to disuse in the 1970s and early 1980s because many scholars said it “blamed the victim” for his/her problems. Inherent in the culture of poverty thesis is the assumption that people might cease to be poor if they changed their culture.59

The goal of welfare reform was to encourage economic independence by eliminating behavioral problems and welfare reliance. A successful and permanent exit from welfare would require an ability to dissociate from or leave behind what is known

as the “culture of poverty.” The ideology posited by the culture of poverty theory, 
distracts non-welfare receivers from the possibility that poverty is not as much a cultural 
peculiarity but rather, a shortage of finances.

Theory Integration

Women on welfare live in a world where they are too often criticized for having 
too many children, lacking in education, being lazy and unmotivated, indifferent about 
finding employment, existing in a culture that is outside the norms of society, and 
exhibiting abnormal behaviors which may lead to health and other issues. Due to their 
position within society, they may find themselves unable to be productive and self-
sufficient citizens.

For African-American women on welfare, the challenge is compounded by race, 
gender and class. The recipients find themselves attempting to adhere to government 
imposed policies that they have no control over and dare not question for fear of losing 
their benefits. Consequently, the women are situated in the experience of being both 
outsiders and insiders within a system where keeping benefits provided by the 
government are crucial to their well-being. They are outsiders because they sit on the 
outside of a system as subordinates with others making rules and policies that they must 
follow if they want to continue receiving assistance; and if they as recipients break the 
rules, they will be cut off from the system. They are insiders because they are part of the 
system, whether they want to be or not.

When integrated, Black Feminist Theory, Human Capital Theory and Culture of 
Poverty Theory create a framework for understanding the many circumstances that affect
women while striving for economic self-sufficiency and intellectual development, particularly African-American women who are utilizing public assistance and postsecondary education to escape poverty.

Methodology

To explain qualitative research, Earl Babbie suggests that it is a method which seeks to understand why a certain phenomenon exists, thereby revealing a deeper understanding of the particular phenomenon. As well, qualitative research attempts to uncover common themes and emerging trends about a phenomenon. Ethnographies, explains Allen Rubin and Babbie, are normally used to study cultures within a society since the approach emphasizes participant observation. However, ethnographies also provide a detailed description of the way in which people in a particular culture or subculture live and their perception of the meaning of things.

The research methodology used in this qualitative study was a triangulation of semi-structured and in-depth interviews, along with a structured survey. Triangulation in this study refers to the use of the different methods of data sources to enhance the strength of the study. For greater ease with data organization “template analysis,” adapted from a model designed by Professor Nigel King, was the method used to analyze the data. Also, the analysis process utilized a critical ethnographic approach

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viewed from a black feminist perspective. The critical ethnographic approach was used so that the interview questions could possibly promote positive action from the recipients. More specifically, because this study focused on the overall well-being of African-American TANF recipients and their quest to obtain self-sufficiency via postsecondary education, a black feminist perspective was most appropriate for framing this study.

Research Questions

The following were the guiding research questions:

1. To what extent has the “work first” philosophy of the 1996 Welfare Reform Act impacted African-American TANF recipients’ access to postsecondary education in Jackson, Mississippi?

2. To what extent have Mississippi TANF recipients’ perceptions of the welfare culture, also known as the culture of poverty, influenced their choice to forego or pursue postsecondary education?

3. How do TANF recipients in Jackson, Mississippi perceive access to postsecondary education relative to their economic well-being?

Rationale

To learn specifics about a phenomenon, it would be wise to turn to those who have actually experienced the phenomenon and listen to their stories. For this reason, women who received TANF and attended postsecondary education institutions were solicited for this study since they are best qualified to help others understand the particulars of their circumstances.
Qualitative research, according to Babbie, is concerned with non-statistical methods of inquiry and analysis of social phenomena. It draws from a process in which themes emerge through data collection and data analysis using techniques such as interviews, observations, videotapes, taped recordings, and case studies. Qualitative research also has the advantages of flexibility, in-depth analysis, and the potential to observe a variety of aspects of a social situation. A qualitative researcher conducting a face-to-face interview can quickly adjust the interview schedule if the interviewee's responses suggest the need for additional probes.

Thus, by developing and using questions on the spot, a qualitative researcher can gain a more in-depth understanding of the respondent's beliefs, attitudes, or situation. During the course of an interview, the researcher can detect changes in body expression, mood and voice tone which might influence the interviewee's responses. Such observational data can be of particular value when the interviewee's body language runs counter to the verbal response given to an interview question. Additionally, qualitative research is used to gain insight into a person's attitude, their behavior, their value system, concerns, motivations, aspirations, culture and lifestyle. It is used to inform decisions, policy formation, communication and research. Focus groups, in-depth interviews, content analysis, ethnography, and evaluation are among the many formal approaches that are used. Moreover, argues Deborah Padgett "some topics are better suited for qualitative inquiry, especially when: 1) the researcher is exploring a topic about which

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63Babbie, The Practice of Social Research, 244-248.
little is known; 2) pursues a sensitive or emotional topic; or 3) want to capture the lived experiences from the perspective of those who live it and create meaning from it."64

Critical Ethnography Approach

Research involving social problems sometime requires the use of various methodologies and approaches. The approach, according to William Trochim, is a general way of thinking about conducting research. It describes the purpose of the research study and the method of data analysis.65 As such, an approach appropriate to the research concerns should be chosen. For this reason, this study will utilize a critical ethnographic approach to analyzing the collected data.

Critical ethnography is a relatively new mode of qualitative investigation. It is grounded in theories assuming that society is structured by class and status as well as by races, ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation to maintain the oppression of marginalized groups.66 As suggested by Soyini Madison, critical ethnography begins with an ethical responsibility to address processes of injustice within a particular lived domain. Critical ethnography ask questions about the historical forces shaping societal patterns as well as

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the fundamental issues and dilemmas of policy, power and dominance in institutions, including their role in reproducing inequalities such as those based on gender and race.67

Moreover, critical ethnography is not a theory but a perspective through which a qualitative researcher can frame questions and promote action. Its purpose is to free individuals from ideologies that are not to their benefit and not of their creation—an important concept in critical theory. Because critical ethnography is borne out of the theoretical underpinnings of critical theory, it is premised upon the assumption that cultural institutions can produce a false consciousness in which power and oppression become taken-for-granted ‘realities’ or ideologies.68 In that ethnographies are designed to produce descriptions and accounts of the experiences in the lives of a group of people with a focus on cultural characteristics, critical ethnography increases its borders from the examination of culture to action for change by challenging ideologies uncovered through the social research.

Research Design

The purpose of this study is to seek an understanding of how the 1996 Welfare Reform Act impacted TANF recipients in Jackson, Mississippi access to postsecondary education. In order to answer the aforementioned research questions, a qualitative research design method was deemed most appropriate. The main benefit of a qualitative

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research design, according to Michael D. Myers is the researcher can see and understand the context in which someone acts a certain way. In addition, maintains Myers, a qualitative research design is best if the researcher wants to understand motivation, reason, actions, and the context for participant beliefs and actions in an in-depth way.69

Research literature indicates that much of the policy discourse surrounding the 1996 Welfare Reform Act focused on economic, rather than educational issues. As a result, the work requirements of the Act functioned as a barrier to higher education for recipients of welfare in the United States. Therefore, to achieve the deepest understanding of the participants' awareness of the work requirements for the TANF program and other information pertaining to the welfare system, a polar survey was designed to obtain answers to a variety of questions relating to the subject.

Additionally, a series of in-depth, open-ended, semi-structured interview questions were designed for the purpose of understanding the personal encounters of recipients whose access to postsecondary education may or may not have been impacted by the educational policies within the 1996 Welfare Reform Act. See Appendix A and B for copies of the Survey and Interview Questionnaires. Several of the survey and interview questions were adapted from a 1996 dissertation by Margaret Montgomery entitled *Time: A Barrier to Postsecondary Education for AFDC Recipients*.

One of the goals of this study was to provide an opportunity for African-American TANF recipients from Jackson, Mississippi to share their lived experiences

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reflecting their points of view about the welfare system, work requirements, and their educational pursuits while in the TANF program. Thus, the in-depth open-ended interview questions were constructed within a black feminist context. Questions were designed so that participants would feel comfortable enough to be forthright with their answers.

Recruitment of Participants and Sample Size

After receiving IRB approval from Clark Atlanta University, the recruitment process began. Purposeful sampling was the method used to identify potential participants for this study. Purposeful sampling, according to Michael Patton, is popular in qualitative research and involves the selection of subjects based on a particular characteristic. Additionally, John Creswell suggests that purposeful sampling involves the selection of participants who can best answer the research questions. Participation in this study was voluntary and selection was based on the following criteria: (a) participants must be an African-American female; (b) participants must currently receive TANF assistance from the state of Mississippi; and (c) participants must be a high school graduate with either a high school diploma or a General Equivalency Diploma (GED).

To recruit a practical number of participants for the study, the researcher enlisted assistance from the Mississippi Department of Human Services (MDHS) and The Prosperity Center for Greater Jackson, a partner with MDHS. Specifically, the MDHS

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Bureau Director in charge of the program serving TANF recipients in the Jackson Metropolitan area was contacted and a meeting was arranged to discuss the purpose and significance of the study. During the meeting, the Bureau Director provided assistance on ways in which TANF recipients eligible to participate in the study could be recruited. The agreed upon approach for recruitment was that the researcher would visit the lobbies of county welfare offices to obtain approval from the recipients themselves to be interviewed. The Bureau Director emailed the supervisors of the county offices to inform them of the process in an effort to move the study forward (See Appendix C for a copy of the email sent from the Bureau Director).

When the recruitment for participants' process began at the Hinds County welfare office, it quickly became apparent to the researcher and the administration at the welfare office that the intended approach was not going to achieve the desired results. The potential recruits were very skeptical to provide information to the researcher. The administrative staff at the welfare office revealed that this could be due to a culture of suspicion from the welfare recipients. It was believed that the recipients would not trust anyone who walked up to them and started asking about their welfare benefits. They would not reveal the information for fear that their benefits would be cut-off or suspended. After lengthy discussions between the Director of the welfare agency and the researcher, it was agreed that the information necessary to conduct the study could be obtained from students who participated in the TANF job readiness program at the county office.
The sample size for this study was thirty-two (32). The thirty-two participants were all women who received TANF benefits at the time of the interviews and were between the ages of 18-37. The sample size was limited to thirty-two (32) because this was the number of participants who volunteered from the postsecondary education college program and the job readiness program who felt comfortable enough to participate in the study. Fifty percent (50%, N=16) of the sample population were chosen from women who were enrolled in the job readiness program at the Hinds County Welfare Office. These women were not attending college at the time of the interviews. The remaining fifty percent (50%, N=16) of the sample population were enrolled in the postsecondary education college program at the Prosperity Center for Greater Jackson and were attending college at the time of the interviews. A cohort of college attendees and non-college attendees were ideal for the study as their perspectives and experiences in and of the TANF program are similar but different.

The Sites

This study was conducted at the Hinds County Welfare office in Jackson, Mississippi and the Prosperity Center for Greater Jackson in downtown Jackson, Mississippi. The Prosperity Center for Greater Jackson is a one stop shop facility offering a variety of essential components needed to prepare individuals and families for growth and development. The Center is supported through partnerships with Midtown Partners, The United Way of the Capital Area, The Mississippi Department of Human Services (MDHS) and CredAbility. This particular site was chosen because of its affiliation with MDHS and because of the different service programs within the facility. MDHS refer all
TANF recipients who are eligible to participate in the postsecondary education program to the Prosperity Center for 30 – 40 hours per week for life skills training. For those TANF recipients who do not participate in the postsecondary education program and do not possess the desired skills to enter the workplace are referred by MDHS to the job readiness programs at the Prosperity Center or the Hinds County Welfare Office, depending on which part of town a recipient resides.

While in the job readiness program, recipients are taught job search skills; standards of behavior and appearance in the workplace; and study skills for the General Equivalency Diploma (GED). The recipients also have access to computers, fax machines, and telephones. All training is made available to the recipients in an effort to help them find and keep a job; as well as help them become and stay self-sufficient. The job readiness recipients are also required to train at the training center for 35 – 40 hours per week for 2 months in order to fulfill the welfare to work activity mandate set forth by the 1996 Welfare Reform Act. After the two months, recipients are given 10 days to find a job. If the recipient does not find a job within the 10 day period, caseworkers are allowed to sanction or close the recipient’s case.

Because the focus of this study was to examine the educational options of TANF recipients in Jackson to understand why they choose the work first approach to labor force attachment as opposed to participating in a postsecondary education program, the researcher determined that the Prosperity Center for Greater Jackson and the Hinds County Welfare Office would be the most appropriate sites to conduct the research. With more than 150 TANF recipients engaged in study skills, job readiness, and professional
development activities, these sites were able to provide the researcher with a cohort of subjects. The administrators from each site provided subjects who utilized the work first approach to finding a job as well as a cohort who participated in the TANF postsecondary education program.

Procedure for Collecting the Data

Data collection methods included semi-structured, in-depth, open-ended, critical ethnographic interviews and survey questions. The benefit of semi-structured interviews comes from the flexibility offered by this method in following up on new information and exploring key points using probing questions.72 Critical ethnographic interviews, according to Charles D. Hale, are usually purposeful, employing open-ended questions so that the subject’s reality and perception can be documented, understood and interpreted.73 Consequently, open-ended interview questions were used to encourage thoughtful expressions by the interviewees. An interview protocol, adapted in part from a 2008 Dissertation by Sheila Katz entitled Pursuing a 'Reformed' Dream: Caliworks Mothers in Higher Education After “Ending Welfare As We Know It, was developed and followed for each interview session (See Appendix D for a copy of the Interview Protocol).

With permission from site supervisors, the hour long in-depth interviews were conducted in a private, uninterrupted setting at each location. At the beginning of each interview, the researcher: (a) restated the purpose of the study; (b) thanked the subjects.

72Sharan B. Merriam, Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 1998), 73.

for their participation; and (c) explained the expectation of being open and straight forward during the interview. After that, each participant was asked to thoroughly read, sign, and return the consent form to the researcher (See Appendix E for a copy of the Consent Form).

The survey questionnaire was then given to the participant for completion. The survey contained general information pertaining to demographics, i.e., age; race; residence, etc., as well as general information about their participation in the TANF program (Refer to Appendix A for a copy of the Survey Questionnaire). Each participant chose a pseudonym and placed it at the top of the survey before completing and returning it to the researcher. With the consent form and survey questionnaire in hand, the researcher requested permission to audio tape the interviews for maximum accuracy of all responses. The interviewee was reassured that only the pseudonym would appear in any printed documents. Additionally, the interviewee was told that any information discussed during the interview was strictly confidential and would not be discussed or reported to anyone, especially their caseworker. After these statements, the interviewees appeared to be more relaxed and ready to begin the in-depth interview.

A limited amount of probe questions were necessary during the interviews as most of the interviewees were very forthcoming with their answers. At the conclusion of each interview, the interviewees were thanked for their time and asked if they had anything to add to the discussion. Most stated that they did not have anything further to discuss and that the interview was very thorough. Two participants did offer an additional
question to be asked of the remaining participants. The researcher took the questions into consideration and incorporated them into the remaining interviews.

Data Analysis

After the interviews were completed, the recording of each interview was transcribed verbatim and typed onto a template for analysis using Nigel King's template analysis method. Template analysis, explains King is a way of thematically analysing qualitative data. It involves transferring information onto various templates to: a) develop a coding system; and b) to group themes and patterns identified by the researcher as important in a data set.74 Each template is designed by the researcher according to his or her needs. The process of coding the information to interpret the data is a crucial part of conducting research. Coding is a procedure by which the data can be broken down into manageable categories. Codes are usually derived from research questions, hypotheses or key concepts.75

Data analysis began with the development of a template in Microsoft Word to facilitate the process for coding the demographic and general data from the surveys. Subsequently, a coding system was developed to classify the research questions, concepts from each research question and to identify themes and/or patterns within the data from the interview questions. A template was then designed with this in mind. It included a heading with columns listing the participant ID #; interview question that the participant

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75Babbie, The Practice of Social Research, 376.
was responding to; response to the question; the code for the corresponding research question, and a miscellaneous column.

After transferring all of the information onto the template, the researcher reviewed each participant’s response several additional times and then coded the responses based on concepts from the corresponding research question. So that all relevant data could be utilized, a miscellaneous column was established for responses with no code classification. Thereafter, the voluminous information was sorted and grouped according to the concepts. Finally, the researcher developed a unique color coding system to discover emergent and recurring themes from the meaningful information presented by the participants during the interviews. Color coding was applied which helped the researcher to easily identify consistency across the experiences of the participants. Findings from the analyzed data are presented in Chapter 4.

Ultimately, the research should have some measure of validity. One purpose of validity in qualitative research is to ensure the trustworthiness of the study. Without validity, confidence in the findings and/or results could possibly be called into question. R. Burke Johnson offers several strategies which can be used to decrease the concerns associated with validity and confidence in research studies. Among them is interpretive validity which, according to Johnson, refers to the accurate portrayal of the meaning attached by participants to what is being studied. More specifically, interpretive validity is obtained to the degree that the participants’ viewpoints, thoughts, intentions and

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experiences are accurately understood and reported by the qualitative researcher.\textsuperscript{77} To ensure greater validity of the data collection and analysis method, the researcher used this interpretive technique by presenting a transcribed version of each subject’s interview to them for review, verification and reaction. If there were no corrections or comments to the transcribed interview, the subjects were asked to initial the copy to validate the accuracy of the reported transcriptions.

“Peer debriefing,” also known as peer review, argues Yvonna Lincoln and Egon Guba, is a useful technique for establishing trustworthiness of a study. Lincoln and Guba describe peer debriefing as a process in which the researcher permits a disinterested peer who has a broad understanding of the subject under study to discuss and examine the data collected for the purpose of probing for meaning, bias and understanding of the research.\textsuperscript{78}

This study included peer debriefing as a technique for ensuring trustworthiness. A doctoral candidate who completed her field research in women’s studies acted as a peer reviewer who provided feedback on the data collected.

Limitations

The sample for this study involved thirty-two (32) African-American women whose ages ranged from 18 to 37 and participated in the TANF program in Jackson, Mississippi during the years 2009-2011. The study’s limitations are:

\textsuperscript{77}Ibid.

• The small sample size of thirty-two (32) participants precludes generalization as is the case with other similar qualitative studies. Further, generalization is precluded due to the political and sensitive dimensions of the topic. Although the sample size is small, it serves as a foundation for more detailed studies on this topic.

• Because each participant’s interpretation of the interview questions may have been different, the responses may be unlike the expected or predicted responses based on the literature. Consequently, this could pose a threat to validity and therefore its results should not be generalized to other states or other site locations for the Department of Human Services in Mississippi.

• Welfare Reform is a broad and sensitive subject. It converges on the most vulnerable of societal issues, i.e., work, family, personal responsibility and integrity. All of these issues are part of the welfare debate; however, this study is limited to the segment of Welfare Reform that addresses TANF recipients’ access to postsecondary education.

Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 sets the foundation for the study with the introduction, statement of the problem, significance of the study, theoretical framework, research questions, methodology, definition of terms, and limitations of the study.

Chapter 2 provides a review of significant literature that relate to the 1996 Welfare Reform Act. The theoretical frameworks for this study are used in this Chapter as matrixes to draw attention to pertinent literature focused on the welfare recipients’ access to postsecondary education.
Chapter 3 places the state of Mississippi’s early welfare and educational practices into historical context. The Chapter traces the social history of these practices during the Jim Crow era up to the present. Chapter 3 also establishes a framework for understanding Mississippi’s welfare culture as well as its approach to dealing with the poorer, less fortunate citizens of the state. Lastly, the Chapter attempts to explain why Mississippi’s current welfare recipients may face challenges in their pursuit of postsecondary education.

Chapter 4 presents Findings from the analyzed data. The participants who contributed to the study are also introduced in this Chapter.

Chapter 5 is the final chapter of the dissertation. It presents a conclusion and recommendations based on the findings.

Definition of Terms

So that all readers are assured the meaning and relevance of the terms and phrases used throughout this study, the following words and phrases are defined:

Aid to Families with Dependent Children – Cash and/or medical support paid from government funds to a parent or other approved guardian on behalf of children who do not have the financial support of one of the parent’s due to death, disability, or absence from the home. AFDC, the nation’s welfare program, was replaced under the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA) by the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant program.

Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA) – Legislation which overhauled the nation’s welfare system requiring work
in exchange for time limited assistance. The law contains strong work requirements, a performance bonus to reward states for moving welfare recipients into jobs, comprehensive child support enforcement, and supports for families moving from welfare to work including increased funding for child care and guaranteed medical coverage.

Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) – Time limited assistance payments to lower income families. The program provides parents with job preparation, work and support services to help them become self-sufficient. TANF replaced Aid to Families with Dependent Children.

Self-Sufficiency – Economic condition set by the state indicating levels of support sufficient to maintain a minimal level of subsistence for an individual or family.

State Plan – Formalized plan developed by each State in conjunction with the Office of Child Support Enforcement. The State Plan includes procedures for implementing State policy and the allocation of necessary resources.

