

== Chapter 1 ==

Welfare Reform and Its Challengers¹

MANY BOOKS about the politics of welfare reform in the United States provide a top-down perspective. They tend to focus on the role that political, cultural, and economic elites have played in pushing for welfare reforms and in shaping the design of federal welfare reform acts—in particular, the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA).² Similarly, both feminist and race-centered scholarship on welfare reform highlight the influence of hegemonic ideologies; they emphasize how racist stereotypes of the poor, expectations that poor mothers must work, the stigma of single motherhood, and heterosexism shape the content of, support for, and implementation of federal welfare reform policies.³ These discussions about contemporary welfare policymaking in the U.S. fail to account for the role that low-income people and their allies have played in reshaping state and local welfare reform policies—policies that were enacted and imposed by those aiming to “end welfare as we know it.”

This book seeks to fill some of this gap by examining how welfare recipients and their allies have helped shape the implementation of welfare reform. Elites have certainly dominated the development and implementation of welfare reform policies. They have shaped and constrained national welfare reform legislation, imposing major changes in how the welfare system functions and justifying new regulations by invoking all sorts of negative stereotypes of the poor. Nevertheless, elites’ influence over welfare policies has not gone uncontested, and state actors’ views towards welfare have been multivocal, varying across state governments and institutions. As Paul Pierson suggests, welfare state retrenchment is politically risky because it threatens to alienate organized interest groups that have developed around particular welfare programs.⁴ Along with such interest groups, newly formed membership organizations of welfare recipients and ad hoc welfare rights coalitions and task forces have mobilized to defend the rights of those with little or no income. While these groups were largely unable to block new national welfare reform

policies like the PRWORA, they were sometimes successful in reshaping them, altering or moderating the ways in which they were implemented, and challenging the terms of policy debates.

Welfare rights campaigns that emerged over the period of welfare retrenchment surrounding the enactment of the PRWORA provide two important lessons about the challenges of improving our social safety net, and how those challenges can sometimes be overcome through mobilization and coalition-building. First, these campaigns reveal how, even after legislation has been passed, activists can still reshape policies. I argue in this book that in the case of welfare reform, policy implementation at one level was policymaking at another level. The implementation of federal welfare reform measures required states and local governments to redesign their welfare programs, creating opportunities for activists to halt or improve welfare reform policies and practices. Second, these campaigns reveal the importance of building coalitions to make change. When the welfare rights struggle broadened its reach beyond its traditional advocates and the very poor, it gained new allies, which, in turn, helped to make policy gains. While the victories in this period of welfare retrenchment were limited, the alliances that were formed could help to sow the seeds for further gains in the future.

This chapter provides the historical and social context for the rest of my study. I first examine the way in which the 1996 federal welfare reform act (the PRWORA) and its reauthorization changed U.S. welfare policies and how those policies and recent shifts in U.S. labor market conditions have shaped poor people's living and working conditions. Advocates of welfare reform have portrayed these policies as beneficial for both poor people and society at large, but most Americans have little detailed knowledge of these policies or their impacts. Reviewing the research on the impacts of welfare reform helps us to better understand the concerns of poor people and their allies, why the welfare rights movement became reinvigorated in the late 1990s, and why this movement continues to be relevant today.

I then discuss my comparative case study methodology. States and local governments had considerable discretion in how they implemented federal welfare reform policies. In addition, welfare policies varied considerably across space, partly as a result of the uneven influence of welfare rights activists. To capture this diversity, I examine similar welfare rights campaigns in two states—California and Wisconsin—and their two largest cities, Los Angeles and Milwaukee. I review some of the major ways in which California's and Wisconsin's welfare reform policies differed and how political, social, and economic conditions varied between these two states, providing distinct challenges and opportunities

for activists to shape the implementation of welfare reform. I then provide an overview for the rest of my book, summarizing the conclusions from each chapter.

U.S. Welfare Reform and Its Failures

The 1996 federal welfare reform act, or the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), represented a major overhaul of the U.S. welfare system. Fifteen years after its enactment, politicians both within the United States and around the world continue to hail the virtues of the U.S. welfare reform policies. They claim that time limits, strict work requirements, and other policies adopted in 1996 were effective in reducing welfare dependency among poor families. They also point to the sharp reduction of welfare caseloads that followed the implementation of welfare reform, from a monthly average of 4.8 million families in 1995 to 1.7 million in 2008, as a sign of success.⁵

By other measures, however, this massive reform of the U.S. welfare system was not so successful. The vast majority of former welfare families, even those with employed parents, have remained in poverty since the PRWORA's enactment.⁶ And, as the economic situation worsened after 2007 and unemployment increased nationwide, the number of families receiving welfare in the U.S. rose about 11 percent between December 2007 and June 2010.⁷

Compared to welfare systems in other wealthy democracies, the U.S. welfare system is far less effective at reducing poverty. By international measures, the United States has the highest child poverty rate among highly industrialized countries—most of which have a poverty rate that is 50 percent lower than that found in the United States. Other affluent democracies are far more effective at eliminating child poverty than the U.S. They provide better regulation of the labor market and offer families—even middle-class families—far more generous welfare rights and benefits, including universal child allowances, national health insurance, subsidized child care, and paid family leave.⁸ Similarly, the U.S. also holds one of the highest poverty rates among women compared to other affluent nations. Cross-national research indicates that the high poverty rate for women in the U.S. is due to America's low wages and lack of public assistance—and not the country's higher incidence of single motherhood.⁹

