

School CEO Paul Vallas (and eventually Gery Chico) to establish "a corporatist regime focused on accountability, high-stakes testing, standards, and centralized regulation of schools," which has resulted in the retention of thousands of Latino and black youths, as well as their being sent "to mandatory remedial programs and basic education transition high schools" (Lipman 2003:81). The result has been a deepening stratification of academic programs and stronger centralized control over local school districts.

19. Salzman (2003:21) notes, for example, that attempts to address the militarization of education "must go beyond challenging militarized schooling so as to challenge the many ways that militarism as a cultural logic enforces the expansion of corporate power and decimates public democratic power."

20. The students I interviewed were heterogeneous in language ability (ranging from fully bilingual in English and Spanish to predominantly monolingual in either language) and in length of stay in the United States; it did not appear that either of these factors accounted for differences in experiences and attitudes regarding JROTC and military service. Students specified country of birth, but I did not ask them to identify their citizenship or legal status. None referred to their legal status in explaining their decisions to participate in JROTC or to consider military careers in the future.

7

The Specter of Slavery

Workfare and the Economic Citizenship of Poor Women

Jane L. Collins

Rachel Fernandez was born in Puerto Rico, but her parents moved to Milwaukee when she was still a baby.¹ At the time I interviewed her, she had four children, three of whom were living with her. She was on parole from a minor drug conviction. Rachel was feeling very grateful to have her children back and was working hard to reestablish a stable place for them. She had turned to the state of Wisconsin's new workfare program, hoping that the caseworkers there would help her get her GED and find an office job. But the requirements of the Wisconsin Works (W-2) program left her frustrated:

I do what they want me to do. Things I don't want to do....Like right now, they gave me an activity to work at a pantry shop [food pantry] that I'm not interested in whatsoever. My interest was computer and office assistant classes, and they don't want to put me in that. But they force us to do it just to get our little paycheck. Sometimes I feel like saying, "Screw W-2." You know? But I can't, because I can't afford my rent or my bills, so I have to do the things they want me to do.

Serena Clark grew up in a house full of drug addicts. She started selling drugs when she was eleven. But when she was about sixteen, a religious

organization took her in and helped her overcome her addiction. For a while, she traveled around the country, giving testimony about her experiences. Returning to Milwaukee, Serena married and gave birth to a son in 2001. In 2003 she turned to Wisconsin's welfare program to see whether she could get support while training as an AODA (alcohol and drug abuse) counselor. She was participating in a minority training program at a reputable drug and alcohol treatment center and believed that she had found her calling. But her "employment counselor" felt that this was not in keeping with the work-first philosophy of the state program. Serena was critical of what she perceived as the shortsightedness of this approach:

She says I shouldn't be wasting my time at the [counseling training], that I need to make more time to do my job logs, or I need to find a full-time job, you know, like working as a waitress, rather than having a part-time job and doing what I want to do for my future. She wants me to give up my hopes, my dreams. What the hell am I gonna do that for? Give up all this I accomplished just to be a waitress?

Building on accounts such as these, in this chapter I seek to understand the temporally and geographically specific labor market of southeastern Wisconsin from 1999 to 2004. I explore the way in which Wisconsin's reformed welfare practices—as implemented by private agencies contracted by the state—have shaped the labor market experiences of low-wage workers. Many evaluations of the historic welfare reform of 1996—named, without shame or irony, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA)—have concluded that its expulsion of impoverished mothers to the bottom of the labor market did not much improve their circumstances. But I make a stronger claim: the policies of welfare reform that force poor mothers to work long hours outside the home have undermined the economic citizenship of these women.

LABOR MARKETS AND WELFARE

Debates over the impact of welfare on labor markets date back to Elizabethan poor laws. Claims that any aid makes those who receive it dependent and weak have accompanied every new initiative to provide relief. Hirschman (1991) and Somers and Block (2005) call this response a "rhetoric of perversity," which asserts that aid to the poor creates perverse incentives, breeding dependency and undermining the will to work. Based in Malthusian metaphors of natural law that interpret scarcity as a "spur to

labor," this rhetoric warns against the dangers of state intervention in the labor market.

In contrast, those who have advocated public aid have understood it as softening the harshest impacts of market rationality. One of the most explicit formulations of this perspective can be found in Karl Polanyi's (2001) *The Great Transformation*. Polanyi argued that, when eras of market fundamentalism push labor to the breaking point, social groups demand what he called a "double movement" (Polanyi 2001:79): a network of policies designed to temper the treatment of labor as a simple commodity.

In a similar way, Frances Piven and Richard Cloward have seen welfare policies as responses to the destructive effects of unregulated labor markets. In *Regulating the Poor* (1993), they present the history of the welfare state in the United States not as a progressive liberalization but rather as characterized by periodic expansion and contraction. They argue that government provided social supports only when threatened with civil disorder and that when disorder waned, government withdrew support in ways that reinforced work discipline. Tracing the history of the two major relief expansions of the past century—the New Deal and the War on Poverty—Piven and Cloward link them to the social uprisings of their periods. After these movements were palliated and order restored, federal agencies returned control of social programs to localities and instituted new rules that channeled workers back into the low-wage labor market (Piven and Cloward 1993). Although a number of authors have criticized Piven and Cloward for their functionalism (Kincard 1990; Shaver 1989) and for neglecting gender and domestic labor (Gordon 1988), their work remains a compelling account of how welfare programs articulate with struggles over labor rights and regulation.

