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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ADC</td>
<td>Aid to Dependent Children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFL</td>
<td>American Federation of Labor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AASW</td>
<td>American Association of Social Workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCC</td>
<td>Civilian Conservation Corps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIO</td>
<td>Congress of Industrial Organizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CWA</td>
<td>Civil Works Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DPW</td>
<td>Department of Public Welfare</td>
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<tr>
<td>DSW</td>
<td>Department of Social Welfare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ERA</td>
<td>Emergency Relief Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FERA</td>
<td>Federal Emergency Relief Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FWA</td>
<td>Family Welfare Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NASW</td>
<td>National Association of Social Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NYA</td>
<td>National Youth Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OAA</td>
<td>Old Age Assistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SERA</td>
<td>State Emergency Relief Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEWRC</td>
<td>State Emergency Welfare Relief Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSA</td>
<td>Social Security Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WCSWA</td>
<td>Wayne County Social Workers Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WPA</td>
<td>Works Progress Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WRC</td>
<td>Welfare Relief Commission</td>
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<tr>
<td>WRSC</td>
<td>Welfare and Relief Study Commission</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Michigan Governor John Engler eliminated the state’s General Assistance program, which provided relief to unemployed individuals, in October 1991. Other states followed his course, and the number of states providing General Assistance benefits dropped from twenty-three to thirteen.¹ Engler’s efforts to reduce welfare costs were mirrored at the national level, culminating in the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act. The presumption behind many of these reforms was that welfare recipients could work but refused to do so. Michael Katz argues that the 1996 law “signaled the victory of three great forces—the war on dependence, the devolution of public authority, and the application of market models to public policy.”² The 1996 reforms emphasized the link between work and citizenship, and the 1996 law redefined work to exclude any training program that took more than one year; recipients could no longer pursue post-secondary education and have it


². Katz, The Price of Citizenship, 1. Katz argues that welfare “reform” has redefined citizenship and strengthened the link between employment and benefits.
Introduction

considered a “work-related activity.” Work was only work if it paid wages. The goal of early-twentieth-century maternalists—to provide mothers’ pensions to enable mothers to care for their children at home—fully disappeared. Child care qualified as “work” only if one was watching someone else’s children. The emphasis of these reforms was on one’s responsibility to provide for oneself and one’s family.

A key goal of the reforms of the 1990s was to return control over welfare to the states. Proponents of such reforms, like Engler, questioned the role of the federal government in welfare provision. The shift to federalism dates to the 1930s, when the federal government first entered the arena of public welfare. According to Katz, “Instead of the constitutional allocation of government functions by level, federalism became a system in which major functions were shared among local, state, and national governments.” Welfare became a partnership between the different levels of government, and financial responsibility and administrative control shifted, in part, from the county and township levels to the state and federal governments. Engler and other governors sought to reverse that in the early 1990s, arguing that it was not the federal government’s role to end poverty. Engler was extremely critical of the programs of the Great Society in the 1960s, and believed they should be dismantled and authority returned to the states: “These programs,” he claimed, “have worked untold mischief on the American republic.” Engler led the charge to return the power to develop programs to the states; he welcomed federal funds, but argued that states could more effectively administer those funds, resulting in more cost-effective programs that would encourage independence.

My goal is to provide a historical foundation to this narrative by studying the debates of the 1930s, which led to the federal and state partnership that Engler and other welfare-reform advocates sought to dismantle. I do this by analyzing the experiences in Michigan from 1930 to 1940, the period in which the administration of relief policies shifted, at least in part, from local communities to the state and federal governments. The New Deal was, in fact, a compilation of many “little New Deals” at the state and local levels; implementation of the Federal Emergency Relief Act of 1933 and the Social Security Act of 1935 varied tremendously across the nation.

Edwin Amenta


argues that the limited and uneven change brought by the New Deal resulted from this variance in the states’ implementation of those programs. States with limited public welfare before the Great Depression saw the greatest change, as the New Deal programs fostered the creation of a public welfare system. States with a strong network of private welfare agencies saw at least a partial shift to public welfare programs under the Social Security Act. Other states, such as Michigan, whose needy residents relied on public welfare, saw a mix of change and continuity. Despite the new laws, Michigan’s welfare system reestablished local control, within the legal limits of the Social Security Act, in 1939. The question of which level of government—local, state, or federal—would create and implement public welfare policy was a major issue in Michigan’s debates.

Defense of local control, and thus of democracy, is central to understanding the development of welfare programs in Michigan. Early efforts to respond to the economic crisis of the Great Depression were framed by what I term fiscal localism: the attempt to minimize local expenditures and provide tax relief, even at the expense of welfare services. A fear of creating dependence and a reliance on the private sector for solutions to the economic downturn were central to this idea. A significant antitax sentiment fueled fiscal localism, which overlapped and at times merged with a belief in home rule. Local officials did not seek an end to public relief programs and believed such programs were necessary for the truly needy and deserving; they also welcomed state and federal funds. They did argue, however, that they could best administer the programs, with minimal state or federal oversight. Home rule advocates shared a hostility to professional social work, arguing that business professionals were the most competent welfare administrators. Home rule advocates believed local control was the best means to limit taxation and to achieve fiscal efficiency. Both home rule and fiscal localism appear throughout the decade.

The emergency-relief period did not end in Michigan until 1940, when the 1939 Welfare Reorganization Act was applied. Although Michigan qualified for funds under the Social Security Act’s Aid to Dependent Children, Aid to Blind, and Old Age Assistance programs beginning in 1936, administration of those programs continued under the emergency-relief administrative structure (local welfare-relief commissions and the State Emergency Relief Administration) until 1940.\(^7\) The emergency-relief structure remained in

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\(^7\) SERA administered relief efforts at the state level, using local welfare-relief commissions (also referred to as county emergency-relief administrations). Both terms were used in the
place in Michigan, and in other states, well beyond the demise of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration in December of 1935. Those years saw the overlap and intertwining of numerous welfare programs, including traditional poor relief, county infirmary care, mothers’ and old-age pensions, direct relief, work relief, and the categorical aid programs. The 1939 Welfare Reorganization Act attempted to consolidate the state’s welfare system while conforming to the requirements of the Social Security Act to permit the state to continue to receive federal funding.

The decade witnessed significant debate and conflict over the state’s social welfare policy. Debates operated at numerous levels in Michigan’s diverse demographics: rural and urban, industrial and agricultural, native-born white and immigrant or nonwhite. Through these counties we see the negotiations of relief at all levels. In my research, I analyze four counties: Marquette, Saginaw, Van Buren, and Wayne. Collectively they illuminate Michigan’s combined rural and urban and agricultural and industrial economy, as well as its population demographics. It is at this level that we see the actual implementation of the New Deal programs, rather than just what the federal government envisioned when the laws were written.

