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Understanding social welfare policy in American history texts

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Abstract

The analytic article presents social welfare development throughout history according to different authors' perspectives: Jansson (2012) in *The Reluctant Welfare State*, and Day and Schiele (2013) in *A New History of Social Welfare*. The article focuses on the authors' views on the importance of understanding the history of social welfare in the United States and the contributions of disadvantaged groups such as women, people of color, and immigrants. It also emphasizes that the authors disapprove of people's biased efforts of people who were influenced by social Darwinism in writing social welfare history and ignored vulnerable populations whose suffering and battles contributed to the history of social welfare history. This article can help students majoring in social work improve their understanding of American social welfare policies' history. When applying it to social work practice, they may also be motivated to evaluate social work policies.

Keywords: Social, welfare, immigrants, contributions, work, students

Introduction

Many social scholars have addressed the development of social welfare from old civilizations to contemporary civilizations to make us understand the historical development of social welfare and use it as a threshold to develop social welfare to meet entitlements of contemporary life. Bruce S. Jansson, Phyllis J. Day, and Jerome H. Schiele addressed the history of Social Welfare and gave their perspectives on the concepts, value assumptions, philosophical traditions, and the formulation of social, political, and economic forces that impacted on social welfare in the United States.

The perspective of social welfare in the history of the United States' texts

In the *Reluctant Welfare State*, Jansson (2012)^[4] depicted the chronology of social welfare development from the Medieval to the contemporary era. Jansson also focused on the historical struggle of the American welfare state and encouraged social workers to advance their practice in contemporary society. The book traced the development of the American welfare state and the political, economic, and social circumstances that American welfare has encountered. In addition, Jansson (2012)^[4] discussed successful social policies and the factors that made some social policies fail through depicting the experiences of vulnerable populations such as in the United States before and after Civil Rights legislation, as well as the rights enacted in contemporary times. As well as, he discussed the controversial political plans in political milieus that go back to the ideological influence of each political party to meet vulnerable populations' issues in respect of applying social welfare policies and social programs that ensure people's rights and meet their needs (Jansson, 2012)^[4]. On the other hand, in *A New History of Social Welfare*, Day and Schiele (2013)^[2] explained that in the past, writing the history of social welfare was affected by discrimination against sex, color,

class and other aspects of oppression. As a result, the history was confined, honoring the achievements of only white men and overlooking other efforts of other groups that have a significant role in social welfare history, such as women, people of color, and minorities. Therefore, the authors provided *A New History of Social Welfare* that depicted the objective knowledge of the history of social welfare free from biased social contexts. Their depiction of social welfare was mainly focused on Judaism is influence on economic and political decisions in the way of providing social welfare. It was more in-depth about women and poor people, and immigrants, people of color than Jansson regarding elaborating the historical chronology of the beginning of social welfare since BC down to the medieval civilizations, to feudalism to the industrial era, then to the contemporary era. Their purpose was to highlight the conditions of vulnerable populations and their contribution to early social welfare.

Jansson (2012)^[4] presented social welfare concepts that emerged in the 20th century in the United States with opposition from some groups that have the power to direct social policies according to their ideological and economic interests. Also, he presented the factors that affected the concept of social welfare and shaped American social welfare policies which embodied in the influences of religion and social culture and which emphasized individualism and institutional factors. As a result, the state issued modest social welfare policies for 13 vulnerable populations, such as.

women, African Americans Asian Americans, older persons, Native Americans, Latinos, children and adolescences, persons with chronic physical challenges, persons with substance abuse and mental health issues, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons, persons accused of violating laws and residing in or releasing from, correctional institutions immigrants and low-income persons." (Jansson, 2012. p. xvii)^[4].