Underclass – Those who have no stable relationship to the labor market; those individuals who stand outside of the normative structure of society; those who have only a marginal relationship to the labor market and who suffer extreme poverty.

Welfare – Public assistance program that provides at least a minimum amount of economic security to people whose incomes are insufficient to maintain an adequate standard of living.

Welfare Culture – Frame of mind, attitudes, self perceptions, lifestyles and behaviors that people develop while on public assistance. The behaviors could include
such things as dependence, having children just to increase the monthly allowance, never looking for employment and having no desire to develop their own human capital or self worth.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Let me make sure I understand you correctly, I inquired of the welfare caseworker as I presented her with my pregnancy confirmation note from a doctor. All I have to do for you to send me $465 per month, $176 worth of food stamps, and 100 percent free medical and dental assistance is keep this baby. As long as I don’t have a bank account, find a job, or get married I qualify for aid? Where do I sign up?

--Welfare Recipient, 2003

The American social welfare systems, like other social institutions, were created to address specific needs for specific problems. The need, in the case of the American welfare institution, was poverty and the social problems that often accompany being poor. Recent years have seen an increase in the extent and significance of social legislation, possibly a reflection of the downward spiral in the economy or the changed attitudes of the American people toward government and its responsibility to the less fortunate. This growth is noteworthy to say the least; however, social legislation that encourages postsecondary education as a route out of poverty for poor mothers on welfare has not experienced this increase. The role of education in promoting economic security for mothers on welfare has experienced a dramatic change since the passage of the welfare reform act in 1996. Consequently, this Chapter on Literature Review is intended to provide an overview of welfare reform with a focus on recipients’ access to

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1Star Parker, *Uncle Sam’s Plantation* (Nashville: WND Books, 2003), 77.

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postsecondary education. The literature for this study will support the theoretical frameworks which guided this study. In particular, this review will focus on three areas: 1) the “work first” and “human capital” approaches to welfare reform under the 1996 welfare reform act; 2) unequal access to postsecondary education by welfare recipients and the culture of poverty theory; and 3) perceptions of the nature of welfare reform viewed from a black feminist perspective.

Human Capital Approach vs. the Work First Approach

The Human Capital Approach

The human capital theory suggests that an investment in human capital (i.e., education) can raise future earnings in the workplace. Education, according to the human capital theory, is associated with an individual’s economic well-being in several ways. First, as a capital good, education can be used to develop the human resources necessary for economic and social transformation. The focus on education as a capital good relates to the concept of human capital, which emphasizes that the development of skills is an important factor in production activities. Second, it is widely accepted that education creates improved citizens and helps to upgrade the general standard of living in a society. Therefore, positive social change is likely to be associated with the production of qualitative citizenry. Third, higher levels of education are usually associated with higher earnings and higher occupational status.² Empirical studies consistently indicate that

education, specifically postsecondary education, positively affects the economic well-being of individuals in our society.

Theodore Schultz’ article “Investment in Human Capital” provides insight into the interactions between human capital and the benefits of knowledge and skills. He, as well as other human capital theorists, argues that both knowledge and skill are a form of capital, and capital is a product of deliberate investment. Schultz maintains that the concept of human capital implies an investment in people and that the investment in people via higher education, open up opportunities and choices that otherwise would be unavailable to many individuals. The educational concept of human capital, as suggested by Schultz, is an investment in man and the consequences of which are a form of capital. He refers to it as human capital since it becomes an integral part of a person.

During the early 1960’s, Schultz’ pursuit into the further development of the human capital theory increased when other economists became interested in the role of education and its benefits to individuals and societies. Even though Shultz and other economist were convinced that education potentially brought about better opportunities for individuals in society, their specific concerns were centered on who should bear the cost for such education and training. Prior to Schultz’s interest in the Human Capital theory, Keynesian economist had suggested that education was consumable and, if education could enhance an individual, then that individual should bear the costs.

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Additionally, Gary Becker’s article “Investment in Human Capital: A Theoretical Analysis” hypothesizes that there is a relationship between education and an investment in human capital. His hypothesis asserts that it is possible to measure the profitability of human capital investment through a rate of return. He proposed a theory of human investment that calculated the relationship between levels of education, income and economic growth.\(^5\)

Studies on welfare patterns clearly indicate that recipients with greater investments in human capital work their way off welfare faster than their counterparts. The low levels of human capital experienced by welfare recipients make it difficult for them to find a job that would raise the family’s income over the poverty level. Moreover, it has been found that higher education increase the chances of obtaining a job with higher earnings, thereby raising recipients’ above welfare eligibility levels and improving their chances for upward mobility and self-sufficiency.

To further illustrate this point, Rebecca London completed a study on the role of postsecondary education as a path to self-sufficiency in which she gathered information from 20 years of panel data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth. During the years of the study, she concentrated on the extent to which both college attendance and graduation were associated with improved outcomes in employment, welfare recidivism and poverty in one and five year follow-up periods. Her findings concluded that college attendance was most associated with improved employment outcomes, but graduation

had an even greater effect on family poverty and return to assistance up to five years post-welfare. Thus, according to London and other economists, an investment in human capital can have far reaching effects on welfare recidivism rates as well as an improved economic status.

The 1960s was a time when women were entering the workforce in significant numbers. What is more, the welfare system had grown to the point where government leaders and policymakers began to make suggestions that the cash assistance component of the welfare programs should shift its emphasis to integrating its recipients into the workforce. The suggestion, however, raised questions regarding how to best do this.

Discussions about the subject centered on programs and approaches seeking to increase welfare recipients' self-sufficiency. The two approaches emphasized were work first and human capital. The work first approach focused on quick employment reflecting the belief that recipients can best build their employability, and eventually achieve self-sufficiency, through actual work, even if the job is minimum wage and without health benefits. This labor attachment model promoted job search through some sort of work first program that pushed recipients into any job that was available. This approach promoted immediate reconnection to the workforce with a particular philosophy within it.

The human capital approach focused on skill-building, reflecting the view that this would enable recipients to eventually obtain higher-wage, longer lasting jobs with

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health insurance coverage. The human capital view also stressed broad education and training to prepare recipients for work. Proponents of this view stressed the need for basic education and literacy training as well as postsecondary education in order for recipients to get and keep better jobs with better outcomes. This model consisted of extended programs designed to raise the basic skill levels of recipients and even prepare them for college level work.7

Constructing the Work First Approach

Cash assistance programs for welfare recipients in the United States existed in various forms from 1935 to 1996, i.e., Aid to Dependent Children (ADC), Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). Prior to TANF, eligibility for cash benefits was determined by whether a family met the state's standard of need and included a dependent child under 18 years of age. The standard of need was the maximum amount of income allowed for a family to be considered "needy."8 Under ADC and AFDC, no work or training requirements were mandatory for recipients. However, work requirements have been associated with welfare from its inception in the Western world, even though these requirements were not mandatory.9

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Ellen Reese, author of *Backlash Against Welfare Mothers: Past and Present* provides an overview of how work became the central theme of the Welfare Reform Act of 1996. In her overview, Reese explains that the idea of work for welfare recipients became a primary concern during the Mothers' Aid era. Welfare programs were then based on the widely held maternalist belief that children received the best care from full time mothers. Maternalist reformers, mainly upper- and middle-class white women hoped that these programs would ensure that poor mothers could stay at home with their children, and portrayed aid as compensation for the work of raising good children. However, these programs were extremely limited in their reach and generosity before the late 1930s. Recipients were forced to work because of inadequate benefits, and because mothers' pensions were so poorly funded that many recipients had to continue to work to survive.  

A similar position was put forth by Brian Steensland when he reported that the nature of the American welfare system since the early 1800s has categorized the poor based on social expectations that they work. Although cash assistance programs were considered to be for the "deserving poor" during that 1800s, their benefit levels were from meager to generous because program administration was left to local authorities. The idea of work for recipients of public assistance has always been associated with the U.S. welfare system. However, one of the missing ingredients under welfare reform was

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that it stressed work but did not include language within its policies that mandated its recipients to pursue higher education which could serve as a crucial determinant of future employment and future earnings.

**Work First Philosophy in the Context of Welfare Reform**

The one theme that is stressed more than anything else to welfare recipients is the "work first" philosophy that lies at the heart of the welfare reform act of 1996. Even though this is not a new idea, the basic concept behind this philosophy is simple – any job is better than no job and work should be every welfare recipient's highest priority.¹² Since reforming the U.S. welfare system, enormous pressure has been placed on recipients to seek, accept, and maintain a job. According to Reese, in some states, welfare recipients are required to accept the first job, minimum wage or higher, that is offered to them, or they risk losing their benefits to harsh sanctions.¹³ Thus, in the modern day welfare system, work - any work, takes precedence on the priority list.

There are numerous and grave problems in the work first approach noted several social research authors. The work first philosophy is intrinsically predicated on the idea that poverty is a result of personal failure and individual flaws, particularly, the lack of a proper work ethic.¹⁴ Sar Levitan, Frank Gallo and Issac Shapiro put forth the ideology that the working poor in America are a glaring contradiction. The coinciding of work and

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¹² Holcomb, “Building An Employment Focused Welfare System: Work First and Other Work-Oriented Strategies in Five States”.

¹³ Reese, 167.

poverty is contrary to the American tradition which assumes that a willingness to work leads to material advancement, and it contradicts the prevailing view that the cause of poverty among adults capable of work is deviant behavior, particularly a lack of commitment to work. In other words, the dominant cultural message about poverty is that it is a result of a lack of commitment to work. Yet, the working poor do work and continue to struggle with poverty.\textsuperscript{15}

David Ellenwood feels that work, which is the centerpiece of American identity, does not always lead to material advancement. In many cases, he says, it does not even lead to material stability.\textsuperscript{16} Moreover, Ellenwood argues that many people believe that poverty is a condition that results from individual, personal and moral failures. He believes that this is simply not true as poverty is in fact an institutional problem, not an individual problem and it serves many subtle functions in the national economy. For example, poverty keeps people desperate for jobs. In this way, they will accept terrible working conditions and negligible wages that financially secure workers would pass over. This benefit the corporate world in a profound way by providing a class of low-skill underpaid workers who do not dare to push for benefits, pensions, or higher wages for fear of losing meager jobs they do have.\textsuperscript{17} As a result corporations maintain a perpetual class of uneducated people for whom basic survival is the most important day-to-day

\textsuperscript{15} Levitan, Gallo, Shapiro, \textit{Working But Poor: America's Contradiction}, 32.


\textsuperscript{17} Ibid, 210-214.
objective. In some way, this silences the voices of the people whose interest directly conflict with those of wealth.

Additionally, Warren Copeland’s review of the history of poverty as a public issue in the United States included a chapter devoted to Daniel Patrick Moynihan. The chapter discusses the “Moynihan Report,” a famous white paper that Daniel Moynihan presented to President Lyndon Johnson on the black family. The report attributed the black family’s instability to generations of discrimination and puts the blame of poverty on the victim.18 Many critics of the report stated that Moynihan blamed the victim and placed the burden of change on the victim and removed it from society. Moreover, the report carried an underlying assumption that poverty has nothing to do with social injustice, but there is a culture of the poor that perpetuates poverty.19 Looking at this assumption from a “culture of poverty perspective,” an individual might assume that until the poor changes its “culture,” no amount of government intervention or welfare programs will solve the problems in the welfare community.

A key objective of welfare reform is for recipients to establish stable, long-term work habits under the assumption that regular involvement in work would eventually improve their well-being. However, the clear-cut solution to this assumption would be to demand or force welfare recipients into whatever job can be found, regardless of whether the job pays enough to permit self-sufficiency. During a study of the Wisconsin work first program, Mark Courtney found that there are many obstacles that go largely


19 Ibid, 163-178.
unnoticed by the work first philosophy, i.e., the associated hidden costs of working. For example, welfare recipients need trustworthy child care, reliable transportation, suitable work clothing and personal grooming supplies, cost of certifications or licenses, vital document costs and identification fees- all of these factors place a serious burden on welfare recipients who are seeking employment. Other, more obvious obstacles, reported Courtney are just as frustrating. More than four of five parents stated that potential barriers to employment was a disability, a disable family member; poor and fair health; no high school diploma or general equivalency diploma, a mental health problem, an alcohol or drug problem; involvement in a physically abusive relationship. These obstacles to employment are given little to no consideration within the scope of the work first ideological camp, but are a serious dilemma for people who are facing harsh work requirements in order to qualify for public assistance. A simplistic, work first welfare policy that does seriously and comprehensively consider the complex barriers to employment to exist within the community of the poor is poorly constructed at best, and deliberately neglectful at worst.  

While examining the impact of the 1996 Welfare Reform Act on the college enrollment of welfare recipients who completed high school, Kenya Cox and William Spriggs makes clear that possibly the most serious problem with the work first philosophy is that it places little to no value on the pursuance of higher education. Education, after all, is one of the most successful ways to raise oneself out of poverty, but

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the work first philosophy of welfare reform makes higher education extremely difficult, if not totally impossible. In order to meet the requirements and rules that must be adhered to in order to receive desperately needed financial assistance, welfare recipients are often forced to drop out of college (or forego it completely) for the sake of accepting the menial, low wage jobs that are the hallmark of “work first.”

In an essay on welfare mothers and higher education, author Vivian Adair writes

> Unlike previous provisions in AFDC and JOBS education training program in existence when I first went to college, TANF restrictions from 1996 do not allow higher education to be counted as work, and required a larger proportion of welfare recipients to engage in full-time recognized work activities. This work first philosophy emphasized rapid entry into the labor force and penalized states for allowing long-term access to either education or training.

AFDC, the old welfare system, guaranteed at least a basic minimal standard of living for all citizens who met income guidelines. However, under the reformed welfare system, TANF, no one is guaranteed aid. States are no longer required to help all eligible needy families.

**Beginnings of Work First and Welfare Reform in Mississippi**

In 1992, Mississippi elected Kirk Fordice, its first republican Governor since 1874. Among the most important factors contributing to the Fordice victory was his promise to reform welfare in the state of Mississippi. A steadfast conservative, Fordice

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began promoting welfare reform legislation immediately after his election. Welfare reform in Mississippi is the story of political and administrative expediency against a background of race, political culture, party politics, conservative political values and conflict over the role of the state in welfare programs. Mississippi was in the first echelon of states to reject the Great Society conception of public assistance and one of the first to seek alternative policy instruments and administrative arrangements to provide welfare services. For example, when the Clinton Administration began to grant federal waivers to states that would allow them to experiment with welfare reform in their own states, the Mississippi Department of Human Services, along with federal officials in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services developed and submitted a package of waivers for approval in 1993.

Upon approval in 1995, Mississippi became one of three states chosen as a model to provide for the enactment of the 1996 welfare reform act. The other two model states were Wisconsin and Oregon. These three states developed early welfare reform initiatives within their state, which Congress echoed nearly completely in the later federal law. The fact that these states were under the administration of a Republican governor added to the conservative nature of the program. In mid-1995, the federal waivers

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24 Ibid, 43-44.

empowered the Mississippi Department of Human Services to implement two pilot programs, Work First and Work Encouragement.

Thus, when Governor Fordice unveiled the work first welfare reform program at a press conference in Gulfport, Mississippi in the summer of 1995, it was no surprise when he publicized the program to be a means of getting welfare recipients off government roles and onto an employer’s private payroll. Fordice reported that he didn’t want the program to create public make-work jobs or be a flash-in-the-pan attempt at welfare reform. Hopefully, he said, “we will be able to help employers and we will certainly be able to help the welfare recipients. Work first participants will be placed in real jobs and not some pie-in-the-sky training program that may or may not reflect the job market for the area.”

In addition, said Fordice, you’re going to see varying skill levels, we’ve got some people on employment that have a high number of skills, but more common, of course, are people that have little or no skills. I don’t mean to depreciate anybody but I think what’s going to be most important to you is that we can provide the training that says ‘this round thing is an alarm clock. When it rings you must get out of bed, put your feet on the floor, get dressed and go down to work. And the bad news is you’ve got to do it every day, day after day, just like other folks have been doing. I think that’s the basic training that’s going to be mainly required and we’ll try to handle that on our end and make the transition just as smooth as we can. With the blessing of the federal government, Mississippi has eliminated a lot of those excuses for not working but continuing to receive the benefits. Now we are saying ‘if you want that same benefit you are going to have to work for it if you are physically capable of working. It’s as simple as that.


27 Ibid.
Overall, Fordice was very enthusiastic about work first initiatives in the State of Mississippi. However, according to Bill Minor, syndicated columnist for the Daily Mississippian, implementation was riddled with problems. Minor maintains that "some critics of the work first initiative believed that legislative leaders were trying to move too quickly to implement the plan and that the proposed legislation was based too much on the theory that welfare mothers only needed a 'kick in the pants' to go out and find a job. The one thing that everybody knows, he contends, is that in this state welfare mothers are woefully lacking in education which will prohibit them from getting a good job."28

Unequal Access to Education for Welfare Recipients

Among the many controversial changes that PRWORA made to the U.S. welfare system to end dependence of low income women on public assistance, the "work first" requirement has been the most highly emphasized. Welfare recipients became required to work in order to receive benefits. Thus, the work requirements drastically reduced the opportunities for welfare recipients to pursue, or continue, postsecondary education.29 In other words, under the PRWORA, states were given extensive latitude in designing programs for recipients, including allowing them to decide which activities would satisfy the work requirements. The decision to include postsecondary education as an activity to satisfy work requirements was left up to the state. However, in order to qualify for the


full TANF block grant with no financial penalties, states were required to show that 25% of recipients receiving welfare worked in 1997 and 35% in 1999. These percentages gradually rose to 50% by 2002 (see Table 1.1 on page 8 of this study).

Moreover, beginning in the year 2002, recipients were required to work at least 30 hours per week to be counted as an individual engaged in work activities. Indeed, the legislation did not completely restrict access to postsecondary education, but it limited participation to one year or less. A number of regulations that discouraged states from enrolling recipients in college, particularly in degree granting programs, were included in the legislation, namely: 1) legislation that encouraged a work first approach to moving recipients off the welfare rolls. In many instances, recipients could only receive vocational training after they were unable to find employment within a specified period of time; 2) states could only include 30% of the total number of persons being moved from welfare to work to receive the one year or less of vocational training or postsecondary education; 3) the 30% cap included those persons seeking to complete high school or obtain a GED, thereby further limiting the number of those seeking to enroll in higher education; and 4) recipients enrolled in postsecondary education for longer than twelve months were excluded from the state's calculation of its work participate rate. When put together, these requisites can greatly reduce welfare recipients' access to meaningful postsecondary education.³⁰

Although PRWORA was drafted to reduce dependency, among other things, on government assistance by welfare recipients, Maria Ruiz asserts the following

³⁰ Ibid, 126.
the PRWORA was designed to drastically limit the number of recipients who can participate in higher education. The American Psychological Association Task Force on Women indicates that approximately three quarters of a million students are currently on welfare. The PRWORA create a precarious situation for those students who need an income. These individuals must now get a job, but taking a job may force them to leave school. The writing on the wall is clear, and it is estimated that colleges will lose up to 60% of welfare students as states are mandated to put larger proportions of their caseloads to work.31

Likewise, The Center for Women Policy Studies’ report entitled “From Poverty to Self-Sufficiency: The Role of Postsecondary Education in Welfare Reform” describes how college enrollment has declined for welfare recipients in several states since the passing of the PRWORA. The report maintains that since the enactment of the TANF programs in 1996, welfare recipients’ college participation rates have plummeted. Examples given were: a decline in enrollment of welfare recipients’ in New York dropped by 77% - from 22,000 in 1996 to 5,000 in 2000; Massachusetts reported an average decrease in enrollment of welfare recipients of 46%; and Michigan reported declines in recipients enrollment from 50 to 60%.32 This example is a case in point as other studies provided similar information on the decline of welfare recipients’ college enrollment after the welfare reform act was enacted.

In an effort to determine how beliefs, values and causal theories play in welfare and education policy making, Christopher Mazzeo, et al. examined policies pertaining to postsecondary education in three states - Massachusetts, Illinois, and Washington.


Mazzeo et al. were particularly interested in the sources and consequences of state variations and how the variations affected the type and amount of education and training available to welfare recipients. They concluded that discretion afforded by federal welfare reform policies led to significant differences in access across the states. They also found that different and competing ideas about welfare, work and the role of education in the lives of welfare recipients help structure and shape political debates, and ultimately policy outcomes, in each of the states. Ideas influenced welfare reform policies in all of the states through state human service agencies and the persistence of work first ideas within implementation processes. For example, Mazzeo et al. determined that liberal legislation, when implemented by caseworkers who were instructed to follow a work first ideology or who believed in it themselves, was no longer liberal in practice. In fact, it became clear that the actions of caseworkers and case managers followed the tone set by the department in which they worked. In some cases, the caseworkers were instructed to follow a work first ideology for all recipients. In other cases, education was rarely offered to recipients by caseworkers since the department of human services for the state instructed them to focus on work first. Their examination found that access to postsecondary education by recipients were challenged by implementation problems, particularly at the level of frontline caseworkers and other street level bureaucrats, who interpret and make policies real for recipients on a daily basis.

