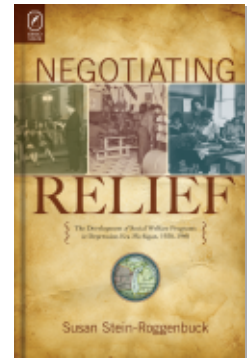




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6. "I Can't Make a Go of It": Negotiating Relief with the Family at the Center

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CHAPTER SIX

“I Can’t Make a Go of It”

NEGOTIATING RELIEF WITH THE FAMILY AT THE CENTER

RECIPIENTS OF RELIEF in Michigan in the 1930s faced a welfare landscape different from the old system, but with some familiar landmarks. The expansion of federal and state involvement in welfare opened new avenues for appeal and protest. Emergency-relief programs provided many families and individuals with much-needed assistance at a time when their own resources were exhausted.¹ Michigan recipients welcomed the programs initiated by the federal government, but not all agreed with the programs’ policies. The process of applying for relief entailed a maze of interactions on the part of both recipients and caseworkers. Casework was an interactive process, driven by negotiations between recipients and their caseworkers. But these negotiations also included other community agencies and professionals, such as police, the courts, the schools, physicians, private welfare agency personnel, public officials, and family members outside the immediate household. Neighbors and those in contact with the recipients also injected their views at times through informal communication networks. At the center of these negotiations was the family and expectations of how families should behave, which were rooted in legal expectations of relatives’ obligations to support one another. Behavior that was rendered a private concern for those not in need became a public

1. Gordon, *Pitied But Not Entitled*, 138–39, 294; Cohen, *Making a New Deal*, 252–53; and Edsforth, *Class Conflict and Cultural Consensus*, 142–43, 149–51.

issue for those receiving public assistance. These negotiations operated in the realm of a welfare discourse different from the dominant narrative, and spotlighted questions about why welfare recipients acted as they did.

Under Michigan law, families were legally required to support one another. This responsible-relative clause represents an important continuity in Michigan social welfare policy and was also used to contest the meaning of responsibility with respect to race, gender, family, and finances. Its very existence highlights the integral role that notions of family played in welfare administration in America. This rule mandated that parents, spouses, adult children, and grandparents were legally responsible for family support. In practice, the responsible-relative clause prompted significant conflict between social workers and welfare recipients, and also between recipients and other family members. Social workers were not looking for a specific family type or organization, such as two-parent families with a male breadwinner and a mother as caretaker. Rather, it was the dynamics in those families—whatever their makeup—that interested them. Much like child and spousal support, the responsible-relative rule was a means to minimize the financial burden the needy placed on the state.² The responsible-relative clause was a key way in which welfare administration regulated families receiving relief.

While some historians argue that the stigma against “the dole” declined during the New Deal years, applying for relief was not easy for many people in the Great Depression.³ Instead of seeking aid from a township supervisor or superintendent of the poor, applicants went to the office of the county welfare-relief commission. The process of applying for relief required providing information about property ownership, bank-account listings, and debts, as well as verifying birth and citizenship records; the latter were critical for the Aid to Dependent Children and Old Age Assistance programs. Caseworkers computed a monthly budget (including shelter, clothing, food, and utilities) to determine the amount of relief needed, which was then offset by any income sources the family had. Caseworkers also verified wages of any employed household members.⁴ Noninstitutional medical care could be included, but hospitalization was a local welfare obligation.⁵ Thus applicants sometimes

2. Willrich, “Home Slackers,” 463; Igra, *Wives without Husbands*, 86–87.

3. Robert S. McElvaine, *The Great Depression: America, 1929–1941*, Rev. Ed. (New York: Random House, 1993), 176–79.

4. Age and citizenship were defining factors in the old-age pension program. Recipients of old age pensions had to be citizens for fifteen years and seventy years of age.

5. Armstrong, *We Too Are the People*, 62–63; Carothers, *Chronology of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration*, 7–9; Haber and Stanchfield, *Unemployment and Relief in Michigan*, 70–71; and *Michigan Emergency Relief Administration Budget Manual* (Lansing: 1937).

dealt with both the WRC offices and local poor-relief officials, and perhaps private agencies as well, to gain the help they needed.

Case files generally contained at least one application form on which caseworkers recorded the home condition, family background and education, statements about household members and relatives, employment history, and health status, as well as whether the family attended church. Some workers encouraged applicants to develop the best plan for themselves, particularly in the ADC and OAA cases later in the decades. Emergency-relief caseworkers recorded a report on collateral information: what did the applicant's references, often a township supervisor or poor official, say about his or her need for relief? The goal of casework was to analyze the family's information in order to attempt to address any larger problems, beyond unemployment, that had prompted the family or individual to seek relief in the first place.⁶ The caseworker was to present a composite picture of the family, and then to determine the best course of action, ideally with the recipients' input.

Case-file records from the early years of Michigan's categorical-aid programs offer an opportunity to assess an alternate welfare discourse: why relief recipients circumvented the system. Cases generally originated in the New Deal years, and were among those eventually transferred to either the Old Age Assistance or the Aid to Dependent Children programs in the late 1930s. Case records are inherently subjective, as virtually all information, except for correspondence directly from the recipient, is filtered through a caseworker's perspective and bias.⁷ Despite these limitations, case-file records also are rich sources of information about the daily administration of welfare, and offer a window into the power relations between recipient and caseworker, or "the ways in which state power infiltrated civil society."⁸ Case records provide an opportunity to analyze the discourses and practices of welfare administration, including those employed by caseworkers and policy makers, as well as by recipients.⁹ The exchange of information rendered casework a negotiation

6. Kunzel, *Fallen Women, Problem Girls*, 126–27; Gordon, *Heroes of Their Own Lives*, 62–63.

7. Both the caseworker and the applicant are engaged in "performing" in this process. Caseworkers know that their records will be read by supervisors, and recipients often framed their answers to ensure they would get aid. Little, "He Said, She Said," 439; Franca Iacovetta, "Gossip, Contest, and Power in the Making Suburban Bad Girls: Toronto, 1945–60," *The Canadian Historical Review* 80.4 (December 1999): 606–12.

8. Franca Iacovetta and Wendy Mitchinson, "Introduction: Social History and Case Files Research," in *On the Case: Explorations in Case History*, eds. Franca Iacovetta and Wendy Mitchinson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 9–10.

9. For a discussion of the use of poststructuralism in case file analysis, see Iacovetta, "Gossip, Contest and Power," 591–92, 621, and Gordon, *Heroes of Their Own Lives*; Kathleen Canning, "Feminist History after the Linguistic Turn: Historicizing Discourse and Experience,"

throughout the process. Recipients told caseworkers only the information that they wanted to share, and framed their narratives in ways they thought might best result in aid. Caseworkers also sifted the information with their own perspective, and their case histories—supposedly containing objective facts important in the diagnosis of the family's problem or need—included many personal assessments. Many social workers, for instance, commented on the lack of education or desire to work on the part of clients and on the intellectual or psychological abilities of recipients or members of their families, even after one brief visit. Racial, ethnic, and class biases were also evident. Social workers often found it impossible to remove their own judgments from their work.¹⁰

Investigations involved gathering information through informal communications, including gossip, and this method was key in enforcing family support. Gossip reinforced family support by providing information that could lead to obtaining additional family financial assistance. The provenance of the gossip might be a letter or telephone call, or the result of a conversation with a neighbor. Caseworkers might seek information from the local grocer, school personnel, a police officer, a landlord, or another family member. Caseworkers might hear about an ex-husband who was employed and could afford child support, or about a son or a daughter who had a job and thus could contribute to the family income. The content of these informal communications rested almost exclusively on the two issues of morals and money. Accusations of immoral behavior, including sexual relationships or consumption of alcohol, or the misuse of agency funds, including hiding income, employment, or assets, were the most common. Regardless of the content of the accusation, one nearly universal outcome was increased scrutiny on the case and efforts to secure information about other sources. Caseworkers and policy makers focused primarily on rooting out those who broke the rules rather than on interrogating why recipients did so, in large part because of the dominant discourse about welfare. This discourse, evident in casework practice, stereotyped the welfare recipient as one who lacked moral character instead of questioning the structural problems in the program's administration and the economy in which recipients lived.¹¹ Many recipients who operated outside the boundaries of agency regulation generally felt compelled to because they

Signs 19.2 (Winter 1994): 368–404.