Using U.S. measures, 43.6 million people (representing more than 14 percent of the population) and more than one out of five children under the age of eighteen lived below the official poverty line in 2009; these figures have undoubtedly risen with the deepening of the economic crisis.¹⁰ Poverty is particularly concentrated among racial minorities and

female-headed households. More than one out of every three African American and Latino children in the United States lived in poverty in 2009.¹¹ Among all female-headed households with children, the poverty rate was 38.5 percent, and for African Americans and Latinos, this rate was even higher (44.3 and 46.0 percent, respectively).¹² The poverty rates among children and female-headed households declined in the late 1990s amid the country's employment boom, but then increased between 2000 and 2009 as economic conditions worsened.¹³

Though shockingly high, official measures of the U.S. poverty rate underestimate the true extent of poverty. These measures presume, based on consumption patterns in the 1950s, that at least one-third of household income should be spent on food.¹⁴ In an attempt to address concerns that the official poverty line was outdated, the National Center for Children in Poverty estimated the actual costs in 2008 of various basic needs, such as rent, utilities, food, child care, medical care, and transportation. Its "basic budget" estimates suggest that the federal poverty guideline should be set more than three times higher than its current level in high-cost urban areas and about twice as high in low-cost rural areas. By those measures, millions more families in the United States would officially be counted among the poor.¹⁵

Rather than expanding working-class people's access to welfare, efforts to reform the U.S. welfare system in the late 1990s largely restricted poor people's access to income and welfare services by imposing all sorts of new rules and regulations. In the 1980s, the backlash against welfare had risen to new heights. Critics charged that American welfare programs were overly permissive and generous, despite the fact that they provided far less support to low-income families than welfare states in other affluent democracies.¹⁶ In response to such criticisms, in 1996 PRWORA ended federal entitlements for low-income families to receive public assistance through Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) that had been operational since 1935. It replaced AFDC with a more restrictive and decentralized program called Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). A central thrust of welfare reform was to put poor mothers to work and prepare them to make the "welfare-to-work" transition. To this end, the 1996 federal welfare reform act introduced two-year consecutive time limits and five-year lifetime limits on welfare receipt. It also required states to expand adult TANF recipients' participation in welfare-to-work programs and authorized states to adopt work requirements for able-bodied recipients of food stamps with no dependent children.¹⁷

While the public supported welfare reform in general terms, few knew the details of the new policies. As Kent Weaver points out, Republican control of Congress produced harder time limits and stricter work require-

ments than most people supported.¹⁸ Many states adopted even stricter time limits than those required by federal law for welfare mothers and developed systems of full- and partial-benefit sanctions to enforce work requirements.¹⁹ And, despite strong public support for job training programs, most states implemented “work-first” models of welfare-to-work programs. These models prioritized actual work and initial employment rather than education and training for long-term career development.²⁰ PRWORA also denied most legal immigrants access to federal public assistance during their first five years in the country, authorized states to contract out welfare administration to private agencies, and authorized state adoption of “family cap” or “child exclusion” policies, which denied greater benefits to women who had an additional child while receiving welfare.

At the same time, General Relief programs, which provide assistance to indigent adults who are ineligible for federal public assistance, also came under attack. Of the thirty-eight states that still had General Relief programs in operation in 1989, twenty-seven enacted new eligibility restrictions by 1998, while twelve states eliminated their requirements that counties provide General Relief altogether.²¹

In 2006, ten years after PRWORA’s enactment, congressional politicians not only lauded its success, they adopted even more stringent work requirements for welfare mothers in the legislation reauthorizing PRWORA. Promoters of welfare reform claim that tough rules and regulations are necessary for disciplining the poor and encouraging self-sufficiency, and they highlight stories about recipients who successfully made the transition from welfare to work.²² They also claim that welfare reform was responsible for the dramatic decline in TANF welfare cases between 1995 and 2007, as well as for the rising labor force participation among single mothers, which rose from 58 percent in 1995 to 71 percent in 2007.²³ Yet these trends were partly the result of the employment boom of the 1990s, not just the change in welfare policies.²⁴ Indeed, as labor market conditions worsened after 1999, TANF caseloads rose in many states, while recipients’ and former recipients’ employment rates fell.²⁵ As labor market conditions continued to decline, TANF caseloads rose in thirty-seven states between December 2007 and September 2009.²⁶

Additionally, work was not always the sole reason why all women left welfare. National studies of mothers who left welfare between 1995 and 1999—the height of the employment boom—found that between 40 and 50 percent were not employed.²⁷ Welfare reform did little to address the structural barriers that keep people in poverty, such as racial discrimination; the shortage of stable, living-wage jobs; and the lack of affordable child care. As a result, it is not surprising that most former welfare-to-work participants who found some employment did not

work full-time or year-round and remained in poverty.²⁸ Indeed, many employed mothers suffered hardships and were worse off financially than before leaving welfare due to the loss of subsidized child care and health care benefits and the increase in work-related expenses, such as transportation. Problems with insecure employment and insufficient paychecks contributed to frequent cycling between welfare and work and the need for welfare to supplement low earnings.²⁹ Researchers estimate that, at most, only between 10 and 20 percent of former recipients of TANF will permanently leave poverty.³⁰

Advocates of the “work first” philosophy argue that “any job is better than no job” and will lead to upward mobility.³¹ Unfortunately, these policies have dramatically reduced welfare recipients’ access to secondary education and vocational training, even though research has shown that educational attainment improves employment and earnings outcomes significantly for most Americans as well as most welfare recipients;³² 40 percent of TANF recipients have not completed high school, while only 5 percent have attended any college.³³ In fact, work-first models complement the needs of flexible, low-wage labor markets by ensuring “a continuously job-ready, pre-processed, ‘forced’ labor supply for the lower end of the labor market.”³⁴