Numerous state and local studies of the New Deal have appeared in recent years, adding to our understanding of the operation of these programs at the local and state levels. The New Deal encompassed a range of programs and issues, and scholars vary in their emphasis by necessity; an all-inclusive study of the New Deal is impossible in a single monograph. Many state studies assess the New Deal programs, and the relationships between federal and state governments, as well as the effects of the programs on different groups: farmers, workers, minorities, etc. The studies are often organized around the specific programs, including the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, the Works Progress Administration, the Agricultural Adjustment Act, and the Social Security Act. Some emphasize labor or farm issues.8

Studies such as those by Jo Ann Argersinger and Douglass Smith examine the impact of the programs on urban politics: Argersinger in Baltimore, and Smith in four southern cities. Cecelia Bucki examines the role of the Socialist Party, and third-party politics in general, in Bridgeport, Connecticut, in the fifteen years leading to the Depression and the New Deal years. Other studies,

1930s, but I tend to rely on the former (WRC).

such as Karen Ferguson’s *Black Politics in New Deal Atlanta*, look at the issue of race and black activism during the New Deal.9

A key goal in this study is to examine these years through the lens of relief and welfare, and thus other issues, including farm and labor programs, are given minimal attention.10 I consider programs, particularly work relief, as they intersected with welfare programs and were conceived as an alternative to “the dole.” The title, *Negotiating Relief*, refers to the multiple negotiations that took place between various groups during the debates about how best to provide for the state’s needy residents. Local officials, state officials, local welfare-relief commissions, relief workers, professional social workers, and the recipients of relief—all took part in these negotiations and helped to shape the outcome of relief administration. These multiple perspectives reveal the often-competing narratives of relief that emerged during the 1930s in Michigan. Frequently local government representatives, particularly those from rural areas of the state, were at odds with those who sought progressive change in welfare administration. Time and again recipients had different ideas about relief and, although in positions of minimal power, used the system to gain support for their families.

Competing professional visions in welfare administration took center stage in the 1930s in Michigan. The debate centered on what expertise and training were required to administer relief. In its most basic form, the debate pitted home rule advocates who favored a return to pre–New Deal local control of relief (although they welcomed the state and federal monies of the New Deal) against those who advocated a centralized welfare system staffed by professional social workers. The first group saw welfare as a business; therefore, business expertise, and not social work experience, was central to the administration of welfare. Two groups of professionals were behind these debates: local officials and their professional organizations, including the Michigan State Association of Supervisors and the State Association of the Superintendents of the Poor, and professional social workers educated in college social


work programs. Social workers believed that social work training, including casework methods and family counseling, was critical. The reaction against the passage of the 1937 law reorganizing welfare, which implemented in large measure the recommendations of the 1936 Welfare and Relief Study Commission, illustrates these polar views. The subsequent 1939 Welfare Reorganization Act was a blend of more-traditional practices and more-modern ideas about social welfare.

The story of welfare reorganization is intertwined with the development of the profession of social work. Social workers entered public welfare in an unprecedented way with the onset of the emergency-relief programs of 1933, and were critical negotiators of relief, both with local officials and individual recipients. The profession faced its own internal conflicts during the 1930s, including debates about the role of the “new” relief worker, who did not fit the professional model constructed so carefully by professional organizations in the previous decades. The professional social work system was hard-pressed to meet the training and educational demands of its untrained emergency workers. The status of social work as a profession was contested, and like others employed in the “semiprofessions” or female-dominated fields, social workers were underpaid, but the administrative costs of the emergency-relief system, in particular the salaries paid to caseworkers, were at the heart of criticisms by opponents of professional social work. Competing visions of professionalization, or how to define or use it, existed within the ranks of relief workers. Some wanted no part of the “profession,” opting instead to use unionization to address issues such as working conditions, low pay, and high caseloads, and some allied with relief recipients to secure more adequate benefits.

Michigan’s debates about welfare and relief speak to larger issues operating throughout the nation during this difficult and turbulent period. Fears about the centralization of government and the decline of the local community, and the values associated with notions of community, were at the center of several New Deal–era movements, and also have a larger history in the American past. The reaction against social work, and centralized, state-supervised relief administration, was rooted in these larger national issues, although it manifested itself in the relief debates in this state. Criticisms of local government actually predate the Depression, and political scientists and policy makers questioned the quality and efficiency of county and township governments. The Depression’s severity, and the inability of local governments to respond fully to that crisis, further called into question local government structure. But belief in the sanctity of local control ran deep, as William Brock argues:

Whatever professional critics might say, local government was, in popular estimation, the seed bed of American democracy. If the depression brought
it to the verge of ruin, more would be at stake than the functions of county commissioners, boards of supervisors, township trustees, and overseers of the poor; however pressing the case for centralization, many Americans would consider that the erosion of local responsibility had inflicted fatal injury upon self-government.\textsuperscript{11}

Alan Brinkley’s study of Huey Long and Father Charles Coughlin, the popular “radio priest” based in a parish in Royal Oak, Michigan, presents an example of this belief in local control and autonomy. Brinkley argues that the importance of these two men and their movements extended far beyond their limited constituencies: “They were manifestations of one of the most powerful impulses of the Great Depression, and of many decades of American life before it: the urge to defend the autonomy of the individual and the independence of the community against encroachments from the modern industrial state.”\textsuperscript{12}

This study of Michigan’s relief debates further validates the resonance of those feelings. The hopes and fears tapped by Long and Coughlin, and described by Brock, were remarkably similar to those evidenced in these debates, and in part explain why opponents of professional welfare administration were ultimately successful. Fueled by anti-intellectualism, antiradicalism, antitax sentiment, partisan politics, and growing opposition to the New Deal programs by 1935, opponents of welfare reform advocated a return to local administration of relief, to ensure that relief administration did not become too far removed from the electoral reach of Michigan voters. The rhetoric they employed struck a familiar chord among Michigan voters in the 1938 referendum on welfare reform.

One of my central arguments is analyzing the continuities in social welfare history, as well as the key changes resulting from the New Deal. The hardship of the Great Depression in the 1930s prompted some of the boldest initiatives in social welfare in American history. Two centuries of American poor law, with responsibility for social welfare firmly rooted in local communities, changed as a result, but at times in limited ways. Although a major period that witnessed significant changes and sparked heated debates, the New Deal continued many practices found in pre-Depression relief. The New Deal did introduce the professional social worker to public welfare on a much greater scale than earlier, shifted the source of funding from primarily local to a financial partnership between local, state, and federal governments, and of course changed the magnitude and scope of welfare. In fact numerous continuities


existed between pre–New Deal relief and the establishment of the Social Security Act’s Aid to Dependent Children and Old Age Assistance programs, as well as general-relief programs under the 1939 state law.