10. Kunzel, *Fallen Women, Problem Girls*, 137–39; Gordon, *Heroes of their Own Lives*, 14–18.

11. Sharon Hays makes a similar argument about recipients and the 1996 welfare-reform law. Welfare law ignores the larger structural and institutional barriers to independence and focuses on the individual. Hays seeks to explain not only the choices recipients make but also the context in which they make them. Hays, *Flat Broke with Children: Women in the Age of Welfare Reform* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 60–61, 123.

needed to support their children, but this experience was a much less recognized welfare discourse in this period.¹²

Most scholars define gossip as information that is shared informally between people who often know each other. Margaret Little, who argues that welfare administration is an arena in which gossip is used in the public sphere, rather than in private communications, broadens the definition of gossip to “a form of communication exchanged about other people’s activities and behaviors that may or may not be substantiated.”¹³ Gossip is often used to control or change the behavior of individuals in the community, or to ensure that community mores are followed. In the case of welfare administration, its persistence as an investigative tool rests in part on its effectiveness. Unsubstantiated gossip and informal communications that would not be admitted as evidence in a court of law enabled caseworkers to discover information about recipients they might otherwise not obtain. Informal communication was an effective investigative tool that prompted caseworkers to focus on individual behaviors rather than larger contextual issues, including limited employment opportunities, budget shortfalls, and family conflict.

The position of the recipient in American society played a significant role in justifying the use of informal communications in these investigations. As a condition of receiving aid, recipients signed away their right to privacy regarding virtually all aspects of their lives. They were no longer full, independent citizens within the welfare system. Actions by those with financial means that might have been accepted, or at least not investigated, by public officials were subject to criticism and censure when a person asked for public assistance. Moral issues intersected with fiscal concerns, as agencies sought to enforce behavior deemed acceptable by larger community customs, a part of the bigger goal of limiting welfare costs. The New Deal was the period in which the link between welfare and dependency solidified, but Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon also argue that “this use of the term [*dependency*] was fundamentally ambiguous, slipping easily, and repeatedly, from an economic meaning to a moral/psychological meaning.”¹⁴ Economic need was still equated largely with individual failing, despite the widespread unemployment during the Great Depression, and the nineteenth-century goal of determining those who were “deserving” of aid continued. This effort required “constant vigilance . . . to ensure that [the undeserving] did not slip in, disguising themselves as

12. Canning, “Feminist History after the Linguistic Turn,” 381–82.

13. Little, “He Said, She Said,” 434; Tebbutt, *Women’s Talk?*, 1–2.

14. Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon, “A Genealogy of *Dependency*: Tracing a Keyword of the U.S. Welfare State,” *Signs* 19.2 (Winter 1994): 319.

deserving.”¹⁵ By the 1930s the ADC program, like other public assistance programs of the period, “continued the private charity tradition of searching out the deserving few among the many chiselers.”¹⁶ Gossip and anonymous tips were effective methods to do that, and their continued use reinforced the status of welfare recipients in American society.

REGULATING THE AMERICAN FAMILY

Social welfare programs were designed to provide aid only when all other avenues, including family support, were exhausted. Caseworkers designed the aid a family received, whether it was ADC, OAA, or work relief, around the needs of the family, and not around the individuals within that family or household. Those who followed the “family ideal” of support received the compliments of caseworkers. In contrast, families who did not support one another were often seen as “problem cases,” usually because individuals within the family failed to fulfill their roles. In some cases, relatives would leave the household or community rather than conform to social welfare regulations, oftentimes allowing their family members to regain their relief benefits. In other cases, recipients of relief also used this provision to secure the aid of social workers in enforcing their own authority in their families.¹⁷ The efforts to enforce support often yielded unintended results, including exacerbating family conflicts or prompting the departure of family members from the household. The responsible-relative clause resulted in negotiations, and sometimes heated conflicts, between caseworkers, recipients, and their families.

Child support or alimony, usually from the fathers, was the major source of support checked for ADC recipients. Before caseworkers would even begin to investigate ADC applications, mothers who received no alimony or child support at the time of application had to file a complaint of nonsupport with their local prosecuting attorney. Enforcement by the prosecutor varied from county to county and case to case, but recipients had to initiate the process of securing alimony to receive ADC. If the court did not order alimony, or if an estranged or ex-husband did not pay it, the woman could receive ADC, but

15. Ibid., 320.

16. Ibid., 321.

17. Mary Odem describes the latter trend in her study of laws governing age of consent in California. Odem argues that parents used age of consent laws to control their daughters' behavior when traditional family controls failed. See *Delinquent Daughters: Protecting and Policing Adolescent Female Sexuality in the United States, 1885–1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995).

she had to file the complaint. Sarah Forbes hoped to avoid the courts in getting her husband to support her, but when that failed, she filed a complaint so she could receive ADC. When her husband stopped paying alimony, caseworkers increased her grant to make up the difference.¹⁸ This case was typical of ADC cases of nonsupport.

The enforcement of family support went far beyond spousal and child support to include other family members. Conflicts usually centered on the amount of a child's wages that had to be budgeted as family income. When determining a recipient's eligibility for aid, social workers computed a family budget based on the needs of all the household members. They then offset that amount with any other support the recipient had, such as income from a part-time job, boarders, alimony, or family earnings. For children and parents living in the same household, caseworkers considered 60 percent of each person's income from private employment as family resources, after deducting for employment and personal expenses.¹⁹ If a family member was employed on a public works job (such as the Works Progress Administration, the Civilian Conservation Corps, or the National Youth Administration), caseworkers considered 100 percent of the income as family resources, since a public works assignment was granted to provide for the support of the entire family.²⁰

Adult employable children were often the targets of support-enforcement efforts. Marion Rose, of Saginaw, was widowed in 1929. She received a mothers' pension and emergency relief before qualifying for the ADC program in 1936. Her son, Frank, helped his mother with work from the Civilian Conservation Corps, the National Youth Administration, and later the WPA, before joining the army in 1941. At that point, a married daughter and her husband moved into the home, and their income fell under the responsible-relative clause. They asserted that they were not permanent members of the household, and the son-in-law told the caseworker "not to monkey around with his wages." The caseworker allowed two weeks for them to move, but sent a wage-verification form to the son-in-law's employer. Three weeks later, the couple was still there; the caseworker calculated their contribution to be sixty-

18. Case C7300142, Saginaw ADC Records, reel 4533.

19. This policy remained until 1945, when the State Social Welfare Commission allowed adult children to pay a "going rate" for room and board, rather than 60 percent of their wages. Investigation by staff found that cost of the change was not that high (fifty thousand dollars statewide over a year, even if the caseload doubled), and commission members felt it would be more practical. State Social Welfare Commission Minutes, August 28, 1945, 16–17, Box 2, Folder 1.

20. Donald S. Howard, *The WPA and Federal Relief Policy* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1943), 341–50, 381–82.

two dollars per month, which covered the family budget. She did not close the case, although she told them she would. Instead, she held their checks at the welfare office. She hoped the threat to cancel the grant would prompt them to leave or accept their responsibility to help support the mother.²¹ The daughter protested in a letter to the State Department of Welfare, two months after the checks were held. She rejected the notion that she and her husband were financially responsible for her mother. "I think it is your place to wright [*sic*] and tell them to send checks immediately to my mother for when my husband married me he didn't marry the whole fambley [*sic*]."²² They refused to support the mother, but did eventually move.