After the welfare reform of the 1990s, employers across the nation benefited from publicly subsidized drug-testing and skill-testing of job applicants, job training, and job fairs that were organized as part of welfare-to-work programs. Employers also benefited from welfare-to-work (or “workfare”) participants’ free labor as well as tax breaks for hiring welfare recipients in unsubsidized jobs. Welfare-to-work programs were especially popular among low-wage employers. According to Welfare to Work Partnership, “businesses like Burger King franchises . . . swear by it.”³⁵ In Missouri, the main beneficiaries of these programs were meat-processing plants, temporary agencies, and nursing homes.³⁶ In Wisconsin, hundreds of welfare recipients were placed in temporary jobs, mainly in light industrial factories or warehouse positions.³⁷ In areas of high unemployment, local governments lowered municipal labor costs by employing welfare recipients for various public jobs, including picking up trash, scrubbing toilets, doing routine paperwork, and guarding parking garages.³⁸ This trend was most dramatic in New York City, where almost seven thousand welfare recipients were assigned to work for the Department of Parks and Recreation in 1998.³⁹

Most welfare-to-work programs were not as work-oriented as expected, however. Because states received credit for reducing case-loads and because many recipients could be exempted from work requirements (for example, because of a disability or to care for a disabled child), only 31 to 34 percent of adult recipients of TANF in the nation were actu-

ally employed between 2001 and 2006.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, even when employers did not hire welfare recipients directly, work requirements helped to degrade welfare receipt and reaffirm the work ethic in the wider society, which in turn protected employers' supply of low-wage labor.⁴¹ Restrictive welfare policies also increased competition at the bottom of the labor market, putting downward pressure on wages.⁴² For all of these reasons, business lobbyists and corporate-sponsored think tanks actively promoted work-based welfare reforms.⁴³

Welfare policies, like criminal justice policies that also target the poor, have become increasingly punitive.⁴⁴ New eligibility criteria—time limits on receiving welfare, tougher welfare-to-work requirements, and restrictions on legal immigrants' use of federal public assistance, for example—have disqualified millions of poor people from public assistance.⁴⁵ Other obstacles to welfare access had been long-standing barriers, such as the stigma associated with welfare and the low-income ceiling used to determine eligibility. In order to qualify for TANF, the main public assistance program serving low-income families, a family must be extremely poor. As of 2006, only twelve states used the federal poverty guidelines to determine the maximum monthly earnings a family can have while remaining eligible for the program. More importantly, only one state (New Hampshire) uses a standard of need above this poverty guideline, while the thirty-four other states set their income ceilings below the federal poverty guideline.⁴⁶ Nationwide, the median annual household income of all families receiving TANF in 2005 was \$9,606.⁴⁷ There are millions of “working poor” families in the U.S. that have household incomes well below the federal poverty line and that struggle to pay for basic necessities but who still earn too much to qualify for cash assistance through TANF and other public welfare programs.

Yet, even those who still qualified for welfare were using it less frequently after federal welfare reforms were implemented. By 2005, only 40 percent of people eligible for TANF were receiving it, down from 84 percent in 1995 under AFDC. Likewise, 62 percent of poor children received AFDC in 1995 compared to only 21 percent receiving TANF in 2009.⁴⁸ According to Kay Brown, director of the U.S. Education, Workforce, and Income Security Department, 87 percent of the decrease in caseloads between 1995 and 2007 was due to the decline in participation of eligible families as welfare rules became more restrictive, the real value of welfare benefits declined, and diversion programs were implemented.⁴⁹ The loss of welfare contributed to a rise in extreme poverty among single parent families within the few first years of federal welfare reforms, even though overall poverty rates were then declining.⁵⁰

Low participation in TANF helped to slow the growth in TANF caseloads when economic conditions worsened after 2007, despite a growing need for economic assistance among female-headed households. While the TANF caseload rose 11 percent between December of 2007 and June of 2010, Food Stamp participation increased 55 percent in this same period. Similarly, between 1994 and 2003, TANF participation rates declined while participation in other means-tested public assistance programs—such as Medicaid, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), and the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)—rose.⁵¹ And even as participation rates in other welfare programs were increasing, many eligible families were still not using them. One study found that, as of 2002, only 7 percent of “working poor” families received benefits from all four of the core programs established to serve them: the EITC, Food Stamps, Medicaid (subsidized health insurance), and the State Children’s Health Insurance Program (SCHIP).⁵² Federal housing assistance and subsidized child care are also not fully funded, creating enormous waiting lists for these programs. Poor outreach, the complicated bureaucratic maze of different categorical welfare programs, onerous application procedures, and the stigma associated with receiving welfare all discourage low-income people from getting the help they need.