One area of continuity was the distinction between earned benefits and public assistance. As Barbara Nelson and other scholars have argued, the New Deal entrenched the “two track” welfare system, separating those who were entitled to help from those who needed benefits. Connected to this was the notion that some recipients deserved assistance, such as widowed mothers of a certain ethnicity or culture, while others did not. The issues of gender and race played important roles. Women and nonwhites often were among those who did not work in paid employment areas included in the early workers’ compensation or the Social Security Act’s insurance program; instead, they often fell under the area of dependent mothers. A key change from mothers’ pensions was the administrative placement of the program; no longer a part of the Probate Court, ADC was situated squarely in public assistance. This was a significant shift, and a contested one, in some counties, while in others it simply codified the administrative practices of mothers’ pensions.

Welfare reorganization created what I term a “third track” of welfare, or the general-relief programs which were outside the federal arena, the same aid (General Assistance) eliminated in 1991. Home rule advocates had successfully regained control of these services in the 1939 law. These programs, often forgotten in the analysis of federal welfare under the Social Security Act, served those people not eligible for aid under Aid to Dependent Children, Old Age Assistance, or Aid to the Blind: often the disabled or those unable to work but too young for OAA. The state government began to contribute funds to general relief after the 1939 reorganization, a key change from pre–New Deal years. Control over this third track of welfare was a contentious part of the debates over welfare reorganization in the 1930s, as local officials fought to prevent the centralization of all relief. For many counties, that translated into a wholesale return to poor-relief practices and traditions. Local officials, particularly township supervisors, continued to wield extraordinary influence in the administration of relief. General relief became the “third track” of welfare provision, and perhaps the most stigmatized of all the welfare programs. The

state replaced these county programs in 1976 with General Assistance, with the state fully funding the program, completing the centralization of relief started in the 1930s. The arguments for the welfare reforms of the 1990s hearken to those put forth in the 1930s by groups and individuals opposed to the federalism created by the New Deal. Michigan’s General Assistance program, which provided both cash aid and health care for unemployed residents, evolved from the changes of the 1930s.

Another area of continuity, intertwined with the issue of gender, was the role of the family in welfare administration. Central to that administration is the ideology of family responsibility, closely linked to the family wage. Social welfare law in Michigan, and in most other states as well, contained stipulations that family members had a legal responsibility to support other family members, if able to do so. For young children, fathers were the logical first step as the expected family breadwinner. If the father could not provide, that duty extended to other family members. The responsible-relative clause dates to Michigan’s earliest poor laws in the nineteenth century, and it remained in force in Public Act 146 of 1925, which consolidated Michigan’s relief system. Township supervisors or county superintendents of the poor enforced support of relatives in the county’s probate court. Children who had been deserted or abandoned by parents before they reached the age of sixteen were exempt from the responsibility, but they had to prove that they were in fact deserted. The 1935 Social Security Act did not require that states enforce any family responsibility in administration of the categorical aid programs, but a large number of states, including Michigan, nevertheless retained those provisions in their laws. The responsible-relative clause persisted in emergency-relief


15. Opponents of the program argued that recipients were employable, able-bodied adults who refused to work. Katz points out that more than 40 percent of GA recipients in Michigan were over the age of forty and 61 percent were never employed; the majority of the latter category were “many newly widowed or divorced women.” Only 38 percent found work within two years, and only 26 percent earned an income comparable to their benefits under GA. Katz, The Price of Citizenship, 87–88. The program served many of the state’s seasonal workers, employed in construction, tourism, and agriculture, as well as some auto workers. Thompson, “The Death of General Assistance,” 81–82.


17. A Works Progress Administration study found that just nine states, and the District of Columbia, had no provisions for relatives’ support. Another nine states included grandparents, grandchildren, and siblings among the responsible relatives, and nine others excluded only siblings. The Social Security Bulletin reported in 1939 that twenty-seven of the fifty-one Old
administration practices, and also in the 1937 and 1939 welfare-reorganization laws in Michigan.\textsuperscript{18}

All relief programs, whether direct relief or work programs, framed aid through the lens of the family. Whether it was the earnings of a father or brother with a Works Progress Administration assignment, or of a young man sent to a Civilian Conservation Corps camp, such aid was for the family’s needs, and was budgeted accordingly. Program administration often ignored individual needs and dissension within the family in their focus on the family as a unit. The WPA, CCC, and other work-relief assignments operated with the expectation that wages would support the family and household. The enforcement of the responsible-relative clause was a key source of conflict among social workers, relief recipients, and their families before, during, and after the New Deal. Often when families balked at helping other members, particularly elderly parents on OAA or mothers receiving ADC, the recipient paid the price in terms of delayed or lost benefits. Although the intention of the law was to use the state as a means of support as a last resort, the outcome at times was to punish those who needed the aid the most, and who often had the least power to persuade family members to contribute. Gender played a critical role in this debate, both in what social workers expected of recipients and in the positions individuals held in the negotiation of relief in households and families.

Recipients were very much a part of the relief story, and provided their own narrative of the experience of receiving relief during the 1930s. Case records from the emergency-relief programs and the early years of the categorical-aid programs permit the inclusion of their voices, although filtered through the lens of the caseworker. Four counties serve as case studies based in part on the availability of case-file materials from those localities; all four counties’ case records from the New Deal programs have survived to some extent.\textsuperscript{19}


19. All case files of the Department of Human Services have restricted access in the archives. Researchers must obtain permission from the department to see the files, and they cannot record any proper names of recipients. Thus my records include only case numbers and...
(See maps I.1 and I.2.) Van Buren County’s Emergency Relief Administration case-file collection includes 102 case files dating from 1930 to 1940, and is the most complete source base I have located. I also analyzed the OAA and ADC case files from Saginaw County, in the thumb area of Michigan, on the east side of the state; Marquette County, on the shores of Lake Superior, in the Upper Peninsula; and Wayne County, which includes Detroit, the state’s largest city. I focused on cases initiated before the close of 1940, when the emergency-relief period ends. These case files include original application forms, verification investigations conducted by social workers, detailed case histories chronicling case visits, and correspondence. Particularly valuable are letters or other correspondence written by recipients voicing their views on the relief programs serving them. These records make it possible not only to study the basic questions of who sought relief and why, but also to reconstruct the interactive relationships between the various individuals and agencies involved in the administration and receipt of welfare aid. In addition, the records enabled me to assess how both groups viewed welfare policy and their individual case, and how relief recipients influenced the program’s administration.

the personal characteristics of the recipient. All recipients’ names are fictitious, although I have endeavored to retain ethnic characteristics in the selection of a name. All case numbers, and footnote references to archival locations and microfilm reel numbers, are accurate; anyone who obtains permission from the department can identify specific cases using the case number.

20. The full collection includes 133 records through 1945, but as with the ADC and OAA files, I examined only those initiated before or during 1940. Samples of other counties’ ERA records survive for Kent and Bay counties but contain only a handful of case files. While useful for anecdotal purposes, they are too limited for any statistical analysis or for the county’s administrative practices. Most counties’ emergency-relief records were apparently lost, although many of the categorical-aid records include ERA information. A large number of OAA and ADC recipients in the late 1930s also received direct relief under FERA.