When social workers enforced the responsible-relative clause, the recipient often paid the price, either through family unrest or financial hardship. Marion Rose was caught in the middle. According to the caseworker's notes, she wanted her daughter to move out, but they would not leave. She lost her ADC grant but could not depend on her son-in-law to contribute. She pleaded with state officials to send a check, or "I will be out on the road bcuse [*sic*] I don't got no muney [*sic*] to live on."²³ Rose sought the aid of the caseworker, who agreed to interview the son-in-law and other children. She did not have the power in her household to force her daughter and son-in-law to contribute or leave. Because she lacked that authority, the agency stepped in, at her request. The caseworker, by simply holding the checks rather than closing the case, saved Rose the time of reapplying, but she remained without support for months.

Caseworkers determined aid based on the needs of the family, and at times agency workers used work relief to force children to support their parents. Donna Barker, a Van Buren County resident, was a divorced mother of two. She earned three dollars per week caring for her grandchildren while her daughter worked, and earned extra during the fruit season. These wages were not enough to support her, and her son, Frank, who was twenty-two, was unemployed. She applied for emergency relief in December of 1937. Caseworkers reported that Barker "tried to impress worker with how badly she felt about applying for relief, and how she has always tried to keep off relief." According to the township supervisor, "That boy is too lazy to do a thing."²⁴ Caseworkers noted that Barker had no control over her son, and recommended work relief for the son. So while Barker had little authority over her son, the agency could attempt to control him by providing him with a public job to support his

21. Saginaw County ADC Case C7300218, quote from case history June 30, 1941.

22. Saginaw County ADC Case C7300218, letter in file dated September 16, 1941.

23. Saginaw County ADC Case C7300218, August 4, 1941.

24. VB ERA Records, Case 5229.

mother. Five months later, Barker was living with her daughter, and the case record ends there.

Recipients at times encouraged caseworkers to enforce their children's support, either through letters or visits from the agency. Barker's voice is relatively silent in the case record, and it is not clear whether she supported the agency's efforts to enforce her son's responsibility to support her. But other recipients hoped that agency workers might influence relatives in ways that family members could not.²⁵ Soliciting the aid of the caseworker to enforce support, however, did not necessarily imply positive feelings toward the agency. Amanda Lorensen, first introduced in chapter 5, complained about the size of her grant and about the budgets relief workers calculated for her family. She also was upset that she herself was not hired as a caseworker, a job she sought on more than one occasion. The hostility evident in her interactions with the relief agency, however, did not prevent her from seeking the help of social workers to enforce the support law. She turned to them to collect alimony, and also sought their aid in garnering support from her single son, Olsen. He was twenty-four years old and employed at Saginaw Auto Sales, earning twenty-four dollars per week in May 1941. Lorensen told caseworkers that he spent his wages on his girlfriend, but she thought his money should be going to her, his mother. At her request, the social worker visited her son, who refused to help either parent. He agreed to provide support for his sister, Evelyn, but preferred to help her directly rather than through his mother. The social worker was able to negotiate with Olsen some support for the family, but not in the way that Lorensen had hoped.²⁶

The presence of employable adult children in a household receiving categorical aid (such as ADC) under the Social Security Act, as in Sandy Eckett's case in St. Charles Township in Saginaw County, endangered the household's grant. Eckett was a widow with six children, and her three eldest—all beyond the age of seventeen—were reluctant to take employment to help support the family. Walter had two WPA assignments, which helped cover the family's budget, but the other two sons, and later an older daughter, were less cooperative. Another son refused a CCC assignment in October 1940, and none made any effort to register at the local employment office. The caseworker pressured them to search for employment, and when they failed to make the effort, he canceled the ADC grant. He believed the sons "want[ed] to sit around and

25. Historians analyzing case-file records have found that the recipients of aid or regulation often employed those services in ways never intended by policy makers. See Odem, *Delinquent Daughters*, 49–52; Gordon, *Heroes of Their Own Lives*, 164–65, 234–35, 293–95. See also Ruth M. Alexander, *The "Girl" Problem: Female Sexual Delinquency in New York, 1900–1930* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995).

26. Saginaw County ADC Case C700045.

live on [their] mother's ADC grant." The caseworker attempted to prevent the sons from living off money intended for the minor children.²⁷ The family wrote a letter to the bureau supervisor, arguing that only one person was working (Walter on WPA), and that there was no work. Bureau supervisor Dora Heilman replied that the family had the WPA income, and that there was no evidence any of the children had seriously sought employment: "Your problem is really that they need work and we believe they can find it if they try."²⁸ The bureau believed that three employable sons and one employable daughter could support the family of seven, particularly with a base income from WPA, and the case remained closed.

Budgeting practices frustrated many recipients, who resorted to deception simply to make ends meet.²⁹ Budgets computed for the program allowed for only a minimum standard of living. ADC was not a generous program. Grants were intended for children's expenses, and federal guidelines did not include support for the parent.³⁰ In 1938 a parent with one child was eligible for a maximum grant of eighteen dollars per month; additional children garnered twelve dollars.³¹ Some counties, including Wayne County, supplemented federal grants with local and state funds, but not all counties did so. Barely enough to cover rent, let alone anything else, an ADC grant was indeed "partial support."³² All women faced limited employment opportunities, but none more so than black women, who were largely confined to domestic work and who paid higher rents for poorer housing.³³ Most ADC recipients

27. Saginaw County ADC Case C7300478, case history dated October 14, 1940.

28. Saginaw County ADC Case C7300478, letter to recipient, October 18, 1940.

29. Kathryn Edin and Laura Lein discuss this trend in contemporary welfare programs in *Making Ends Meet: How Single Mothers Survive Welfare and Low-Wage Work* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1997). See also Hays, *Flat Broke with Children*.

30. Linda Gordon, "Putting Children First: Women, Maternalism, and Welfare in the Early Twentieth Century," in *U.S. History as Women's History: New Feminist Essays*, eds. Linda K. Kerber, Alice Kessler-Harris, and Kathryn Kish Sklar (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 81–82; Suzanne Mettler, *Dividing Citizens: Gender and Federalism in New Deal Public Policy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 138–39.

31. Gordon, "Putting Children First," 83; *A Manual for Aid to Dependent Children* (Lansing: Michigan State Emergency Relief Commission, 1938), 1. By 1940 minimum grants had increased to twenty-four dollars and sixteen dollars. Michigan's average grants tended to be higher than in some other states, especially in the South. Robert C. Lieberman, *Shifting the Color Line: Race and the American Welfare State* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 126–28.

32. Joanne Goodwin, "'Employable Mothers' and 'Suitable' Work: A Re-Evaluation of Welfare and Wage-Earning for Women in the Twentieth-Century United States," *Journal of Social History* 29.2 (Winter 1995): 253–74; Goodwin, *Gender and the Politics of Welfare Reform*, 172–74.

33. See Wolcott, *Remaking Respectability*, 52, 60; Kevin Boyle, *Arc of Justice: A Saga of Race, Civil Rights, and Murder in the Jazz Age* (New York: Henry Holt, 2004), 108–10.

were single mothers who had to work any paid employment around their children. Critics argued that ADC rules discouraged employment. Caseworkers deducted all employment income from the grant unless a budget deficit existed; thus for every dollar recipients earned, they lost a dollar from their respective grants.