Qualitative research provides a clearer picture of some of the devastating impacts of welfare reform than is conveyed in survey statistics. One such study was conducted over a three-year period in Cleveland, Ohio, through in-depth interviews. This study found that the implementation of welfare reform led some women into dependency on current or former abusers (often the fathers of their children) for help with child care, transportation, car maintenance, and help in purchasing basic necessities such as diapers or food. These women had serious health problems and no one else to help them. In several cases, recipients who reached the end of their time limits, desperate for money, became dependent on sex work.⁵³

Perhaps most alarming are indications that the loss of welfare has contributed to the rise of homelessness. State surveys suggest that between 5 percent and 8 percent of former welfare recipients were forced to rely on a homeless shelter.⁵⁴ These surveys likely underestimate the extent of these problems, as they frequently rely on phone communication, thus excluding former recipients with the greatest housing problems. In 2007, families with children made up as much as 23 percent of the urban homeless population nationwide and an even greater percentage in smaller cities. If homeless parents who gave up custody of their children were included, these figures would be even higher. With layoffs and foreclosures rising and more families reaching the end of welfare time limits, homelessness among families rose. By 2009, 76 percent

of twenty-seven cities surveyed claimed that homelessness among families had risen over the past year, and more than 50 percent claimed that they could not provide enough shelter to all those in need.⁵⁵

Cutting off access to welfare has also contributed to the breakup of families because it denies parents the means to take care of their children. Follow-up studies found that as many as 4 percent of “timed off” welfare recipients had a child removed from their custody.⁵⁶ Other surveys indicate that between 5 and 10 percent of all former welfare mothers lost custody of their children.⁵⁷ Quantitative studies also show that, compared to states with more lenient time limit policies, states with shorter time limits experienced greater increases in reported child maltreatment, the number of children in out-of-home care, and the foster care population.⁵⁸

Additionally, even when low-income people do receive federal public assistance, welfare does not provide enough money to lift a family out of poverty or even to pay for all of a family’s basic necessities. Because most states did not increase benefits in order to keep up with inflation while twenty states froze or lowered benefit levels, the real value of TANF cash benefits, adjusted for inflation, declined in forty-eight states (including Washington, D.C.) between 1996 and 2010. As of 2010, TANF benefit levels for a family of three were less than half of the federal poverty line in all states and less than one-third of the federal poverty line in more than half of them. And in no state did TANF benefits provide enough to pay fair market rent for a two-bedroom apartment.⁵⁹ Even when families received both TANF and Food Stamp benefits, the value of those combined benefits remained below the federal poverty line in all states and less than 75 percent of that line in more than forty states.⁶⁰ As a result, welfare families commonly struggle to pay their bills, even when they receive other public benefits. Surveys of welfare recipients and other low-income families found that both groups often relied on friends and family members to survive, which contributed to overcrowded housing. Many of these families had to “make ends meet” by combining earnings from multiple sources, including paid work, welfare, and work in the informal economy.⁶¹ Material hardships are also common among welfare recipients. In 2000, a fifteen-state survey of mothers who received TANF in the past twelve months found that “over 30 percent reported experiencing one or more of the following four hardships: maternal or child hunger; eviction or homelessness; utility shutoff; inability to receive medical care due to cost.”⁶²

As more poor mothers were denied welfare and pushed into the low-wage labor force through welfare-to-work programs, they faced deteriorating labor market conditions. Even before economic conditions worsened in 2008, a combination of factors undermined the position of

most American workers. Union membership continued to decline in the late 1990s and early 2000s, reaching below 13 percent for all U.S. workers in 2008. New rulings and insufficient resources for labor law enforcement undermined labor regulations. In this context, private-sector employer intimidation of unionizing workers ran rampant. Researchers estimate that employers fired workers during about one-third of all union election campaigns held between 1999 and 2003. During half of these campaigns, employers or supervisors threatened workers during mandatory one-on-one meetings about the union.⁶³ Workers also faced new downward pressures on wages through economic globalization, neoliberal policies, and economic restructuring, all of which contributed to a global “race for the bottom.”

The net result was that workers faced what Steven Greenhouse aptly calls the “big squeeze.” While worker productivity rose by 60 percent since 1979, the wages for most workers were stagnant or declining: in the same timeframe, “hourly earnings for 80 percent of American workers (those in the private-sector nonsupervisory jobs) have risen by just 1 percent, after inflation”⁶⁴ as of 2005. A decline in the real value of the minimum wage contributed to this wage stagnation. Meanwhile, “corporate profits have climbed to their highest share of national income in 64 years, while the share going to wages has sunk to its lowest level since 1929.”⁶⁵ The percentage of the labor force in contingent jobs (part-time, seasonal, or contract jobs) also rose, increasing job insecurity among workers and leaving fewer workers covered by collective bargaining rights. Along with declining unionization and rising health care costs, the rise in contingent employment contributed to a declining share of workers with employer-provided benefits. By 2009, more than 50 million Americans, representing about 16.7 percent of the population, lacked health insurance.⁶⁶ Given the decline in workers’ real wages and rise in contingent work, it should not surprise us that, as of 2005, most adults receiving TANF were working, with one-third engaged in full-time employment sometime in the past year. Moreover, among the welfare parents meeting TANF work requirements, the majority participated in unsubsidized employment.⁶⁷ While critics of welfare demonize welfare recipients and contrast them to good, hard-working, tax-paying citizens, the vast majority of welfare recipients are tax-paying workers, often with long work histories.⁶⁸

Conditions for U.S. workers and their families deteriorated even further as the economic crisis deepened, leading to a massive wave of foreclosures and layoffs. By March 2009, about 5.4 million mortgages were delinquent as middle- and working-class households faced the brunt of financial deregulation and speculation: rising interest rates on top of overpriced mortgages. Mass layoffs further exacerbated the foreclosure

crisis.⁶⁹ The following year, the crisis worsened, with 1 in every 389 houses in the nation receiving a foreclosure filing in October 2010.⁷⁰ That same month, the official unemployment rate had reached 9.6 percent of the labor force. The long-term unemployed (those without a job for twenty-seven weeks or more), had reached 6.2 million, representing nearly 42 percent of the unemployed.⁷¹ Studies in several states show that the recent economic recession hit single mothers especially hard, as the growth in their unemployment rates between 2007 and 2010 exceeded that for both married men and women.⁷²