Recent work by Jamie Peck has brought these debates into the post-PRWORA, welfare era. Peck (2001:6) claims that welfare "is not about creating jobs for people who don't have them" but about creating "workers for jobs that nobody wants." He sees welfare as establishing a floor under the labor market, setting the conditions under which certain groups, at certain times, have access to means of subsistence outside the market. He decries the rhetoric that frames welfare as overcoming the motivational deficiencies of the poor; instead, he argues that it is designed to counteract the weak pull of contingent and undesirable work at poverty wages (Peck 2001:185). In Peck's analysis of local welfare regimes, he focuses on what he calls the "boundary institutions" of the labor market: these include welfare offices, but also schools, hospitals, and prisons. Peck (2001:52) argues that these institutions adjust the flow of workers into and out of the

labor market and also remake the workers themselves, shaping their attitudes toward work and wages, their expectations about employment continuity and promotion, and their identities.

Building on these accounts, I explore the way in which Wisconsin's reformed welfare practices, as implemented by private agencies contracted by the state, adjusted the flow of workers in and out of the labor market and remade workers in the context of the labor market of southeastern Wisconsin from 1998 to 2004.

GENDER, RACE, AND ECONOMIC CITIZENSHIP

Kessler-Harris (2001:17) has written about the changing rights that "accrue to men and women as part of the obligation to engage in wage work." Like others who study the American welfare system, she notes that the US state has attached its most valuable benefits first to property and later to wage work. In particular, it has distributed rights to income security—programs such as social security and unemployment insurance—through work, rather than residence or citizenship. For this reason, Kessler-Harris finds T. H. Marshall's (1950) classic list of citizenship forms (civil, political, and social) incomplete. Because key rights have been tied to earning in the United States, she proposes the additional category of economic citizenship—which interacts with, but is distinct from, other forms (Kessler-Harris 2001).

Judith Shklar traces the rise of work as a marker of citizenship to the Jacksonian period. Jacksonian democrats asserted that to work and to receive an earned reward was a right; they held that we are citizens only if we earn. They developed the idea of the worker-citizen—who was, of course, white and male—by contrasting him to the slave, on one hand, and the idle aristocrat, on the other. For them, the emblem of the proper citizen was the white male craft worker (Shklar 1991). As Fraser and Gordon have shown, the language of dependency marked this boundary. Those on one side were autonomous, independent workingmen who supported their families, and those on the other were considered psychologically or morally unfit for citizenship (Fraser and Gordon 1994:318).²

Many scholars have pointed out that, theoretically, respect and resources in the public sphere could have been tied to family roles and that caregiving could have been a route to democratic participation. In the early twentieth century, protective labor legislation and mothers' pensions began to solidify a new role for "mother-citizens" (Lister 1997). But each step toward enhancing the social rights of motherhood closed paths to economic citizenship for women by requiring them to stand back from the

labor market. Thus, welfare programs in the United States "created a... pattern of rewards and discouragement that effectively regulated the family lives and labor market behavior of mothers in line with patriarchal expectations," at least until the passage of the 1996 welfare reform act (Kessler-Harris 2001:13–17).

The rights and benefits of economic citizenship forged during the New Deal—social security, unemployment insurance, access to credit, lower mortgage rates—accrued mainly to men by virtue of their status as workers. But the policies of this period configured citizenship along lines of race as well. Seeking support from southern politicians, Roosevelt excluded from New Deal programs the categories of work in which blacks predominated (such as agricultural and domestic labor). Workers in these sectors had no access to social security, workers' compensation, or unemployment insurance. Because these jobs were rarely unionized, their workers gained no protections under the new National Labor Relations Board; they were also exempt from the wage and hours protections of the Fair Labor Standards Act (Metzler 1998; Quadagno 1994). As Dorothy Roberts (1996:1563) has argued, "racism structured the political choices that led to the current system of welfare," and America's stratified and unequal welfare programs and labor laws reflected, and perpetuate, a "racial definition of citizenship."

Over the second half of the twentieth century, with growing labor force participation, some women moved into economic citizenship. Since the 1970s and particularly in the 1990s, a new balance of power between workers and employers eroded key benefits of economic citizenship for all workers: decreasing job security, loss of benefits. More temporary and casual work resulted. Welfare reform in 1996 intersected with these two trends. The reforms, which required poor women to work for benefits rather than claim these as mothers, placed them on the threshold of economic citizenship at the moment that our social contract *vis-à-vis* work was changing.

DATA AND METHODS

Working with a research team, I conducted the interviews in this chapter between April and July 2004 as part of a project at the Institute for Research on Poverty at the University of Wisconsin.³ Using a sampling frame that ensured proportional coverage of differences in race and other important factors, we randomly selected potential participants who had recently been enrolled in a "lower tier" of the Wisconsin Works (W-2) program from the state welfare system's administrative records. Wisconsin Works, the Wisconsin version of welfare reform, has an especially heavy

focus on work.⁴ Sixty-nine percent of the women we contacted in Milwaukee and Racine counties agreed to be interviewed.

Our interviews covered household composition, work and income, work-family balance, livelihood problems and solutions, social networks and support, and social program participation. We collected work histories for each woman, focusing on her last five jobs. Because we had access to state data on W-2 participation, food stamp receipt, and supplemental security income (SSI), as well as to unemployment insurance data on jobs, we verified each woman's personal account with state records. In all instances, women's responses to our interview questions were consistent with the official data.