The agency's budgeting system was not always the problem; rather, it was sometimes a caseworker's overzealous interpretation of the budgeting practices.³⁴ One Wayne County caseworker, for instance, received a report that Georgia Evans was employed at a local beer garden, and a check with the employer found that she had indeed worked there, briefly, and was paid one dollar. Despite the small amount of income (Evans paid rent of thirteen dollars per month for herself and her son), the caseworker admonished her that she had to report all income.³⁵ Elizabeth Kurzawski denied any outside employment, and said she worked at the local farmer's market on Saturdays for chicken and eggs. Her caseworker was unconvinced, even after a letter from the market stated that Kurzawski had received a dozen eggs. The caseworker deducted two dollars—the estimated value of the produce—from the woman's budget.³⁶ When Mary Stevens was confronted by her caseworker about the furniture she had purchased, she said that “she was tired of having her budget decreased . . . Each time she instructed her worker that she was working she would cut her budget.” She no longer told the agency when she earned extra income, because, she told the caseworker, “they don't give you enough anyway and then they deduct what you make and you have to work very hard to earn this money.”³⁷ When Norah Robbins's case was closed in 1944, after her children obtained employment, she admitted she had not always told caseworkers of her children's earnings, or of her alimony, asserting that the “agency had always been so rigid in budgeting policies that this was the only way that she could manage.”³⁸

34. For a discussion of budget practices under the SEWRC, see *A Manual for Suggested Policies and Procedures for Use by County Relief Administrators* (Lansing: Michigan Welfare Emergency Relief Commission, 1938), 3–8.

35. Wayne County ADC Case C8204988, case history from February 16, 1939. Neighbors also alleged that Mrs. Evans' roomer was her common-law husband, but the charge was never proved. The case was closed two years later when her son, Melvin, entered the CCC and was no longer in the home.

36. Wayne County ADC Case C8206148, case history from October 30, 1939; November 3, 1939; November 9, 1939. The case was closed in early 1943 when Mrs. Kurzawski obtained employment at a local defense factory.

37. Wayne County ADC Case C8202382, case history from May 22, 1942.

38. Wayne County ADC Case C8203039, reel 4647, case history from May 9, 1944.

DECIDING TO LEAVE

In some cases, state regulation of family responsibility prompted children to leave home. Some children accepted public employment but rejected the program's rule that they relinquish all of their wages to the family, opting to move out or even leave the area. Frank Perelli, for example, moved in with his grandparents to escape the harassment of caseworkers and their insistence that he find work.³⁹ Cynthia Wright's son, Burton, refused to accept a WPA assignment if it meant supporting the entire family. He saw that income as his, regardless of the source, and refused to "work under those conditions." He had had a previous WPA assignment, and resented his monthly wage of thirty-eight dollars going to the family. The caseworker informed him that if he refused the WPA job, he would be removed from the family's food budget and receive no aid. He relented and agreed to be recertified. But one month later, Burton left the city before his recertification went through, and the caseworker had to increase Wright's ADC grant to compensate for the lost wages.⁴⁰

Family members who secured private employment and lived in the household applying for aid did not face the same rules governing public employment. Their contribution was set at 60 percent of their income (after deductions and employment expenses). But some refused to do even that. Sarah Harding, a mother of two living in Detroit, began receiving an ADC grant in 1938. Having been deserted by her husband the year before, Harding relied on ADC and on the earnings of her older daughter, Lilly, for support. But Lilly moved out in mid-1942 rather than support the family. Her mother sympathized with her, and refused to tell the caseworker where her daughter lived. The caseworker spent two months trying to locate Lilly, advising Harding that her case would be closed if Lilly did not come to the office. Eventually, Lilly did return home, and called in September to notify the caseworker that she would support the family.⁴¹

Not all children, however, returned after leaving home. Rachel Raney, a black woman whose husband deserted the family in 1932, supported her three children with a WPA sewing job in Saginaw. She was cooperative, and caseworkers admired her efforts to keep her family together. When her WPA project ended in 1939, she applied for ADC because she wanted to stay home to supervise her teenage daughter. Her grant was reduced, however, when her

39. Marquette County ADC Case C5200174, case history from April 25, 1938.

40. Saginaw County ADC Case C7300200, case history from August 16, 1939; September 18, 1939.

41. Wayne County ADC Case C8205153, case history from July 12, 1942; August 27, 1942; September 26, 1942.

son, Garland, entered the CCC. Later, a wage check found her son earning enough at a local factory to support the family. But Garland Raney refused those terms, and was gone a month later. When Rachel Raney finally received her grant in mid-October, she was trying to support her family with occasional housework, for which she earned \$1.50 per day.⁴² Employment opportunities in Saginaw and other Michigan cities were scarce for black women such as Raney. Day work was among the few options.⁴³ Limited in employment opportunities because of race and caught in the middle of the social agency's bid to enforce family obligations, Raney and her two younger children struggled to make it in a labor market segregated by race and gender.

Caseworkers, in their efforts to enforce family support, often expected the person with perhaps the least power—often the stay-at-home mother—to enforce that responsibility with her adult children, as in the case of Raney. But parents dependent on public aid likely carried little authority with their adult children, particularly their sons, who saw themselves as independent adults with a right to the money they earned. Parental efforts to enforce family support, and later efforts to do so by the welfare agency, did worsen or rupture relationships. When Edith Walton of Detroit applied for ADC for her two young daughters in 1938, her son Clyde was working, and his brother Arthur was on WPA. Consequently, the application was denied. Two years later she reapplied, after Arthur had married. The caseworker again denied the application because Clyde was employed by Dodge and earning thirty-two dollars each week, 60 percent of which easily covered the family expenses. Clyde threatened to leave both the household and his mother with no support. But he also realized his mother was physically unable to work and thus Clyde stayed in the home.⁴⁴

Walton reapplied again five months later. Her son Clyde had become verbally and physically abusive in the meantime. She preferred dependency on the state to her son's behavior. The agency approved a small grant, but not enough to relieve Clyde of his obligations. A few months later, he married and moved out. He would not contribute anything to his family's support, and the mother reported that they were barely speaking. She eventually found defense work in Detroit, and her case was closed in early 1943. The damage to her family's relationship, however, had already been done.⁴⁵ Although it is impos-

42. Saginaw County ADC Case C7300279.

43. Wolcott, *Remaking Respectability*, 80–85, 231–39; Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 25.

44. Wayne County ADC Case C8207798, case history from June 27, 1940; November 4, 1940.

45. Wayne County ADC Case C8207798, case history from April 23, 1941; February 11, 1942; March 19, 1943.

sible to know if the agency caused the problem, their zeal likely exacerbated the conflict. It placed the mother in an abusive situation, however unintended. This case also highlights the centrality of the family unit's well-being over that of individual family members. The family dynamics, with a son providing support for his mother and siblings, overrode what might have been in the best interest of the mother, who was placed in a vulnerable position economically and forced to depend on a son reluctant to support her.

Efforts to enforce a child's responsibility prompted some parents to side with their children, opposing their children's obligation to provide for the family. Betty Johnson, an African-American mother of two daughters, offers one such example. Widowed in 1938 after her husband died from tuberculosis, Johnson also had to cope with living with an arrested case of the disease herself, and her children were monitored because of their exposure.⁴⁶ Early entries in the case record describe a family who lived in a nice residential district. The caseworker wrote that the "relationships within the family are excellent and it seems apparent that Mrs. [Johnson] is giving the children excellent care."⁴⁷ Problems arose when the two daughters began working. Betty was employed at Ex-Cell-O Products, but her mother told the caseworker that "Betty was giving her too much now and it was none of the worker's business how much she gave the family." A wage check found that Betty was earning forty dollars per week, but planned to move, with the full support of her mother.⁴⁸ She would rather have the case closed, she said, than allow caseworkers to intrude even further in her family's life. The case was closed the next month.⁴⁹

The probate court was another avenue to enforce support. At times caseworkers encouraged family members to seek aid through the court system, if their efforts proved unsuccessful. The probate court had long been the agency to enforce support through court orders, as caseworkers could only threaten to end or refuse aid. When sixty-seven-year-old Diane Strand of Saginaw was referred to the Welfare Relief Commission for an OAA grant in late 1937, her son, David, lived with her and worked part-time at the local Chevrolet parts factory. His mother told the caseworker outright that he was irresponsible. Strand, a widow since 1926, was in poor health and suffered from asthma; she could no longer work as a domestic and laundress and relied on her son and

46. For the treatment of TB, see Barbara Bates, *Bargaining for Life: A Social History of Tuberculosis, 1876-1938* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), and Georgina D. Feldberg, *Disease and Class: Tuberculosis and the Shaping of Modern North American Society* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995).