The current economic crisis has helped to broaden concern around the failures of the U.S. welfare system to reduce poverty, as many workers are confronting the limits of the U.S. welfare state for the first time in their lives. Many unemployed workers have qualified for Unemployment Insurance, but many others have joined (or rejoined) the TANF or General Assistance programs. Others who had received permanent sanctions or reached the end of their TANF time limits found themselves at the mercy of private charities, many of which have been unable to meet the growing demands for their services. And, even as demands for government assistance have increased for low-income people, the nation's safety net, already shredded, has become even more so as state deficits rise and a new wave of welfare cutbacks spread across the nation.⁷³

Concerns about the limits of federal welfare reform policies have long been raised by community and labor activists, especially in the wake of the 1996 welfare reform act. The implementation of PRWORA reinvigorated the U.S. welfare rights movement, which had declined considerably since its heyday in the late 1960s and early 1970s. While many of those facing the hardships associated with welfare reform and its shortcomings suffered silently or engaged in individual-level forms of resistance, some low-income people mobilized collectively for their rights.⁷⁴ This book examines the lessons of some of those welfare rights campaigns: when and under what conditions poor people's rights can be defended and improved in the context of retrenchment.

Examining Welfare Rights Activism Through Comparative Case Studies

This book provides in-depth case studies of welfare rights campaigns that took place within two states, California and Wisconsin, in the aftermath of PRWORA's passage. The purpose of these comparative case studies is to better understand how and why activists were or were not able to shape the implementation of welfare reform. California and Wisconsin and their two largest cities, Los Angeles and Milwaukee, were chosen for their contrasting contexts as well as their prominence

within national debates about welfare reform. Welfare reforms in California and Los Angeles were closely watched by both welfare critics and advocates, mainly because they claimed the largest state and urban welfare populations in the nation. By contrast, Wisconsin's welfare reform program gained its notoriety in the late 1990s because of its plummeting caseloads. While critics of Wisconsin's tough new welfare regulations pointed out how they caused hardships among poor families, proponents portrayed them as a cure for ending "welfare dependency." Many southern states adopted even more draconian welfare policies than Wisconsin and provided less generous benefits to poor families. Nevertheless, Wisconsin's welfare rules, adopted under a Republican-controlled legislature, were a stark contrast to those found in California, where Democrats controlled the state legislature. Indeed, Wisconsin's tough welfare reform program helped to make its largest city, Milwaukee, the "epicenter of the anti-welfare crusade,"⁷⁵ or the "world's most famous welfare-eradication zone,"⁷⁶ as journalist Jason DeParle put it. I will now briefly review the main differences in the content of welfare reform legislation in these two states and other conditions that shaped the context for welfare rights campaigns explored in this book.

Welfare Reform Legislation in Wisconsin

Wisconsin Works, or W-2, was the culmination of a series of restrictive and work-based welfare reform programs that Wisconsin's Republican governor, Tommy Thompson, actively promoted and passed through the Republican-controlled legislature in 1996.⁷⁷ As one observer described,

Thompson was a relentless campaigner for his welfare reform agenda. This was manifest in each of his statewide election contests, his legislative negotiations, his national policymaking roles, and his extensive interaction with the media. His message was so consistent that a *Chicago Tribune Magazine* cover story dubbed him "Governor Get-a-Job."⁷⁸

Historically, Wisconsin had been a relatively generous welfare state compared to other states in the nation, and conservative politicians sought to reverse this pattern, claiming that it had become a "welfare magnet," despite a lack of clear data supporting that claim.⁷⁹ Conservative, corporate-sponsored think tanks also actively promoted the "Wisconsin model" of welfare reform as an example not only for the nation but also for other Western industrialized countries. In the mid-1990s, the Thompson administration hired researchers from the Hudson Institute, a conservative corporate-sponsored think tank, to design W-2 and then evaluate its performance. Not surprisingly, the Hudson Institute's eval-

uations of the program, widely publicized by the press, emphasized W-2's capacity to reduce welfare dependency.⁸⁰ During congressional debates on PRWORA and its reauthorization, various conservative think tanks, including the Heritage Foundation, the Heartland Institute, the Manhattan Institute, and the Wisconsin Policy Research Institute, promoted Wisconsin's welfare initiatives as model programs for the rest of the nation.⁸¹ Largely because of the accolades that Thompson gained from Wisconsin's welfare reform initiatives, in 2001, President George W. Bush appointed him to be the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services. In this post, Thompson advocated more stringent work requirements for welfare mothers.

Advocates of W-2 also promoted the program as a model for other Western industrialized nations, many of which were actively seeking ways to reduce their rising welfare caseloads.⁸² In 1997, the Hudson Institute promoted the virtues of the Wisconsin model of welfare reform through an international conference that drew experts and policymakers from England, Germany, Holland, and Denmark.⁸³ Politicians in Germany, Great Britain, and Holland sent delegations to Wisconsin to study the W-2 program, and they later incorporated key aspects of the W-2 program into their own welfare reform initiatives.⁸⁴ A Dutch reformer, describing the influence of the Wisconsin model within Europe, also upheld the "Wisconsin model" at a conference in Australia.⁸⁵ So did Tommy Thompson when he served as a featured speaker for an event organized by the libertarian Centre for Independent Studies in Australia. Such events helped to build international support for creating work requirements for welfare recipients, a move adopted by the Australian national government in 2000.⁸⁶

Welfare Reform Policies in California Versus Wisconsin

While Wisconsin's welfare rules tended to be tougher than those found in most other states, California's policies were, in general, comparatively lenient. When California designed its new welfare-to-work program, CalWorks, it was ruled by a Republican governor, Pete Wilson. In contrast to Wisconsin, however, Democrats in California controlled the state legislature, constraining Republicans' influence over welfare policies.