21. Saginaw’s collection is the most complete, including 409 ADC cases and 218 OAA cases. I analyzed the complete run of surviving ADC files and a sampling (every tenth case) of OAA records. A sampling of Wayne County’s collection (every fiftieth case) yielded a base of 319 ADC and 285 OAA cases. Marquette’s collection is much smaller, with just 16 ADC cases and 39 OAA cases. Only about a quarter of Michigan counties are represented in the collections with a significant number of case files; most collections contain only a 2 percent sample, thus limiting the counties available for study.

22. The ERA case files and the categorical-aid records represent different relief populations. ERA records reflect a variety of case types, from unemployment to ill health to dependent mothers. They include anyone who applied for relief during the emergency-relief period. In contrast, the ADC and OAA programs served unemployable individuals, or those people who either could not work, physically, or should not work, according to policy makers, because of parental responsibilities. Many of the categorical-aid recipients also received emergency relief and were simply transferred to the ADC and OAA programs in 1936. Although they were categorized as ADC or OAA, the local welfare-relief commission continued to administer those programs until the 1939 law was implemented. Thus they continued under the New Deal emergency-relief umbrella until the end of the decade.
Although New Deal programs were opposed and criticized from the start, they were important to Michigan residents, providing relief and employment when there were few other outlets. The state of Michigan suffered high unemployment and relief rates during the Depression years, and its economic problems dated to the 1920s. Much of the state was already in a recession by the crash of 1929, and the problems only worsened in the 1930s. By 1933 between 13 and 16 percent of all Michigan residents depended on some kind of relief, and those numbers approached 20 to 30 percent in the northern parts of the state, especially the Upper Peninsula.23

Michigan was a diverse state in terms of demographics and economics in the 1930s, and thus its residents experienced the Depression in different

ways, depending upon one's region, race, nativity, citizenship, sex, age, and occupation. Although Michigan contained a relatively small minority population (just 4 percent in 1930, the vast majority of which was African-American), its foreign-born population was 19.8 percent in 1920 and 17.4 percent in 1930. Its economy varied from the industrial centers of Detroit and Flint to the agricultural centers in southwestern Michigan, mid-Michigan, and the thumb area on the east side of the state between Saginaw Bay and Lake Huron. The Upper Peninsula and the northern Lower Peninsula centered on lumbering and lake commerce, and mining also was a critical industry in the Upper Peninsula. The counties selected for this case study reflect this diversity in population demographics and economics, both of which are intertwined with the need for and delivery of relief and social welfare services in the 1930s. Representing that diversity, in conjunction with securing the case-file source base, were critical factors in selecting the counties for
study. Historians know much more about social welfare, relief, and the New Deal programs in large urban centers than they do about smaller towns and rural areas. My study seeks to illuminate both the rural and urban nature of relief.

Van Buren County, largely white and native born, represents the rural, agricultural experience in Michigan, while Marquette County illustrates the mining and lumbering (and some agriculture) economy of the Upper Peninsula. Saginaw County, with its racial and ethnic diversity, represents the “simultaneous growth of industry and agriculture” characteristic of Michigan and other Midwestern states.24 Its economy centered on sugar beets and other agriculture, but industry also played an increasing role, particularly with the rise of the automotive and steel industries, and later the defense plants of the 1940s.25 These job opportunities attracted African-Americans and Mexicans, offering an opportunity to assess the role of race and citizenship in the welfare process. Race was and is a critical issue in welfare policy, but citizenship also played an important role. Noncitizens of all nationalities experienced discrimination in welfare programs as well as in employment opportunities, and both Saginaw and Wayne counties offer the basis for this analysis. Mexican populations in Saginaw and Wayne counties also faced repatriation efforts in the 1930s, a strategy used at the state and local level to remove noncitizens who might take jobs, or relief benefits, from citizens and residents.

Wayne County was the center of Michigan’s automotive industry (and later the defense industry). It had the highest population of any county, and its racial demographics were very similar to Saginaw County (see table I.1). Those two counties contained the majority of the state’s African-American and Mexican populations. Wayne County had more than half of all Mexicans who lived in the state, but the Mexican population in Saginaw made up a greater percentage of the county’s overall population.26 Wayne County (and Detroit) experienced a unique relief situation. Detroit professionalized its social welfare department in the 1920s, and thus does not represent the larger experiences in the state. Detroit’s size also permitted it to create a Department of Social Welfare separate from Wayne County under the 1939 Welfare Reorganization Act.

Van Buren County, largely rural, with only one city (South Haven) in the 1930s, had a population of 32,637 in 1930. At that time, the county’s popula-

tion was 88 percent native-born white, 10.5 percent foreign-born white and 1.4 percent African-American (see table I.1). More than half of its employed residents labored in the farming industry, either on their own farms or as laborers. Other key areas of employment included retail, construction, and domestic work (for women).

Van Buren County residents made their living through the century from fruit production, including berries (blueberries, strawberries, and cherries), apples, pears, and peaches. Grape vineyards not only yielded fruit but also fed the wine and juice industries. Juice companies had organized in the early years of the twentieth century, with companies in Lawton and Paw Paw. Welch Grape Juice Company, for instance, started business in Van Buren during World War I, manufacturing grape jelly for the armed forces. With the demise of Prohibition, in 1933, came the growth of the wine-making industry, and by 1937 the county boasted five wineries. Some residents also labored in the paper mills of Watervliet, in nearby Berrien County, as well as in Kalamazoo and Grand Rapids.

Marquette County, like much of the Upper Peninsula, had a significant foreign-born population. It was slightly larger than Van Buren, with a population in 1930 of 44,076. Nearly one-quarter of its residents were non-native-born whites; the foreign-born population was 22.8 percent. However, as was true for much of Michigan, Marquette had few nonwhite residents, with just 0.4 percent of its population listed as African-American. Immigrants from Scandinavian countries—especially Finland, Norway, and Sweden—and also from

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>1930 Census Population</th>
<th>% Foreign-Born</th>
<th>% African-American</th>
<th>% Mexican</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marquette</td>
<td>44,076</td>
<td>22.8</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Saginaw</td>
<td>120,717</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Van Buren</td>
<td>32,637</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wayne</td>
<td>1,888,946</td>
<td>25.3</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>0.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State of Michigan</td>
<td>4,842,325</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>3.5</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


27. Fifteenth Census, 1140.
28. Fifteenth Census, 1164.
30. Fifteenth Census, table 13, 1138, 1140.
Ireland, Scotland, England, and Canada, helped to settle Marquette. Some came under contract with mining companies, while others migrated for land in addition to the promise of employment.31