In addition, Jansson (2012)^[4] gave a general procedural definition of social welfare as the organized societal response to the need and rights of residents through social policy represented by a collective strategy formulated by “government laws, rules, regulations, budgets, and personnel” to address people’s social problems (p.6). According to Jansson (2012)^[4], different policies have been influenced by different ideologies which shaped governors’ opinions and directions about the rights of vulnerable populations. Therefore, his underlying value assumption is that speaking out and bringing out widespread social issues to the social surface is an effective way to find social solutions for social problems. Jansson (2012)^[4] provided frameworks to help social workers understand the importance of policy advocacy, policy referral, and policy practice by discussing social reformers’ efforts and social practices of using case advocacy and case referrals to obtain positive changes that serve the rights of vulnerable populations. For example, the efforts of Drothea Dix in the 19th century defended the rights of individuals with mental disorders. She did that by using policy advocacy to influence the members of the state legislatures to take steps to separate prisoners with mental illness from other prisoners and transfer them to specialized institutions and provide them moral treatment to rehabilitate them (Jansson, 2012)^[4].

The theoretical perspective was that all professionals should engage in their work by using their knowledge of social welfare history to extend beyond the scope of the traditional services that they provide. Jansson (2012)^[4] relied in analysis on Max Weber's Social Action Theory that emphasized "structural and action approaches as necessary to develop a full understanding of society and social change" (kdkasi, 2017; *Revise Sociology*, 2017. Line 2)^[5], to understanding the influence of the social, economic, political and environment on social welfare functions. That would help social workers to be vigilant about the inability of many social services and programs in the state to provide benefits that meet people's needs. Jansson (2012)^[4] analyzed the factors that influenced social welfare functions based on the four types the social action theory: “Traditional Social Action, Affective Social Action, Value Rational Social Action and Instrumental-Rational Social Action” (kdkasi, 2017)^[5]. They focused on controlling certain ideologies and religions in society such as they believed that Christianity against savages. Also, it depicted the Gilded Age Americans succeeding in industrialization as a sign of hard-work and self-reliance, leading to the emergence of new values that industrialists had the freedom the exploitation of vulnerable populations. The victims are blamed for their weakness and inability to meet their needs. Those ideologies believe that the industrial community has a capacity of achievement which provides an opportunity to individuals who work hard to change their social states for better positions. Thus, Jansson (2012)^[4] encouraged social workers to find official and effective ways to help vulnerable populations through understanding the history of social welfare that illustrated the original circumstances for the long-term of battles that brought positive changes in social welfare and raised awareness about people's rights, as well as leading to the emergence of Human Rights Protection Acts that lasted until the present time (Jansson, 2012)^[4].

Jansson (2012)^[4] formulated the social, political, and economic forces that have played essential roles in the development of the social welfare state through history. Jansson (2012) depicted a

social force that propels social development through history by providing an opportunity for policy advocates who took the responsibility to help vulnerable populations by reforming and establishing policies that protect their rights and sympathized with people who faced victimization and provided assistance for children and older people, as well as guaranteed them basic needs to survive. Other opportunities for vulnerable people included job training and good education, as well as other social programs, especially postsecondary education, and Head Start. Also, policy advocates created and supported regulations and policies that served civil rights for all people without discrimination based on sex, color, and social status. In addition, the author depicted the example of the Great Depression in boosting social and political pressure for the legislation of a set of social reforms as well as giving the opportunity for policy advocacy for social reforms such as what happened during the New Deal and Great Society eras. In the legal and economic milieu, the author depicted an economic force that propelled social development through history. That can be done through providing an opportunity for policy advocates, such as reformers who defend human rights and believe in helping vulnerable populations. In addition, these advocates promoted economic growth in some areas by expanding job opportunity for many populations, as well as helping low-income families with housing and education. Also, these advocates made all levels of populations, including immigrants, contribute to and boost the American economy, which led to increased government resources and budgets, increased social spending, and funded the social programs. In the political arena, Jansson (2012)^[4] asserted that political force is the core of successful social reforms. He explained that in spite of political challenges to reform policies, professional groups who have an interest in political reforms worked hard to find opportunity to benefit civil rights and social programs. For example, Franklin Roosevelt humanized the American industrial system and established social programs of the “New Deal” (p. 252), Lyndon Johnson enacted the Civil Rights Act in 1964 against discrimination, and Bill Clinton who signed the Family and Medical leave Act. These leaders were an essential part in propelling social development throughout history.