Table 1.1 illustrates some of the main differences between the two states' welfare reform programs. The sanction policies in California were more lenient than those found in most other states, and its rate of applying welfare sanctions was among the lowest in the nation. At worst, when TANF recipients in California were sanctioned for not complying with welfare program rules, they were only denied the adult portion of the

Table 1.1 Welfare Policies in California and Wisconsin

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Policies	California	Wisconsin
Most severe sanction for non-compliance	Adult portion of grant for six months	Entire grant permanently
Application of sanction rate, compared to most other states	Low	High
Permits all work activities allowable under federal law	Yes	No
Exempts adult recipients from work requirements and time limits if they are sick or incapacitated	Yes	No
Exempts adult recipients from work requirements and time limits if they are caring for a sick or incapacitated person	Yes	No
Exempts recipients aged sixty or more years from work requirements and time limits	Yes	No
Exempts victims of domestic violence from work requirements and time limits	Yes	No
Maternity leave from work requirements (months after birth of an infant)	12	3
Exempts recipients from time limits if child is three months or less in age	No	Yes
Exempts from time limits unemployed recipients cooperating with welfare regulations	No	Yes
Other welfare programs		
Number of federal benefits replaced for legal immigrants	4	2
Requires counties to provide General Assistance	Yes	No

Source: Author's compilation of data from Rowe and Murphy (2006), National Immigration Law Center (2002), Geen et al. (1998), and Coughlin et al. (1998).

grant for up to six months and for first and repeated incidences of non-compliance, the state adopted partial sanctions. California families also continued to receive the child portion of welfare benefits even after they exceeded the five-year lifetime limit on welfare. By contrast, Wisconsin's sanction rates were among the highest in the nation, and its sanction policies were some of the toughest in the country.⁸⁷ Along with only five other states in the nation, Wisconsin authorized caseworkers to deny recipients their entire benefit permanently as the most severe sanction.⁸⁸ California's

TANF welfare-to-work policies and time limit policies were also more lenient than those of Wisconsin and many other states in terms of allowing for more types of exemptions.⁸⁹ Like most other states, California permitted all activities allowable under federal law to count towards the TANF work requirement. By contrast, Wisconsin defined “work activities” more restrictively than the federal law and enforced its work requirements more strictly than most states. In fact, Wisconsin was one of only five states that placed more than 50 percent of its welfare-to-work participants in workfare positions.⁹⁰ As Jane L. Collins and Victoria Mayer suggest, Wisconsin’s welfare reform program “reveals what workfare looks like in its starkest form.”⁹¹ However, it should be noted that even before 1996, California policymakers gave counties considerable discretion over welfare policies, and some counties adopted more restrictive rules than others. The welfare program in the Republican-controlled county of Riverside, for example, was actively promoted by conservatives in the 1990s as a model of the “work first” approach to welfare reform that emphasized labor force participation over education and training.⁹² California was also more generous toward legal immigrants, replacing their federal benefits for all four major public assistance programs, whereas Wisconsin only replaced benefits for two of these programs. Whereas Wisconsin eliminated its requirement that counties provide General Relief in 1995, California continued to require counties to provide these benefits. Efforts to privatize welfare services were also carried out more extensively in Milwaukee, where TANF administration was completely privatized, as compared to Los Angeles, where only 25 percent of its welfare-to-work case management services were privatized.

Setting the Stage for Welfare Rights Campaigns

The broader context in which welfare reform policies were implemented in these two states and their two largest cities also shaped opportunities for welfare rights activists to mobilize and make gains. Wisconsin’s more restrictive welfare policies and lower poverty and unemployment rates, combined with Milwaukee’s smaller labor force, produced a smaller welfare population there than in Los Angeles, for example (see table 1.2). Compared to Wisconsin, California also had a much larger population of immigrants and a more racially and ethnically diverse population (see table 1.3). These conditions shaped the size of the populations affected by welfare reform policies, making it more or less easy to mobilize in response to them. In addition to a more liberal legislature, California also had a higher share of legislators that were Latino and spent more on welfare than Wisconsin, as exemplified by its higher average monthly AFDC payments (see table 1.3). Along with broader political differences in the two states and their largest cities, there

Table 1.2 Selected Characteristics of Los Angeles and Milwaukee

	Los Angeles– Long Beach	Milwaukee– Waukesha
Labor Force (PMSA, 1998) ^a	4,645,468	809,079
Unemployment Rate (PMSA, 1998) ^a	6.5%	3.3%
Unemployment Rate (Central City, 1998) ^a	7.4%	5.2%
GR welfare-to-work participants ^b	15,000–26,000	—
TANF welfare-to-work participants ^b	60,537	14,121
All welfare-to-work participants ^b	75,537–86,537	14,121

Source: Author's compilation based on U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (1999a, 1999b), Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development (1998), Citizens for Workforce Justice (1998), and Los Angeles Department of Public Social Services (1998). This table appears in part in Krinsky and Reese (2006) and is reprinted with permission of the publisher.

Note: GR = General Relief; TANF = Temporary Assistance for Needy Families; PMSA = primary metropolitan statistical area.