THE LABOR MARKETS OF MILWAUKEE AND RACINE

Milwaukee and Racine share a past as industrial centers and a present characterized by struggles to move to a service-based economy. Milwaukee has made more headway toward this goal than Racine, having invested heavily in tourism and downtown entertainment facilities in the 1990s, but both counties have a much higher share of their workforce in manufacturing than the nation as a whole (20 percent and 30 percent, respectively, as opposed to 11 percent [COWS 2000, 2002]).

Both counties also have experienced deindustrialization. Analysts have described Milwaukee as "devastated by the rust belt recession of the 1980s" (Bernhardt, Dresser, and Rogers 2004:233). Since the 1970s, the city has lost almost 60 percent of its manufacturing jobs. Some have referred to this pattern of job loss as a "stealth depression," evolving slowly as unemployment rates have crept up and discouraged workers have left the labor market (Levine 2003a). Not only have manufacturing jobs disappeared, but also overall job growth has been anemic, up only 0.4 percent between 1991 and 2000. In addition, all net job growth in the metro area since 1995 has occurred in the suburbs, leading economists to talk about a "structural spatial mismatch" between the high unemployment in the inner city and job growth in the suburban "greenfields" (Levine 2003a:3, 12).

Deindustrialization did not affect white and black families equally. Zeidenberg notes:

During the post-war economic boom, large numbers of blacks migrated to Milwaukee, Racine and other northern manufacturing cities. Many were able to move out of poverty and into the working class. In fact, by the 1970s, black workers in Wisconsin earned median wages well above their national counterparts.

However, the loss of manufacturing jobs in the 1980s has led to increasing concentrations of poverty in black communities.... These high poverty neighborhoods grew continuously in size between 1969 and 1989, with most of the expansion occurring in the 1980s. [Zeidenberg 2004:4-5]

In 2003, the unemployment rate for the city of Milwaukee was 9.3 percent, at a time when the average for the fifty largest US cities was 6.9 percent (Levine 2003a:7). But even this very high number hid massive disparities. Unemployment for white workers was 3.3 percent in 2000; for black workers, it was 16 percent (Levine 2003b). In 2002 nearly 60 percent of working-age black men in the city were jobless, by far the highest rate of any city surveyed by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (Levine 2004:3). In 1990 the city ranked last among major US metropolitan areas in the proportion of blacks holding managerial jobs, and in 1992, last in the number of black-owned firms (Levine 2003b).

The large number of African American men whom Levine found to be "outside" the labor market is connected to rates of black imprisonment in the state. The disparity in black:white imprisonment rates in Wisconsin at the end of the 1990s was 20:1, the third highest in the nation. The black:white ratio of new prison sentences for drug offenses rose from 22:1 in 1990 to 67:1 in 1999. Nearly half these new sentences were for the ambiguous category of "intent to deliver." Researchers attribute much of this disparity to "back end" criminal justice processing, such as sentencing decisions, but also to law enforcement practices such as "sweeps," where police clear out "high crime" neighborhoods by arresting everyone possible on any charge possible (Oliver 2001; Oliver and Yocum 2002). Men with a criminal record, and especially felony convictions, have difficulty re-entering the labor market.

Not unexpectedly, these trends affect income and poverty. African American household income in Milwaukee was 50 percent of white household income; Milwaukee ranked forty-ninth among the fifty largest urban areas on this measure. The black poverty rate in metro Milwaukee in 2000 was 32.5 percent, six times the white rate. White residents of Milwaukee were twice as likely as black residents to own their homes. Pervasive patterns of residential segregation led some inner-city neighborhoods to be 95 percent black (Levine 2003b).

Like Milwaukee, Racine County has experienced deindustrialization, although manufacturing remains a more important part of its employment base. It experienced modest job growth over most of the 1990s, with the

majority of new jobs concentrated in construction (COWS 2000:6). The per capita income and educational attainment of Racine's inhabitants are slightly higher than those for Milwaukee, and its proportion of African American and Latino residents is somewhat smaller. But like Milwaukee, Racine is a divided city. A report on concentrated poverty notes that in 2000 Racine had one center-city census tract with a poverty rate of more than 45 percent. This tract was 75 percent black (Zeidenberg 2004:18).

WOMEN'S LABOR MARKET HISTORIES

It is common in American political culture to portray women who turn to the welfare system as dependent and unwilling to work. Aid is said to create perverse incentives that lead poor women to withdraw their labor from the market and to focus on raising children. As Roberts (1999), Solinger (1999), and others have shown, lifestyles that society encouraged for middle-class white women in earlier decades were pathologized by public discourse when chosen by poor women. The corollary to the dominant view of welfare dependency is that, with proper incentives and pressures, poor women can get and keep jobs and that work will eventually lead to a living wage and to self-sufficiency.

In a review of empirical studies of welfare reform and work, Mary Corcoran and her co-authors show that both assumptions are untrue. They found that poor women can and do get jobs but that there is considerable volatility to their work trajectories linked to physical and mental health problems, substance abuse, family stresses, employer discrimination, and partner violence (Corcoran et al. 2000:249). In a similar way, we found that roughly half of the women with whom we spoke were working at the time of the interview. Of those who were not, half were looking for work, and the other half had a serious health or mental health problem or an ill or disabled child. All the women had held a variety of jobs in the past, some as many as twenty-five. More than 60 percent had worked at a job for more than a year. Some had held responsible managerial positions. Still, the work trajectories for many women were disrupted by personal or family crises.