Day and Schiele (2013)^[2] presented the major concepts of American social welfare, which relied on Judaism and institutional properties. Also, they illustrated that social welfare was based on dominant American social values. These values emanated from Judaeo-Christian concepts which support for helping people in need, and Puritan morality values, which determine that certain people do not deserve help, such as women who have children out of marriage as well as homeless men who do not work. However, these values have a great influence on social welfare policies and their practices. Also, they have significant impact on the political, economic and religion institutions in determining how to provide social welfare in the United States. Day and Schiele (2013)^[2] defined social welfare as one of the social institutions and included the concepts of social treatment and social control. They depicted social welfare as a channel to provide a social safety net for people in need, based on social values. Those values are endorsed by societal legislations and carried out by the public and private agencies in order to provide benefits for individuals, families, and groups to maintain the social order. Also, Day and Schiele (2013)^[2] mentioned the importance of the social worker's role in running

social organizations and influencing policy decision makers to support social services.

Day and Schiele's (2013)^[2] value assumptions mentioned the influence of societal ideology and political tendency in providing social welfare. They said that social treatment and social control in society could give political and economic direction to consider providing social services and to control social problems in a way which makes people in need obtain their social rights. Day and Schiele (2013)^[2] emphasized the importance of helping people in need by professionals without imposing the providers' beliefs on people's lives or prejudging them, whether their entitlements are social values-based or not.

Day and Schiele's (2013)^[2] theoretical traditions interpreted that there were conflicts between individuals who owned social, economic resources in American society which is dominated by white men culture who see themselves as better than vulnerable populations. This culture allowed them to write social welfare history without including the suffering of vulnerable populations and their contributions throughout social welfare history. Day and Schiele (2013)^[2] analyzed the historical events that contributed to the development of social welfare. Therefore, they used the conflict theory founded by Karl Marx that focused on the conflict of social classes and depicted the conflict between individuals or groups' interests within one society. Also, conflict theory showed the minority upper class had power to control political decisions to benefit those who have social and economic resources (Farganis, 2014; Cole, 2017). Day and Schiele (2013)^[2] depicted two significant historical conflicted stages that resulted to positive changes for the sake of the human rights field, such as Social Darwinism and the Civil War. The the influence of social Darwinism on society as a social class controlled the means of production and led political and ideological forces to dominate American society. Then, resistance showed the influence of the Civil War on vulnerable populations and social reformers who fought for human rights which eventually succeeded for the sake of civil rights. According to the conflict theory, social Darwinism was the stage when social classes or certain groups controlled the material forces and the intellectual force over society. This ideology made them categorized people into worthy and unworthy; worthy people were those who succeed economically, while unworthy people are vulnerable populations. They believed that helping unworthy people was against God's will; consequently, social Darwinists were biased in writing the history of social welfare because they thought they were genetically better than people of other ethnicities. Those individuals did not believe in social reforms for the sake of vulnerable population and social welfare. Then, the second stage of influence of the Civil War emerged. Based on the theory, it is the phase of conflict between social classes to obtain social reforms. That influence made social reformers provide help to vulnerable populations because they believed in social betterment. For example, the Protestant religion, Jewish immigrants, and Catholic groups sought for social reforms and helped unfortunate individuals. Also, in 1824, Yates' New York; Secretary of State along with other philanthropists, called for improving the condition of poor people and promoted local law to change poor laws that were categorized into worthy and unworthy poor, as well as calling for employing poor individuals and preventing them from begging. In addition, Yates encouraged poorhouses to provide protection and education to children. Also,

Day and Schiele (2013)^[2] said that feminist theory gave insight to social professionals about the importance of women's contributions in social welfare and illustrated how writers of the history of social welfare overlooked women suffering from oppression throughout history. For example, "women could not vote; could not practice law, theology, or medicine; could not sign wills or contracts without their husbands' consent; and could not serve on juries." (Day & Schiele, 2013. p. 183)^[2]. So, raising awareness about women's rights gave women the opportunity to form and organize Civil Rights activities. For example, in 1930, women were working at low wages for long hours. That encouraged them to establish the National Women's Trade Union League (NWTUL) and fight for equal pay.