^aUnemployment rates are annual averages from U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (1999a, 1999b)

^bThese welfare-to-work figures are for June 1998 and include participants in educational and training programs, and thus are larger than the actual size of the workfare population (data not available). They give a rough approximation of the relative sizes of the populations that activists sought to organize in each city however. Monthly total from Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development (1998); estimate from Citizens for Workfare Justice (1998); monthly total from Los Angeles Department of Public Social Services (1998).

were also significant differences in movement politics and infrastructure. Milwaukee had been known as an important “center of labor organizing” in the past,⁹³ while Los Angeles had a long history as an “anti-union city.” Yet, by the late 1990s, Milwaukee’s local labor movement was relatively more traditional and less vibrant when compared to the innovative labor campaigns underway in Los Angeles.⁹⁴

Table 1.3 Demographic and Political Characteristics

	California	Wisconsin
Percentage of the population that is foreign-born, 1996*	25.6%	2.9%
Percentage of the population that is Latino, 1996**	27.9%	2.1%
Percentage of the population that is Asian, 1996**	11.7%	1.4%
Average AFDC*** payment, 1996	\$198	\$155
Percentage of legislators who are Latino, 1996****	11.7%	0%

Source: Author's compilation based on *Zimmerman and Tumlin (1999) and U.S. Census Bureau (1997); **U.S. Census Bureau (1997); ***U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (1998); and ****Council of State Governments (1998) and National Association of Latino Elected Officials Educational Fund (1997).

Note: AFDC = Aid to Families with Dependent Children.

To structure my comparisons of welfare rights struggles in California and Wisconsin and their two largest cities, I focus on the rise and outcomes of four different types of welfare rights campaigns: statewide campaigns to restore public assistance benefits to legal immigrants that were denied at the federal level, local campaigns to improve welfare-to-work policies, local campaigns to oppose the privatization of welfare services and to improve the regulation of welfare contractors, and state and local campaigns to improve child care services. I choose these four campaigns because they represent significant lines of conflict around welfare reform and also help reveal how the local politics of race, class, and gender shaped welfare rights activism. Comparing similar campaigns in these two contrasting settings helps to illuminate the complex interplay between popular mobilization and the policymaking process and how these dynamics were shaped by local demographic, economic, and political conditions. Most importantly, these comparative case studies reveal how the actions of welfare rights coalitions altered state and local welfare policies, and under what conditions.

Overview of This Book

My comparative case studies in the chapters that follow show how, and under what conditions, activists built influential coalitions and, in effect, successfully impacted four types of state and local welfare reform policies in California and Wisconsin. As Suzanne Staggenborg suggests, there are three dimensions of measuring success for social movement coalitions: they last long enough to achieve goals or concessions, they consistently carry out collective action, and they manage to influence their targets in desired ways.⁹⁵ Although activists seek to achieve their ultimate goals, they seldom do. We would fail to acknowledge most activists' actual influence if we viewed it simply in all-or-nothing terms, particularly when political conditions are not ripe for real, fundamental social change. According to the "collective goods" criterion, social movements are considered to be influential if they "secure . . . collective benefits for the challenger's beneficiary group," even if the benefits won are concessions other than a movement's ultimate goals.⁹⁶ This criterion allows us to acknowledge when gains are made, such as when low-income families get greater access to cash assistance or services, as well as the limits of those gains.

Chapter 2 puts my book into the context of prior scholarship on the U.S. welfare state and welfare reform policies as well as the literature on social movement coalitions. I argue that greater research is needed on the collective struggles that sought to influence the implementation of welfare reform policies and challenged the negative construction of

welfare recipients in ongoing policy debates. The welfare rights campaigns examined in this book complicate our understanding of how U.S. welfare reform policies are shaped by the politics of race, class, and gender. They also reveal the multivocal character of the U.S. welfare state as state actors' positions on welfare issues and their relationship to welfare rights activists vary across state institutions and levels of government. Drawing insights from social movement scholars, I argue that when new allies joined welfare rights campaigns, activists were better able to make policy gains.

Chapter 3 focuses on state-level campaigns to replace the public assistance benefits for legal immigrants that were lost through PRWORA's passage and how their outcomes were shaped by racial politics. These campaigns forged new coalitions among traditional welfare advocates, immigrants, and the larger ethnic communities to which they belonged. In California—home to the largest immigrant population in the nation—cross-racial and cross-ethnic collaboration between Asian Americans and Latinos produced large demonstrations and grassroots lobbying campaigns in favor of benefit-replacement programs. This, along with the growing size of the foreign-born, Latino, and Asian electorate and the active leadership of Latino legislators, put pressure on politicians to replace benefits for all four major public assistance programs. In Wisconsin, where the immigrant population remained small, there was much less popular mobilization around this issue and far less electoral pressure on politicians to support benefit replacements. Nevertheless, popular mobilization and the visible role played by Hmong refugees in this campaign helped advocates win legislative support for two benefit-replacement programs. This chapter demonstrates the important role that broad-based and multiracial alliances played in preventing the implementation of federal cutbacks to legal immigrants' welfare rights, as well as the importance of demographic and political conditions to welfare policy outcomes.

Chapter 4 focuses on labor and community campaigns that took place in Los Angeles and Milwaukee against the privatization of welfare services. With the passage of the 1996 federal welfare reform act, Congress authorized the privatization of a wider range of welfare services than ever before; state and local governments could now offer for-profit and nonprofit private agencies contracts for eligibility determination as well as case management services for cash aid programs like TANF. After PRWORA's passage, multibillion-dollar companies, such as Maximus Corporation and Lockheed Martin Information Management Systems, aggressively pursued and received multimillion-dollar contracts to administer state and local welfare-to-work programs, claiming that they could provide cheaper and more effective services than the public sec-

tor. Because it threatened to displace unionized public-sector workers and erode the quality of welfare services, welfare privatization spurred the formation of community-labor alliances. Public-sector unions and community activists joined forces, seeking to shape the implementation of PRWORA by preventing or minimizing welfare privatization or by reducing the harms caused by private contractors.