Like much of the Lake Superior shore of the Upper Peninsula, Marquette centered its economic base on extractive industries such as mining and lumbering, dating to the mid-nineteenth century. For the Marquette area, iron ore was the major material, as compared to copper in the Keewenaw Peninsula. Iron ore was first found in the region in 1844, and by 1845 the first mine—Jackson Mine—opened, and became the site of the city of Negaunee in Marquette County.32 Other mining ventures soon followed, including the Cleveland-Cliffs Iron Company. The county’s location on the shores of Lake Superior made it a natural choice as an urban center for the Upper Peninsula and the mining industry, and completion of the shipping locks in 1855 at Sault Ste. Marie—connecting Lake Superior with the lower Great Lakes—only facilitated the industry’s growth. Until the late nineteenth century, all of Michigan’s iron-ore industry was concentrated in the Marquette range.33

Of the companies founded during the peak of Marquette’s mining industry, the Cleveland-Cliffs Iron Company, the largest, continued to operate into the mid-twentieth century, and gained ownership of several smaller mines throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Mining continued to be a key employer in the area by 1930.34 In addition to its role as a shipping center, Marquette also developed other industries, including chemical production (nitroglycerin), sawmills, brownstone quarries, flour mills, and a brickyard, in addition to agriculture. Its key industries—mining, forestry, and railroads—were all on the decline by the Depression, however, and the short growing season made agriculture less than ideal in the Upper Peninsula.35 But its more diverse industrial base saved it from disappearing, as some mining towns did.

Saginaw County represents the state’s mix of industry and agriculture. Originally founded as a major lumber town, Saginaw, both the city and the

larger county, developed an industrial base that helped it to weather the worst of the Depression years. Saginaw County had a population of 120,717; of its residents, 9.1 percent were foreign-born, 3.9 percent were African-American, and 1.9 percent were Mexican (see table I.1). Immigrants from Germany, Poland, and Canada (French), some of whom were recruited to work in the lumber industry, helped to settle the area by the 1870s, although native-born workers continued to dominate the lumber workforce. Sugar beet farming and processing emerged by the early twentieth century as a major part of Saginaw’s economy, bringing the area’s first Mexicans to Saginaw as migrant laborers.\footnote{36}

Lumbering provided the economic foundation for Saginaw, and the first sawmills were built on the shores of the Saginaw River in the 1830s. Saginaw’s location—just downstream from the convergence of four major tributaries of the Saginaw River—made it a logical site for storing logs and constructing sawmills.\footnote{37} The lumber industry prospered in the nineteenth century, and thus so did the city of Saginaw and the surrounding area. By the 1880s and 1890s, however, lumbering of the pine forests was on the decline, and only half of the sawmills remained in operation at the close of the nineteenth century. By the turn of the century, manufacturing began to replace lumbering as the dominant industry. Manufacturing companies, both metal and automotive, developed rapidly, including what would become the largest employers in the area: Jackson-Church and Wilcox (later to be General Motors and Saginaw Steering Gear) and Valley Grey Iron (Chevrolet Grey Iron Foundry). The auto-parts manufacturers would be major employers by World War I. By the 1920s more than ten thousand people worked in the Saginaw Steering Gear Division.\footnote{38}

*Negotiating Relief* is organized chronologically in the first half and topically in the latter. Chapter 1 describes pre-Depression relief in Michigan, focusing on Marquette, Saginaw, Van Buren, and Wayne counties and their social welfare systems. Michigan’s welfare system was locally administered and publicly funded, even before the New Deal. Chapter 2 chronicles the efforts of both public and private agencies to meet the rising demand for unemployment relief in the early years of the Great Depression, before the Federal Emergency Relief Administration. Ultimately, all counties would face major financial crises as a result of the relief problem, but resistance to federal aid remained strong until 1932, and never entirely disappeared.


\footnote{37. Kilar, *Michigan’s Lumbertowns*, 20–22.}

\footnote{38. Ibid., 293; Kilar and Schwan, *Saginaw’s Changeable Past*, 114–15.}
Chapter 3 assesses the implementation of the Federal Emergency Relief Act in 1933. The FERA years foreshadowed the deep anticentralization views regarding relief administration that would only magnify in the next five years. Local officials sought to defend home rule. Many counties resented the intrusion of the federal and state governments into what they saw as their business; they welcomed the financial help, but did not want the rules that accompanied that aid. Chapter 4 chronicles the work-relief programs of the New Deal, particularly the Civil Works Administration, Works Progress Administration, National Youth Administration, and Civilian Conservation Corps. These programs were important in bringing millions of dollars in wages to the state, and often served as a vehicle for family support until private employment became available.

Chapters 5 and 6 turn to two groups critical to relief negotiations in this period: social workers (and the profession at large) and the recipients of relief. Chapter 5 analyzes the competing professional visions for relief administration, with a focus on the effects of the Great Depression and New Deal years on social workers and the profession of social work. High demand for caseworkers created an influx of untrained relief workers who did not meet the professional-education standards, creating tension and division within the profession. The conflict culminated in the spread of social worker unions to address the labor grievances of relief workers. This chapter also examines the influence of professional social work on public welfare agencies.

Chapter 6 analyzes the relief negotiations between caseworkers and recipients, who saw federal and state officials as new allies in the administration of welfare. The recipients' narrative often contrasted sharply with that described by the caseworker. At the center of these negotiations were expectations of family responsibility, and the framing of relief around the unit of the family. Recipients were not passive participants, but agents in the administration of relief in the 1930s.

Chapter 7 turns to the statewide negotiation of relief in the welfare-reform debate after FERA’s end in 1935. The ideologies of home rule and fiscal localism are central. Michigan’s welfare law needed major revision to enable the state to receive federal grants under the Social Security Act. The conflicts outlined in chapter 3 only intensified as local officials sought to defend their authority against what they saw as encroachment by the federal and state governments. Debates took place during meetings and hearings of the Welfare and Relief Study Commission, appointed in 1936 to assess the state’s welfare system. Local officials, and their representative associations, successfully mobilized to defeat the 1937 laws that resulted from the commission’s recommendations, in a victory for home rule.
Debates about relief in Michigan in the 1930s centered on notions of expertise and power, as well as on home rule and fiscal localism. Differences between key groups, particularly local officials and advocates of professional social work, focused on beliefs about what expertise was needed for relief administration. In detailing these debates, and the competing narratives they generate, I do not aim to privilege one over the other, but seek to give voice to the complexity of those debates and to illuminate the experiences of those involved. Although associations representing specific groups often took a firm stand on welfare issues, the individuals within those groups represented a spectrum of beliefs. Some local officials advocated professional social work and centralization of relief, while some advocates of social work practices did not believe those methods were needed in public welfare. The complexities, revealed in part by the lack of a unified voice and a diversity of motives, resulted ultimately in a welfare system that represented both change and continuity.39 The mixed nature of the 1939 Welfare Reorganization Act left few people on any side fully satisfied, and welfare administration continued to be debated in the years that followed.