47. Wayne County ADC Case C8201132, case history from December 6, 1941.

48. Wayne County ADC Case C8201132, case history from July 21, 1943.

49. Wayne County ADC Case C8201132, case history from August 17, 1943.

OAA for support.⁵⁰ Her son's arrest for lewdness a few months later involved the police, who asked the caseworker to stop Strand's OAA grant, arguing that she used it for her son. Investigation found that David Strand earned more (fourteen dollars per week) than a WPA wage, although he was employed only part-time. He also had a car, and refused to get rid of it. The Strands were told the grant would be canceled, and returned later with an attorney, to no avail.⁵¹ The caseworker consulted probate court officials, and all agreed it was better to enforce the son's responsibility to support his mother. Diane Strand did not agree, and protested the closure in a letter to supervisor Dora Heilman. She had no money and questioned the power the caseworker and the agency held over her grant: were they "the judge and jury?" The caseworker apparently had told her that she had spoiled David, but Strand refuted this, writing that she had to leave him alone often after she was widowed to clean houses to earn a living. He had been forced to take care of himself, she wrote, at a very young age.⁵² Caseworkers did not reinstate her grant, but did secure a WPA assignment for David, and Strand later obtained full-time employment with Chevrolet in Saginaw.⁵³

Some recipients reluctantly sought help through the probate court. Joan Yates, a widow with four children, did file a support complaint. Yates, a seventy-one-year-old native of Mississippi living in Saginaw County, was initially denied OAA in late 1936 because she had two employed men (a son and a son-in-law) living with her, and also because she lacked the proof of age and residency required for a grant. She applied again in 1937 and was approved. A 1939 investigation found a daughter, Leslie, and her husband and four children living with Yates, but these family members asserted they had enough resources only for themselves. Another son, Warren, also lived there, but told the agency he could not help his mother. He had debts to pay and was separated from his own wife. Agency supervisor Dora Heilman wrote that he would "never be responsible for his mother's support."⁵⁴ Two years later another caseworker found Warren earning \$190 per month; his contribution, using the agency's formula, covered the budget deficit. The caseworker, after consulting with Heilman, closed the case and referred Yates to the probate court. Yates came to the office and told the caseworker that she could not

50. Saginaw County OAA Case A7302543, reel 3015, case history from November 18, 1937.

51. Saginaw County OAA Case A7302543, case history from March 21, 1938.

52. Case A7302543, case history from April 26, 1938; letter from Strand to Heilman, dated June 1, 1938.

53. Case A7302543, case history from June 23, 1938; December 9, 1938.

54. Saginaw County OAA Case A7301193, reel 3003, case history, April 12, 1939; April 18, 1939.

take her son, whom she called "a whiskey head," to court, and that it was not fair for "this agency to expect me to rely on him for support." Warren again refused to help her, but her case remained closed. With no other options and no other children to help, Yates reluctantly filed a petition for support with the probate court. The court found that because of the shutdown of local factories employing the woman's children, support could not be ordered.⁵⁵ The woman reapplied, but died one month later before her case had been investigated. Because she had not been an approved OAA recipient, no burial allowance was permitted.⁵⁶ In this case, the pursuit of court-ordered support caused much grief for the recipient with no resulting support.

Combining court-ordered support with pressure from caseworkers also prompted children to leave home rather than support their parents. Pauline Ristav, a forty-five-year-old widow with six children, faced conflict with several of her children over their support for her and their younger siblings. Ristav, who was a recipient of an ADC grant before her husband's death from tuberculosis, in late 1938, had her case closed at one point because of sufficient income, likely from her older children. She invested her insurance money in a home. Her son Avery left home because of the amount he was expected to contribute. Ristav went through the probate court, which ordered Avery to pay three dollars' support per week. She told the caseworker that the court-ordered support had soured her relationship with her son. Her eighteen-year-old daughter, Laurie, who worked part-time and contributed four dollars per week in room and board, later balked at paying sixty dollars per month, which had been computed on the basis of her higher factory wages; Laurie was expected to contribute 60 percent. She would pay only eight dollars per week in room and board, however, and argued further that since her brothers did not pay, she would not.⁵⁷ Laurie moved out rather than pay the ordered support, and her mother refused to go through the probate court again. Without a court order, Laurie was not obligated to pay the support. Caseworkers did not decrease Ristav's grant for her younger children, ages six and ten, as she had endeavored to enforce support and other children were helping, most likely. But when the caseworker received word that Avery had claimed his mother as a dependent on his draft form, in the hopes of getting an exemption, Ristav's ADC check was held, pending investigation. If the report were true that Avery claimed he was supporting Ristav for draft purposes, the agency would

55. Case A7301193, case history from August 11, 1941; August 24, 1941; November 24, 1941; December 15, 1941.

56. Case A7301193, case history from January 19, 1942 and February 20, 1942.

57. Saginaw County ADC Case C7300548, reel 4540, case history from December 28, 1939, to February 4, 1942.

eliminate the ADC. However, he had apparently not claimed her as a dependent, and the state office, when asked, allowed the ADC to continue despite the ability of relatives to help, because they had been unsuccessful in enforcing support.⁵⁸ Again, efforts to enforce support only increased family friction and resulted in Ristav losing what little help her children had provided.

Some recipients simply refused to allow family members to be interviewed for support. This occurred in Sarah Harding's case, described earlier, when she refused to tell caseworkers where her daughter, Lilly, lived. Another case involved James and Ellie Stern, who lived with their son, employed at the Saginaw Foundry. They had deeded their home to him in exchange for support. The Sterns did receive a small Old Age Assistance grant, as their daughter-in-law was an invalid and their son had large medical bills to pay.⁵⁹ When the caseworker suggested contacting their daughter to see if she could help, the son refused. He would assume full support, despite the burden, rather than see her investigated. The case was closed, although the father wrote to Governor Murray Van Wagoner, pleading for his grant; his son could not do it all. State officials joined the negotiations when they requested a report from the Welfare Relief Commission, and also suggested a small grant. State officials backed off immediately when the local officials explained the case, and encouraged the family to allow the daughter to be contacted. They continued to refuse, and the case remained closed. State officials deferred to local caseworkers in this instance, as they had direct knowledge of the case and clearly were following agency regulations.