The volatility of women's employment was not just a product of their personal dilemmas, however, but was inextricably linked to the kinds of employment they found. Many of these jobs (15 percent) were seasonal or temporary in nature. Few offered sick leave, personal days, or maternity leave. When the women we interviewed were ill, had a sick child, or were about to give birth, they had few alternatives. They talked about quitting jobs when they had to care for children who were hospitalized or injured,

when they had to take in relatives' children, when their kids were in the court system, and when they needed to care for dying parents. They also quit jobs when their cars died and they could not get to work, when their bosses asked them to lift or climb when pregnant or injured, or to take second or third shifts when they could not find child care for those hours. One woman told us, "I ended up suffering from severe depression. I was put on medication, so my doctor suggested I take a leave. And after my leave was up, when I came back, they terminated me." Another said, "They fired me from there because my son got sick and I needed to take off several days in a row because he has chronic ear infections...he had to have surgery to get tubes in his ears."

The majority of the women we interviewed worked in retail or fast food establishments, followed closely by work as nursing assistants or home health care aides. A few worked in factories, for cleaning services, and in telemarketing. One-third had acquired their jobs through a temporary staffing agency. Women's wages in these jobs ranged from \$5.75 to \$13.75 an hour and averaged \$8.63. A Wisconsin legislative audit found that the average annual income of workforce participants who entered work in 2003 was \$9,291; the poverty threshold for a family of three was \$14,494. Less than 22 percent of those entering work earned more than poverty-level wages (Wisconsin Legislative Audit Bureau 2005:50-52). The audit acknowledged that this was an overestimate because it was based on employer-reported wages and did not include 2,672 women who left welfare but could not find jobs. Only three of the women we interviewed received health insurance through their employers.

The jobs these women held not only were insecure and poorly paid but also had some of the economy's strictest work rules, which helped explain volatility in women's employment. One woman noted, "I ended up getting fired for taking my break fifteen minutes early because I had to go to the restroom. And I was pregnant, mind you!" Another, who had back problems, was fired for allowing a customer to move forty-pound bags of water softener salt onto the conveyor belt in her retail job.

Women felt the effects of the stealth depression that beset the local economy. One said, "Factories you can't do, because they are packing up and moving overseas." Another said, "A lot of businesses are closing, and people are losing their jobs.... There's so many people here that look for jobs every day, and all you can find is fast food restaurants, and that's not gonna pay the bills." Another simply said, "Jobs right now are an endangered species!" In a more personal vein, one woman explained, "People are expected to have more skills...so having your GED or high school

diploma isn't good enough anymore.... Yes, I could go to McDonald's or Burger King and flip burgers, or whatever, but, realistically, how am I going to send my children—my three children—to college off of \$6.75 or \$7 an hour pay?"

Women also spoke of the job market difficulties of black men—putting a human face on a 60 percent jobless rate. One said bluntly:

Stop putting all these men in a penitentiary! You got everybody's daddy, brother, and uncle locked up in the Wisconsin prison system. These men come home after ten and twelve years, and they still can't get a job to provide for their kids, which makes them become repeat offenders. You know, how can you live your life if you've done your time but you can't get a job! McDonald's won't even hire convicted felons!

As these women suggest, poor families faced a labor market that was not only weakened by deindustrialization and job flight but also distorted by deep racial disparities.

WORKFARE ERODING ECONOMIC CITIZENSHIP

Although all low-wage workers in Milwaukee experienced a deindustrialized labor market with insecure jobs and few benefits, women whose lives touched the welfare system were in a unique position. As heads of household responsible for families, they used the system as a safety net to replace benefits they would have had from employers in good jobs—or from most jobs in earlier decades. The system's strict work requirements sent them back to work the moment their crises had abated. Through its community service jobs program, the system placed them in some of the economy's least skilled and least desirable jobs, churning them, to quote Peck (2001:14), "back into the bottom of the labor market." Working twenty to forty hours a week, often for private sector employers, these women were still considered to be receiving "assistance" and therefore could not access many of the benefits that normally accompany paid work.

Benefits "Wal-Mart Style"

Beginning around 2003, labor movements began to note that many families receiving food stamps and medical assistance were working full-time at low-wage jobs, suggesting that taxpayers were subsidizing corporations too stingy to provide wages above poverty level or benefits to their workers. In 2005 a few states and municipalities began framing laws to

force such firms to pay higher wages and cover more benefits. The most visible of these bills passed in Maryland in April 2005 and was reaffirmed in January 2006 when the legislature overturned the veto of Governor Robert Ehrlich Jr. (*Washington Post* 2006a). The bill required companies with more than ten thousand employees to spend 8 percent of their payroll on health benefits or to pay the balance into a state health insurance fund for low-income workers. The legislation, which was quickly dubbed the "Wal-Mart Bill," was struck down by a federal judge on July 19, 2006 (*Washington Post* 2006b). Chicago passed an ordinance requiring a \$10-an-hour wage and \$3 per hour of benefit expenditures for big box retailers on July 26, 2006 (*New York Times* 2006), which Mayor Richard Daley vetoed on September 11 of that same year.

As wages and working conditions erode, the rules of the "new economy" force workers to rely on state agencies for basic benefits and for subsidies, such as food stamps, that bring their income to subsistence levels. If a decent wage and health insurance were formerly rights of economic citizens, earned in return for hard work, then that route is now closed to poor women, no matter how many hours a week they labor. Instead, the benefits and subsidies that make survival possible are doled out as state aid.