The beliefs and attitudes of caseworkers and other frontline employees about work and education consistently reinforced the work first message coming from the
welfare bureaucracy. Without a doubt, this, and other research, confirms that many frontline workers, human service agencies employees and policymakers really believe that work should be the primary precondition to receiving public assistance. Consequently, emphasizing postsecondary education as a means to long-term employment stability and economic self-sufficiency has been marginalized in welfare legislation and has not been a very serious consideration among federal and state policymakers.

A common theme in welfare policy and legislation is dependency. The dependency arguments have typically focused on individualism versus structural methods as explanations for welfare dependency. Consequently, supporters of individualism suggest that individuals are primarily responsible for their own economic well-being and that the same opportunities are available to everyone who is willing to work hard and who have motivation and initiative. Since the same opportunities exist to obtain skills, character, and other qualities needed for upward mobility, then those who fail to make it have only themselves to blame. Proponents of structuralism focus on economic and social imbalances within our social structure that serve to restrict opportunities for some people. Some suggest that poverty is an inherent feature of capitalism. Others point to the structural features of the economy such as growth in the low paying service sector and the lack of educational and employment opportunities. However, according to Donald Norris and Lyke Thompson, the determination of welfare dependency is not

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influenced by only one fact, but rather, is the result of a continuous interactive process between the individual and their social environment.\textsuperscript{34}

Yet another particularly rough version of the welfare dependency argument was offered by Daniel Patrick Moynihan. His argument centered on his belief that a “culture of poverty” (discussed below) existed among the poor. Although the term “culture of poverty” had been coined by Oscar Lewis, it was Moynihan’s startling 1965 report about the urban black family being caught in an inescapable “tangle of pathology” of unmarried mothers and welfare dependency that was seen as moral inadequacies of black people.\textsuperscript{35}

The content of his report placed the blame squarely upon the poor for their own misfortunes.

\textit{Culture of Poverty Literature}

The “culture of poverty” theory developed by anthropologist Oscar Lewis is the trademark of traditional poverty studies. Although Lewis’ culture of poverty thesis was developed from the study of five families in Mexico, others have, over the years, taken its descriptive concepts to accommodate a wide variety of components, including dependency, the underclass, welfare recipients, African Americans, lack of education, teen parenting and so forth. For example, using some of the precepts from Lewis’ culture of poverty thesis, some authors, writers, etc. may utilize the phrase “the culture of dependency” to describe how dependency, used in a welfare context, becomes a way of


life for welfare recipients; while other authors may write about the culture of the underclass to explain how the characteristics of the underclass, etc.

The contents of an article written by Lewis and entitled "The Culture of Poverty," will be the principal script used for this section of the literature review. The "culture of poverty" concept was introduced by Lewis in 1959 in his book *Five Families: Mexican Case Studies in the Culture of Poverty*. The book describes the attitudes and behaviors of migrants attempting to adapt to city living in an economy that rendered their labor redundant. He develops perceptions of the poor and concluded that they are active participants who create a subculture as a means of coping with their marginal position in a class stratified, highly individualistic, capitalist society. The book details the way of life developed by rural Mexicans who migrated to Mexico City and Puerto Ricans who moved from the island to the mainland. Lewis conducts intensive research into extended families, looking for patterns of behavior across generations. This research led him to conclude that the behaviors that comprise "the culture of poverty" are indoctrinated in children by the age of six or seven. Moreover, once socialized into the poverty cycle, the poor are not equipped to take full advantage of changing conditions or increased opportunities which may occur in their lifetime.36 Lewis' development of the culture of poverty theory primarily established today’s foundation for liberal and conservative analyses of the *urban underclass*.

In what follows will be a written discussion about the article "The Culture of Poverty" written by Oscar Lewis. The article begins with a dialogue on the nature of the

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poor. Lewis contends that some characterize the poor as blessed, virtuous, upright, serene, independent, honest, kind and happy. Others see them as evil, mean, violent, sordid and criminal. Moreover, some stress the great potential of the poor for self-help leadership while others point to the irreversible destructive effect of poverty upon individual character, and therefore emphasize the need for guidance and control to remain in the hands of the middle class. The two opposing views, says Lewis, is reflective of a political power struggle between competing groups. However, the confusion results from the failure of these groups to distinguish between poverty per se and the culture of poverty and from the tendency to focus upon the individual rather than upon the group, that is - the family and the poverty community. Lewis suggests that poverty is a common adaptation to a common problem. He understands its associated traits as a culture, or more accurately as a subculture with its own structure and rationale which is passed down from generation to generation.

The culture of poverty can come into being in a variety of historical contexts. It tends to grow and flourish in societies with: 1) a cash economy, wage labor and production for profit; 2) a persistently high rate of unemployment and underemployment for unskilled labor; 3) low wages; 4) the failure to provide social, political and economic organization; 5) the existence of a bilateral kinship system rather than a unilateral one; and 6) the existence of a set of values in the dominant class which stresses the accumulation of wealth and property, the possibility of upward mobility, and thrift, and explains low economic status as the result of personal inadequacy and inferiority. The way of life which develops among some of the poor under these conditions is the culture
of poverty. The culture of poverty is both an adaptation and a reaction of the poor to their marginal position in a class-stratified, highly individuated, capitalistic society. It represents an effort to cope with feelings of hopelessness and despair which develop from the realization of the improbability of achieving success in terms of the values and goals of the larger society.

Many of the traits of the culture of poverty can be viewed as attempts at local solutions for problems not met by existing institutions and agencies because the people are not eligible for them, cannot afford them, or are ignorant or suspicious of them. Lewis’ example of this would be the poor’s inability to obtain credit from a bank. In this instance, the poor are thrown upon their own resources to organize informal credit devices without interest. The most likely candidates for the culture of poverty are the people who come from the lower strata of society and are already partially alienated from it, i.e., the welfare population. According to Lewis, the culture of poverty is studied from various points of view. First, it can be studied from the relationship between the subculture and the larger society; secondly, from the nature of the slum community; thirdly, from the nature of the family; and finally, the attitudes, values and character structure of the individual.

Relationship Between Subculture and the Larger Society

The lack of effective participation and integration of the poor in the major institutions of the larger society is one of the crucial characteristics of the culture of poverty. This is a complex matter and results from a variety of factors which may include lack of economic resources, segregation and discrimination, fear, suspicion, or
apathy, and the development of local solutions for problems. However, participation in some of the institutions of the larger society – for example, in the jails, the army and the public assistance system – does not per se eliminate the traits of the culture of poverty.

In the case of a public assistance system which barely keeps people alive, both the basic poverty and the sense of hopelessness are perpetuated rather than eliminated. Low wages, chronic unemployment, and underemployment lead to low income, lack of property ownership, absence of savings, absence of food reserves in the home, and a chronic shortage of cash. These conditions reduce the possibility of effective participation in the larger economic system. As a response to these conditions, it is found in the culture of poverty a high incidence of pawning of personal goods, borrowing from local money lenders at outrageous rates of interest, spontaneous informal credit devices organized by neighbors, the use of second-hand clothing and furniture, and the pattern of frequent buying of small quantities of food many times a day as the need arises. People within a culture of poverty produce very little wealth and receive little in return. They have a low level of literacy and education, do not belong to labor unions, are not members of political parties, generally do not participate in the national welfare agencies, and make very little use of banks, hospitals, department stores, museums, or art galleries. They have a critical attitude toward some of the basic institutions of the dominant class, hatred of police, mistrust of government and those in high positions, and a cynicism which extends even to the church.

The preceding characteristics gives the culture of poverty a high protest for being used in political movements aimed against the existing social order. People within a
culture of poverty are aware of middle class values, talk about them and even claim some of them as their own; but on the whole, they do not live by them. Thus it is important to distinguish between what they say and what they do.

The Slum Community

The culture of poverty on the community level can be described as poor housing conditions and crowding, but above all, a minimum of organization beyond the level of the immediate and extended family. Indeed it is the low level of organization which gives the culture of poverty its marginal and useless quality in a highly specialized, organized society. For example, the lack of organized protest to certain elements that are happening within the community can be seen as not having organization.

The Family

The major traits of the culture of poverty within poor families are the absence of childhood as a protected stage in the life cycle, early initiation into sex, common law marriages, high incidences of wife and children abandonment, a trend toward female or mother centered families, greater knowledge of maternal relatives, lack of privacy, sibling rivalry, and competition for limited goods and maternal affection.

The Individual

The major characteristics of the culture of poverty on the individual level are a strong feeling of marginality, of helplessness, of dependence, of inferiority, high incidence of maternal deprivation, weak ego structure, confusion of sexual identification, a lack of impulse control, a strong present time orientation with relatively little ability to defer gratification and to plan for the future, a sense of resignation and fatalism, a
widespread belief in male superiority, suffer from racial discrimination and have a high
tolerance for psychological pathologies. People in a culture of poverty have very little
sense of history. They know only their own troubles, their own local conditions, their
own neighborhood, and their own way of life. Usually they do not have the knowledge,
the vision, or the ideology to see the similarities between their problems and those of
their counterparts elsewhere in the world. They are not class conscious although they are
very sensitive indeed to status distinctions.

Finally, says Lewis, when the poor become class conscious or active members of
trade union organizations, or when they adopt an internationalist outlook on the world,
they are no longer part of the culture of poverty although they may still be desperately
poor. Any movement, be it religious or rebellious, which organizes and gives hope to the
poor and which effectively promotes unity and a sense of identification with larger
groups, destroys the psychological and social core of the culture of poverty.37

An opposing view to the concepts of the culture of poverty theory comes from
Sociologist, William Julius Wilson. Wilson offers the “opportunity theory” in which he
suggests that poor people share exactly the same values and goals as everyone else in
society. The problem, he states, is that their odds of achieving those goals by the means
considered legitimate by the broader society are not very good, so they take on the
alternative. Wilson’s example is:

A poor teen sees people on his television enjoying the pleasure of middle-
class life, say a sports car. Living in a poor neighborhood with an

---
inadequate school and little job opportunity, that teen’s best chance of owning a sports car may well be by selling drugs. Even if that is not true, he probably knows at least one drug dealer with a new sports car. That young man has exactly the same values and goals as most people his age, but he may well choose an alternative means that fits better with his social situation, such as selling drugs, for achieving them.38

In the welfare context, this researcher provides the following example to highlight Wilson’s opportunity theory with a welfare recipient and her lack of access to postsecondary education. For instance, a welfare mother (who we will call Joan) seriously wants the opportunity to pursue postsecondary education. This has been her dream for a long time. Currently, she is in a dead end job at McDonalds making $5.15 hourly. Joan has three kids and no husband. To her credit, Joan is one of the few people in her family that completed high school. Joan finds it difficult to pursue postsecondary education because most people that she knows, including family, are high school dropouts for one reason or another. Joan has often thought about some of the girls that she graduated with who have gone on to earn very good salaries because they graduated from college.

All things considered, Joan has the same values and goals as the girls who graduated. However, Joan has low self-esteem. With this, Joan may continue to want to pursue postsecondary education, but does not act upon it for fear that she may get many criticisms from others. Also, if Joan’s caseworker’s belief is that Joan should be working and not pursuing postsecondary education, Joan may never learn that access to postsecondary education by her caseworker was denied to her. Joan never attends

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38 Copeland, And The Poor Get Welfare: The Ethics of Poverty in the United States, 152.
college. As a result, Joan has foregone “the opportunity” according to the theory and may be contributing to the culture of poverty. In other words, Joan’s poor decision to remain in her current situation became more important, in her mind, than the long term and better decision to fight for her dream to attend college.

*The Nature of Welfare Reform from a Black Feminist Perspective*

To some degree, discussions about welfare policies are slowly emerging into feminist literature. This comes as no surprise since welfare has always been a woman’s issue. In fact, women comprise the majority of welfare recipients in the United States. More specifically, African-American women have become overly represented in U.S. welfare statistics as shown in Figure 1. Such information has lead to criticism and stereotypical depictions of African-American women in welfare media and literature which has in turn given rise to prejudice, discrimination, and punitive actions toward the welfare population.

![Figure 1-Racial Composition of Welfare Recipients in the United States 1994 - 2000](image)

Source: Department of Health and Human Services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>Native American</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>FY 94</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY 96</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY 98</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY 00</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For instance, when President Ronald Regan publically criticized women on welfare during his 1976 presidential campaign by using the phrase “welfare queen” to reinforce images of criminal, sexually promiscuous, lazy black mothers who cheated the system and robbed taxpayers of their money state welfare policies that were based on these fabrications, significantly changed. As a result, some states slashed cash benefits to recipients, underfunded childcare and job training programs and created barriers for poor women to gain access to public assistance.39 Unfortunately, the effects of these images have continued to frame national and local welfare discussions.

Within the welfare population, sincere expectations are in conflict with stereotypical images and assumptions about African-American women. Feminist theorists, Rhonda Bryant et al, claims that stereotypical images illustrate the systematic attempt to influence, manipulate, and wipe out behaviors of others for the purpose of gaining control, order or dominance over African-American women.40 More specifically, Collins states that Black feminist should examine how Black women negotiate intersections of race, class, and gender while eliminating biases of the image of black womanhood.41

In order to gain an understanding of the ways in which welfare mothers in Jackson, Mississippi perceive the lack of access to postsecondary education relative to


their economic well-being, (research question 3), a Black feminist analytical lens will utilized for this study. Using Black feminist theory as a framework will encourage recipients to examine aspects of their social environment to determine whether an attitude change is needed for their own economic well-being. Moreover, Black feminist analysis allows questions to be asked that will indeed bring welfare women’s perspective from the margins to the center of welfare discussions in the state of Mississippi and elsewhere.

The 1996 welfare reform act replaced the former Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) and initiated the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). Under AFDC, families received federal cash assistance indefinitely, without threat of time limits or fear of arbitrary termination. Moreover, the Welfare Reform Act of 1996 established a new system of work requirements and time limited benefits. Basically, the act transferred much of the federal government’s responsibility to the states, which then transferred the implementation process to individual cities and/or counties. Currently, states receive TANF block grants and have almost full discretion to spend the grant as they see fit. Although this move towards devolution has allowed states more spending flexibility, it has also resulted in a lack of accountability within the welfare system.

Furthermore, regulations vary from state to state making policy and overall accountability difficult at best.\(^42\) Implementation of state and federal mandates are basically left to the discretion of individual caseworkers and this has led to a lack of accountability and ultimately to adverse consequences such as sanctions for non-compliance, unexpected loss of eligibility, or non-uptake of welfare benefits which

\(^{42}\) Handler and Hasenfeld, \textit{We the Poor People: Work Poverty and Welfare}, 207-209.
families are eligible. In support of this thought, Susan T. Gooden’s work in Virginia on welfare recipients’ experiences with caseworkers revealed that in many instances, caseworkers’ discretion in deciding individuals’ grants and sanctions and providing ancillary services provides an opportunity for discrimination. The consequence of this type of arbitrary behavior can sabotage a recipient’s successful transition to higher education and work. Black clients, reports Gooden, did not receive information about job prospects, opportunities to advance their education, or specialized aid with transportation to the same degree that whites did, and in some cases, they received no support at all.44 Academicians Joe Soss, Sanford Schram, Thomas Vartanian and Erin O’Brien argue that the Welfare Reform Act can be described as one in which states enjoyed increased federal funding for programs that made benefits more accessible to poor families, as long as they toed the line in meeting federal guidelines.45 In principle, the legislation enabled clients to pursue new opportunities. Indeed, a small number of states emphasized enabling policies which produced opportunities for poor people to become economically independent. In fact, most states passed at least some policies that fell into this category.

However, public outcry for welfare reform in the early 1990s was encouraged by

43 Courtney, Dworsky and Piliavin, “Applicants’ Understanding of Wisconsin’s TANF Program and Its Relationship to Other Programs for Low Income Families,” 2.


opinions that AFDC was too permissive, and the federal legislation in 1996 reinforced this ideology by creating outcome-based penalties for states that did not act quickly to enforce work and lower caseloads. The result is that policy creation in the states has been skewed in a restrictive and punitive direction. Many states stuck close to the basic requirements set forth by federal government. But among those that deviated, the vast majority used their authority to limit access to social provisions and most especially, to shift the balance in welfare policy design from rights to obligations, imposing burdensome sanctions on recipients.\(^46\) On the punitive side, it could be reasoned that the legislation implicitly aimed to create a population of obedient workers who are willing enough and worried enough to take any temporary, part time, or minimum-wage job that comes their way, not matter what the costs may be.

More important to the punitive nature of welfare, Betty Mandel argues that the welfare reform act was not really about instilling personal responsibility or strengthening families, it was really about kicking people off the welfare rolls as fast as possible and giving people as little help as possible. She contends that caseworkers across the nation regularly harass and intimidate recipients, and withheld information about benefits which they were entitled. Welfare offices across the nation are meaner than ever before and they are punishing large numbers of families by reducing or terminating benefits for failure to comply with a welfare program requirement. A recipient could be punished for any number of reasons. For example, recipients are punished for failing to return a form on time, for failing to fill a form out correctly, for not coming to a meeting with a

\(^{46}\) Ibid, 384.
caseworker, for not cooperating with work or community service requirements, and often because of worker mistakes.\textsuperscript{47} Moreover, it should be noted that in the state of Mississippi, when a recipient is sanctioned from the welfare roll, they are also dropped from Medicaid, thereby losing health insurance.

Finally, the intention of this Chapter was to provide information to policymakers, welfare administrators, advocates and others so that a connection can be made between having access to higher education and long term economic security for women who receive welfare benefits. The next Chapter presents an historical overview of the welfare system and educational policies in the state of Mississippi since 1935.

\textsuperscript{47} Betty Reid Mandell, "Welfare Reform: The War Against The Poor," http://www.3.2punj.edu/~newpol/issues30/mandel301.htm (accessed February 25, 2010).
CHAPTER 3

THE PROBLEM IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The purpose of this chapter is to create a context for understanding why African-American welfare (TANF) recipients in Jackson, Mississippi are not taking advantage of the federal policy to include postsecondary education as an option to achieve long-term sustainable economic security for themselves and their children. The postsecondary education option is an allowable work activity in Mississippi under the 1996 Welfare Reform Act, even though it is limited in scope. To create this context, however, would require knowledge of the ways in which welfare and educational practices and policies on the federal level became entangled in the politics of race and racism during and after the Jim Crow era in the state of Mississippi. The aim of the Chapter is to provide insight into contextually understanding how welfare and education policy has taken form in the state of Mississippi since 1935.

First, however, brief descriptions of the state and city are provided. Second, the Chapter examines the pervasiveness of Jim Crow in the attitudes of white citizens in Mississippi. Third, an examination is presented of how welfare and educational policies on the federal level were affected by these attitudes. Fourth, the Chapter presents a brief overview of the period in which public assistance became accessible to African-American women in the United States. Finally, a review is provided of the strategies
which Mississippi welfare agencies undertook to implement postsecondary education into its welfare programs to help recipients become self-sufficient following the 1996 Welfare Reform Act. This historical account should lead to a discovery of a connection between welfare policies and perceived legislative attitudes about welfare recipients.

An Image of the State of Mississippi

Mississippi, known as the “Magnolia State,” is in the southern portion of the United States and is primarily rural and considered a poor state. As seen in Figure 2, Mississippi is bordered on the north by Tennessee, east by Alabama, west by Arkansas and Louisiana, and south by the Gulf of Mexico.

![Mississippi State Map](http://www.mapsofworld.com/usa/states/mississippi/mississippi-map.html)

Approximately two-thirds of the 2.9 million residents of the state live in non-metropolitan areas. Mississippi’s poverty rate is still on the rise. In 2009, the national poverty rate was 13.5, however, Mississippi’s rate was 21.4 (see demographic
characteristics for the state in Table 3.1). In fact, Mississippi has led the nation in poverty for nearly a decade. The racial composition is mixed. Among all other states, Mississippi has the largest percentage of black residents.\(^1\) Poverty levels for the state as a whole are 65% higher than the national average. The median income is $36,796, well below the national average of $51,425. The percent of persons age 25 and over that have earned a bachelor’s degree or higher in the United States is 27.5 percent and only 19.1 percent in Mississippi.

Table 3.1. Characteristics of the State of Mississippi

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population Characteristics</th>
<th>Mississippi</th>
<th>U.S.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population (2010)</td>
<td>2,967,000</td>
<td>308,746,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent 18+ (2010)</td>
<td>74.0%</td>
<td>75.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Black (2010)</td>
<td>37.0%</td>
<td>12.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent White (2010)</td>
<td>59.1%</td>
<td>72.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (2010)</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Characteristics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Income (2009)</td>
<td>$36,796</td>
<td>$51,425</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment Rate (2011)</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent below poverty (2009)</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty Rate by Race (2009)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Characteristics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Graduates (2009)</td>
<td>78.9%</td>
<td>84.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of Persons Age 25+</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelors Degree or higher (2009)</td>
<td>19.1%</td>
<td>27.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of Persons Age 25+</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TANF Recipients (June 2011)</td>
<td>24,458</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: http://www.bls.gov/web/laus/laumstrk.htm
http://www.irp.wisc.edu/faqs/faq3/table2.htm

The state’s poor reputation has persisted into the twenty-first century. Outsiders have adopted an image that leads them to believe that Mississippi’s economic and social systems remain prejudicial and incapable of change. Federal statistics are a recurring

reminder that Mississippi is at or near the bottom of practically every index of social and economic growth, from per capita income to literacy.