CONCLUSION

THE 1939 WELFARE Reorganization Act and the federal Social Security Act of 1935 shifted the organization and funding of relief, but brought limited actual change to Michigan’s welfare system. The law resulted in a dual system of administration in most counties, with separate departments for the categorical-aid programs, governed by federal guidelines, and the general-relief programs. Categorical-aid programs, funded in part with federal matching grants, were implemented slowly, and few grants provided adequate support for recipients. In addition, families on WPA, and those who received ADC, OAA, or AB, often could not receive any supplemental aid in some counties, despite the low grants under those programs. Categorical-aid recipients continued to be subject to means testing and financial investigation. ADC, OAA, and AB were on the assistance track of welfare, and were not administered as entitlement programs. But while immediate change was limited, and continuities persisted, the events of the 1930s began a process of centralization at the state level that would continue for the next three decades.

The 1939 reorganization law was a compromise between old and new practices, and the lack of a consensus rendered the law unsatisfactory to people on both sides of the relief issue. Debates over welfare administration continued. Many counties continued to struggle with the financial burden of relief despite federal and state funds. Local officials did not have full control over all aspects of relief, including the categorical-aid programs. The state, when computing
matching formulas for categorical-aid grants, did not consider the expenses of the county infirmary or of soldiers’ and sailors’ relief or medical and hospitalization costs, all programs that continued to be the full responsibility of counties. Local officials also wanted the state to earmark at least one-third of revenues from the 1933 sales tax for local relief. Supervisors attending the state association meeting in January 1940, just weeks after the new law was implemented, strongly endorsed resolutions on all those issues.¹

Many local officials and their organizations wanted to return home rule to all areas of relief. The new law, in creating the ADC program, which was subject to federal guidelines, effectively eliminated mothers’ pensions, a locally funded and administered program.² Some officials resented this shift, despite the accompanying federal funds. Melville McPherson, chair of the state tax commission and a vocal home rule proponent, even advocated a return to locally administered mothers’ pensions, rather than the ADC program with its federal matching funds. He argued at the 1940 supervisors’ meeting that more-efficient local administration, in conjunction with a larger OAA federal grant, would offset the $3.5 million ADC grant the state would receive.³ Saginaw County’s Arthur Hauffe, a former superintendent of the poor and member of the county’s social welfare board, advocated a wholesale return to the pre-Depression system. The reorganized relief administration resembled the WRC too much, he insisted.⁴ Both the State Association of Supervisors and the State Association of County Social Welfare Boards (the successor to the Association of Superintendents of the Poor) sought changes in the Social Security Act to allow local officials control over the categorical-aid programs. At its 1942 meeting the Michigan State Association of Supervisors urged Michigan’s federal representatives to seek amendments to the Social Security Act to permit state and local, rather than federal, control, and reiterated, the following year, the power of supervisors in welfare administration.⁵

Most local officials did not mourn the demise of the professional caseworker in general relief. Social workers, who played such a central role in

². The 1939 law did not explicitly eliminate mothers’ pensions, but the federal funds for ADC were the key reason for a switch to that program. Landers and Tharp, Administration and Financing of Public Relief, 19–20.
the battle over the 1938 referendum, largely disappeared from general-relief administration thereafter. Ira Dean, Kent County's social welfare director and a longtime poor-relief commissioner and outspoken home rule advocate, proudly stated that he required only a high school education of his staff, which was comprised of “nine young fellows about twenty-eight years old.” They did not need a college education, he said, and “I defy anyone to pick better trained social welfare workers.” He rejected the help of “the Kent County Social Welfare group” in setting standards and selecting personnel, because “we feel we can pick our own personnel, and we have reduced our administrative costs thirty-one percent.”6 Many counties reduced their costs by relying on supervisors’ recommendations on the eligibility of applicants, rather than having employees conduct extensive investigations. Kent County opted for the “professional” relief worker as defined by local officials. The absence of social workers was not one of the flaws of the 1939 law, according to Dean and other home rule advocates.

Not all counties were unhappy with the new system, although a majority sought a revision of the matching-grant formula to include all local welfare expenditures, as well as an increase in the state’s relief contribution. Ironically, Van Buren County’s supervisors, among the most critical of the WRC and SERA in the early years of the New Deal, expressed few problems with the new system. They were the only county among the four to select the integrated relief system, placing their entire relief administration under the state’s supervision. Their director, Louise Wilkinson, a former WRC caseworker, had to meet civil service requirements to hold her post, but had the board’s support from the time of her appointment as administrator in 1938.7 The county, which had faced a seventy-five-thousand-dollar deficit just a few years before and had suspended all poor relief and mothers’ pensions, had recovered financially in the meantime, and the county treasurer told the supervisors at the 1940 budget meeting that the county was in its best financial shape in years.8 Marquette and Van Buren officials did not fundamentally change their relief systems, or their personnel, in the years immediately following the new law’s passage.

Detroit continued to operate a welfare department separate from the county system after the 1939 law. But all categorical-aid programs transferred to the Wayne County Bureau of Social Aid. Probate Judge D. J. Healy resisted

the transfer of mothers’ pensions from the probate court, but those cases were nevertheless moved to the BSA beginning in January 1940. The DPW continued to provide aid for those waiting to transfer to ADC, OAA, and AB. The county chose a dual system, with the BSA separate from the DSW, and established a part-time, policy-making board with a full-time director. Wayne County supervisors were committed to maintaining the standard of living in the shift from mothers’ pension to the ADC program, and agreed to provide supplementation from county funds to make up for the minimal ADC grants, as did the Detroit DPW.

Saginaw County faced a difficult year in welfare administration. Early budget projections called for an additional twenty-five thousand dollars to run the reorganized system. Repeated requests from the county for added funds to cover deficits angered city officials, who came to believe that the reorganized system, under county administration, was still too expensive. The savings promised through local administration by home rule advocates, including many Saginaw County officials, failed to materialize. Instead, the city had spent double the amount in 1939–40 than it had in previous years, and city officials questioned the county’s ability to administer relief. Rumblings of discontent spread to the finance committee, which was upset at reports that administrative costs for the social welfare board were 25 percent, three times the rate of the WRC in the 1930s. Committee members called the costs “disgraceful,” arguing that “no business could carry an administrative burden of 25 percent.” An investigation and subsequent reorganization followed. Instead of a three-member full-time board, supervisors established a three-member commission, with only one member serving full-time—as a director. They appointed to the social welfare board two “dollar-a-year” commissioners, in addition to Grover Stine, a former county clerk, as full-time director.