This shift became clear to me when I heard Della May Collins, one of the women we interviewed, refer to her W-2 check as her "unemployment." She had stopped working in 2004 when doctors diagnosed a pituitary tumor, and she received benefits through the Wisconsin Works Transitions program (W-2T) during her surgery and recovery. She did not receive unemployment compensation or disability pay, because the fast food job she had held for three years was part-time and had irregular hours, although she often worked forty-hour weeks. These kinds of casualized work relations (no long-term contracts, part-time schedules, fluctuating hours, temporary placements) denied women access to programs, such as unemployment compensation, that have been key elements of economic security for workers since the Depression. Without access to these entitlements, they turned to the state for "aid."

Several women told us that when they became pregnant, their bosses suggested that they stop work and apply to the state's Caretaker of Newborn program, which provides benefits for twelve weeks after a birth, promising their jobs back when they return. The employers in question ranged from factories, to large retailers, to small service franchises. Some women also said that their firms offered health insurance for a high monthly payment and that personnel officers told them "off the record" that, with their salary, they would still be eligible for state medical assistance

and "that might be a better value." A Wisconsin legislative audit in 2005 noted a large increase in women who received Caretaker of Newborn support between 1998 and 2004: "The reason may be that some of these individuals were already employed before they entered W-2 and were using the program as a form of paid maternity leave" (Wisconsin Legislative Audit Bureau 2005:55). As this trend was covered in the Wisconsin papers in 2004, the danger was that public outrage would lead to program cuts rather than hold corporations' feet to the fire, leaving low-wage workers bereft not only of the benefits that used to come with a job but also of the means-tested "handouts" that now substitute for them.

Workfare as Downward-Mobility Machine

The second way workfare erodes economic citizenship is by fostering downward job mobility. To grasp how this downward pressure works, it is necessary to understand the job programs in place under Wisconsin's welfare reform. As figure 7.1 shows, the state reserves transitional placements for women who "because of severe barriers are unable to perform independent, self-sustaining work," whereas community service jobs (CSJs) aim to move women into the labor market (Wisconsin DWD 1999b). In Milwaukee County, caseworkers assigned about 60 percent of W-2 participants to CSJs in 2002. They sent 63 percent of black women and 58 percent of Latinas to these placements, compared with 52 percent of white women (Wisconsin DWD 2004:7). The state targeted these jobs at individuals "who lack the basic skills and work habits needed in a job environment and who could benefit from positions offering real work opportunities with added supervision and support" and "an opportunity to practice work habits and skills" (Wisconsin DWD 1999b). Most CSJ assignments included twenty hours of work, ten hours of educational activity, and ten hours of job search, or twenty hours of work and twenty hours of job search per week, and the jobs involved office work, light industrial/housekeeping, and thrift store and care work (Robles, Doolittle, and Gooden 2003:21, 50).

As part of welfare reform, Wisconsin hired five private agencies to manage its welfare caseload. The staff of these agencies determined whether workers were ready for employment and assigned them to activities, including job placements with non-profit, for-profit, or public organizations. In practice, most of the larger job sites in Milwaukee belonged to the administrator agencies themselves (Goodwill, the YWCA, United Migrant Opportunity Services, the Opportunities Industrial Center, as well as for-profit Maximus). Privatization of services gave caseworkers tremendous discretion. Some listened to participants' needs and tried to make appropriate

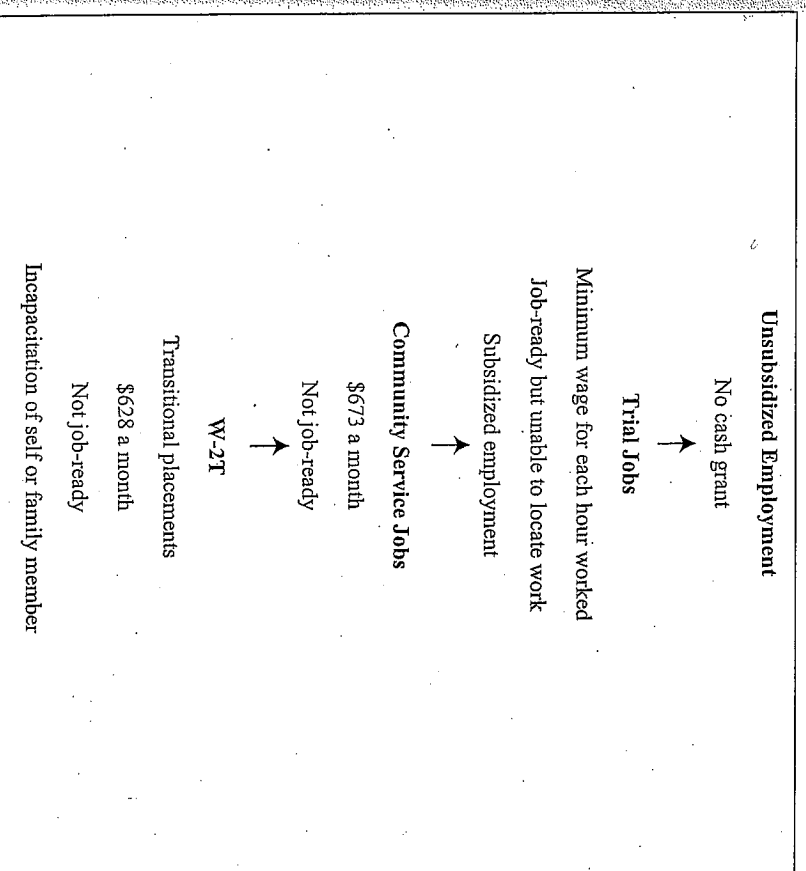


FIGURE 7.1.
The W-2 Employment Ladder (Wisconsin DWD 1999a).

matches, but others offered no opportunities to express preferences or make choices. Program evaluations suggested that caseworkers based assignments more on the availability of work slots at sites than on the background, skills, or goals of the participants (Robles, Doolittle, and Gooden 2003:33).