Since welfare reform, Mississippi has increasingly moved away from assistance with education and training for welfare recipients. This, according to Gretchen Kirby, is evidenced in its strong work first approach to labor force attachment. 2 Undeniably, educational programs were allowable in Mississippi under AFDC’s Job Opportunities and Basic Skills (JOBS) program, whereas under TANF they are severely restricted. The federal JOBS program allowed recipients to pursue a college education while receiving cash assistance, but the JOBS program was terminated at the same time as the AFDC program.

*An Image of Jackson, the City*

Jackson, the capital city of the state, has a population that exceeds 173,000. It is the largest city in the state and part of Hinds County. The 2010 census revealed that the population for Jackson declined from 184,256 in 2000 to 173,514 in 2010. The racial composition of the city is 70.6% Black and the median income is much lower than the national average (see Table 3.2 for demographic characteristics of the city). Jackson’s current slogan is *Jackson, Mississippi: City with Soul*. It is named after Andrew Jackson, U.S. President from 1829-1837. Jackson is ranked as the 23rd most dangerous city in America. The percent of persons age 25 and over that completed high school is higher in Jackson than in the state; however, it is lower than the national average. The city’s

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poverty level is higher than the state poverty level. The assumption here is that Jackson has more of a concentration of black residents – thus, a higher rate of poverty. Indeed, national studies have indicated that cities with a higher concentration of black residents have higher poverty rates. This could possibly be attributed to indicators such as unemployment, discrimination, health issues, or welfare statistics.

Table 3.2. Characteristics for Jackson, Mississippi (Hinds County)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population Characteristics</th>
<th>Jackson (Hinds Co.)</th>
<th>Mississippi</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population (2010)</td>
<td>173,514</td>
<td>2,967,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent 18+ (2000)</td>
<td>71.5%</td>
<td>74.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Black (2000)</td>
<td>70.6%</td>
<td>37.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent White (2000)</td>
<td>27.8%</td>
<td>59.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (2000)</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Characteristics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Income (2000)</td>
<td>$30,414</td>
<td>$36,786</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment Rate (June 2011)</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent below poverty (2009)</td>
<td>27.8%</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Characteristics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Graduates (2000)</td>
<td>79.1%</td>
<td>78.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of Persons Age 25+</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bachelors Degree or higher (2000)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Percent of Persons Age 25+</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TANF Recipients (June 2011)- Hinds Co.</td>
<td>4,045</td>
<td>24,458</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jackson,_Mississippi#Demographics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jackson,_Mississippi#Demographics)  

Jim Crow in Mississippi

Historically, Mississippi’s past reveal a structure grounded in a Jim Crow mentality that denied basic freedoms to Black Americans well into the 1980s. Jim Crow is a term that originated around 1890 during the days of traveling minstrel shows when Thomas “Daddy” Rice, a white minstrel entertainer, blackened his face with charcoal paste and danced a jig while singing the lyrics to the song, “Jump Jim Crow.” Rice created the character after seeing a crippled, elderly black man dancing and singing the song:
"Jump Jim Crow, weel about and turn about and do jis so
eb'ry time I weel about I jump Jim Crow"³

Some historians believe that a Mr. Crow owned the slave who inspired Rice's act-
-thus the reason for the Jim Crow term in the lyrics. Jim Crow's image was one of many
derogatory images of black inferiority during that era. Mr. Rice's act was based on a
stereotype which implied that blacks were ignorant, submissive and comfortable with
being treated as servants. The words Jim Crow became a racial slur synonymous with
black, colored, or Negro in the vocabulary of many whites and by the end of the
nineteenth century laws that supported racial discrimination toward blacks were often
referred to as Jim Crow laws and practices.

The Jim Crow era in American history came into being in the 1890s when
southern states began to enforce state laws and constitutional provisions to force Black
Americans into subordinate positions in society.⁴ Jim Crow was about subordination and
separation of the races and it increasingly assimilated itself into the American vernacular.
Prior to the late 1970s, Jim Crow laws in Mississippi not only separated its people by
race, rather it regarded the black residents as inferior and unworthy of economic, political
or social equality. Black Americans in Jim Crow Mississippi were forever reminded of
their subordinate status within the social hierarchy. The results of this subordinate status
were psychologically devastating. To be black in Mississippi during the Jim Crow era

history/creating2.htm (accessed August 12, 2011).

⁴Ibid.
and into the late twentieth century meant being cast into a sphere of inferiority and the chances for upward and social mobility were extremely restricted.

Economically, Mississippi's black population was deemed as laborers and was thought of as second class citizens. Jim Crow separated Mississippi into a black and white world. It was expected that blacks would work for less and that black employees could be treated harsher than whites. Jobs for blacks most often included domestic service in the homes of whites, maids in hotels, cleaning in retail establishments and restaurants, bellboys, porters, janitors and cooks. Any work that dealt with manual labor, working with the hands or simply backbreaking work was known as "nigger work." Excluded from nearly all work that paid a decent wage, many blacks became "seasonal field hands," particularly in the rural areas of the state. Field hands, in other words, were common laborers who picked cotton, tilled soil, and gathered crops for white land owners.

James Silver, well known historian and author of the book *Mississippi: The Closed Society*, provides his own description of Mississippi's oppressive and unpleasant history during Jim Crow's reign. He argues that Mississippi was "the Closed Society" and that segregation was deeply rooted in all of Mississippi's societies. He contends that blacks were relegated to second class citizenship. Black residents, most of them impoverished, attended poorly funded, inferior schools and had little contact with whites. Blacks and whites were separated by 'Jim Crow' laws that kept lunch counters, buses, restaurants, department stores, hotels and beaches – virtually all public places in the state,

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Thus, with no political power to enforce equality among the races, blacks had only their voices to express disapproval and resistance of the society that was closed. With this understanding, beginning in the 1960's blacks in the state of Mississippi began to organize and unite with civil rights, welfare rights, and other movements that were evolving nationwide. These movements brought legal challenges to discrimination in public places, as well as public services, such as welfare. Many scholars and literary agents have reported that nowhere else in the United States was more resistant to the civil rights movements in their quest for equality of the races than the white citizens of Mississippi. However, because of the vigilance of the civil rights movement and the national welfare rights movement to eliminate discrimination in all areas of public and social services, poor black women were, for the first time, able to access the same social services that white women had long used as a financial safety net.

_Federal Assistance for the White Delta Planters_

During the early period of the civil rights movement, the federal government became increasingly involved in promoting efforts to advance racial equality in Mississippi, especially in the Delta region where approximately 90 percent of the residents were black and depended entirely on white employers and government assistance for their incomes. Describing just the opposite of federal intentions, James Cobb’s article “Somebody Done Nailed Us to the Cross” tells how racial inequalities in...
farm and welfare policy in the Mississippi Delta during this time period led to extreme economic distress for black sharecroppers. The straightforward nature of the article deepens our understanding of the relationship between race and social policy. Cobb explains how the federal government’s efforts to reduce cotton acreage, boost agricultural wages, and improve assistance to the needy went astray when acreage reduction subsidies only enhanced the economic position of white planters who also had full control over the distribution of welfare assistance. Moreover, claims Cobb,

many of the New Deal farm policies were virtually written by the planters and Oscar Johnson, who presided over the massive Delta and Pine Land Plantation. Johnson helped to conceive and administer several New Deal farm agencies, including the Agricultural Adjustment Administration (AAA), the largest planting operation in the Delta.

The AAA was appointed by the federal government as the single agency to administer public assistance programs in the Delta region. With the head of the largest planting operation shaping AAA policy, the program served the interest of white Delta planters. The crop reduction subsidies not only lined the pockets of large landowners but enabled the landowners to mechanize their operations and streamline their labor system. Subsequently, planters systematically began to illegally evict tenants and demote sharecroppers to wage laborers or day hands employed only when their services were needed. Some members of the AAA enjoyed the benefits of cheaper labor, higher prices,
and a guaranteed subsidy, all supplied by the U.S. government. While white privileged planters enjoyed governmental benefits, conditions for black residents only worsened.

No Federal Assistance for the Black Delta Sharecroppers

Jack Kirby’s book, *Rural Worlds Lost: The American South 1920s-1960s* suggests that shrinking labor markets and planter control of federal assistance programs undercut the efforts of blacks to call attention to their own needs. For example, planters became alarmed when the Southern Tenant Farmers Union, an organization that assisted black farmers throughout the South, publicized their unfair practices and use of intimidation, including efforts to cheat sharecroppers out of government assistance. Complaints about AAA abuses and treatment of recipients fell into a bureaucratic pit or found their way back to county committees whose members’ saw to it that neither sharecropping contracts nor federal assistance was available to many blacks.11 Black sharecroppers who depended on government assistance faced additional despair when the new food stamp program began to make its way across Mississippi during the early 1960s.

Prior to food stamps, impoverished blacks in the state of Mississippi received free monthly distributions of flour, canned foods, cheese, corn meal and other staples through the federal commodity program. Under the food stamp program, welfare recipients were to be sustained by food stamps that could be spent in grocery stores in lieu of cash. The new program promised a more varied diet and increased independence and dignity for the recipients. The food stamps, however, had to be purchased monthly at a price determined

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10Ibid, 916-917.

by a formula based on income which in many cases was already not enough to provide
for the family. Government assistance checks were considered income. For those
without income, the minimum charge of $2.00 per participant was often out of reach,
particularly when there were medical bills, which like other expenses were not taken into
account by the food stamp formula. As one Delta resident explained “food stamps is all
right if you is able to buy them.” 12 Another resident complained that “my $55 monthly
income is too low to pay $22 for $90 worth of food stamps.” 13 When Leflore County,
Mississippi shifted from commodity distributions to food stamps in 1965, the number of
welfare recipients fell from 20,000 to 8,300. 14 This drastic downward shift was, for sure,
due to affordability. The $2.00 cost on food stamps was subsequently changed in 1970 to
permitting free stamps to families earning less than $30 per month.

Other complaints arose over the disparity in federal expenditures for the state.
For example, in Sunflower County, six thousand families lived in poverty, but
government spending of the $446,000 for food relief and the $8,600 for manpower
development was insignificant in comparison to the $10.2 million dispensed to the
county’s white farmers in 1967, two-thirds of which was to compensate them for lost
cotton revenue and crops they did not plant. In Sunflower County, 77 white planters each
received more than $25,000 in 1967. The best known of the recipients was Senator
James O. Eastland, who collected $168,524.52 in price support and acreage-reduction

12 Cobb, 922.

13 Ibid, 923.

14 Ibid.
payments. Such was the case with many other white Delta planters. For example, Roy Flowers of Coahoma County, a long time beneficiary of governmental generosity, collected over $210,000 in federal payments in 1967. Flowers, whose income was approximately $1 million dollars in 1966, had come to the Delta in 1908 as a store clerk earning $25 per month. By the early 1960s he claimed to own everything within forty-nine square miles, including seven thousand acres of cotton, four gins, a bank, the entire town of Mattson, and in his own words, “more niggers than anybody in Mississippi.”

It is precisely situations like the ones mentioned in the previous paragraphs that place Mississippi in the larger context of race and welfare policy. The federal government’s role in funding Mississippi farm agencies and farmers, either knowingly or unknowingly, contributed to the formation of racial hierarchies in the state of Mississippi. Understanding how these formations came into being helps to explain the inequalities that still exist in the state. With this in mind, it cannot be denied that race has played a big part in shaping Mississippi’s social history.

*Equal Education for All in Jim Crow Mississippi*

Perhaps even more important to Mississippi’s historic racial past was its response to federal attempts to enforce non-segregationist policies in the educational systems after *Brown v. Board of Education*. The state’s deplorable attitude towards integration became a national concern. Blacks having access to equal education was not an idea that Mississippi whites were ready for during the Jim Crow era and throughout the mid-

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15Ibid, 927.

16Ibid.
1970s. In fact, according to James Silver, Mississippi’s position as a “closed society” was truly reflective in its 1954 decision to keep the school systems segregated. Silver maintains that the state’s Lieutenant Governor, Carrol Gartin (a devoted white supremacist who served the state from 1952-1960) resented federal interference in what he considered a local issue. Moreover, claims Silver, Gartin informed the readership of the Jackson Daily News on August 3, 1954 that “Segregation is our last and most important State’s right.”17 Outright defiance of Brown v. Board was the response from the state’s capitol. Also appearing in the Jackson Daily News in August 1954 was an article written by Fred Sullen, the Editor of the newspaper, who voiced his interpretation of Brown v. Board as the final insult from a Supreme Court that was determined to destroy the South’s way of life regardless of the confusion it would cause. The decision, Sullen claimed

was the worst thing that happened to the South since carpetbaggers and scalawags took charge. Mississippi will never consent to placing White and Negro children in the same public schools. White and Negro children in the same schools will lead to miscegenation. Miscegenation leads to mixed marriages and mixed marriages leads to mongrelization of the human race. Brown will be ignored in Mississippi. There may be many doubts as to what other states intend to do, but the people of Mississippi have always had the intelligence and courage sufficient to manage our own destiny.18

Similarly, James Vardaman, editor of the Greenwood, Mississippi Commonwealth in 1899 and subsequent Governor of Mississippi (1904-1908) expressed his adamant opposition to expanding educational opportunities and facilities for blacks in the state

17Silver, Mississippi: The Closed Society, 67.

18Ibid, 10.
after reconstruction and during the Jim Crow era. Vardaman’s claim to expressing common ideology of the times was revealed in the following editorial:

In educating the Negro we implant in him all manner of aspirations and ambitions which we then refuse to allow him to gratify. Yet people talk about elevating the race with education! It is not only folly, but it comes pretty near criminal folly. The Negro is not permitted to advance and their education only spoils a good field hand and makes a shyster lawyer or a fourth rate teacher. It is money thrown away.

James K. Vardaman
-Commonwealth (Greenwood)
30 June 1899.19

Despite Vardaman’s prevailing attitude and despite the fact that the Supreme Court ordered national school desegregation after Brown v. Board, Mississippi continued to deny equal education to its black citizens. It took approximately 15-20 years after Brown and approximately 70 years after Vardaman’s editorial before mixing of the races occurred in all public facilities in Mississippi, including the school systems.

Although the state now boasts of the monumental steps it has taken towards racial reconciliation, it has yet to elect a black candidate to statewide office. Many activists may contribute this fact to lingering segregationist and racist attitudes by policymakers, legislators, and administrators. Truth or not, if Mississippi’s leadership over its social programs, particularly welfare programs, still harbor attitudes of racism, then implementing or ensuring strategies to elevate welfare recipients’ status in society might receive little or marginal attention; including access to postsecondary education. Over

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the long term, the success of welfare reform in Mississippi depends on helping welfare recipients find better jobs so that they can become self-sufficient.

Access to Public Assistance for African-American Women in the United States

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the U.S. public assistance program (ADC) was created to provide widows, orphans, and children with supplemental aid as a result of a spouse’s death, physical or mental incapacitation. Public assistance, also known as welfare, was conceived during Franklin D. Roosevelt’s presidency. In response to public pressure relating to growing unemployment and poverty, President Roosevelt established a working group to design the federal welfare program. The working group, the Committee on Economic Security (CES), was charged with developing and designing Aid to Dependent Children (ADC). Congress followed the CES’s recommendation to allow states to administer ADC, requiring counties to establish their own programs. Additional bureau recommendations, intended to make welfare more equitable, i.e., having national standards for receiving benefits, a merit system for welfare employees, and oversight by the U.S. Children’s Bureau, were defeated by other congressional committees.

These committees were dominated by southern politicians who President Roosevelt viewed as among the most senior in congress and who occupied strategic places on most of the senate and house committees. Moreover, the committees gave authority over the welfare program to the more conservative Social Security Board who defended “states rights” to keep their welfare programs stingy and inaccessible to blacks. Their concerns were rooted in the notion to protect cheap labor supply for southern
farmers and to maintain the racial status quo in the south. Thus, in order to gain support for his domestic agenda, which included welfare, President Roosevelt yielded to the political power of a majority southern congress and excluded domestic, casual and agricultural workers from eligibility for federal welfare programs. As a result of this action, many blacks who primarily served in agricultural, domestic, or casual positions were not eligible to receive welfare assistance and therefore had to remain in such positions regardless of the conditions under which they had to work. Furthermore, there were wide variations between states on eligibility for welfare, with southern states being the toughest. Welfare agencies in the south were known by federal officials to use race in determining levels of eligibility.\textsuperscript{20} It would take another 25 years before welfare became impartial in the administration of its benefits.

In the late 1950s politicians and journalists began to draw attention to the rapid pace in which the welfare rolls began to increase, especially among African-American single mothers. Welfare now became the political concern of the day. State campaigns to tighten welfare eligibility and purge ADC of “undeserving” recipients began to heighten. Tougher “suitable homes’ and “man in the house” rules were adopted by states such as Mississippi, Georgia, Louisiana and Tennessee. These rules were created in an effort to deny aid to unwed mothers, who were disproportionately black, and other women considered promiscuous on the grounds that their homes were unsuitable for children. By 1962, twenty four states, many of them southern, had adopted “man in the house” rules

that denied aid to mothers if there was an able bodied stepfather or substitute father in the house. Like suitable homes rules, men in the house rules were commonly used to purge blacks from the welfare rolls.\textsuperscript{21,22} It was not until the late 1960s that many of these discriminatory policies were overturned, mainly through a series of legislative amendments liberalizing eligibility requirements.

Before his assassination in 1963, President Kennedy made a commitment to reduce poverty in the United States. His successor, Lyndon B. Johnson, followed Kennedy’s direction by declaring an unconditional War on Poverty, and made the development of his Great Society programs one of his first priorities.\textsuperscript{23} Welfare was one of the Great Society priority programs. Hence, the War on Poverty, the civil rights movement, urban unrest, and the welfare rights movement played significant roles in attaining full access to welfare benefits for African-American women.

Expanding social, civil, and political rights were also part of President Johnson’s “Great Society”; however, they did not eliminate racial discrimination against welfare recipients. For instance, to date, states with large black populations, such as Mississippi, offer significantly lower benefits than states with a higher concentration of whites\textsuperscript{24} –


\textsuperscript{23}Reese, Backlash Against Welfare Mothers: Past and Present, 109.

creating a national pattern of inequality in the amount of aid given to black and white recipients.

Strategies to Include Postsecondary Education for Welfare Recipients in Mississippi

Fiona Pearson, well known welfare researcher and author of many articles on welfare reform, claims that when states began the process of implementing their TANF programs, critics were anxious yet hopeful to believe that the program would produce more opportunities for recipients to achieve self-sufficiency. Legislators and researchers, she contends, have vigorously debated the successes of welfare reform in the years since its passing, but one fact became clear near the beginning of the debates --- the emphasis on work first programs relegated postsecondary education to the background.25

Despite the federal emphasis on the work component of the PRWORA, many state officials recognized the importance of maintaining welfare recipients’ access to higher education as a means of achieving self sufficiency. These states responded favorably to the creation of state-level educational programs. Many TANF administrators took advantage of the opportunity to include postsecondary education into its work activity requirements. However, many states, counties, welfare offices, and even individual case managers greatly varied in how they interpreted guidelines allowing for postsecondary education, with some allowing only limited vocational study and others allowing participants to pursue baccalaureate degrees. The variations, in part, could have resulted from the devolution of authority for welfare, which allowed states and local

offices a certain level of freedom to design appropriate programs for recipients.26 Likewise, variations could be the result of welfare administrators' use of state policy to pursue their own interest. Thus, if a welfare administrator feels that higher education for recipients will serve no purpose, either to the individual or the state, policy in that regard will get little or no attention.

In 1996, the Welfare Reform Act mandated each state to replace recipients' eligibility requirements for AFDC with new TANF requirements. Particularly, each state was instructed to establish work requirements, education requirements, and sanctions for TANF recipients who did not comply with the terms of the new TANF program. In response, Mississippi made the required changes in its 1997 Report to the Mississippi Legislature: A Review of Mississippi's 1997 Welfare Reform Legislation. For purposes of this study only reference to education requirements are included. Page 8 of the report states

The Federal Welfare Reform Act makes work and preparation for work a mandatory element of the new TANF program. Consistent with the idea that assistance is no longer an entitlement is a requirement that needy families engage in acceptable work activities in order to be eligible for assistance under the TANF program.

Work Requirements

House Bill 766, Section 3, subsection 6, establishes the requirement that TANF recipients engage in work activities. The requirement is that persons be engaged in work after no more than twenty four months on TANF assistance or when deemed work-ready by the department. To be engaged in work, a person must complete at least twenty hours per week in any one of the activities listed in Exhibit 2, page 9.

26Ibid, 724.
The bill also lists a series of activities which are permissible for hours in excess of the twenty hour requirement. These activities include job skills development, education directly related to employment, high school attendance or GED preparation (presumably for those who are not required to attend because of age), and job skills development.\(^{27}\)

The report makes no reference to postsecondary education as an allowable work activity to fulfill work requirements. Appendix F includes the section from the 1997 Report to the Mississippi Legislature which contains language for vocational education training, but excludes any language regarding postsecondary education.