Property ownership was a problem unique to OAA cases. Property transfers to children were relatively common, and did not always remove eligibility, as in the Sterns' case, depending on the income of the children who received the property. The property transfer usually was in exchange for continued housing and financial support. Carl Janetzka, for instance, a native of Czechoslovakia and a U.S. citizen, received a rather small OAA grant—just \$2.50 per month—for clothing and incidentals. He had lived with his son and daughter-in-law for more than a year, since his wife had died, and they got along well. But when the caseworker found that his grant was for “pocket” money, rather than essentials, and also found a deed transfer, she closed the case. Under the terms of the property transfer, it was up to the son to provide for his father, and he had sufficient means to do so.⁶⁰ Janetzka was in the OAA office a few

58. Case C7300548, case history from March 16, 1942, to January 25, 1944.

59. Saginaw County OAA Case A7301106, case history from July 30, 1936; April 14, 1937.

60. Saginaw County OAA, Case A7301375, reel 3005, case history from September 2, 1938; December 4, 1939; and May 1940.

months later, seeking a WPA job, as he needed clothes and did not want to ask his son. The caseworker told him he had already paid for the clothes with his land, and that his son was legally obligated to provide for him.⁶¹

Not all cases involving property transfers and parental support were so amiable. In the Janetzka case, the son did not protest his responsibility to his father, but others did, often exerting extreme stress and hardship on their parents. John Arnold, who had farmed just west of Saginaw, began receiving aid in late 1935 because of ill health, and later was transferred to the OAA program. He lived with his son, George, a farmer. Arnold's small grant covered clothing and medical care, as his son's wife was rather ill and their income was limited. At that time his son did see his father's care as his duty, and continued to provide for him, although the other children did not contribute.⁶² A year later, however, George asked his father to leave. Arnold planned to move in with his daughter, but later moved to Bay City to live with a brother. Prompted by a comment by the brother, the caseworker found that Arnold had deeded his property to his son, and that the terms of the agreement included a life lease, space for a garden, medical care, and burial. After consulting with the state office, the caseworker closed the case, since Arnold had never been entitled to the original grant.⁶³ The son immediately protested, arguing that his father did not know what he was talking about, but was chagrined when the caseworker told him that his father had said nothing about the deed. The tragedy was that the son refused to take Arnold in again, and asked him to leave for good. The caseworker intended to visit the son, but nothing was recorded. Apparently Arnold stayed with his brother until his death, three years later, at the age of ninety.⁶⁴

Property requirements served as a deterrent to the OAA program. A significant number of Wayne County's recipients (nearly 7 percent) withdrew their applications before they were investigated, and the most common reason was a refusal to sign over their property to the state. Many opted to forego aid rather than sign that form. More than half were later approved for aid anyway, but the property requirement likely dissuaded some from applying. The 1947 Recovery Act enabled the state and county to make a claim against a deceased recipient's estate for OAA grants during his or her life.⁶⁵ State officials saw an

61. Case A7301375, case history from August 9, 1940. The man died two years later.

62. Saginaw County OAA, Case A7300761, reel 2998, case history from September 13, 1938.

63. Case A7300761, case history from July 19, 1939; July 25, 1939; September 5, 1939.

64. Case A7300761, case history from September 11, 1939.

65. Public Act 262 of 1947, *Public and Local Acts of the Legislature of the State of Michigan* (Lansing: Franklin, DeKleine Company, 1947), 393–94.

immediate 3 percent increase in closings, which they attributed to the new law.⁶⁶

Caseworkers and policy makers were aware of the difficulties the enforcement of relatives' support had on families. They discussed how best to pursue such support, and some acknowledged that their efforts were "very apt to be harmful to the family relationship."⁶⁷ In 1946 the Michigan Social Welfare Commission recommended rethinking the budgeting of relatives' contributions. Budgets should include only support that was actually received, rather than expected, because "many aged persons are barred from receiving assistance, or are compelled to subsist on reduced payments" due to relatives refusing to fulfill their responsibilities.⁶⁸ But the commission's overall support for the law remained and continued to be used to limit the state's welfare costs.

THE MODEL CASE

Families who conformed to welfare administration's expectations of support earned the respect and compliments of caseworkers, and were often described as model cases for the program. What is most compelling about these trends is that the family structure or marital status of the ADC grant recipient was less significant than the dynamics operating within the family. In fact, the case-file sample shows that married or widowed recipients accounted for about half of all cases in both Saginaw and Wayne counties, even among ADC recipients (see table 6.1). Single women in Wayne County are the smallest group, but 22 percent of Saginaw County's cases were unmarried. The numbers reveal that although married and widowed women, long defined as the most "deserving" recipients of mothers' pensions, comprise more than half of the Saginaw and Wayne ADC pool, nearly half were divorced, deserted, separated, or even never married.⁶⁹ Men also accounted for some recipients in all counties: 36 percent in Marquette County, just 2.3 percent in Saginaw County, and 7 percent in Wayne County. Male recipients were found almost exclusively in the married or widower category in all three counties.

66. *Fifth Biennial Report of the Michigan Social Welfare Commission, July 1946–June 1948* (Lansing: December 1948), 17–20.

67. Field Report by Ella Lee Cowgill, Kent County, June 4, 1943, 1–2, Narrative Field Reports, Archives of Michigan, Box 6, Folder 10.

68. *Fourth Biennial Report*, 2–3.

69. Linda Gordon analyzes the long-term stigma of single mothers of all types in welfare history and also documents the early bias against separated, divorced, deserted, and never-married mothers. ADC's early advocates remained silent about the latter groups of women, but in Michigan they did receive aid. Gordon, *Pitied But Not Entitled*, 26–29, 105, 280–81.

TABLE 6.1
MARITAL STATUS OF ADC RECIPIENTS (%)

County and Program	Divorced or					
	Married	Deserted	Separated	Single	Widow	Widower
Marquette ADC	67	6	9	2	4	0
Saginaw ADC	18	21	21	22	37	1
Wayne ADC	13	31	10	1	42	3

The ADC program was far more inclusive racially in the sample than other studies have shown, particularly for Wayne County. One-third of Wayne County's ADC recipients in the sample were nonwhite, far higher than their share of the population. Saginaw County's sample included 10 percent that involved nonwhite recipients. But the sample also shows that while married and widowed recipients are a significant share, they are not a majority. Forty-four percent of Saginaw's nonwhite ADC recipients were either married or widowed. The rest were divorced, deserted, or separated. Just under 4 percent were unmarried, again the smallest group in the sample. For Wayne County's nonwhite recipient population, 49 percent were widowed, and just a little more than 5 percent were married. Deserted, divorced, and separated recipients accounted for 43 percent of the cases, but unmarried women accounted for just 1 percent.

Family dynamics were central to a caseworker's perception of a case. Regina Schultz, a forty-one-year-old mother of four, began receiving a mothers' pension from Saginaw County in 1931, after her husband died of a heart attack. Schultz's youngest child was two, and she also cared for her elderly mother. She supplemented her mothers' pension with domestic work and sewing, and fortunately had a place to stay in her mother's home. Schultz's case was transferred to ADC in 1936.⁷⁰ She continued to receive ADC until 1947, but despite her lengthy partial dependence on public aid, caseworkers saw this case as a model that justified public social welfare programs.

Caseworkers found Schultz to be an excellent housekeeper and mother. As her children grew older, they began to supplement her ADC grant with part-time jobs. Her siblings also assisted with the care of her mother. Her children never balked at helping support their mother, and she eventually lived with one of her married children. The caseworker who closed the case in July of 1947 wrote, "The situation in this home is one that is really beautiful. The

70. Saginaw County ADC Case C7300182, reel 4534.

children are obviously fond of their mother and she of them. The grandmother is a welcome and loved member of the household.⁷¹ Schultz's case clearly followed the "family ideal" of support: she raised her children to be independent but also accept their familial responsibility, and thus reduced her long-term dependence on the state.

Case-file analysis also shows that race was not the determining factor in model cases. Families who worked together and accepted responsibility for other members were not only white, middle-class widows, as Schultz was. White widows often were portrayed as the most "deserving" of America's poor, but women in other categories could also be a part of this model group. This is not to say that marital status, race, and class were irrelevant, but positive family relations could, in some sense, overcome other factors that might have contributed to a negative view of a case or family. Positive family relations—which followed the white, middle-class model—could result in what caseworkers termed a "high type" case. Divorce, desertion, or illegitimacy did not carry the stigma in 1930s Michigan social work that is found in earlier periods.⁷² Minorities and noncitizens did receive aid from the state social welfare programs in the Depression, although not in proportion to their rates of unemployment. Caseworkers entered homes of Mexicans, African-Americans, and the foreign-born with different expectations than in those of white homes. In a sense, minorities and lower-class whites had to "prove" their worth in ways that other families did not. But some were successful, and exhibiting family relations of harmony or unity was one such way.