While many state and local governments established public-private partnerships to administer welfare services, the extent of "mixed governance" and its terms varied by locale, creating different conditions for influencing the implementation of welfare reform. In Los Angeles, where county officials had discretion over the issue and where support for welfare privatization was already mixed, public-sector unions and their allies mobilized together and succeeded in minimizing the privatization of welfare services. By contrast, TANF administration in Milwaukee County became completely privatized, a move that was imposed from above by conservative state politicians, despite the opposition of community and labor groups. As scandals involving private welfare agencies surfaced, community groups mobilized and demanded greater public oversight of private welfare contractors. Although many of the activists' demands were ignored by distant state officials, a combination of public pressure and bad publicity helped to curb some of the worst practices carried out by private welfare contractors. Chapter 4 demonstrates how public-sector workers and community groups can mobilize together to pressure public officials to minimize welfare privatization and its negative impacts and how policymakers can either help or ignore their demands.

Chapter 5 examines the efforts of community and labor activists in Los Angeles and Milwaukee to organize welfare recipients as workers in response to the expansion of welfare-to-work programs. In Los Angeles, organizers mobilized recipients of both TANF and General Relief to develop multiracial and cross-gender workfare workers' campaigns that were sustained for more than three years. These campaigns called for workers' rights and job creation, challenging the racist stereotype that underemployed public assistance recipients did not want to work, and they resulted in the creation of two transitional jobs programs and a number of small but significant improvements in the implementation of the city's and county's welfare-to-work programs. By contrast, workfare workers' campaigns in Milwaukee never involved more than a few hundred participants and lasted less than one year. I argue that these divergent outcomes were partly related to the political economy of workfare in these two cities. High unemployment levels in Los Angeles helped to create a relatively large workfare population concentrated in the public sector, where they posed a displacement threat to unionized

workers. This facilitated the mobilization of workfare workers and encouraged public-sector unions to join forces with community groups around demands for workers' rights and job creation. By contrast, Milwaukee's low unemployment levels, along with the state's highly restrictive welfare policies, produced a small welfare-to-work population that was widely dispersed across worksites that were located mainly in the private sector. The small and largely privatized workfare population in Milwaukee, along with the complete assault on public welfare administration discussed in chapter 4, hindered the development of a union-organizing drive among welfare-to-work participants. Union revitalization processes and employer responses to unionization also shaped the trajectory of workfare workers' campaigns in these cities.

Chapter 6 examines the political threats and opportunities for expanding and improving subsidized child care programs in the context of policymakers' interest in putting more poor mothers to work. Forcing thousands of welfare recipients into the labor market significantly increased the demand for child care services, putting further strains on programs already stretched beyond capacity. Yet, it also increased political support for expanding publicly subsidized child care programs within state and local governments. In both California and Wisconsin, women—including low-income mothers, child care providers, and female policy advocates—played key roles in state and local campaigns to improve child care policies. Taking a stand against work requirements for welfare mothers, local chapters of Wages for Housework and Welfare Warriors defended the right of poor mothers to stay at home and care for their own children, but they found few allies to actively support their demands in either state. More successful was the movement to expand and improve subsidized child care, which challenged the devaluation of paid child care and sought to defend and expand low-income working parents' access to affordable child care. New resources and grassroots energy to state and local campaigns resulted from the efforts of community organizations and unions to organize home-based child care providers and the families relying on their services. They greatly helped to defend, expand, and improve subsidized child care services in California and Wisconsin. Policymakers alternately helped or rejected activists' demands, and the fate of these campaigns ultimately depended upon gubernatorial politics. Whereas Democratic governor Jim Doyle in Wisconsin authorized collective bargaining for home-based child care providers, Republican governor Arnold Schwarzenegger refused to do so.

Chapter 7 draws conclusions about the lessons learned from welfare rights activism in this era. I argue that the implementation of federal welfare reforms became an opportunity for policymaking, but only under

certain conditions. The welfare rights movement was generally small and its influence was very limited, especially in rural areas, in conservative states, and at the national level. Policy victories depended upon activists' ability to mobilize welfare recipients and to forge broad alliances both inside and outside of the state. Consistent with welfare-to-work goals, state and local policy gains made by activists often involved expansions of work-based entitlements, such as improvements in subsidized child care or the authorization of new transitional jobs programs. Other policy victories were mostly defensive ones that prevented the implementation of federal or state cutbacks rather than expansions in welfare rights. Although limited, these policy gains represented significant victories for those who benefited from them.

The book ends with a discussion of the challenges and prospects for the welfare rights movement in the United States in the midst of the deep recession that began in 2007. Large corporations and other powerful proponents of welfare reform and privatization remain strongly entrenched within U.S. politics. In the midst of the current economic crisis, the welfare rights movement remains small and weak, and even broader assaults on public social services and public-sector workers' rights are under way. The coalitions formed in response to the implementation of welfare reform—along with new campaigns emerging in response to the economic crisis—could sow the seeds for future policy gains for working families. Broadening support for more universal welfare programs and strengthening the organizational capacity of and alliances between grassroots anti-poverty organizations, unions, and other working-class organizations remain critical tasks for rebuilding the U.S. welfare state.