As mentioned in previous Chapters, the focus of the TANF program in 1996 and thereafter was on work and responsibility and on providing states with the flexibility to be innovative in addressing the pressing issues unique to each state. Furthermore, PRWORA granted states some authority over determining how and when to use education in their welfare to work programs. During the creation of its TANF policies in 1997, Mississippi's welfare administrators may not have thought that college educating its welfare population was a pressing issue for the state. Therefore, the policies that were created excluded any language that brought attention to postsecondary education. Rather, they strongly encouraged quick job placement by requiring recipients to participate in 30 hours per week of work activities and limited the extent to which education could count toward such work activities. This suggests that as the foundation for the TANF program was being laid in 1997, there were no strategies or efforts taken by TANF administrators and policymakers in Mississippi to include postsecondary education as a viable means to obtaining self sufficiency for its welfare recipients.

However, upon enactment of the federal legislation to reauthorize TANF in 2002, Mississippi revised its 2002 State Plan for TANF to address the matter of allowing postsecondary education as an allowable work activity for recipients. Including postsecondary into its Mississippi State Plan, was a positive move towards creating strategies for welfare recipients to attain self sufficiency with postsecondary education. Even though the postsecondary education component of the State Plan has a 12-month time limit,\textsuperscript{28} according to Ms. Sandra Giddy, to date postsecondary education is an allowable work activity. In the 2002 Mississippi State Plan—Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, postsecondary education is defined as

\begin{quote}
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an organized educational program which offers a sequence of courses directly related to the preparation of individuals for employment in current or emerging occupations that requires a baccalaureate or advanced degree.\textsuperscript{29}
\end{center}
\end{quote}

Appendix G includes the relevant section from the 2002 Mississippi State Plan which addresses postsecondary education for TANF recipients.

Other strategies used by Mississippi caseworkers and case managers to encourage recipients to pursue postsecondary education will undoubtedly emerge in subsequent Chapters, particularly in the Chapter on data collection and analysis.

\textsuperscript{28}Ms. Sandra Giddy, Project Officer for the Mississippi Department of Human Services, telephone conversation with Charlette Brown on September 15, 2011, Jackson, MS.

Summary

Historically, Jim Crow impacted every aspect of Mississippi life. Black Americans in Jim Crow Mississippi were forever reminded of their subordinate status within the social hierarchy. He was reflected in federal welfare policies that was supposed to financially reward black sharecroppers just as it financially rewarded the white delta planters; he was reflected in every school system all over the state of Mississippi until well into the late 1970s; he was so ingrained in the mistreatment of the Mississippi’s black citizens that people (white and black) from other states were scared to drive through Mississippi for fear that they would never be seen again. Without a doubt, present day Mississippi is a better place. The walls of separation are torn down and both black residents and white residents are trying to live in harmony with each other. However, poverty is still a big problem for the state. Welfare recipients are still disproportionately black. Leadership is still disproportionately white. Residents are slow to move to action. If welfare caseworkers do not talk about postsecondary education – the recipients do not ask why.

This historical account of Mississippi’s past and present should provide a context for understanding why so few African-American welfare recipients in Jackson, Mississippi is taking advantage of the federal policy to include postsecondary education as an option to achieving sustainable economic security. The reason could be that historically when white authority in Mississippi writes blanket policies in which African-American citizens, especially African-American welfare citizens, are not encouraged to pursue postsecondary education, the policy will not be questioned.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

As stated in previous Chapters, this study seeks to determine the extent to which the 1996 Welfare Reform Act impacted African-American TANF recipients' access to postsecondary education in Jackson, Mississippi. The purpose of this Chapter is to present the findings from the analyzed data and to present the salient themes that emerged from the in-depth interviews with the participants. A brief introduction of the women who participated in this study will begin the Chapter. Also, throughout the Chapter, the "voices" of the women will be used to support the data from the qualitative interviews.

Research Questions

1. To what extent has the "work first" philosophy of the 1996 Welfare Reform Act impacted African-American TANF recipients' access to postsecondary education in Jackson, Mississippi?

2. To what extent have Mississippi TANF recipients' perceptions of the welfare culture, also known as the culture of poverty, influenced their choice to forego or pursue postsecondary education?

3. How do TANF recipients in Jackson, Mississippi perceive access to postsecondary education relative to their economic well-being?

Introducing the Participants

All of the participants are identified with pseudonyms which were chosen by them for the purpose of protecting their identity.
Participant 1 (Kianna) is 21 years old with 2 children. She is unmarried with some college experience. Kianna dropped out of college because of pregnancy but her goal is to return to college soon. Kianna is attending the job readiness program to help improve her interviewing skills.

Participant 2 (Nikki) is 24 years old with 3 children. Nikki has an Associate’s Degree from a local community college which she had earned prior to entering the TANF program. Nikki wants to return to college to earn her Master's degree in Education. She is in the job readiness program to enhance her clerical skills.

Participant 3 (Shae) is a 21 years old single mother with 1 child. Shae recently received her GED while in the TANF program. She plans to enroll in one of the community colleges next semester. Because Shae was not ready to attend college after completing the GED program, her caseworker assigned her to the job readiness program to help her with preparing a resume.

Participant 4 (Chenise) is 22 years old with 1 child. Chenise has an Associate’s Degree from a local community college. She is currently enrolled in a 4-year institution where she is majoring in Social Work. Her future goal is to own her own day care center.

Participant 5 (Tweety) is a 23 year old single mother with twin boys. Tweety is an outspoken young woman with a high school diploma. She said “I plan to attend college so that when my children grow up they will see that I attended college and then they will have no excuse not to go themselves.”

Participant 6 (Khloe) is a 21 year old with 1 child. She is currently in the job readiness program. Khloe said that she was in college last year but had to drop out
because she got pregnant. Khloe says that “education is very important to her because with jobs now you can’t just have a diploma you have got to have some degrees.”

Participant 7 (Alycia) is a 23 year old mother with 2 children. Alycia had a high school diploma when she came into the TANF program. After being the in the program for a short while, she decided that she wanted a better life for herself and her child. After that decision, she says, “I enrolled in one of the community colleges where I am now majoring in nursing.”

Participant 8 (Simone) is 24 years old with 4 children. Simone has been married but is now separated from her husband. Simone is very articulate. She mentioned that she’s had numerous jobs. She stated “I am tired of all the dead-end jobs, so I made a decision to put an end to that – so I enrolled in college.” She is now majoring in Pharmacy Technology at one of the community colleges in Jackson.

Participant 9 (Renae) is a 31 year old mother of 2. She is currently enrolled in college to become a Certified Medical Assistant. Renae is currently attending a technical college where she is studying to become a Certified Medical Assistant. She admits that she has started college and dropped out on several occasions. However, she said “this time is going to be “different, I’m not going nowhere until I finish.” She only has one semester remaining.

Participant 10 (Taylor) is a 23 year old single mother of 3. Taylor is a very outspoken and articulate young lady. She appears to be self driven. Taylor revealed that she came into the TANF program without a GED. She said that it took her one month to get her GED. After that she enrolled in a community college where she is now studying
Computer Programming Technology. Taylor admits that she has never had a job and that she has been on and off TANF for several years; but she says “that will all change once I receive my degree.”

Participant 11 (Kabby) is an 18 year old single mother with 2 children. Kabby is studying to be an interior designer at a local community college. She says that she lost her last job because her hours were cut so drastically that it was no longer feasible to remain at that job.

Participant 12 (Twoboy) is a 37 year old single mother with 2 young boys. Twoboy is currently enrolled at one of the 4-year institutions in Jackson. She is majoring in Social Work. Twoboy has used her 12 months of postsecondary education credits which are allowed under the TANF program; however she remains in college because as she said “she’s come too far to stop now.” Twoboy is proud of the fact that she has decided to remain in college under the circumstances because many other TANF recipients have not been able to do what she is doing.

Participant 13 (Denise) is a 23 years old and is the mother of 3 children. She is currently attending a community college, majoring in Accounting. Denise expressed that her Dad is the reason why she is in college. She says “my dad was always on me about going to college because he went to college and he told me that he wanted me to so I can support myself and my kids – he keeps telling me Denise, you can do it.”

Participant 14 (Brandy) is 27 years old with 3 children. She is currently attending a technical college majoring in Business Technology/Medical Assistant. Brandy admits that she has had many jobs – working at gas stations, Walmart and McDonalds. She said
that she never liked any of the jobs and that is why she kept moving from job to job. She said she has always wanted to work in the medical field. Brandy says “I feel that I can’t stay on a job if I don’t like the job. That is why I’m going to college to be a medical assistant because I love working in the medical field.”

Participant 15 (Yvette) is a 25 year old mother with 4 children. She has a bachelor’s degree in Political Science and is currently a Law student at Mississippi College School of Law. Yvette appears to know exactly what she wants in life and as she states “it does not include being on TANF for a long period of time. I am here now because I am going through a hardship. I lost my car last year and that caused me to lose my employment and my house. I’m getting back on my feet now with the help of the programs that TANF offer. I came to TANF to receive a child care voucher and job readiness skills so I can get back into the job market along with going to law school.”

Participant 16 (Sanaa) is a 25 year old mother with 1 child. She has a GED but has decided to delay going to college because “I am still young and I can go later if I want to. The choice is mine and I made the decision on my own not to go to college. It had nothing to do with me being on welfare or me getting welfare or my environment. I do believe that education is good but college is not for everybody.”

Participant 17 (Passion) is 22 years old and has 2 children. Passion is another articulate young lady who is attending a 4-year institution in Jackson. Passion is majoring in Interdisciplinary Studies with a concentration in Education and an endorsement in English. She says that she had to leave her last job because “they would
not give me the time off to attend my classes so the human resource manager suggested that I put in my two week notice and -- I did.”

Participant 18 (Michelle) is a 29 year old mother with 3 children. Michelle is studying to be a barber at one of the local technical colleges. She said that she was already in college before coming into the TANF program. She stated that “I am going to school for myself and for my daughter, especially my daughter, I want to show her that you can be down but you can also pick yourself up. We are not doing too well right now but that is why I am going to college, so I can do better.”

Participant 19 (Sasha) is 25 years old with 1 child. She is currently enrolled at Mississippi College, majoring in Elementary Education. Sasha mentioned that she is so happy that she chose teaching as a career because she really enjoys working with children. She loves teaching the kids so much that she said “I would do it for free if I was in a position to do so.”

Participant 20 (Nikkipooh) is 28 years old with 2 children. She is attending one of the community colleges in Jackson, majoring in nursing. Nikkipooh said “I am the first one in my family to go to college and I am the first one to graduate from high school.” Nikkipooh is one of six children and she feels very proud that she is starting this trend and hopes that others in her family will follow her footsteps.

Participant 21 (Fatty) is 19 years old with 1 child. She is a student at one of the local community colleges, majoring in medical billing and coding. She is a very outspoken young lady with an optimistic outlook for her and her child’s future. She stated that her mother is her role model because her mother always pushes her to do what
is right. Fatty says that she knows that graduating from college will help her to accomplish her goal of “getting that big house on the hill.”

Participant 22 (Rochelle) is a 24 year old mother of 4 children. She is enrolled at one of the local community colleges in the Nursing program. Rochelle stated that she came into the TANF program to get her GED so that she could get a CNA license. However, she says “when I got my GED I was so happy that instead of going for a CNA license I decided to enroll in the Nursing program at the college.” Rochelle feels that a college education is very important to her success in life.

Participant 23 (Tamika) is 24 years old with 2 children. Tamika is not attending college at the present time; however, she does have some college experience. She revealed that she had to drop out of college when she could no longer use the college credits to receive benefits. She feels that a college education is important because “back in the day all you had to do was have a high school diploma and you could get anywhere and do anything. But now days without a college degree or at least some college, it is hard to even work at a fast food place.”

Participant 24 (Maggie) is 28 years old with 2 children. She is enrolled in the job readiness program to advance her interviewing skills. Maggie said that she did attend college for a year after high school but dropped out because she “wanted to work and make some money.” Maggie stated that she enjoys working but it is hard to keep steady employment in this economy. Like many of the other recipients, Maggie said that she would rather be working than receiving TANF assistance.
Participant 25 (Mya) is a 21 year old single mother with 1 child. She is not in college and does not have any college experience. Even though she feels that “college is important and everyone should have at least one college degree,” at the time of this interview she had not made a decision to attend.

Participant 26 (Poohbear) is 25 years old with 3 children. Poohbear graduated from a vocational college in 2010 as a Certified Medical Assistant. She revealed that she is the first one in her family to receive a college degree and she feels great about that. Her future goal is to attend a 4-year institution and major in Business Administration.

Participant 27 (Raigan) is a 23 year old mother with 1 child. Raigan has some college experience but presently she is enrolled in the job readiness classes in hopes of “finding a job.” She has worked on several non-professional, low-paying jobs. She hopes that the job readiness class will help her find a job that she likes. When asked if she liked the jobs that she has had in the past, Raigan said “I appreciated them more than I liked them.”

Participant 28 (Shunta) is 20 years old with 1 child. She attended one of the local community colleges for one year where she majored in nursing. She had to drop out of college because of pregnancy and home responsibilities. Her plans are to return to the college and graduate as a Registered Nurse (RN) after she finds a job and “get some stability in my life.” Shunta seems to be a very intelligent and outspoken young lady with some very bright ideas about life in general.

Participant 29 (Em) is 19 years old and has 1 child. Em’s appearance was very childlike and she kept a smile on her face throughout the entire interview. She attended a
local community college for a short time but had to drop out because TANF recipients who attend college are only able to use up to a year of classroom time to meet the work requirement hours.

Participant 30 (Tiffany) is a 21 year old single mother with 1 child. Tiffany is currently in the job readiness program. She has some college experience at a local community college where she majored in Early Childhood Development. Tiffany dropped out of college after 1 year because she “wanted to work”. Her future goal is to become a Director of a daycare center.

Participant 31 (Lamaiya) is a single 22 year old mother with 4 children. Lamaiya is another TANF recipient who was enrolled in a nursing program at a community college but dropped out when she was no longer able to use the college credits in order to reduce the amount of work activity participation hours. Her plan is to return to college to complete the nursing program after she finds a job with some stability.

Participant 32 (Jean) is a 29 year old mother with one child. Jean is a very outspoken and friendly young lady. She admits that she has been on and off TANF several times; however, she says “this is the first time that I have ever had a caseworker who actually listened to what I have to say. I told him that I needed to get my GED because I felt that not having my GED was the reason why I was not finding a job. He actually heard what I said and put me in the GED program. My caseworkers prior to him just wanted me to go out and find a job, which is what I did. This time he put me in the GED program and I finally got my GED after a few weeks and now I just applied to one
of the community colleges in Jackson to be in their nursing program. I hope to hear from them soon.”

Participants Demographic Information

Tables 4.1 provide demographic information for all the participants in the study.

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Summary of Demographic Information

The data in Table 4.1 was taken from the surveys each participant filled out during the interview session. The data revealed that the 32 participants (N=32) ranged in age from 18 to 37; 41% of the participants have 1 child (N=13); 31% have 2 children (N=10); 19% have 3 children (N=6); and 9% have 4 children (N=3); 28% of the participants have a GED (N=9) and 72% have high school diplomas (N=23); 13% (N=4) already earned one degree prior to entering the TANF program, 53% (N=17) is in the process of receiving a degree at the time of this interview, and 47% (N=15) had no college experience; 100% (N=32) were single mothers at the time of the interview.

Contextual Findings from Themes

One of the key objectives of the 1996 Welfare Reform Act was to increase employment and responsibility for individuals on public assistance. However, many of the recipients, particularly in Jackson, Mississippi, are unable to obtain meaningful employment because they lack the education and/or job skills that are necessary to meet the growing demands of today's workforce. While Mississippi is one of the states that have implemented welfare reform programs aimed at helping recipients attend college and become self-sufficient, it also holds the rank of being one of the poorest states in the nation - perhaps because of the low educational attainment of many of the state's residents. Federal "work first" policies which mandate recipients to either enter the workforce or be involved in a work activity for an approved number of hours per week create obstacles for many welfare mothers who want to pursue postsecondary education.
The researcher began to see these obstacles emerge in the form of themes during the transcription of the in-depth interviews provided by each of the participants. The themes, mainly logistical, reflect the challenges, experiences and concerns of the recipients as they strive to be good students, workers, and parents at the same time. The overwhelming obligations of each of these roles and the work first requirements embedded in the TANF work activities appear to have a direct impact on the participant's ability to persist in a college environment. The salient themes which emerged from the data were: Hours Spent in the Work Activity; Financial Concerns, and Childcare Difficulties.

**Hours Spent in the Work Activity**

One of the requirements of TANF is that recipients spend a set number of hours per week (ranging from 20-35) either working or engaging in a work activity. Some of the challenges and concerns mentioned during the interviews with the participants involved the simultaneous planning and implementing of tasks associated with work activity requirements, going to college, and performing the duties of a mother within the home.

The act of juggling these multiple roles created a feeling of restlessness and anxiety for several of the participants. For the majority, the act of juggling was not that complicated and was seen only as one of life's challenges. However, some felt that while they were attending the work activity, they could very well be: a) spending time in the library; b) spending time studying in the home so that they would have more time to spend with their children; and c) cold calling at employer sites during the morning or
early afternoon hours in hopes of finding a job. Other participants felt that the amount of
time spent in the work activity was about equal to that of being on a job.

Taylor expressed that being in a work activity distracted from her school work.
She felt that devoting so many hours per week to the work activity was not providing her
with ample time to study. She reported

I was told that you can use the time in the work activity for study. But
when you are up here you have so many distractions because you are
being called to do this or do that. It’s like you are going to school, but you
are not getting time to study. Most of the time you can’t study at home
because you go home and you have no other choice but to be a parent to
your kids and when your kids go to sleep at night it’s about time for you to
go to sleep because you got to start the whole thing right back over again
tomorrow. So I feel that some things are just too much in this program.
It’s like when you leave here and go to the job readiness program and
when you finish the job readiness program, they send you out to find a job.
I mean you’re on your own. They give you 10 days to find a job, if you
don’t find a job in 10 days you are sanctioned and will probably lose your
benefits. I mean it is too strict.

Tweety communicated that she really wants to find a job as quickly as
possible. She said

Spending time here at the Center is not doing me any very much. I know
they are helping me with my resume but when I get out of here, it’s like
late in the day and most people don’t want to talk to you about a job at 
4:00 or 5:00. If the hours here were a little shorter, it would be better 
because I could have a longer time to find a job.

Kabby was fulfilling her work requirement responsibility by coming into 
the Center Monday through Friday. She said

Most parents have to get the kids ready for the bus or drop them off at 
daycare. Then you have to rush here and deal with these people. Then 
you have to go back home and deal with those responsibilities of cooking 
and cleaning. Then you start all over again the next day. They ask a lot of 
us, just to keep our benefits. I don’t want to complain but some people are 
here from open to close. So by the time you come here and stay until it 
closes, you don’t have any time for yourself because you have to go 
straight home to the kids. I feel that a lot is lacking. Some days I don’t get 
a chance to cook whole meals because I am so tired when I get home.

Kids want to play, but I am too tired.

Fatty felt that spending so much time in the work activity did not 
contribute to her success in college. She said

I only have one child so I can’t imagine what it is like for the people that 
have 3 and 4. I don’t mind working or being down here but I really just 
want to focus on school. I know that I can do it but I don’t want to 
pressure myself knowing that I have to come here, go to school and then 
go home to my child. I just really think that it would be better if I just
could use the hours that I am here to just focus on school. You know when I get out of class, I really want to stay in the library and do my work, but I can’t because I have to come over here. When we have to do some paperwork here, I really don’t mind doing it but I really just want to concentrate on my school work because I know I have to go home to my child I have to attend to him.

Denise, on the other hand, thought out of the box, she felt that time management was not a big concern for her. She said

I think it might be for the person that is not too organized. If you can’t manage in life it can be stressful. I really didn’t think that I could manage at first but now I know I can. Being here has helped me because I see that I can go to work now, go to college and spend time with my kids. It has taught me how to make a schedule and I see it can be done and my dad really helped me out a lot because he kept telling me that you have to manage your time and you have to do this and then you have to do that and you have to plan out your day. Actually, it is helping me because now I have to come up with a schedule. I really was not a schedule type of person but now I am good. Before everything was so unorganized but now I have to come up with a plan on how to do things. Like when I come here then I go home and I know that I have to get everything situated there and then I have to do everything in a timeframe so it really kind of helps me, a lot.
Financial Concerns

Although the U.S. welfare system has been criticized for its numerous faults, many agree that it has always served as a vital safety net for many families. Some form of public assistance for single women raising children on their own has always been necessary in a society that makes earning a living through labor intensive employment the main source of income. Many single mother families in this country are poor – but not because they are lazy, lack initiative, or are unlucky, but the primary reason is because it is difficult for one person with little income to support a family, and even more difficult if that person is female. Mothers must do unpaid work, limiting their time to do paid work, and when they do paid work, they are paid significantly less if they do not possess the education or skills necessary to compete in today’s workforce.¹

Many recipients of public assistance in Jackson, Mississippi are faced with financial difficulties and the challenges of being the sole provider for their child or children. An overwhelming number of the participants in this study stated that the circumstances that brought them into the TANF program was the fact that they were faced with financial challenges. All the participants (N=32) were unemployed and not receiving any child support from the fathers of their children when they came into the program. These participants were suffering economically and felt they had no other choice but to apply for TANF relief.