Marcella Hernandez of Saginaw was one case in point. A Mexican citizen with one daughter, Hernandez suffered from tuberculosis, the same disease that had killed her husband in 1930. She spent six years in the local sanitarium while her sister cared for her daughter, Beatrice. She was released in May 1938, although not fully cured, and applied for an ADC grant. From the start, she impressed the caseworker "as being exceptionally honest and trustworthy and was most anxious to cooperate." She lived with her sister and brother, who had supported the family with a job at the Saginaw Foundry. He had been laid off, however, prompting her to seek ADC for her daughter.⁷³ The application was approved, and Hernandez received aid for the next six years. The daughter earned excellent citizenship marks, and a caseworker in 1942 referred to her as "a high type Mexican girl."⁷⁴ The mother returned to the hospital briefly in 1944, and again the sister cared for her child. When Hernandez was released,

71. Case C7300182, quote from case history from July 18, 1947.

72. For a discussion of marital status, race, and welfare, see Mink, *The Wages of Motherhood*, 36–41.

73. Saginaw County ADC Case C7300010, case history from May 5, 1938.

74. Saginaw County ADC Case C7300010, case history from January 16, 1942.

her daughter secured a part-time job to help her mother, who could also work only part-time. When Beatrice finished high school in 1947, she planned to secure full-time work and support her mother, whose health still precluded any job more than part-time. The social worker saw the Hernandez case as an exemplar, one that served as "a good advertisement for the ADC program."⁷⁵ The lengthy partial reliance on public support was not a problem, and neither was the woman's race or citizenship status. Rather, it was the family network and feeling of responsibility—illustrated through the sister and brother's willingness to help their sister with child care and financial support, and later her daughter's assumption of part of that responsibility—that made this an ideal case. The ADC program enabled the mother to care for her daughter, who grew up to be a responsible and self-sufficient adult. Beatrice's willingness to support her ill parent precluded other long-term support for her mother at that time.

Rose Moore, a Detroit African-American mother of four, earned the praise of caseworkers for similar reasons. Her husband died in 1930, when her oldest child was eleven. She received a mothers' pension before her case was moved to ADC, whereupon she supplemented that grant with day work. Her home was always neat and clean, and she lived in a "good negro district."⁷⁶ Her children helped with part-time jobs as they grew older. By 1942 her son Fred, who was eighteen, was able to support the family on his income, and the case was closed.⁷⁷

Caseworkers also sometimes helped noncitizens who faced restricted employment opportunities. Hilda Weber was a divorced mother of a two-year-old son when she applied for aid. A native of Germany, she had never obtained citizenship. Her ex-husband did not have a job, and thus she had no support. When she needed a tonsillectomy two years later, the county denied her, telling her to get a job. She would have to pay for child care, and only factory work paid enough. As a noncitizen, however, no one would hire her. Thus she was caught; she needed employment that paid enough to enable her to obtain care for her child, but had limited options because of her lack of citizenship, circumstances that county officials failed to see. At the encouragement of her caseworker, she started the citizenship process, unsure whether she could afford the fees, but she eventually did and obtained factory work, leaving the ADC program.⁷⁸

75. Saginaw County ADC Case C7300010, case history from May 8, 1947.

76. Wayne County ADC Case C8200720, reel 4630.

77. Wayne County ADC Case C8200720, case history from January 10, 1941; September 23, 1942.

78. Saginaw County ADC Case C7300184, reel 4534, case history from July 13, 1939; October 1, 1941; August 20, 1942.

When Juan Gortez, a Mexican citizen and sugar beet worker, was diagnosed with tuberculosis, in 1938, his family began receiving ADC while he recovered in the Saginaw County TB Hospital. His wife, a Mexican-American woman born in Texas, cared for their children on the ADC program and with domestic work until he recovered. But upon his release, he found himself unable to secure employment, as he had no citizenship papers. His caseworker, along with bureau supervisor Dora Heilman, contacted local churches and community members to help with the process. As a result, he became a citizen and found a good factory job that enabled him to support his family.⁷⁹ The family was well liked by the entire community, as evidenced when their home burned down in 1943. All four children died in the fire, and a collection produced one thousand dollars for a new home for the couple. The caseworker recorded: "In spite of all the hardships they endured they held to their purpose to rise above the level of itinerant beet worker and to make a place for themselves as respected citizens." The caseworker classified the family as "high type," again a model Mexican family who "disproved" the stereotypes so common among the agency staff.⁸⁰

In the case of Beulah Beloiz, a son faced marital troubles over the issue of helping his mother and siblings financially. Beulah Beloiz was widowed in 1934. A naturalized citizen, she received a mothers' pension and then ADC for her four children. Josef was the oldest, and, in 1940, had left his wife, in part over disputes about his financial support of his mother, who spoke little English and required Josef's help in order to navigate the language barriers. One caseworker commended the "strong feeling of family responsibility on the part of each to the group as a whole." By October 1940, two daughters were employed, one on WPA and another at Dodge. Josef was divorcing his wife and planned to help as well, and the case was closed.⁸¹

The case of Anthony Benilli is a unique one, in that a father was the recipient of ADC for his children. Left a widower in 1936, Benilli received ADC for his six children, the eldest of whom was born in Italy. His citizenship status made employment difficult for him and his eldest son; he was laid off WPA when rules precluded the hiring of noncitizens.⁸² Benilli also was a man of pride, and therefore did not always tell caseworkers when his children lost jobs; he made do rather than seek a higher grant. Caseworkers reported that

79. Saginaw County ADC Case C7300444, reel 4538, case history from April 3, 1939; January 10, 1940; December 10, 1940.

80. Case C730044, case history summary from August 29, 1947.

81. Wayne County ADC Case C8201050, reel 4633, case history from January 23, 1940; April 2, 1940; October 24, 1940.

82. Wayne County ADC Case C8203480, reel 4650, case history from October 21, 1940.

the children were always willing to help their father and siblings, and commended the cooperative feeling they shared. By 1942, two of the children had steady employment. Benilli told the caseworker they no longer needed aid, although he gave no details, and the case was closed.⁸³

Efforts to enforce support were moderately successful, although many family members quietly did their part with no vocal objection to caseworkers. Fifteen percent left the Marquette County OAA program because they had the means to support themselves, either through family members or through the sale of assets, often a home or farm. Nine percent of Saginaw's OAA recipients left the program when relatives were able to support them, and another 4 percent found other means, often through the sale of assets, to regain their independence from government programs. Just 3 percent of Wayne County recipients, however, were able to leave the program through family support or other reasons. More than a third of the ADC cases in both Saginaw and Wayne counties were closed when a family member—either a parent or child—found employment sufficient to support the family.⁸⁴ Thirteen percent in Saginaw found other sources of income, usually from more than one area, including alimony, part-time work, or a military allotment from a son or other relative. The war years saw an increase in cancellations due to family resources, since the war's employment opportunities enabled more families to support their elderly parents.⁸⁵ In 1940 and 1942, increased family resources accounted for about half of all ADC closures in the state.⁸⁶

Work-relief programs also proved to be an important means for people to leave the direct relief programs. Half of the Van Buren emergency-relief recipients found employment, either in the private sector or on a works program. Twenty-seven percent of the Van Buren cases listed private employment as the reason for closing the case; in one case a son secured a job to support the family. Another 3 percent found "unsteady" employment, but since their case was not reopened, someone in the family likely was able to find full-time work. Sixteen percent received WPA assignments, and in two of those cases it was for a son in the household. Three percent received assignments on a National

83. Wayne County ADC Case C8203480, case history from June 24, 1942.

84. In Saginaw, 35 percent of the cases listed private employment as the reason for closing the case. Employment of children accounted for 15 percent, employment of the mother comprised another 15 percent, and in 5 percent of the cases a husband was again able to work. For Wayne County, mothers were employed in 8 percent of the cases while fathers accounted for 4.4 percent. Children's employment resulted in closure in 22 percent of the cases.