Participation in CSJs was associated, in a disturbing number of cases, with downward job mobility for the women we interviewed. This pattern was shaped by changes in the job market, as well as changes in social programs. Women who left or lost a good job in the late 1990s could not always find an equivalent job a year or two later, because the labor market was weaker and the quality of jobs was declining (COWS 2004; Dresser and Rogers 2004; Tilly 1997). In addition, available training opportunities narrowed during this period because two agencies lost their contracts with the state because of corruption or mismanagement (DeParle 2004:chapter 14).

Several women told of leaving clerical or managerial positions and then moving through a series of less responsible jobs. When they turned to W-2 in a crisis, they were placed in CSJs that involved unskilled manual work.

One woman, Rowena Watson, had worked for three years as a manager of a group home for adults with developmental disabilities. She supervised staff members, was salaried, and had benefits, including health and life insurance. She described this period of employment as the best time in her life:

Me and my kids were doing well. I didn't have to ask nobody for nothing. I didn't have to kiss nobody's ass. I could do things with my daughter that we have not done in so long.... I worked a lot, but she was always taken care of by my grandmother. We had a car. We went out to eat every Friday. You know, I even took my daughter to work with me, and she would sit at the kitchen table and do her homework...just like a family.

Although Rowena enjoyed this job, she quit after several experiences of what she interpreted as racism.

Well, I was a young black supervisor in a very big company with a bunch of Caucasians.... They started doing little things to me. They would come and get my time sheets, and they wanted to see receipts...like they were just trying to find something to fire me about. I got really tired of it. And I know me, and I think they knew that eventually I was going to say something, so I resigned from my position so that I could keep my supervisory title. Because I thought, "I can go anywhere and become a supervisor," you know, especially as a caregiver.

From 2001 to 2003, Rowena worked as a certified nursing assistant. Then, during a pregnancy in 2003, her doctor told her that she would have to take medical leave. Because her employer offered no leave, she turned to W-2. When we interviewed her, her baby daughter was seven months old, and she had been assigned to a community service job.

They send me places to work. One of them is on the north side—you help them cut down their rubbish and their trees. Another one, they send me down to the City of Milwaukee Department of Public Works, and you help them fix the streets. Or that island out there, you know, they have people from W-2 go out there and

water the grass and plant the flowers. What am I going to do cutting down bushes? Am I going to put that on my resume?

Ebony Jackson provides another example of downward mobility. Ebony was a mother of five children—two were grown and three still lived at home. She had finished high school and taken some college courses. In 1996 she worked as an office manager for a community development organization in Milwaukee. She loved the job, which required considerable administrative and clerical skill.

We helped the senior citizens clean their houses and make repairs, picking them up, taking food to them...that was very fulfilling. I started out as a clerical aid and worked my way up to executive secretary. I already had the secretarial skills, but I didn't have computer literacy yet and I learned a lot there. I learned to do payroll, calculating percentages, helped with audits, learned how to do inventory. And my boss trusted me to handle money, so I went to the bank for the company.

Ebony lost this job when the organization's funding was discontinued, six months after she had started there.

When she turned to the welfare office for help in finding a new job, Ebony was assigned to a trial job with another community organization.

It started off that they were trying to use me as a joke [because she was a welfare placement]. But they didn't understand that I'm a hard worker. I worked my way up to executive secretary for a skilled trade apprenticeship program. I did job recruiting, secretarial work, document production, ran errands...I did a lot of things in that office. I enjoyed that job because I could see that the community was receiving help that they needed.

Nevertheless, she was never hired for a permanent position.

I had that job for over a year. As a W-2 participant, you are supposed to be hired after six months, legally. I didn't know any of that. I just kept working because I liked working. But the company took advantage of me because the label "welfare recipient" was tagged to my head, so they refused to hire me, regardless of all the skills and talent that I had. I had a stigma once I got on the program.

When the state found that Ebony's boss was embezzling large amounts of money, it shut down the agency, and Ebony lost her job. Unable to pay her rent, she ended up in a homeless shelter. There, the periodic depression she had been battling became worse. She had experienced numerous episodes of domestic violence in her life. At that time, she said, she was "having nervous spells" and did not know why. "I take medicine to keep me from shaking because I had that much fear in me. I had nightmares. My children were affected, and I wound up having to get on welfare."

Ebony was placed in a Transitions program for a while but then was assigned to a CSJ that required job search and employment activity. She said, "They [the CSJ program] stuck us all in factories and had us doing jobs nobody wanted to do. And that's the honest-to-god truth—from picking up trash on the street, like the people at the county jail have to do, to working in the Goodwill with the disabled people."

In both these cases, women with significant skills and experience left the labor market for a brief period and re-entered through W-2 programs. Their experience was shared by 39 percent of the women we interviewed and 68 percent of those assigned to CSJs, providing a vivid illustration of what Peck calls "churning workers back into the bottom of the labor market," "creating workers for jobs nobody wants," and the construction of "a new category of forced labor, compelled to accept low wage work" (Peck 2001:14, 6, 188, respectively).