While 91% (N=29) of the participants felt that the cash assistance provided to them by TANF is not enough to erase their financial worries, all of them (N=32) expressed their gratitude to TANF for providing assistance to them during their time of need. Many of the participants expressed that they felt there is abuse within the system, but that overall recipients are receiving TANF because they really need the help. All of the college participants felt that once they received their college degree they would end their stay on TANF for a better life for themselves and their children. A few of the comments follow:

Denise expressed her thoughts by saying

I know there are some people who take advantage of the system but you still should not stereotype everyone. Whatever reasons that they do what they do is pretty much the same as what we do. I don’t think you should judge anybody and you should not name call or predict that because we are on welfare we have to be bad because there are people out here that really need help and this is the only way we can get it. We have all made decisions in our lives that have probably not been the best decisions that we should have made but I don’t feel that we should be judged because we made a different decision than you might have made.

Shae explained that she is really having financial problems right now because she has been out of work for over a year. Shae says she came into the TANF program a few months ago because she got to the point where she really had no money to live on, so she had to apply for assistance. In the past Shae has worked at IHOP,
Popeye’s and Sonics. She is hoping that her next job is better than her previous jobs and is grateful that she is in the Job Readiness program to help her with interviewing skills. She recently received her GED and wants to start college soon but as she explained

Transportation will be a problem because I don’t have a car. I will have to depend on the bus so I can’t go to school in the evening because the buses do not run after 6:00 p.m. So I will have to go to college somewhere that the bus runs and it will have to be in the day time. I may have to put college on hold for a minute because I need a job right now.

Chenise said “I am having financial problems right now trying to make ends meet but I feel that college will help me in the long run get out of the situation that I am in now.”

When the researcher asked Em, Maggie, Khloe and Lamiya what brought them into the TANF program, they respectively responded:

“I am on TANF because I need help and I can’t find a job. I don’t have nowhere else to go. I am just trying to get on my feet so being in this program is helping me.”

“You know some us really do need these benefits and I feel like sometimes the caseworkers feel like ‘she’s just coming up here to get what she can get, so we are going to make them do whatever so that they can get off the program’. I mean they really should not look at us that way like we are just trying to collect a government check. A lot of us are just
trying to make it in life and getting these benefits until we can do better and not just trying to abuse the system.”

“I have had a hard time finding a job because I only have cashier and experience working at a check cashing place. I know that a college education is very important because now with jobs, especially jobs that pay decent money, you can’t just have a diploma, you got to have some degrees.”

“I needed help. Sometimes I feel bad about receiving TANF because TANF is not really enough to live on. You can get by with what they give you but if you want your kids to have more - then really you need to have a college education so you can get a job that can provide more for your kids.”

*Child Care Worries*

Often, affordability, accessibility and reliability present significant child care problems for single mothers with financial constraints. When women on welfare have un-resolvable child care concerns, it affects their ability to secure and sustain long-term employment and persist in college. For those who do obtain employment, hours may vary or they are scheduled to work during nontraditional hours. This creates challenges for obtaining child care during evening, night time, or weekend hours. Furthermore, employment opportunities are often minimum wage with less than full-time hours. As a result, recipients may not work consistently, and therefore may not be able to obtain adequate income to meet all of the family economic needs.
The majority of the participants in this study expressed concern for the welfare of their children while they were either attending classes or on the job. The findings revealed that all of the participants (N=32) came into the TANF program because they lacked the finances to take care of themselves and their children; however, 75% (N=24) acknowledged that they specifically came to the program to receive child care vouchers. These 24 participants expressed that they could not afford to pay for child care services while they look for a job or attend school. Most of them voiced that their extended families were unable to help them with child care issues. Furthermore, without an income it is virtually impossible to pay the high cost of child care. Therefore, the participants found it necessary to come to TANF to at least receive a child care voucher so that they could look for a job or attend classes with the peace of mind. Examples of the responses were:

Fatty said that “I came in for the child care voucher because I needed to look for a job and do some other things and didn’t have anyone to watch my child for me – so I needed to get him into daycare.”

Michele explained her reasons for coming into the TANF program by sharing the following

One of the reasons that I am here is because of child support. Being a single parent I know that fighting for child support is one of the biggest issues that black women have. In order to get childcare or any assistance for your kids you have to go through child support. Not receiving child
support from the fathers and me needing childcare is why I had to apply for TANF.

Alycia stated "Not having a job and needing day care for my little girl – that is what brought me here."

Taylor revealed that she came into the TANF program to receive a child care voucher. She expressed

I was going to school and I really didn’t have the family support system that some other people have. My aunt was working and my mother was sick. So, I did not have the babysitter that I needed. So I came in the program to get a childcare voucher so I could continue my education.

Tiffany wanted to find a job. She was unemployed for several months. She came into the program because she needed help with childcare expenses. She stated

I was out of work and so I needed some kind of help. I was going to school and that was basically the only thing that I was getting since I was out of a job. So I decided to come here and got a voucher to put my child into daycare and that helped me out a lot because now I can go out and try to find a job.

Yvette, a very conscientious person, said "I needed childcare for my kids so that I could stay in college."

Several of the participants (N=3 or 9%) reported that they had family members who were willing to care for their children while they attended classes on the weekends or during the evenings. Their responses were:
Kabby voiced that her mother was more than happy to help her while she attended classes. She stated

My mom helps me a lot. I had my first child when I was 13 and my second child when I was 17. My mom has encouraged me though all of that. She never gave up on me. She always keeps my kids for me whenever I have to take a test at school or anything I have to do.

Passion talked about her aunt who is her mentor. Passion expressed that her aunt helps out whenever necessary to ensure that she continues with her education.

She says

I have two children – the first one at 15 and my aunt never talked down to me for that. She told me that I had to continue with my education and she will do everything she can to make sure that I get it. I had my second child when I was 20 and she was upset but she kept encouraging me and she still makes sure that I get what I need to keep up with my school work and I thank her for what she has done for me.

Research Question 1

To what extent has the “work first” philosophy of the 1996 Welfare Reform Act impacted African-American welfare mothers’ access to postsecondary education in Jackson, Mississippi?

To identify what, if any, impact the “work first” philosophy of the 1996 Welfare Reform Act has had on African-American TANF recipients in Jackson, the researcher wanted to ascertain whether or not participants were familiar with the term “work first”
or the “work first philosophy, as well as how they felt about the “work first” approach to attaining self-sufficiency. Table 4.2 shows that 100% (N=32) of the participants had not heard the term “work first” from anyone associated with the TANF program nor had they seen the term in any of the literature given to them about the program.

Table 4.2. Participant’s Response to the “Work First” Philosophy

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<td>0%</td>
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<td>b) Do you agree with the “work first” approach?*</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>19%</td>
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*This question follows researcher’s explanation(s).

After the researcher carefully explained the pre-TANF welfare system and the ideas that surround the “work first philosophy” as it relates to current welfare policy, the participants were asked to think about part b of the question for a couple of minutes before providing an answer. Findings revealed that 81% (N=26) of the participants agreed that recipients should work for their benefits, even if they were enrolled in a postsecondary education program. This finding coincides with the literature in that other welfare studies have revealed that requiring recipients to work for benefits is not a major concern. Some of their comments to support this finding were:

Alycia: “I would rather work than do nothing or just receiving benefits. I don’t mind working as a matter of fact I enjoy working. It’s just hard now to find a job. I agree with the idea of work first.”
Simone: “I believe that you do need to do something in order to get something. Can’t just sit home and receive benefits. If you are not disabled you should work.”

Renae: “I feel that it’s good. It’s better to be doing something for your benefits than not doing anything and receiving benefits. I’d rather be working. But right now I don’t have time to look for a job because I go to school 3 days a week and I’m here the other 2 days. So I don’t understand how they expect us to find a job if we don’t have time to go out and look for a job.”

Kabby: “I feel okay about it. I think a person should work for their benefits, but I think it is a bit too much what they have us doing to get the benefits. Some of us have to spend all of our free time up here at the Center.”

Sanaa: “I think that it is all right. People should have to work to get their benefits. Before people use to sit home and do nothing for the money and that was not right. I think that this is okay to make people work for it.”

Raigan: “I feel okay about that because I want to work anyway. These benefits are not a lot to live off from month to month, so you need a job while you are on TANF because it is not enough. So, it’s okay with me.”

Tiffany: “I think that is good. It makes you more dependable on your own. This helps you to make your own money instead of just being dependent on the government to give you something while you sit at home. This pushes you to try to do something positive for yourself.”

The nineteen percent (N=6) who did not fully support the “work first philosophy” while in the TANF program cited specific reasons. For example, Nikki did not agree
with the “work first” philosophy because she has an asthmatic son and is the sole supporter of her three children. She stated that when she first applied for TANF, her caseworker was “only interested in her finding work, any work” which is one of the tenets of “work first” philosophy. At the time of the interview, Nikki was somewhat disillusioned because she wanted her caseworker to be compassionate and caring of her well-being. However, she does not feel that she got that from her caseworker. She says

When I first came in the TANF program I was pregnant. At the time that I started TANF I was going to CNA classes. TANF gave me money for transportation to get back and forth to the classes. So after I finished the six weeks of CNA classes I was still getting TANF, but at that time I had a caseworker who is not there anymore but my caseworker was about to sanction my case because she wanted me to find a job as quick as possible. So I was waiting to get my CNA license in the mail. I told her that and within a few days she just closed my case. She told me she wanted me to find a job right away or she was going to close my case. She even told me to go out to a ‘burger joint’ to find a job. I told her that as soon as my license came in the mail I was going to go out to the nursing homes and try to find a job. She could not wait. So when I got my license in the mail, I found a job at a nursing home but I was already sanctioned off TANF by then. I stayed off TANF for a good while before I had to return this time. I believe that emphasizing work so much is kind of harsh. I think they should understand about the economy, especially in Mississippi
it is definitely hard to find a job. I feel that all they care about is going out there and finding something because if you don’t find something in a certain amount of time, they’re just going to close your case. Then you lose your benefits, your childcare and TANF. Even though I don’t agree with the work first idea, I want to work. But I’m trying to work somewhere in my field, not just jump into cashiering, or sales because I don’t have that type of experience and I’m not going to get hired for those kind of jobs. I like to work in the health field and all that my caseworker is saying is find a job, find a job.

Chenise, a four year degree seeking social work student, felt the same as Nikki in that her caseworker was not encouraging in her attitude when she kept telling her that she had to find a job. She felt that her caseworker’s “work first” attitude was not right. Chenise stated

They do only care about us getting a job. But I feel like it defeats the purpose because if you go out there and just get a job, you’re going to end up back in the same situation because you will not get enough hours or you will lose your benefits and food stamps and then the job is not paying anything. So you will lose the job and then be right back here again.

Twoboy, one of the older participants is majoring in Social Work at a 4-year institution. At this point, Twoboy feels that supporting the “work first” approach to self sufficiency would be detrimental to her position because as she explains, it is a peculiar situation for her:
This work first policy of having to put in a specific number of hours per week in a work activity in order to receive my benefits will hurt me next semester because in the Social Work Program at my school, I will have to be in the field from 8:00a.m.-5:00p.m. the entire semester – so I don’t know what will happen to me then – I don’t know if I can put in any hours in a work activity since I will be in the field all day Monday through Friday. I don’t know if I will be put off TANF altogether. I don’t know what I will do if that happens because I am not going to stop school. I can’t pay for childcare, so I don’t know what I will do.

Maggie, a very outspoken young lady felt very concerned about the attitudes of caseworkers who are only concerned about recipients finding any kind of job as long as it is a job. She thinks that the caseworkers never look at recipients as people that need encouragement. Maggie says

   Every since I have been in this program the only thing that the caseworkers have been pushing is for me to find a job. I don’t ever remember a caseworker saying to me ‘have you ever considered going back to school?’

   No they don’t ask that, they just want you to get a job and get out of their face basically. They just want you to get a job so they won’t have to worry about you anymore, not that they want you to further your education and get yourself a career going, but just get a job. They are not coming out here trying to walk in these shoes. So I mean I really hate it.
Tables 4.3 and 4.4 show the results from questions the researcher posed to find out if the “work first” philosophy or any elements of the philosophy interfered with their ability to attend or continue in college.

Table 4.3. Participant’s Response to “Work First” Work Requirements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Have the work requirement hours, or any other TANF requirement, interfered with your school work, class schedule, or your ability to apply for or continue in college?</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thirteen percent (13%) of the participants who responded no to the question in Table 4.3 were job readiness students who articulated that being in the work activity did not interfere with their ability to enroll in college because they were not ready to attend college at this time. The participants expressed that they would not be able to succeed in college because they needed to find a job and it would be too much to do both. The remaining 6% (N=2) of the no responses were returning participants in the job readiness program who expressed that they were no longer eligible for the college program because they exceeded their allotted twelve-month time limit for postsecondary education. Both of these participants stated that they had to drop out of college because their postsecondary education ineligibility also made them ineligible for child care expenses and they could not pay for child care on their own.

The findings revealed that the 81% yes responses were from participants who communicated that the number of hours spent in the work activity interfered with their ability to successfully succeed or continue in their college program. Several of the
participants expressed their concern with academic probation since they were not getting enough study and research time to maintain a sufficient grade point average. For example, Chenise stated

Going to school and trying to get your hours in and then going home to your responsibilities can certainly be stressful. I have a hard time focusing on school work when I am here. I worry about keeping up with my school work because if I have to leave because my GPA is below where it should be, then I’ve spent all this time in school for nothing. I don’t want that to happen. I’ll do what I need to do but it would be better if TANF made better allowances for us who are in school to have study time.

Table 4.4. Participant’s Response to Multiple Family Responsibilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Mixed*</th>
<th>No Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you feel that requiring recipients to work or participate in a work activity for 35 or more hours per week, plus go to college, plus take care of family responsibilities is too much to ask of recipients in order for them to keep their benefits?</td>
<td>59.3%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Represents a yes and no response from the participant.

For the most part, participants expressed that asking recipients to participate in a work activity for more than 35 hours per week, plus go to college was too much to ask of them considering their home responsibilities. As shown in Table 4.4, 59.3% attest to that; however, some of the participants (25%) voiced that participating in the work
activity for 35 or more per week was like having a job and going to school. They voiced that other people outside the welfare population make the adjustment so they should have the same responsibility. This finding was also consistent with the literature in that most welfare recipients are not asking for a handout. Some of the responses were:

Yvette explained

Before about 5 months ago I would have said no, but now I know that it is a lot to require. Before I was in public housing so I did not have to worry about bills, but when a person has to worry about bills and kids you want to get an education but at the same time you have to get those bills paid and the children taken care of. The TANF program is great and they offer us assistance and we probably couldn’t go to school without it, but if they would not give us such crazy hours to fulfill then I believe it would be a better help to us because like now it’s the holiday season and I have to be here for 40 hours this week and that is kind of ridiculous. But we all said we are not going to complain because they are helping us out. I understand that they don’t want to let up on the numbers because some people would take advantage but I believe there are other ways of doing things to make sure that the system works than making us stick so hard to the hours that we were assigned to. Even with the policy of having 2 excuses per month. I have a child that has eczema really bad and her teacher told me that I could not bring her back until I got a doctor note saying that she was not contagious. I could not get an appointment until
that Thursday so in the meantime I had to stay home with her and the next thing I knew my case was in jeopardy of being closed because the supervisor told me that I could not miss more than two days from the program. I mean it is all these blanket policies that is going to cause us more harm than good. I mean we all thank God for the TANF program but the rules are sometimes too much. What they don’t understand is that people have to have their own mindset to want to better themselves and if you don’t have that then there is nothing that anybody can do to help them be better. There are people that come up here every day in the GED program. Some people get their GED in 2 or 3 months and then you have others that have been here for 3 years trying to get their GED. The teachers here know who those people are but they keep letting them be here. So that is what I mean by those blanket policies are much less effective than they really think they are.

Simone stated

No, that’s what you’re supposed to do. To get to where you’re going, you have to do something. So if you get a dead end job, you’re still working that 40 hours. You still getting about the same amount of money that they are giving you here and you still not getting an education to help you go forward. So I think that the TANF program is doing what it needs to do.

Michelle said

Yes, I do sometimes. It’s like the 35 hours plus you have to come here and then go home and take care of your family. Sometimes it is
overwhelming and that brings on anxiety. Then you have to take a little
time for yourself because if you don’t you will break down and get
depressed. Even though I stay with my mother, I am the one who pay the
bills and I am not use to depending on a check at the beginning of the
month. So instead of putting in the hours up here I really feel that I should
be out looking for a job. Like this month I did not get my transportation
money because I got so busy at school that I forgot to call down here to
say I would not be in the day before and after the Thanksgiving holiday,
so they said I had too many excuses for the month. Also, since I have
school Tuesday through Saturday and then I have to come down here and
then go home and be there for the kids – it’s really hard.

Khloe explained

It could be too much but it could not be. I do think that it is a bit much
because you still have to balance things. Sometimes there may be a
conflict with school and then home and then work. So if you are not good
at balancing, it will get to be too much and you will have to let something
go -- more likely for me it will be school.

Nikkipooh expressed

Kind of because with going to school and going through the TANF work
program, it takes time from you to spend with your kids. They have to be
at daycare and then have to be in bed by a certain time. So it only gives
you a little time to be with them. When you leave here you are kind of
tired to even play with your kids and you know they have all the energy
that you don’t have. Some people have quit the program because they say they really need a job and they can’t be here all day and look for a job at the same time. So they just leave here and find any kind of job to take care of their responsibilities at home.

Research Question 2

To what extent have Mississippi TANF recipients' perceptions of the welfare culture, also known as the culture of poverty, influenced their choice to forego or pursue postsecondary education?

To answer this research question, the participants were asked:

1. Are you aware that media portrayal of the “welfare queen” cause many people in society to believe that there is a negative culture within the welfare population commonly referred to as a welfare culture or a culture of poverty?

2. Do you think the media portrayal of African-American women on welfare is true?

3. Do you believe that Mississippi has a welfare culture much like the one constructed in the media? If so, has the welfare culture influenced your motivation to attend college either now or in the future?

Question 1

The findings revealed that 93% (N=30) of the participants were aware that the media had portrayed them negatively. The remaining 7% (N=2) preferred not to answer the question. It should be noted that the participants were very much aware of the stereotypical depictions placed upon welfare mothers by the media. Many of them were not in agreement with the depiction as voiced in the comment section of Question 2.
Question 2

The findings revealed that 91% \((N=29)\) of the participants expressed that the media impressions of African-American women on welfare are untrue; however 9% \((N=3)\) voiced that they thought the media portrayal of African-American women is true.

Comments were:

Shae explained
I really don’t care what anybody has to say because like I said, everybody has their own situations. They don’t know what the next person is going through. Other people are not in my situation. For me, I don’t feel like a welfare queen. I just know that I need help and I’m going to take advantage of this program to get me to where I want to be so I can move on with my life and be financially stable.

Kiana said
I feel like something is wrong with that because women, African-American women, go through so much. We go through a lot. So you just can’t say that we are on welfare because we want to be on welfare or we’re receiving TANF because we want to. It’s not all about that. Nobody knows what a person is going through so we shouldn’t be called lazy for that.

Alycia expressed
I disagree with that. But so many women let it be known that they don’t mind getting welfare. I guess that’s where that came from, but I strongly disagree because I am not a welfare queen. If it wasn’t for my little girl, I
probably wouldn’t even be here. I would try to get it on my own, but with
a child to feed, it’s different, especially when you don’t have any help.
You just have to suck up your pride and do what you have to do.

Nikki said
I think it is kind of discriminating to me because everyone is not perfect.
Most wealthy American women will look at us like we ain’t nothing and it
is a bit disturbing.

Brandy stated
I don’t agree with that because if you look at it we are not the only
ones that are on welfare. For Rankin County to be so high class, I know a
lot of white women over there are on welfare. So, I disagree with that all
together.

Simone explained
It’s not a true portrayal. Some people do become lazy but it’s not just
limited to African-American women. That’s for everybody, African-
American women, African-American men, White Women, it’s everybody.
Lazy is just somebody’s upbringing. It should not be limited to race
because as an African-American woman, I’m not lazy. My sister is
African-American and she is not lazy. My mother - same thing. I have
aunts, cousins, and friends that are women who are not lazy. I don’t even
see how they can call us lazy because we, African-American women, we
work the hardest. Just by being stereotyped as the single mother all the
time, we work the hardest, so I don’t agree with that stereotype.
Fatty expressed

I am not going to down my black women but I can say that some of that is true, but if they are going to put us out there, then put the white ones and the Mexican ones and the Asian ones out there to. It’s all kinds that receive assistance. In a way, it is true but all races of women know that assistance is out there and they are going to try to get it. So if you are going to call black women welfare queens, other races should be called welfare queens to.

Kabby stated

If it were a Hispanic lady or Caucasian lady, it wouldn’t be any different. It would be the same – I don’t feel that women receiving welfare are lazy or welfare queens or any of that. They are getting assistance because they need it. It really makes me feel like nothing when people say that. In some cases, it may be true, but in other cases the person that’s saying it does not even know what’s going on in your situation.