11. Proceedings, Wayne County Board of Supervisors, 1939, November 28, 1939, 992.
12. Ibid., October 18, 1939, 651; Proceedings, Wayne County Board of Supervisors, 1940, September 19, 1940, 530; “Minutes, Detroit Public Welfare Commission,” December 24, 1939, 119; and Sullivan, “‘On the Dole,’” 224.
14. Proceedings of the Council and Boards of the City of Saginaw, January 2, 1940, 1 and 8; January 22, 1940, 20; February 19, 1940, 47.
17. “County’s Relief Chief Dismissed,” Saginaw Daily News, November 8, 1940, 1; “Relief
Saginaw County’s intense conflicts over its new relief system were unique among the counties studied, although it was likely not the only one to undertake changes in the first year of the new system. One criticism of the new law was that it allowed too many administrative choices, but personality conflicts exacerbated Saginaw’s problems. Clashes over relief administration calmed after the 1940 reorganization.18

The 1939 law effectively segregated general relief (later to be General Assistance) from other federal programs. General relief included those in need who did not fit the categorical-aid programs, including those who were disabled or too ill to work, but too young to qualify for OAA.19 Funded by local and state dollars, general relief became the “third track” of welfare, often administered entirely by local officials,20 who established their own eligibility and administrative guidelines. State officials had only limited supervision over those programs, although the state provided at least 50 percent of the funding.21 Recipients of general relief, for the most part, faced a return to the pre–New Deal practices of poor relief when they sought aid from their local county social welfare boards. Relief applicants continued to face a maze of agencies, both public and private, to secure the help they needed. They also did not have the same avenues of protest—state and federal officials—as categorical-aid recipients. General relief was strictly a local concern, and recipients could appeal only to their local agency and township or city supervisor. A single agency did not guarantee change. Even states that merged the programs

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18. Public officials later joined private welfare agencies from the Saginaw Council of Social Agencies in establishing a central index of relief and welfare. The council paid half the cost, and the county the other half, implementing a mechanism to facilitate coordination between public and private welfare agencies. “Food Stamps Plan Opposed,” Saginaw Daily News, January 10, 1941.

19. Single women suffered perhaps the worst, as they likely worked in programs not covered by Old Age Insurance (the program now popularly known as Social Security). Thus their only avenue of support was OAA, or general relief if they were not yet eligible for an old-age grant. See Kessler-Harris, “Designing Women and Old Fools,” 102, 104–5.


21. Landers and Tharp, Administration and Financing of Public Relief, 27. Allocation percentages were set by the State Social Welfare Commission, and some counties received up to 95 percent of their relief funds from the state. The formula was based on the county’s financial situation and its relief needs. In 1940, Marquette, Saginaw, Van Buren, and Wayne all received 50 percent funding from the state. “Minutes, State Social Welfare Commission,” November 29, 1940, 96–98.
into one department, localization, accompanied by minimal state funding, limited the changes. Jerry Thomas argues that West Virginia, which did create a single Department of Public Assistance for all relief, also saw regression in its relief programs: “What happened in West Virginia when the state and counties resumed control of relief reflected a national pattern of harsher administrative practices, reduced relief grants, and lower personnel standards.” Michigan's funding was more generous than many states, but local officials sought to minimize general-relief costs as much as possible.

Fiscal localism emerges in the development of this third track of welfare. Many counties, including Saginaw, used their restored authority over general relief to institute punitive measures to discourage relief applicants, reinforcing distinctions between the federal programs and general relief. A key argument for home rule was that local officials could administer programs more efficiently and economically than professional social workers, and thus could more effectively contain the contagion of dependence. Restricting eligibility for relief was a strategic means to minimize local expenditures. Saginaw County's Charles Bois proudly told supervisors at the 1940 meeting that Saginaw’s board sought “to perfect a system whereby we can catch up to chiselers. We have a Congress . . . and a Legislature in Michigan . . . to make laws and we have five million people to figure out how to break them.”

To limit potential chiselers, several counties placed restrictions on what services or goods rendered an applicant ineligible for relief. Both Saginaw and Manistee counties refused aid unless applicants turned over their automobile license plates; when their need for relief ended, the license plates were returned. No relief was granted to anyone who owned a telephone; exceptions were made if someone other than the applicant paid the bill or if the applicant was elderly or ill. Faced with a deficit early in their fiscal year, Manistee County supervisors refused to grant aid to anyone frequenting places that served alcohol, a practice also implemented in Van Buren County. When costs continued to climb, Manistee County supervisors further restricted eligibility in 1940. Recipients had to maintain gardens and supervisors prohibited newly married couples from receiving relief for a period of one year. The supervisors also denied any supplementation for WPA workers, regardless of their family size, as well as ADC and OAA grant recipients. In addition, the supervisors told the social welfare board not to exceed budgeted amounts;

24. Ibid., 44–45; “Proceedings, Board of Supervisors, Manistee County,” February 1, 1940, 401.
when the money ran out, relief would stop. They sought more careful investigation of cases before relief was granted, and by January of 1941 the supervisors also wanted to see regular lists of recipients. The 1939 law forbade the publication of recipients’ names, but some counties persisted in that practice anyway, prompting the Social Welfare Commission to remind counties of that prohibition, stating that “it does not approve of any action which will tend to stigmatize recipients of public relief.” Fiscal localism, particularly with respect to economy and efficiency, was the guiding principle of relief administration in many counties.

Several counties continued to rely heavily on township supervisors to screen applicants. A member of the Ottawa County social welfare board reported in 1942 that the staff was small “because we depend upon getting information direct from supervisors in the local units, who we feel know better the conditions of each of those applicants . . . We go by the recommendation of the supervisors.” A 1944 study of the role of the boards of supervisors in the administration of relief found that supervisors played a central part in eight counties. In some cases supervisors were simply consulted on applications, but in several counties supervisors were the investigating officials and determined the amount of relief granted. Such actions violated the 1939 law, but continued regardless.

The responsibility of relatives to provide support for family members remained a feature of welfare in both the categorical aids and general relief for three decades. The administration of that policy, and the formulas used in computing the amount expected, changed, but the Social Welfare Commission stayed committed to the responsibility of families to contribute. Many of the changes sought to make it easier for caseworkers to determine the ability of relatives to help family members. The expectation of adult children living in the household shifted from the 60 percent rule to the setting of a “reasonable” room and board rate. In the 1950s, the twenty-dollar-per-week limit on relatives’ contributions was rescinded to reflect rising incomes and costs of

27. Minutes of the Michigan Social Welfare Commission, November 28, 1940, 92; Box 1, Folder 1.
29. The Michigan attorney general ruled two years earlier that the law did not grant supervisors the power to grant relief or make investigations. Minutes, Michigan Social Welfare Commission, Box 2, April 12, 1944, 163; May 19, 1944, 179–84.
living. The legislature also passed a judicial-review option whereby relatives could have the decision of the agency reviewed by the probate court; while the review took place, the contribution would not be budgeted into the recipient’s grant. If the family did not request a review, the contribution was considered in the budget whether it was paid or not.\(^{31}\) The commission sought to alleviate the burden on caseworkers in this area of administration by simplifying budgeting procedures and the required correspondence. The mandatory rechecking of relatives by caseworkers was also moved back to every two years instead of being annual.\(^{32}\) By 1968 local officials requested the removal of the responsible-relative provisions from welfare law, because of the difficulty in administering them and the lack of uniformity.\(^{33}\) The responsibility of relatives to support family members narrowed significantly in 1970, when state law required support only of spouses and parents.\(^{34}\)

