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In 1996, in order to fulfill his campaign promise to "end welfare as we know it" President Bill Clinton signed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), as a result both the fabric and management of the national welfare system were altered. With any policy change comes conflict in the form of opposing perspectives, and the two conflicting viewpoints that will be discussed for the basis of this paper were induced as a result of the enacted PRWORA. Michael Tanner, the first author to be discussed within this paper defended the belief that the alterations to welfare reform achieved desirable results. Author Stephen Pimpare, the voice of the opposition, blasts the PRWORA and its aftereffect. Michael Tanner discussed, how the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) has been the catalyst for the decline of poverty in the United States. Tanner began his argument by accenting the opposition of many American liberals, that anticipated that the passage of this bill would bare cataclysmic results such as, forcing families into absolute poverty. Through the use of statistical data, Tanner discussed how a decade later, the results of the aforesaid bill have proven to be quite opposite of the conjecture. Comparatively, Stephen Pimpare sought to discuss, how the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) has come to fail the recipients that it was originally intended to benefit. Pimpare admits that although, the number of welfare recipients were reduced, there has not been enough substantial evidence to indicate that this was, as a result of welfare reform. Instead, Pimpare believes that the decline in poverty was attributed to forces unrelated to the enactment of the PRWORA. Although, poverty declined in the mid-1990's, he affirms that it is <https://assignbuster.com/janeta-bolden/>

on the rise once more and in large part due to welfare reform. Pimpare continues his argument by making the struggles of former welfare recipients a focal point. By encouraging employment among the poor, the PRWORA placed a work requirement, and a five year lifetime cap on cash assistance, which Pimpare believes has made the lives of those that left welfare, particularly single mothers, that much harder. He more or less explains that under the policies of the PRWORA the federal governments attempt at bringing an end to welfare meant giving states more control over program requirements; doing away with previous federal matching funds, and reducing the incentives for bringing in new welfare recipients. According to Pimpare, without these incentives and the increased authority given to states, many now delegate their allotments for the use of programs or budget deficits that are unrelated to the welfare expenses for which, the funding was initially intended, and the few states that do invest funds into welfare related programs do so by contracting private organizations. Each author agrees that there has been reductions in welfare rolls, but neither believe that this decline occurred for the same reasons. Michael Tanner asserts throughout his article that " rolls" declined in large part as a result of the PRWORA; giving only slight praise to economic growth. Tanner believes that this among other factors are an effective appraisal of the PRWORA's overall success. Although, Stephen Pimpare also acknowledges cuts in the " rolls", he denies that the PRWORA was the influence. He credits the diminishment of the " rolls" to the decline of unemployment and higher wages. He affirms that if it had not been for the implementation of welfare reform, poverty would have been substantially lower then it was. An additional point, addressed by both authors, is how former welfare recipients

have fared beyond their enrollment under the enacted PRWORA. Each side of the opposition maintains that the effects of the welfare reform have bared either negative or positive consequences. Tanner stated that although, many individuals who left welfare, as a result of the PRWORA, have only acquired full time, entry level positions, paying an average of \$16, 000 per year, it was progress and far better then where those individuals once were. He adds, that while these individuals take on menial employment, they are in turn, gaining valuable experience that will provide them with marketable skills for higher earnings in the future. In Pimpare's article, he argues that the PRWORA has ultimately, had adverse effects on the lives of former recipients. He states that homelessness is at an all time high. According to Pimpare, more then half of former recipients remain in poverty, and around 60 percent were unemployed upon there completion of the welfare program. He adds, that poor women, a population that dominates the overall pool of welfare recipients, have become no more autonomous following the welfare reform, then they were previously. Historically, there have been generations of conflict concerning the welfare of the impoverished, and the overall tone of both articles are no exception. Each article, exemplified the current state of conflict. Within our course we have examined this shift of ideology, throughout various periods of time. Historical occurrences, from one era to the next have acted as the catalyst for the fluctuation of the perceived accountability for the poor. The view of personal versus social responsibility has shaped the response to social welfare policies. The retrenchment was a period marked by the relinquishment of responsibility to the individual, and the PRWORA was to be the means of supporting this return of autonomy to the poor. It has been sixteen years since the PRWORA took its place amongst

government legislation, and the lives of its former recipients have shifted during this lapse in time, but has welfare reform changed their lives for better or for worse? Did the lunatic right accurately predict the welfare leavers destinies, or were the liberal prophets of doom correct? I strongly believe, that in order to form an educated rebuttal against the opposition, one should have a clear understanding of the vantage point that they wish to support, as well as, of the one that they wish to dismiss. After, thoroughly examining each viewpoint of the welfare reform quarrel, I believe that I am fully informed enough to take the side of most American liberals. Since, its enactment in 1996, the PRWORA has increased the power of the states, but has done very little to increase the livelihood of those who stood to benefit from it. I am sure in hindsight, the PRWORA seemed like a good idea, but it turned out to be fundamental flawed. Since its passage, single parents have been unable to adequately provide for their families. While, many former welfare recipients have managed to attain employment, a scant amount have actually evaded the reality of poverty. The rise in employment is parallel with the increased presence of single mothers, who have entered the labor force, which can clearly be attributed to welfare reform. The vast majority of former welfare recipients, who have entered the work force are only earning between \$10, 000 and \$16, 000 annually, this is substantially lower then the amount a family realistically requires to obtain life's basic necessities. The impractical expectation of welfare reform were that these individuals would eventually climb the job ladder out of menial, entry level positions, but I am not so naive and simple-minded as to agree. History has offered insight into such situations, thus wages remain stagnant for less educated workers, and being employed does not automatically absolve a

person from impoverishment. On a positive note, more monies have been earmarked for child care agendas, but difficulties still persist. Single parents continue to receive less support to work. Federal and state programs extend to few families that require child care. Head Start serves less than half of eligible children (Blank, Schulman, and Ewen 1999). The quality of child care is insufficient, as a result of low wages for child care workers. An additional problem is that, although former recipients have obtained employment, they have in turn, been left unable to afford healthcare. Many are not offered such benefits through their employers, and become excluded from government funded health coverage, due to their inability to adhere to the maximum wage requirements. While I am sure the debate over welfare reform will persist long after this assignment has been submitted, it is still worth mentioning how fundamentally backwards the passage of the PRWORA was. Although, it has succeeded in pushing individuals off of the rolls, it has failed to pull them out of poverty, and it is for this reason that I must assent with Pimpare's argument. What quality of life do people have when they must survive on the bare minimum? I can make little sense of a government that would allow its citizens to continue living in poverty. The PRWORA does not offer the opportunity for betterment and empowerment, it guarantees a life of struggle.