Michelle explained

Some of it is true because some people put themselves out there. People have knowledge – they just don’t want to do any better because they don’t know any better and some people don’t do any better because they don’t even want to know any better.

Passion expressed

I understand that the media is doing that but some African-American females actually live up to that. It is a lot of African-American females
that is getting assistance because they are lazy and having babies just to keep getting the money. The problem is that we are all getting put in that pile. You know it’s like if one person does this – then we all get blamed for it. The media is always going to go to the bad things so then it’s always going to look like we are all doing it. That’s what’s happening.

Rochelle stated

I feel that it is not fair to say that all African-American women are trying to beat the system because there are some people that are on assistance that really are trying to do good and this is their only source of income so they are doing it because they need it to take care of their households.

Tamika explained

I feel that it is not right why they say that about African-American women is because white people are the same way. They are not just all out there with their stuff because at first I thought the same thing before I even started having children and receiving any benefits. I use to think that why isn’t there anything but black people always going up there to get the stamps or leaving the thrift store with a basket of clothes but then when I started having children and coming to the welfare office I started seeing that white people are up here to. It’s just that a lot of white people hide what they do and don’t be out there all in the open like black women do.

Twoboy explained
I feel that it is wrong for people to label other people like that especially if they don’t know the persons’ background, and the causes of why they are in the situation that they are in. I think it is just wrong.

Yvette stated

I tend not to get frustrated about what other people think of me. It doesn’t bother me because I know better. I know there are people who are living off the system but I believe that most of them are just trying to make ends meet. Sitting here talking to these ladies every day – I will tell anybody that is in this situation, especially if you had a child at a young age, that it is okay to utilize the resources that are available to you until you can do better. If you really need it and don’t use it that just only opens up the door for somebody to use it that don’t really need it. I have 4 children and I only receive assistance because I really need it.

Question 3

Findings for question 3a and 3b are presented in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5. Participant’s Response to Welfare Culture in Mississippi

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question(s)</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Mixed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) Do you believe that there is a welfare culture in Mississippi much like the one constructed in the media?</td>
<td>Yes 100%</td>
<td>No 0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) If so, has the culture influenced your motivation to attend college either now or in the future?</td>
<td>Yes 63%</td>
<td>No 28%</td>
<td>Mixed 9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In response to question 3a, one hundred percent (100%, N=32) of the participants expressed that they believe there is at least some element of the welfare culture in Mississippi. Seventy-nine percent (79%, N=25) of the 100% expressed that TANF recipients in and around Mississippi have too many children; 9% (N=3) stated that they believed some TANF recipients keep having children just so they can receive benefits; and 12% (N=4) stated that they believe that some TANF recipients are lazy and do not want to work at all.

In response to question 3b, sixty-three percent (63%, N=20) of the participants expressed that the negative portrayal in the media and the welfare culture in Mississippi has in some way influenced their motivation to get a college degree; 28% (N=9) expressed that they do not believe that a culture of poverty or a welfare culture had anything to do with their decision to attend college since they were already in college before they came to the TANF program; and 9% (N=3) expressed mixed feelings due to their decision not to attend college at the time of the interviews.

Some of the responses to question 3a were:

Carlena answered “Yes and some of the women on TANF in Mississippi are like that. They are lazy and they don’t have any motivation.”

Tweety said

Well, yes. Some women who get TANF are lazy people. They feel that they should just lay down and live off the system, live under they mama’s roof and don’t do nothing. But if you have kids, you need to set an example for them. So if you have a program like TANF that wants to help
you find a job or be better than you are, you should take heed and do that
so you won’t have to be called lazy or whatever. If your children see you
doing nothing, then they gone grow up and do nothing. You always say
that you want your children to do better than you. How can they do better
than you if they see you ain’t doing nothing but being lazy?

Taylor stated

I feel like it is the truth. That is what it is. Some people have a timeline
like I’m going to do this for a certain amount of time. Some people ride
the system for 5 years straight. Then it’s like some people get on TANF
and get right back off of TANF, but everybody is not like that. And then
when they get off TANF they come right back because they quit their job
and they don’t want to work. So that’s what it is pretty much.

Jean explained

I don’t like to judge people but from what I have seen just in this job
readiness class alone, and I have been in other classes to – but you may
start with about 20 people, but out of that 20 only about 2 or 3 are really
trying to find a job and do what they are suppose to do. But that is just my
opinion. I think many of the women are lazy and when they come up here
looking any kind of way, they should put them off the program because I
would not give some of them benefits let alone give them a job. They
make it bad for all of us.
Some of the responses to question 3b follow:

Simone stated

Yes, I guess you can say the welfare culture influenced me. Well I’ve always had a job. Since I was 16 I have worked. I don’t like just receiving something for nothing. Since 16 I’ve been working but I’m tired of dead end jobs. So my first thing was to start college and my second was to get TANF. The only reason why I enrolled in TANF was because I needed childcare. Childcare is too high in Mississippi. I don’t get any child support from the children’s father and my family does not have money to help me. So yes, this being on welfare culture did influence me to go back to get a degree because I am tired of working on these jobs that pay this little money. I know you need a college degree to get ahead. Yes, I am also tired of people thinking that black women on welfare don’t want to make something of their lives. I want to get a college degree and I want to get off TANF.

Alycia said

Yes it did. The process to get TANF is so long and you have to do so much to get this little bit of money, so I just said that I don’t want to do this for the rest of my life, have to depend on government assistance. I want to be a role model for my little girl and provide for her on my own. TANF only really helps you to just get by, it doesn’t help you to advance yourself. That’s why I decided that college is the best way to get a decent income to help me and my little girl.
Brandy stated

Not really. One of my goals any way was to go to college so I could do better for me and for my kids. Being on TANF does make me work extra hard to go ahead and get my degree.

Kabby said

No. I was already in college when I got in the TANF program. At first when I enrolled in TANF, I had lost my job and I did not have any way to take care of my kids. That did make me feel bad until I came here. What I was hearing about this program was not like what I was seeing. I was hearing that this program is just wasting my time and there was no need to be here; but of course, I feel they waste our time, but the time is wasted for a good reason. I don’t want to come here every day, but truly it is worth me coming here because they teach us a lot, whether the others admit it or not. But I knew for myself that I needed a college degree to get a good job, it had nothing to do with a welfare culture. I am tired of these minimum wage jobs.

Passion stated

No. I was brought up knowing that education is the best way to get ahead in life. My mother and some other family members received TANF, but I was brought up believing that a good education could get you better things. Just because my family and me receive TANF don’t mean that we are lazy at all. My mother was on TANF until she could do better and
then she got off. My other family members are on TANF because they need the help. I am on TANF because I got pregnant and didn’t have any help. But I believe that when I get my college degree, I definitely won’t need TANF and I will get off TANF.

Twoboy said

No, not for me because I was in college before I even started on TANF. I was tired of the factory jobs and I always knew I could do better. I know that long term TANF is not the life I want for me or for my boys. No, I don’t want to be part of the welfare culture.

Yvette said

No, I was already in college before I started receiving public assistance. More than anything, my receiving public assistance affects my wanting to work. I really want to work so that I can get off public assistance. I don’t like that some people think of women who receive public assistance is anything but in need of help. I want to work but I want to work for enough money so that I will not have to return to public assistance. So, I guess that is why I am in college to get a career and not just a job.

Research Question 3

How do TANF recipients in Jackson, Mississippi perceive access to postsecondary education relative to their well-being?

To answer Research Question 3, the study participants were asked the following two questions:
1. How important do you believe postsecondary education is to your overall well-being? Well being, for this question, means to provide financially for yourself and your family.

2. Do you feel that the TANF program provides enough opportunities, specifically college opportunities, to help recipients become self-sufficient?

Findings from question 1 revealed that 100% (N=32) of the participants (college participants and job readiness participants) believed in the importance of a college education. They thought that having a college education would lead them to employment with better pay and the ability to provide a good living for their children. This finding is also consistent with the literature. Several of the comments are listed below:

Jean stated “I think that getting a college education is the best decision that anybody could make because from what I can see most people that get a college education, pretty much have good jobs. I am on my daughter constantly about not waiting until she get to high school to start getting good grades. She can start now and get a scholarship.”

Passion stated that “Everybody that is able to attend college should. Everybody is not Michael Jordon, everybody is not a singer or a football player – so you got to have something to fall on.”

Tamika explained

I feel that it is very important. Back in the days all you had to do was have a high school diploma and you could get anywhere and do anything. But now days without a degree or at least furthering your education, it is hard to even work at a fast food place. So yes, I feel that if you go to
college and get a degree than you can get the job that you want. You can know the hours that you are going to be working, you have a set schedule -- you won't have to be trying to figure out if they are going to give me enough hours this week to meet my obligations or do I have to go to work this day or that day. I will know that Monday through Friday I have to go to work from 8:00 to 5:00 and have weekends off. So you feel that people without a college education have to work on those kinds of job. I don't want that for me, so I know I need to get a college education.

Simone stated “Yes of course, college is important. If you don’t have a college education you are going to be stuck in a dead end job and what you gone do then.

Taylor stated

I feel real good about getting a college education, especially for my kids. They need to know that their mother went to college. I believe that college is a better future for me and also for my children. In this workforce you can’t get by without it. You now have to have a GED or diploma to work at McDonalds. That is how bad it’s getting and I’m not the person who wants to work at McDonalds.

Denise explained

I feel that it is really important, especially with the jobs being the way they are now and plus I have learned that when you are young you don’t think that education is really important; but when you get older and have your own kids you feel that it’s important to have the education behind you because the kids are going to need help with homework and they may
have questions that you have to give them good answers to. My main reasons for going back to college is to show my children, especially when you have girls, that you can change and that you don’t always have to be down. You can fall but you don’t have to fall all the way down before you get up and do something about your life. I just want to show them that education helps them to have a better life.

Table 4.6 shows the results from question from posed to the participants to determine if they felt the TANF program was providing sufficient educational opportunities for them to become self-sufficient?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you feel that the TANF program provides enough educational opportunities, specifically educational opportunities, to help recipients become self-sufficient?</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in Table 4.5, findings revealed that 78% (N=25) of the participants felt that the TANF program does not provide enough educational opportunities for them to become self-sufficient; while 22% (N=7) felt that TANF does offer ample opportunities for recipients to become financially stable. The data revealed that education is important to TANF recipients in Jackson, Mississippi and they believe that access to education is critical in their desire to become self-sufficient and good citizens. Tweety’s response answers the question best. She said
If your children see you doing nothing, then they gone grow up and do nothing. You always say that you want your children to do better than you. How can they do better than you if they see you ain't doing nothing but being lazy and drawing a welfare check every month? If you go to college then 9 times out of 10 when they grow up, they will go to college and not have to be depending on welfare. Many of us come to the TANF program hoping that they will help us. Help us get an education or find a job, so that we can do better. Some of these people that come up here don't know anything about college, but they on TANF and TANF should be trying to help them get off TANF in a good way. I think they don't even try to help us better ourselves. Sometimes I think they rather believe we don't try. None of the caseworkers that I ever had told me about the college program, I found out from my Aunt. She told me that back in the day they could go to college and still get welfare. So I had to come up here and ask them about that. Finally, she [caseworker] told me about the GED and college program. Why didn’t she tell me that upfront? They should talk to us more about getting a college degree to help ourselves and our families stay off TANF.”

The knowledge in Tweety’s response was unknowing to her. Her attitude about welfare recipients in general really brought focus to the often overlooked benefit of postsecondary education in the lives of welfare mothers in that it can be used as a tool to break the intergenerational cycle of welfare dependency. The intergenerational cycle of
dependency, commonly referred to as a culture of poverty does appear to exist to some degree in the welfare community in Jackson. The data revealed that many of the participants (59%, N=17) stated that their mother received some form of public assistance when they were growing up. The public assistance most mentioned was food stamps. The food stamp program was very important to the well-being of poor families during the AFDC era and it is as important to poor families during the TANF era. Without a doubt, many of the women expressed their continued reliance on the food stamps income to help support and maintain the survival of their family. This finding suggests that there is some level of dependency within this population that may contribute to the culture of poverty phenomena. Also, one of the more disturbing findings revealed that 38% of the participants (N=12) are attending 2-year colleges or vocational schools while only 16% choose to attend 4-year institutions.

Summary

Rarely are these women asked for their ideas and opinions related to welfare policies that affect their lives. Jean, one of the participants in the study, asked the researcher “will the information we provide be used for any particular purpose?” The researcher explained that the research findings would be provided to the Mississippi Department of Human Services for their consideration for policy changes. The researcher reiterated that all names would be kept confidential; however, the voices of the participants would be heard. The participant became very excited – she thanked the researcher for asking the tough questions and for listening to their answers. She stated that she was very glad that someone with authority would finally hear what they, the
TANF recipients, had to say. Knowing that she could contribute to the welfare discussions in Jackson was a victory to her. Rather than speak for these women, the researcher presented their own words to accurately portray their thoughts, experiences, and feelings about pursuing postsecondary education while in the TANF program.

The conclusions, further discussions of the findings and recommendations are presented in Chapter 5.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter 5 presents the conclusions, discussion and recommendations from the findings of this research study. Among the many challenges in the United States welfare system, one that has received little attention since the passing of the 1996 Welfare Reform Act more than fifteen years ago is the lack of progress the system has made in providing less restrictive opportunities for postsecondary education for welfare recipients. As a result, the purpose of this study was to determine the extent to which the 1996 Welfare Reform Act has impacted TANF recipients’ access to postsecondary education in Jackson, Mississippi in 2011.

A qualitative research methodology was utilized for the study. With demographic surveys and in-depth, open-ended interviews, data was collected from thirty-two (32) African-American women who volunteered to be participants. The participants were TANF recipients who were either enrolled in the postsecondary education program or the job readiness program supported by the Mississippi Department of Human Services. The participants were encouraged to share their postsecondary education experiences while they were receiving TANF benefits from the state of Mississippi. The study was guided by the following research questions.

1. To what extent has the “work first” philosophy of the 1996 Welfare Reform Act impacted African-American TANF recipients’ access to postsecondary education in Jackson, Mississippi?
2. To what extent have Mississippi TANF recipients’ perceptions of the welfare culture, also known as the culture of poverty, influenced their choice to forego or pursue postsecondary education?

3. How do TANF recipients in Jackson, Mississippi perceive access to postsecondary education relative to their economic well-being?

The goal of the research was to understand why recipients in Jackson, Mississippi were or were not taking advantage of the postsecondary education option available to them as part of the 1996 Welfare Reform Act to help improve their ability to become self-sufficient. After detailed analysis of the data, the goal was accomplished and the following conclusions were drawn:

Regarding Research Question 1 – Overall, the “work first” philosophy of the 1996 Welfare Reform Act has impacted access to postsecondary education for TANF recipients in Jackson, Mississippi to some degree. Data revealed that participants who are enrolled in a college program are experiencing stress because they are not afforded ample time to study. Data revealed that the participants felt that the strenuous work requirements associated with the 1996 Welfare Reform Act and the “work first” ideology should be changed. These work requirements, as expressed by them, have a great impact on their ability to remain in their college program. They felt that they could not study on campus because they must immediately report to their work assignment after they leave their last class. Additionally, they felt that they could not study when they got to the work assignment because there was too much activity.

Data also revealed that the 1996 Welfare Reform Act has further impacted access to postsecondary education for recipients because TANF only allow 12 months toward postsecondary education completion. After 12 months, several of the participants
expressed that they had to "drop out" because they could not pay the high cost of child care. Their child care issues became too stressful and they had to leave their college program.

Regarding Research Question 2 - Data revealed that these women were well spoken. Their perception of the welfare culture is one of rejection. Ninety-one percent (N=29) rejected the idea that there is a welfare culture among the recipients. Several of them stated that "African-American women are not the only women who receive welfare. Do other races have a 'welfare culture'??" The majority of the study participants felt that even if a welfare culture exists among the population, it would not influence their choice to go to college because they know for themselves the value of an education.

Regarding Research Question 3 - Data revealed that all of the participants believe in the importance of a college education. They believe that a college education would lead them to employment with better pay and the ability to provide for themselves and their families. Overall, data revealed that the participants would welcome any changes to restrictive policies that deny them full access to postsecondary education. One participant expressed: "If we keep getting these dead end jobs – we will keep having to come back to TANF."

As a result, these findings are consistent with other welfare studies which emphasize the human capital approach to achieving self-sufficiency. Studies on welfare patterns clearly indicate that recipients with greater investments in human capital, such as education, work their way off welfare faster than their counterparts. The low levels of
human capital experienced by many welfare recipients make it difficult for them to find a job that would raise the family’s income over the poverty level.

Discussion

Individuals who have the resources and accessibility to attend and graduate from college are less likely to be a welfare statistic. Many of these individuals are also more likely to obtain a level of employment that will represent self-sufficiency. Their future is encouraging and their social and economic prospects are unlimited. They are success stories. For most of them, all things are moving in a positive direction. However, individuals who depend on public assistance for their source of income are sometimes not quite as optimistic for their future.

Statistics paint a grim picture of the social conditions of welfare mothers; however, they still believe in the value of a college education, which to them will improve their life circumstances. Welfare caseworkers and administrators should acknowledge that despite the odds, many of the recipients somehow manage work, child-rearing, and household responsibilities in order to obtain a college degree.

Recommendations

It appears that the TANF program in Jackson, Mississippi is well structured. There is no question that all of the TANF recipients who participated in this study are appreciative and grateful for the services they receive from the TANF program. All of the participants in the postsecondary education program were proud to say that they were in college. An overwhelming majority, however, expressed concern about the number of hours they are required to put into their work activity.
Based on the findings from this study, recommendations to the TANF program in Jackson, Mississippi are:

1) A re-examination of work requirements to see if, after 15 years, they can be modified in any way to ease the burden on the participants who are enrolled in a college program.

2) A re-examination of the 12 month vocational education limit. Since all college programs are more than 12 months in length, this 15 year old stipulation prevents many welfare recipients from completing a college program.

3) Continued developmental training for caseworkers and administrators on how to meet the overall needs of recipients in the TANF program in Jackson, Mississippi.

While the goal of this researcher was fulfilled, the findings in no way bring conclusion to the fact that the 1996 Welfare Reform Act had some affect on TANF recipients’ access to postsecondary education in Jackson, Mississippi. This research only serves as a foundation for further studies to explore other opportunities for TANF recipients to obtain self-sufficiency.
APPENDIX A

SURVEY FORM
Pen Name: ___________________________ Identifying #: ____________

SURVEY FOR TANF RECIPIENTS

Date: ___________________________ Interviewer: Ms. Charlette Brown

Demographic Information:

1. Name: __________________________________________
2. Pen Name: _______________________________________
3. Age: ________________
4. Race/ethnicity:  Black____  White____  Hispanic____  Other____
5. Home Phone: ___________________________  6. Cell Phone: ___________________________.
6. Email Address: ___________________________ (Please Print)

General Information:

7. Do you have a High School Diploma:  Yes____  No____
8. Do you have a GED:  Yes____  No____
9. Are you attending college now?  Yes____  No____
10. How many children do you have? ________
11. Have you received TANF assistance for more than 2 years?  Yes____  No____
12. Has any of your family members received TANF assistance for more than 2 years? Yes____  No____
13. Do you believe that TANF recipients in Mississippi are receiving TANF because they are too lazy to work?  Yes____  No____
14. Do you believe that TANF recipients in Mississippi have the same goals in life as non-TANF recipients?  Yes____  No____
15. Do you feel that the sanctions under the TANF program are too harsh?  Yes____  No____
16. Do you presently participate in a TANF work activity?  Yes____  No____
17. Do you presently work a minimum of 20-30 hours per week under the TANF work activity?  Yes____  No____
18. Do you think that the federal government should offer more opportunities for recipients’ to attend college under the TANF program? Yes _____ No _____

19. In the United States, do you believe that more black women than white women receive welfare benefits? Yes _____ No _____

20. Do you feel that receiving welfare over a period of years, create a dependency on welfare? Yes _____ No _____

21. Do you believe that TANF recipients should work in order to receive cash benefits? Yes _____ No _____

22. Do you feel that TANF provides you with enough benefits (cash assistance, food stamps, child care assistance, etc.) for you and your family to have a decent living? Yes _____ No _____

23. Do you feel that your caseworker is as helpful as she/he can be in providing you with information about what you are allowed to do or not allowed to do while receiving TANF benefits? Yes _____ No _____
APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE
Interview Questions for TANF Recipients

**Access to postsecondary education** is defined as having applied for or entered into postsecondary education.

**Lack of access to postsecondary education**: not being able to apply for or enter into college education.

**Work First Philosophy** – "work first" in welfare terminology is an idea that strongly emphasize requiring recipients to find work as quickly as possible. It puts little or no emphasis on trying to help recipients attain a college education or training beyond a vocational education. Looking for or finding a job is often mandatory, and if work is not found within a short period of time, recipients may be routed into unpaid community service. Work first emphasizes quick job placement as a way to accomplish stable employment and moving out of poverty. It requires that every TANF recipient who can work - will work.