The status of welfare recipients did not change significantly, although the targets shifted in the coming decades. The ADC program came under increasing fire as caseloads escalated in the 1960s, and the recipients increasingly were nonwhite and unmarried. The demand for OAA diminished, and the program effectively disappeared in the 1970s. The single mother on ADC, therefore, became the picture of welfare, and increasing dissatisfaction with both ADC and welfare resulted in the state reforms of the early 1990s, and the 1996 welfare-reform law. While the responsibility of relatives to support family narrowed primarily to spouses and parents, with increasing attention to “deadbeat dads,” the emphasis on individual behavior and work increased. As with the 1939 law, the most recent reforms, rather than creating an entirely new system, reshaped existing ones, producing even greater complexity for both caseworkers and recipients. The 1996 reforms added about one-third more rules, and many state manuals doubled in size.\(^{35}\) Although the goal was to foster the movement of people from welfare to independence and work, the outcome has been mixed, according to Sharon Hays: “What we have achieved with the decline of the welfare rolls is, in fact, the appearance of independence.”\(^{36}\)


33. “Resolution, District X,” dated March 11, 1968, approved at Michigan County Social Services Association meeting, 1968, I–2 and I–16; Michigan County Social Services Association Records (hereafter cited as MCSSA), Box 12, Folder 4, Archives of Michigan.


35. Hays, *Flat Broke with Children*, 47.

36. Ibid., 61.
larger discourse about welfare has again masked the complexities of a person’s need for welfare, and equated the receipt of welfare with individual failing rather than larger structural issues or experiences, some beyond the control of the recipient.

The decades following the 1939 law saw an incremental increase in state control and shifts in the formula for funding direct relief. All counties struggled to finance their relief costs, and although the law called for a fifty-fifty match with the state, some counties secured much higher funding from the state. In mid-1940, seven counties paid just 10 percent of direct-relief costs and one paid just 5 percent. Just more than half of all counties paid 50 percent of their costs that year.37 By 1956 the state paid more than 50 percent in just seven counties. The formula changed to require a minimum of 30 percent contribution by the state.38 The state extended control over general assistance in 1967, when it enacted minimum standards for relief. The formula for funding shifted to 40 percent state and 60 percent local, but any county that expended the equivalent of a one-mill tax levy could secure state funding for any expenditures over that.39 The centralization of general relief, sought in the debates of the 1930s, finally occurred in 1975, when the state assumed full administrative and fiscal responsibility for General Assistance.40

In the years following passage of the 1939 law, local officials and the organizations that represented them resisted further efforts to integrate Michigan’s welfare system; instead, they fought to keep the dual-system option, and home rule, available to counties. A 1942 study of the state’s welfare system, requested by Governor Murray Van Wagoner, identified duplication and the concomitant need to consolidate agencies as the key issue. The report recommended integration of both the State Department of Public Welfare and county agencies. The state commission included that recommendation in its 1942 report, and also encouraged that the county be the unit for relief administration.41 Efforts

39. Fifteenth Biennial Report, State Department of Social Services, July 1966–June 1968 (Lansing: December 1968), 47; Annual Report, Michigan Department of Social Services, Fiscal 1969 (Lansing: December, 1969), 51. Five counties secured additional funding under the one-mill limit; that number increased to nine the following year.
to encourage integration, however, were met with disinterest on the part of many counties, and the Michigan State Association of Supervisors passed a resolution opposed “to any county integration of welfare administration” in 1943. They also endeavored to bring the categorical-aid programs in line “with the conception of local home rule and self-government.”42 Efforts to encourage consolidation of the “dual system” into an integrated department (such as Van Buren County’s) began in earnest in 1945; one year later thirty-three counties had reverted to that system.43 The State Department of Public Welfare, divided into two administrations in the 1939 law, as were most counties, merged, by 1944, into a single department administering all types of welfare.44

Efforts to integrate at the local level continued, and the opposition of local officials waned somewhat by the 1960s. Many counties chose to merge their departments by 1965; eight counties did so in 1964 alone. Reducing administrative duplication was a major reason. Often applicants applied for one program (perhaps general relief) but were eligible for a categorical aid. The referral process slowed the application by weeks or up to three months. If the departments merged, one application could cover all programs. Medical-assistance programs further complicated the situation, particularly for the elderly. A single local welfare board overseeing all programs, with the state as an oversight, offered local officials the opportunity to play a greater role in the administration of the categorical-aid programs; some locals officials argued that merging could provide more local authority rather than less.45

The consolidation of Michigan's welfare services at the local level coincided with the 1963 revision of the state constitution, a change that strengthened executive authority and streamlined state administration, which was a trend shared by other states in this period as well. The constitution required organizing state government around no more than twenty departments (down from the estimated 130 that had existed). It mandated four commissions

45. Minutes, Welfare Advisory Committee, December 10, 1965, 1–3; Records Relating to Public Assistance, Box 2, Folder 3, Archives of Michigan.
(education, civil service, civil rights, and state highways). Controversy occurred over how many departments would be headed by commissions, rather than a single department director. Governor George Romney—reminding legislators that if a bill reorganizing state government was not passed in the 1965 session, the power to reorganize would rest with him—gained passage of a bill that included seven commissions and nineteen departments. All other departments were headed by single executives under direct authority of the governor, who appointed them. The senate could disapprove any appointment, but if it took no action, the appointment stood.

The reorganization affected both state and local welfare administration. Under the 1965 law, the Department of Social Services became one of the nineteen departments in the executive branch. The law also abolished the Michigan Social Welfare Commission, placing all authority in the director of DSS. The merging of county departments into a single agency administering both the categorical aids and direct relief became mandatory in 1965. In addition to creating a single county agency for all welfare programs, the law established a ten-member advisory committee comprised of representatives of the districts of the Michigan County Social Services Association. The county association thus had control over who served on the committee. Its standing, however, was advisory only; it had no administrative or policy authority. Members of the county organization sought the reinstatement of the Social Welfare Commission, arguing that they had lost an important voice and resource in the development and administration of welfare, but to no avail. Centralization of welfare services and state supervision was achieved, although local administration continued for all programs.

Michigan's experiences during the New Deal years reveal the limited, but also important, changes of those years. The New Deal federalized parts of the welfare system, although some services provided through the Social Security

Act did exist in different forms before 1935. It injected needed federal funds into relief, and revealed the entrenched hardships of the ill, disabled, elderly, and single parents. Michigan created a third track of welfare, separating those who received general relief from those eligible for categorical aid. The New Deal also illustrates the importance of home rule ideologies, and the defense of local government, which both played out in very clear ways in the welfare-reorganization debates. Competing visions of what professional skills were necessary for relief administration were central to those debates, and for the short-term, professional social workers were excluded. Reorganization debates would continue, but the New Deal years began the process of centralization.
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