When Work Is Charity: Return to the Poorhouse

The third way workfare erodes economic citizenship is by forcing women to work but labeling the wages they receive as aid. When a woman holds a community service job, she is considered to be receiving welfare. The "time clock" that limits her lifetime benefits to five years is ticking. The state's contract agencies monitor her attendance at work and sanction her by reducing her check if she misses a day. This ambiguous status—eerily reminiscent of workhouses in the nineteenth century and earlier—denies women the independence and autonomy associated with wage earning since the Jacksonian period.

Ebony alluded to this problem when she said, "The label 'welfare recipient' was tagged to my head." She expressed the sense that she was not viewed as a "real worker" because she had been sent by the welfare agency ("It started off that they were trying to use me as a joke"). Because she had been assigned to the job by the state, Ebony could not transform her hard work into economic citizenship. She could not forge a direct contract with her employer, who preferred to continue hiring her on an indirect and

subsidized basis. At the time of our last interview with her, Ebony had been engaged in a job search as part of her W-2 assignment.

I had been offered a position as an executive secretary, which is what I used to be. I let one of my caseworkers know that I had the job but that I had to go in for my second and third interviews. She called the temp service that I had signed up with and told them, "Well, she's on welfare, so we want to monitor her for a year and a half, and let me give you the \$1,500 [subsidy]." I hadn't told them that I was a welfare recipient, and because they found out, I couldn't get the job for \$15 an hour. They decided to give it to someone else and started offering me jobs for \$6 an hour, which was not enough for me to actually get off welfare and stay off. You know, I know what I'm worth and I'm capable of doing, and \$6 an hour was like a slap in the face. I tried to go for some of the jobs, but they were so far across town to where I couldn't commute on the bus. So I got depressed again and was ready to give it up, till I looked at my children and said, "Well, I've got to feed my babies."

She added, "There ought to be a law passed that you can't check a person's socioeconomic status. If they come and you find out they are ready to do the job, let them work. They shouldn't have to know that you are on welfare."

Delia Carter told a similar story. She had been assigned to job search and had called a number of companies that seemed promising. Then she found that her caseworker was calling them to verify her log entries. Delia said, "She was calling the places that I had written on my job logs. That's like lowering me. How is the W-2 gonna call the place? Then they're only gonna think I'm qualified for getting \$5.15 an hour.... If they see that I'm getting a W-2 check, you think they're gonna give me a job? No, they're gonna look at me as a statistic!"

There are several issues of grave concern here. One is the way in which moving thousands of poor women into the bottom of the labor market drives down wages and undermines public employee unions. Both Piven (1999) and Boris (1999) report examples of public and private agencies failing to renew contracts with workers at a market wage to take advantage of subsidized workfare participants. The second issue is whether women who participate in workfare are protected by labor laws. The initial PRWORA legislation did not provide for minimal employment standards. Subsequent

administrative rulings by federal agencies have clarified the circumstances under which federal employment law applies to workfare participants, and the 105th Congress established that they were covered under minimum-wage laws and entitled to health, safety, and fair labor protections (NELP 2002).

Nevertheless, the National Employment Law Project (NELP) suggests that the law and administrative rulings are not as clear-cut as they may seem. For example, women placed in "work training" programs like community service jobs are not covered by unemployment insurance. NELP lawyers express concern that "many workers continue to suffer terms and conditions of work which are vastly inferior to those of the paid employees with whom they often work side by side." They note that a lack of Title VII (anti-discrimination) enforcement creates opportunities for sexual harassment and that the lack of explicit provision for workers' compensation results in a failure to recompense workers injured on the job. Finally, they point out that workers who complain—whether of unsafe conditions or harassment—are especially vulnerable to losing their benefits and have no access to an appeals process in most states (NELP 2002; US Department of Labor 2005).

A third issue concerns the Fourteenth Amendment rights of women in workfare assignments. The Fourteenth Amendment states that "included in the right of personal liberty and the right of private property...is the right to make contracts.... Chief among such contracts is that of personal employment, by which labor and other services are exchanged for money or other forms of property." As historians have pointed out, freedom of contract has never been absolute, and many labor struggles (over the minimum wage, maximum hours, and health safety regulations, for example) have given government the power to regulate the terms under which individuals can make a deal. Still, as Kessler-Harris notes, historically our legal system has "treated workers as individuals, each capable of negotiating and each protected by the Fourteenth Amendment's prohibitions on deprivation of property.... [labor's] right to freely contract to sell itself...commonly known as freedom of contract" (Kessler-Harris 1991:38). For political theorist T. H. Marshall (1950:10), the ability to follow the occupation of one's choice in the place of one's choice was a key aspect of citizenship. Therefore, it is disturbing that, under Wisconsin's welfare reform, signing an employability plan appears to cancel an individual's right to choose when, where, and under what conditions she will work.

Lack of access to this fundamental right was troubling to many women on workfare in Milwaukee. As one told Robles, Doolittle, and Gooden

(2003:60), "You love your research...what you're doing. What if your boss came to you and said, 'Now your CSJ assignment is to pick up garbage.' You wouldn't like that. If you put people in a CSJ that they don't care about, they won't learn.... It won't work."