**Welfare culture**, i.e., Culture of Poverty - Refers to the behavioral consequences of providing public assistance to low income individuals. The idea is that welfare creates behavioral consequences. Some may say that welfare empowers individuals by allowing them to do things that they may not be able to if welfare is not received. Others may say that welfare creates dependence on government assistance - i.e., creates laziness, no job skills, etc.

**Work Activity** – An activity that recipients are required to be in a certain number of hours per week in order to continue their benefits. If the recipient has a job, the job is considered a work activity.

**WORK ACTIVITIES**: Job Search and Job Readiness; unsubsidized employment; subsidized employment; work study; work experience; community service programs; vocational education training/postsecondary education; education directly related to employment; secondary school attendance; on-the-job training; job skills training directly related to employment.

**Adjust Questions for College Students or Job Readiness participants**

1. Did you enter the TANF Program before 1996 or after 1996?

2. Were you attending college when you entered the TANF Program?

3. Do you have any plans to attend college? Tell me about that?

4. How long were you out of a job before you entered the TANF Program?

5. Is this program you are in now considered a work activity? Did your caseworker assign you here?

6. Have the work requirement hours, or any other TANF requirement, interfered with your school work, class schedule, or your ability to apply for or continue in college?

7. Has your caseworker or any other person in the TANF program mentioned the term “work first” or the “work first” philosophy to you?
8. Do you agree with the “work first” approach?

9. Were you born or raised in Mississippi? Where or how long have you lived here?

10. When you were growing up, did any of your family (like your mother, aunt, cousins) at any time receive some kind of public assistance? If yes, tell me how you felt about that?

11. Do you know if any of your siblings (sister, brother) receive or have ever received public assistance?

12. Does any of your friends receive TANF or any other kind of public assistance? Do they attend college?

13. Is this your first time on TANF?

14. Do your friends and/or family support your choice to attend college? How do they encourage or discourage you?

15. Do you feel that too many African-American women in Jackson receive TANF or any other kind of public assistance? Describe how you feel about that.

16. Since you have been in the TANF Program, have any of the other recipients in the program tried to encourage you to go to college OR continue with college. Have any of them tried to discourage you from going or continuing? Tell me about that.

17. In your opinion, do you think that there is a welfare culture in Mississippi much like the one constructed in the media? If so, has the culture influenced your motivation to attend college either now or in the future?

18. Explain how you feel about African American women being portrayed as welfare queens, lazy, living off the system, etc.? Do you feel that any of that is true about the recipients in Jackson?

19. Do you have or have you had anyone in your life that is a personal role model or mentor? Talk to me about that.

20. Can you describe your work habits for me? Example, when you’re working do you get to work early? Are you overly anxious to leave at closing time? Do you call in sick often? Do you find yourself unmotivated to go to work?

21. How do you feel about getting a college education?

22. Do you feel that requiring recipients to work for 35 or more hours per week, plus go to college, plus take care of family responsibilities is too much to ask of recipients in order for them to keep their benefits?

23. Since you began the TANF program, have you had any trouble managing your school, work and family responsibilities? Explain.
24. Why do you think there is a work requirement component to the TANF program? Explain.

25. Has your caseworker ever talked to you about going to college? What does she/he say to you about college? How do you feel about that?

26. Did your caseworker readily accept your college classes as a work activity to qualify you for benefits or did the caseworker give you a hard time about being in college and getting welfare benefits? Explain.

27. Does your caseworker schedule appointments for you at inconvenient times, like on the days that you are in school or times that she/he know that you are in job readiness? Explain. What happens if you miss your appointments?

28. If you were to make recommendations to the program managers at TANF about ways to support TANF mother's enrollment in college, what would you say?

29. Do you feel that the TANF program provides enough opportunities, specifically educational opportunities, to help recipients become self-sufficient? Why? Explain that to me.

30. How does it make you feel as an African-American mother to be receiving TANF? Explain.

31. Were these questions difficult for you to talk about? Explain

32. Do you have a question or questions that you feel that I should have asked during this interview but didn't.

33. Finally, what were the circumstances that brought you into TANF? Do you know the circumstances of why your family members may have had that brought them into the welfare system? Tell me about them.
APPENDIX C

EMAIL FROM MDHS DIRECTOR TO COUNTY WELFARE OFFICES
AUTHORIZING THE RESEARCH
Re: Visit to county offices

Thank you so much, Ms. Butler. I will keep you informed of the outcome. Please continue the great work that you do for others.

Charlette

From: Vera Butler < >
To: 
Cc: John Davis <John.Davis@mdhs.ms.gov>; David Noble <David.Noble@mdhs.ms.gov>; Cathy Sykes <Cathy.Sykes@mdhs.ms.gov>; Chris Christmas < >
Sent: Friday, September 30, 2011 2:12 PM
Subject: Visit to county offices

Ms. Brown,

I am forwarding the email that I sent to the regional and county offices in June 2011. Please contact the regional director before you visit the county office.

Also, as stated in the email (dated June 29, 2011) below, we cannot share any information about the client's case.

Gwen Williams - Regional Director 601-469-4762
Hinds
Rankin
Warren

Derrick Crawford - Regional Director 662-363-3838
Yazoo
Issaquena
Madison
Sharkey
Washington
Sunflower
Humphrey
Bolivar

Vera Butler, Bureau Director I
Mississippi Department of Human Services
Division of Economic Assistance
SNAP and TANF Work Programs
Foundation for Families Unit

601-359-4853(phone)
601-359-4435 (fax)

Charlette Brown, a college student, is working on her doctoral degree in the Humanities from Clark Atlanta University. As a requirement for completion of the degree, she has to write a dissertation. The focus of her dissertation is to examine the extent to which the 1996 welfare reform act impacted TANF recipients' access to postsecondary education. She wants to interview TANF recipients. We have informed her that we cannot share the names of our participants with her. However, she can visit the county offices and interview people in the lobby.
This email is to notify you that State Office is aware that she may visit the following counties in July to interview people in the lobby:

- Hinds
- Rankin
- Madison
- Yazoo
- Issaquena
- Sharkey
- Warren
- Washington
- Sunflower
- Humphrey
- Bolivar

If you have any problems, please contact me.

Thanks

Vera Butler, Bureau Director I
Mississippi Department of Human Services
Division of Economic Assistance
SNAP and TANF Work Programs
Foundation for Families Unit
750 North State Street
P.O. Box 352
Jackson, MS 39205
601-359-4853(phone)
601-359-4435(fax)
APPENDIX D

TANF RECIPIENTS' PROTOCOL
TANF Recipients' Protocol

1. Greet participants with handshake and introduce myself.

2. Ask person to have a seat and get comfortable.

3. ****PROVIDE CONSENT SHEET TO BE READ AND SIGNED.

4. Thank them for consenting to participate in study.

5. Inform the participant that this study is being conducted to fulfill my requirement for doctoral degree in the humanities at Clark Atlanta University. My concentration is Women's studies. This interview will be informal and I'd like to assure you again of confidentiality.

6. The purpose of my research is to gain an understanding of how much the 1996 welfare reform act impacted African American TANF recipients' access to postsecondary education in Hinds County/Jackson, Mississippi. For purposes of this study, access to postsecondary education means your ability to enter college or your ability to continue in college. I will be interviewing approximately 30-35 TANF recipients along with case managers/workers during the next several weeks in connection with this study. The findings will be included in my final dissertation.

7. Explain that:
   i. The interview will be audio taped and you, as a participant, have the right to refuse this if you wish.
   ii. If at any time you wish not to answer a question or terminate the interview you may do so.
   iii. The demographic sheet will be given to you first to fill out. I'd like for you to know that the word TANF and welfare are used interchangeably. So if you see welfare in one place and TANF in another, they mean the same thing for purposes of this study.
   iv. The interview questions, which will begin after you have filled out the demographic sheet, are open-ended so that you can speak freely. (GIVE THE DEMOGRAPHIC SHEET AND WAIT FOR IT TO BE GIVEN BACK)
   v. The entire interview should take no more than 1 hour or less.
   vi. You may ask me at any time during the interview to clarify questions and I will do that as best I can.

8. **TURN ON TAPE RECORDER.**

9. Commence the interview.

10. After interview is complete - ask if the recipient has any additional questions about access to postsecondary education for TANF recipients that should have been included in the interview questions. (LISTEN FOR QUESTION AND ANSWER)

11. Anything else.

12. Again, thank you for participating, it means a lot to me. I will be in touch with you via email or telephone if there is any additional information needed. Hopefully that will not be the case.

13. **TURN OFF RECORDER.**
APPENDIX E

PARTICIPANTS CONSENT FORM
TANF RECIPIENT CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Dissertation Title: An Examination of the Impact of the 1996 Welfare Reform Act on Access to Postsecondary Education for TANF Recipients in Jackson, MS

Researcher: Charlette Brown
404-983-4650

Introduction
You are being asked to participate in this research study about how the 1996 Welfare Reform Act has impacted African American TANF recipients' access to postsecondary education in Hinds County/Jackson, Mississippi. You have been selected as a possible participant because you are African American, receive TANF and have completed high school, either with a diploma or General Equivalency Diploma (GED). I ask that you read this form in its entirety and let me know if you have any questions before agreeing to be in the study.

Purpose
The purpose of this research study is to learn about your experiences with having the ability to enter postsecondary education or continue with postsecondary while receiving TANF in Hinds County/Jackson, Mississippi. Approximately 30-35 African American TANF recipients will be interviewed to hear their experiences with work, education, and family life while receiving TANF in Mississippi. Case Managers, Case Workers, and staff persons will also be interviewed to further enrich the study.

Procedure
Participants in this research study are asked to participate on a voluntary basis. Initially, you will be asked to participate in an interview that will last no longer than one hour. A second telephone or email conversation may occur if clarity is needed for a response to a question(s) provided during the interview. Should this conversation occur, it would take no more than 15 minutes of your time. The interview will be tape recorded for transcription purposes and to ensure accuracy of the information that you provide. The transcript will allow the researcher to quote your verbatim while you tell your story about receiving TANF assistance and having access to postsecondary education.

Risks
Participating in this research study will involve no risk to you. However, if you feel uneasy about some of the questions being asked during the interview session, please let me (the researcher) know and the question will be omitted.

Benefits
This research study has the potential to benefit the entire TANF population in the state of Mississippi and elsewhere because it allows the voices of TANF recipients to be heard. Access to postsecondary education for TANF recipients is of major importance because higher education has traditionally been the route to sustainable self-sufficiency in the United States.
Confidentiality Protection

The records for this study will be kept private and confidential. In the event that a report is published, you can be assured that it will not include any information which will make it possible to identify any participant in this research study. Research records and audio taped recordings will be kept in a confidential and locked file and only the researcher will have access to the records and audio recordings. The records and audio recordings will be kept in a confidential and locked file for three years at which point the audio recording will be erased and the records will be shredded and destroyed.

Voluntary Nature of the Research Study

Your decision to participate in this study will not affect your relationship with the researcher or Clark Atlanta University. You have the right to refuse to participate in this interview process at any time. You also have the right to refuse to answer any question(s) that you feel uncomfortable with during the interview process. Should you decide to withdraw your participation in either the audio session or the interview session, your records will be immediately destroyed and will not be used.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is:
Ms. Charlette Brown
c/o The International Museum of Muslim Cultures
201 East Pascagoula Street
Jackson, MS 39201
404-983-4650 (cell) • 601-960-0440 (office)

You may ask any questions you have now or if you have any questions later about the research, you may contact the researcher at the above number(s). The Dissertation Chairperson for my research study is:

Dr. Josephine Bradley
Department of Africana Women’s Studies
Clark Atlanta University
223 James P. Brawley Drive
Atlanta, Georgia 30314
404-880-6654

Also, if you have any questions now, or later, related to the integrity of the research, you are encouraged to contact either - Dr. Georgianna Bolden in the Office of Sponsored Programs at Clark Atlanta University (404-880-6679) or Dr. Paul I. Musey (404-880-6829) at Clark Atlanta University.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent: I have read the above information.

I consent to participate in this study:

Signature: _____________________________ Date: _____________________________

Signature of Researcher: _____________________________ Date: _____________________________
APPENDIX F

REPORT TO THE MISSISSIPPI LEGISLATURE – A REVIEW OF MISSISSIPPI'S 1997 WELFARE REFORM LEGISLATION
A Review of Mississippi's 1997 Welfare Reform Legislation

June 10, 1997

In response to federal welfare reform legislation, the Mississippi Legislature enacted two bills during its 1997 session (House Bill 766 and Senate Bill 2164) which make fundamental changes in the state’s administration of assistance programs and child support enforcement. House Bill 766 creates the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program for state recipients and establishes requirements that recipients work to receive their cash assistance. Senate Bill 2164 establishes new requirements for employers and other persons having information about possible location and assets of persons who owe child support to parents receiving public assistance from the state.

The report outlines several areas of program administration which should be of concern to legislators regarding administration of the new TANF and revised child support enforcement programs and recommends that the Department of Human Services devise measurable outcomes and output measures with which to evaluate these programs. The report also suggests that the Joint Legislative Department of Human Services Oversight Committee require the department to report such information as its success in meeting work participation rates and the significance of transportation and child care in program participants' finding and holding work.

The PEER Committee
A Review of Mississippi's 1997 Welfare Reform Legislation

June 10, 1997

The PEER Committee
Mississippi Legislature
Federal law also authorizes, but does not require, a “family cap” for assistance payments which would allow the state to bar paying assistance to children born after a mother begins to receive TANF benefits.

Mississippi chose to adopt the sixty-month lifetime cap on cash assistance and adopted the requirement that persons be in an allowable work activity no later than twenty-four months after going on assistance. Mississippi also opted to continue its family cap, which went into force several years ago for AFDC. Under the Mississippi family cap, TANI assistance is limited to children living or in gestation at the time the parent applies to assistance. Additional children may be added to the assistance rolls but only after the parent has left the rolls for one year.

**Work, Education, and Sanctions**

The Federal Welfare Reform Act makes work and preparation for work a mandatory element of the new TANF program. Consistent with the idea that assistance is no longer an entitlement is the requirement that needy families engage in acceptable work activities in order to be eligible for assistance under the TANF program.

**Work Requirements**

House Bill 766, Section 3, subsection 6, establishes the requirement that TANI recipients engage in work activities. The requirement is that persons be engaged in work after no more than twenty-four months on TANI assistance or when deemed work-ready by the department. To be engaged in work, a person must complete at least twenty hours per week in any one of the activities listed in Exhibit 2, page 9.

The bill also lists a series of work activities which are permissible for hours in excess of the twenty-hour requirement. These activities include job skills development, education directly related to employment, high school attendance or GED preparation (presumably for those who are not required to attend because of age), and job skills development. For eligible two-adult families, the work requirement is thirty-five hours per week in the above-described activities.

The work activities in Mississippi law were taken directly from the Federal Welfare Reform Act and represent the entire set of federally allowable work activities. Under both the federal law and the Mississippi act, the state may exempt up to twenty percent of the eligible population from work activities. The state must develop and publish administrative criteria for such exemptions. House Bill 766 provides for the administrative criteria to be used in exempting persons from work requirements (see Exhibit 3, page 10).
To assist TANF recipients in their work efforts, the state law authorizes MDHS to provide both child care and transportation assistance to individuals who require these support services to obtain and hold employment.

Exhibit 2

Allowable Work Activities under TANF

- unsubsidized employment;
- subsidized private employment;
- subsidized public employment;
- work experience (when private employment is not available);
- on-the-job training;
- job search and job readiness assistance, limited to six weeks per recipient;
- community service programs;
- vocational education, not to exceed twelve months for any recipient;
- providing child care to a person in a community service program;
- satisfactory attendance at a high school for persons under age twenty who have not completed high school or received a GED certificate; and,
- education directly related to employment for heads of household over age twenty who have not completed high school or received a GED certificate.


Education Requirements

While 'TANF' legislation at the federal and state levels intends that adults be engaged in work rather than in adult education or training, the same is not true of minors receiving assistance. House Bill 766, Section 3, Subsection 4 requires that minor parents who have not received a high
MISSISSIPPI STATE PLAN

TEMPORARY ASSISTANCE
FOR NEEDY FAMILIES

Authorized by the
Personal Responsibility and
Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996

(Public Law 104-193)

Mississippi Department of Human Services

October 1, 2002
their self-sufficiency and improve their competitive positions in the workforce. The Mississippi Code 1972, Annotated, Title 43, Chapters 1 and 17 address authority of MDHS to operate programs and pay benefits within TANF guidelines including requirements for:

- School attendance for children six through 17 years;
- Immunizations for children;
- Family benefit cap to prevent assistance increases for additional children (unless there is a twelve consecutive month break in TANF benefits);
- Minor parents to reside with a parent or adult caretaker and to continue their education at least to high school graduation or GED level;
- Work requirements with supportive and transitional services to move recipients into self-sufficiency and independence through employment; and
- Personal responsibility contract signed by the recipient to acknowledge his/her responsibilities to the State in return for benefits. The law also includes penalties for failure to comply with these responsibilities and provisions whereby benefits can be re-approved following compliance.

C. Work Program

Mississippi’s demonstration full employment program (WorkFirst) was implemented in October 1995 based on State law and waivers granted by HHSS and USDA. The WorkFirst pilot project was implemented in six counties which comprised approximately 25% of the State’s caseload. The WorkFirst Program offered job-ready recipients a helping hand in gaining full employment and in learning and developing new job skills though the subsidized employment component. It also provided an opportunity for businesses to expand without the high cost of employee training as AFDC and Food Stamp benefits were diverted to wages. Under State law, subsidized job placements were new positions; regular workers could not be displaced.

The waivers originally needed to implement the subsidized work program are no longer necessary under the TANF Work Program. Mississippi continues to operate most of the work program activities in place on October 1, 1996, utilizing unsubsidized work placements as authorized in State law in Title 43 and in Titles I and VIII (Food Stamps) of Public Law 104-193.
Types may include:

a. **Regular employment**: Employment in the public or private sector for which the person receives wages on an hourly, weekly, monthly basis, etc.

b. **Self-employment**: Employment in which the participant is earning income directly from one’s own business, trade or profession rather than a specified salary or wages from an employer. Income may be verified by a W2 form, check stubs or written statements from customers.

c. **Contractual employment**: Employment related to or constituting a contract (i.e., some school employees). Income from contractual work must be considered as being received in each month covered by the contract regardless of the number of months in which the income is received.

d. **Work study**: Approved employment plan at an accredited college, frequently granted in addition to other student financial aid.

e. **Workforce Investment Act (WIA)-On-the-Job Training**: Employment in which WIA reimburses the employer up to 50% of the employee’s wages for up to six months when an eligible individual is on the job, receiving training and earning a regular salary.

- **Work Experience**: Alternative Work Experience Program (AWEP) placements are only made with private non-profit entities for no cash payment in order to improve work skills by offering training and experience for a better understanding of the work world so the individual may move more quickly into full-time employment. The maximum number of hours in any month that a participant may be required to participate in AWEP is based upon the family’s combined value of TANF and food stamp benefits divided by the federal minimum wage. TANF recipients assign to this activity cannot displace regular workers.

- **Community Service Programs**: Placements are only made with public entities and are limited to projects that serve a useful public purpose in fields such as health, social service, environmental protection, education, urban and rural development and redevelopment, welfare, recreation, public facilities, public safety, and child care. The main objective of assigning the TANF Work Program (TWIP) participant to a community service activity is to improve work skills by offering training and experience for a better understanding of the work world so the individual may move more quickly into full-time employment. The maximum number of hours in any month that a participant may be required to participate in a community service activity is based upon the family’s combined value of TANF and food stamp benefits divided by the federal minimum wage. These positions are not funded and the participant receives no pay. TANF recipients assign to this activity cannot displace regular workers.

- **Education**
Types may include:

a. **Vocational educational training**: An organized educational program which offers a sequence of courses directly related to the preparation of individuals for employment in current or emerging occupations that do not require a baccalaureate or advanced degree. Such programs shall include competency-based applied learning which contributes in an individual’s academic knowledge, higher-order reasoning, and problem-solving skills, work attitudes, general employability skills, and the occupational-specific skills necessary for obtaining employment and becoming self-sufficient.

b. **School or education directly related to employment for teen heads of household under age 20 without a GED or high school diploma**: High school education or alternative education designed to prepare the person (teen head of household) to achieve a high school degree or equivalency certificate.

c. **Education directly related to employment for recipients without high school diploma or GED**: Employment focused classes with emphasis on information needed in the workplace. Academic subjects include basic skills of reading, writing, mathematics, science, and social studies. Life coping skills include, but not necessarily be limited to, personal health, parenting, employment protocols, and financial planning. English proficiency education will be offered to an individual who does not understand, speak, read, or write the English language.

d. **Satisfactory attendance at secondary school or course of study leading to GED for recipients who have not completed secondary school**: High school education or alternative education designed to prepare the person (adult TANF recipient) to achieve a high school degree or equivalency certificate.

e. **Post Secondary Education**: An organized educational program which offers a sequence of courses directly related to the preparation of individuals for employment in current or emerging occupations that requires a baccalaureate or advanced degree.

- **Job Skills Training Directly Related to Employment**: Employer-specific skills training is directed at a specific employer’s needs.

18. If any adult in a household refuses without good cause to participate in work as required under TANF, the following full benefit sanction will apply:


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