Day and Schiele (2013)^[2] asserted the impact of overlapping social, political, and economic forces throughout history that affected social development and social stability. Therefore, many reform movements put reducing poverty at the top of their agenda. In addition, the social elites throughout social welfare history, through philanthropic activities, provided assistance to poor people to mitigate their social and economic situations. For example, Benjamin Franklin, as an example of providing social welfare, believed in personal, social, and civic responsibility, helped to establish the police force, and founded public hospitals. Accordingly, the government cooperated with private charities and used centralization to provide organized social care to families and their members who needed help, relieving the burden of need and poverty. Those social movements generated social welfare programs in the United States, including social security and social insurance programs, considered as a citizen's entitlement. All those social programs connected with the economic growth were able to fund social institutions and provide services. Each President emphasized economic growth because they knew that economic prosperity has an impact on social welfare programs and meeting people's needs. Thus, Day and Schiele (2013)^[2] showed how the overlap of social, political, and economic forces has an essential impact on developing social welfare throughout history and gave a new understanding of the history of social welfare.

Both Jansson (2012)^[4] and Day and Schiele (2013)^[2] presented the oppression of vulnerable populations and traced the development of social welfare states. However, each of them addressed the social welfare reforms from different aspects. Jansson (2012)^[4] addressed social welfare from the perspective of why American society was reluctant to provide social relief to 13 vulnerable populations. He encouraged social workers to understand the main influence of American society which was dominated with conflict policies and harsh traditions that shaped personal values and political direction. The American welfare state encountered attack by conservative ideology such as Republicans from 1970 to 2008 and seldom made significant social welfare reforms. Republicans believed that certain social programs were ineffective to solve social problems such as poverty because of social and economic inequalities. Even if there were some reforms throughout history, they were accompanied by resistance and stigmatization. The Republicans believed helping fund social welfare programs would increase the number of people in need and increase their dependence on these social programs, which would drain the state resources and cause economic crisis. On the other hand, Day and Schiele (2013)^[2] demonstrated the demand for social welfare throughout history

showing the influence of dominated by social Darwinism, people who did not believe in helping vulnerable populations. To them supporting poor was against the economic nature. Day and Schiele (2013)^[2] depicted the influence of the Civil War in inspiring social reformers to defend poor people and focus on understanding the importance of establishing legislation based on social values with acknowledgment that women, the poor, the minorities, and children were oppressed and exploited. Day and Schiele (2013)^[2] provided a new understanding of the history and rewrote it by highlighting the ignored efforts of vulnerable populations who participated in it. Thus, Day and Schiele (2013)^[2] encouraged social workers and professional reformers to understand the social problems and the way of solving them to provide social treatment through social welfare programs. For example, these writers said social workers need to understand the problems that existed in society such as poverty as class conflict, and high unemployment among African American as racism, and preventing women from opportunity in a society as sexism. This understanding of the sociological, economic, Afrocentric, and feminist perspectives would help social professionals to understand the social welfare functions as one of the social institutions.

Conclusion

These articles discussed the development of social welfare throughout history according to the perspectives of different authors: Jansson (2012)^[4] in *The Reluctant Welfare State*, and Day and Schiele (2013)^[2] in *A New History of Social Welfare*. These writers agreed about the importance of understanding social welfare history, while each book had its own style of presenting social welfare history. Jonsson (2012) addressed social welfare using the lens of a social worker. He believed that understanding social welfare history would advance social workers performance in contemporary society. On the other hand, Day and Schiele (2013)^[2] addressed social welfare history through the historian's lens and called it *A New Social Welfare History*. They called professionals to understand social welfare history in a way that focused on highlighting the contribution of vulnerable populations, such as women, people of color, and immigrants. Also, they aimed to refute the biased efforts of people who were influenced by social Darwinism in writing social welfare history and ignored vulnerable populations whose suffering and battles contributed to the history of social welfare.

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