Another woman I interviewed said, "You can't decide where you want to go. You have no opinion on any of this.... It's like you're a child and your parents are running your life for you, because you don't have no choice." These women were convinced that there was something wrong about the state's ability to dictate the kinds of work they would do and the conditions under which they would do it. In the words of one analyst, "welfare recipients who are told they must work at whatever job is available see the specter of slavery and indentured servitude come to haunt them again, returned from a not so distant past. And the persistence of racism makes that fear plausible" (Shklar 1991:97).

CONCLUSIONS

I have examined workfare not as a project to change individual behavior but as a design for changing the rules that govern the lower tiers of the labor market. I follow Peck in suggesting that, as jobs become less desirable—as they come to pay only a fraction of a living wage, cease to offer benefits, require night and weekend shifts, and become, in many cases, increasingly dangerous—it becomes necessary to force people into them. In the case of workfare, women who once had an option to stay home to raise children—if they were willing to do it on \$600 a month—are now being forced into these degraded jobs.

These trends are about regulating gender, as well as about regulating the labor market. The women who are being forced into work are mothers raising children. Because of their poverty (which brings with it things like inferior health care and lack of access to transportation) and because of the demands of raising children (with chicken pox, teacher's meetings, ear infections), these women need flexible jobs more than most of us. But as we have seen, the jobs they are able to get in fast food, retail, care work, and housekeeping are among the least flexible in the economy. These also have the most punitive work rules.

For women who have to quit their jobs in order to get time off to care for their kids, or to recover from an illness, or to have a baby, the welfare system still provides a safety net. It may have narrow eligibility requirements and time limits and may be extremely punitive in its own right, but it provides these women with "benefits" they do not get from their jobs. In this way, it allows employers to continue offering employment under conditions

that do not provide a living and cannot reproduce the labor force.

Women who accept this aid enter into a Faustian bargain, for they must give up their claim to economic citizenship in order to receive help. They must agree to be treated as dependents and must give up their right to choose when, where, and under what conditions they will work, to sue for fair treatment, and to receive many of the benefits that have traditionally come to workers through their jobs. Participating in these programs propels them into the labor market with the racialized label of "welfare recipient" tagged to their heads. No matter how many jobs they have held, how many years they have worked, or what skills they have, they are marked as deficient workers.

This bargain traps women at the lower end of the labor market, making upward mobility into jobs that pay a wage that can support a family all but impossible. The way out, of course, is to get a job independently. But unless that job provides benefits and flexibility, a woman will be forced to return to welfare programs as soon as she needs time off to care for family. This bargain pathologizes the need for flexible work hours in ways that reverberate beyond welfare. It treats such needs as unacceptable deviations from the "ideal [male] worker norm" (J. Williams 2001: chapters 3 and 4)—the idea that the worker will work long hours with only scheduled vacations and without interruptions for family responsibilities throughout their entire adult life, a model made possible because they have access to a "flow of family labor" from their wives (J. Williams 2001; see also Roberts 2004b). In doing so, it ties universal questions about how our children will be cared for when mothers work and who will provide medical insurance to the "failures" of poor women. The question shifts from why employers are not providing benefits or why the state is not regulating work, to why poor women are not able to solve these problems the way the "rest" of society does. And if the rest of society is struggling with the same issues, they invite the stigma of being associated with the "disorganized poor." This is a new form of labor market discipline and a new form of gender discipline.

In prescient work, completed in the early 1990s (before PRWORA), Shklar (1991:98) wrote, "Welfare has nothing to do with economics. It is about citizenship." At the time, she wrote that the issue was "whether able-bodied adults who do not earn anything can be regarded as full citizens" and "if they are not, may...they be treated with that mixture of paternalism and contempt that has always been reserved for the dependent classes?" (Shklar 1991:98). Today, the issue has shifted, for most of the women Shklar wrote about have already been forced into work. The question now is whether, in turning to the state for subsidies to their less-than-living

wage, for medical care, or for the time off they need during illness, they will be so marked. If so, the link between wages and economic citizenship forged in the Jacksonian period has been broken, and a new class of "dependent workers," laboring outside the social contract, has been created.

Notes

1. All names used are pseudonyms.
2. Fraser and Gordon (1994) trace the evolution of the idea of dependency from the preindustrial period, when wage earners were seen as shamefully dependent on property owners, to the industrialized period's view of waged employment as a new form of property. This new perspective obscured workers' dependence on their employers and their status as subordinates in that relationship, while masking the productive labor of those labeled dependent (housewives, slaves).
3. The project was the W-2 Child Support Demonstration Evaluation, Phase III, led by Maria Cancian and Daniel Meyer and funded by the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development (DWD). The research team included three graduate students at the University of Wisconsin: Victoria Mayer, Nicole Breazeale, and Angela Cunningham. Patricia Brown and Steve Cook helped draw the sample. The project covered three counties: Milwaukee (twenty interviews), Racine (ten interviews), and Dane (ten interviews). Because the labor market of Dane County is very different, this chapter focuses only on Milwaukee and Racine.
4. "Since 1997, no cash assistance has been available to families unless they participate in work or work-like activities...or have a child less than 13 weeks old....Cash benefits are available only after a period of program participation" (Cancian et al. 2002:2). Wisconsin began work-based welfare reforms in the late 1980s, well ahead of the rest of the nation (Cancian et al. 2002). "Lower tier" programs include Community Service Jobs, Caretaker of Newborn benefits (available to mothers of children up to thirteen weeks), and W-2 Transitions (a program for women with obstacles to immediate employment, including health or mental health problems and substance abuse).