85. *Second Biennial Report, Michigan Social Welfare Commission, July 1940–June 1942* (Lansing: December 1942), 35.

86. *First Biennial Report, Michigan Social Welfare Commission, July 1938–June 1940* (Lansing: December 1940), 40; *Second Biennial Report*, 39.

Youth Administration project (two were students), and one case included a CCC assignment for a son. The works programs proved critical for Van Buren residents, where 23 percent were able to leave the direct-relief rolls to secure some type of public work. For those recipients, work relief provided interim employment until a job could be found in the private sector.

The categorical-aid programs of the Social Security Act also were important to a significant portion of Van Buren's relief population. Twenty-seven percent of the cases analyzed qualified for either OAA or ADC. The other 3 percent received ADC (one moved as well), and two others likely received ADC, although it is not clear from the record. Thus about a quarter of the cases continued to receive aid under the Social Security Act, indicative of the entrenched welfare needs that became so evident during the Depression years.

Studies of ADC often overshadow the OAA program, when the latter served far more Americans than ADC until the mid-1950s and was a critical force in reducing extreme poverty among the elderly. Nationally, more than 2 million elderly received OAA in 1940, while just 131,000 received social security benefits. OAA caseloads were twice that of ADC in 1940, and "even as late as 1949, Old Age Assistance beneficiaries outnumbered those of Social Security by a third—2.49 to 1.67 million."⁸⁷ Long waiting periods for applicants was the norm in the first years of the program. Michigan had a backlog of 32,000 cases in 1940 with a nineteen-month waiting period; by 1942 the backlog was just 3,151.⁸⁸ By 1946, OAA served more than a quarter of all Michigan residents above the age of sixty-five, and 22 percent two years later.⁸⁹ The OAA caseload peaked in Michigan at 100,000 cases in September 1950; that same year the ADC caseload was just over 27,000.⁹⁰

The records of the other three counties show stark differences in the two categorical-aid programs. Most OAA recipients received governmental help for the remainder of their lives. The chief reason for closing an OAA case was the death of a recipient: this was true in two-thirds of the Marquette County cases, 80 percent of the Saginaw cases, and 82 percent of Wayne County cases. Another 18 percent of Marquette County's clients were institutionalized in

87. Katz, *The Price of Citizenship*, 4–5.

88. *Second Biennial Report, Michigan Social Welfare Commission, July 1940–1942* (Lansing: December 1942), 33; *Third Biennial Report, Michigan Social Welfare Commission, July 1942–1944* (Lansing: December 1944), 7–8.

89. *Fourth Biennial Report, Michigan Social Welfare Commission, July 1944–1946* (Lansing: December 1946), 20; *Sixth Biennial Report, Michigan Social Welfare Commission, July 1948–1950* (Lansing: December 1950), 11.

90. *Seventh Biennial Report, Michigan Social Welfare Commission, July 1948–June 1950* (Lansing: December 1950), 34–35, 47.

a hospital until their deaths, while 7 percent in Saginaw and 5.3 percent in Wayne County shared that fate. Statewide, death prompted the closure of at least half of the OAA caseload, and those numbers climbed to about 65 percent by the 1950s.⁹¹

UNSUITABILITY

Part of enforcing family responsibility was ensuring an appropriate environment for children, a key goal of the ADC program, which called for a "suitable home with reasonable standards of care and health," but it was up to local agencies to establish and enforce those standards. The 1938 program manual advised measuring the existing standards against available options: "This does not mean contentment with low living standards, but measurement in terms of alternatives."⁹² Michigan's suitable-home clause was approved by the Social Welfare Commission on April 22, 1940. An unsuitable home was defined as one in which children suffered from "indifference, ill health," or a lack of material care (food, clothing, medical care, etc.). Parents were to see that their children attended school and were to provide a positive "example of socially desirable behavior." They were also to make sure children were loved and wanted, and that they enjoyed both security and respect.⁹³

Unsuitability was not an issue in a lot of cases; less than 3 percent of the Saginaw cases and 3.4 percent of Wayne's cases resulted in an unsuitable-home finding or the removal of children, either because of neglect or delinquency. The low numbers of cases closed for unsuitability is somewhat surprising, as the application of such regulations to police recipients is found in studies of later periods.⁹⁴ This evidence points to a period in the program when the suitable-home provision was simply used less in the closure of cases. This observation does not mean, however, that caseworkers were not concerned with issues of morality. Moral issues—including promiscuity, prostitution, unmar-

91. *First Biennial Report*, 35; *Second Biennial Report*, 35; *Third Biennial Report*, 11; *Tenth Biennial Report*, *Michigan Social Welfare Commission, July 1956–1958* (Lansing: December 1958), 30.

92. *A Manual for Aid to Dependent Children* (Lansing: Michigan State Emergency Welfare Relief Commission, 1938), 5.

93. Minutes of State Social Welfare Commission, Box 1, Folder 1, April 22, 1940, Archives of Michigan.

94. Scholars link the increased use of suitable-home provisions to the growing number of nonwhite and nonwidowed recipients in the program in the 1950s and 1960s. Winifred Bell, *Aid to Dependent Children* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1965), 111–23; Mittelstadt, *From Welfare to Workfare*, 46, 86–87.

ried cohabitation, and alcohol use—appeared in 4.4 percent of Saginaw’s cases, 18 percent of Marquette’s cases, and 9 percent of Wayne County’s sample. Recipients both resented and denied many charges about morals issues, and experienced heightened inspection and attention, but few had their respective ADC cases closed in this period.

The majority of morals concerns were related to sexuality. Recipients were often accused of cohabitation; a man was living in the house, and thus was suspected of providing economic support. Some recipients were accused of promiscuous behavior, particularly if they had illegitimate children while on ADC, and a few cases involved prostitution. Alcohol was also an issue, although often it was connected to another problem, as was neglect. Several of the recipients also were labeled “feeble-minded” or of “low intelligence.” Both black and white recipients endured such scrutiny, although black women did so in greater proportion than their share of the caseload. African-Americans assumed 35 percent of all morals cases in Wayne County, and more than 20 percent in Saginaw County.

Gossip was inextricably linked to the investigation of morals in these cases. Caseworkers often relied on reports from neighbors, landlords, and other family members, in addition to their own surveillance. While few recipients lost aid because of such accusations, they did face increased scrutiny. Recipients tired of investigators’ intrusions and investigations, and many did not believe that their relief status warranted such intrusion. Jane Mansfield, an African-American widow in Detroit, was a model recipient in her first years with the agency, but later came under intense investigation. She told the caseworker in 1939 that she preferred not to work—although she had done day work in the past to supplement her mothers’ pension—because her children needed her at home (the youngest was ten). The caseworker reported that the home was suitable and that “no complaint has been received by our office.”⁹⁵ Complaints began after Mansfield’s stepson left for the military. Neighbors reported alcohol use and loud parties and said a man, employed at Ford Motor Company, was living with her. The caseworker became concerned about the home’s suitability and the woman’s honesty, despite the nine years of no complaints with the mothers’ pension program and no corroboration of the accusations. Mansfield denied the allegations, and told the caseworker she had already gone through this with the mothers’ pension department as well. She “talked at length concerning the fact that her case had been thoroughly investigated, why she did not know, and she was definitely tired of it.” She decided to seek private employment, and told the caseworker that if the agency wanted to close

95. Wayne County ADC Case C8200569, case history from July 16, 1940.

the case, that was fine with her. Less than two weeks later, in September 1943, Mansfield called the office to report that she was employed at Ford Motor Company in defense work, earning eighty-five cents per hour, and wanted her case closed.⁹⁶

But rigorous inquiry like this was uneven. The accusation of a male living in a home did not guarantee such invasion. A Saginaw caseworker received a report of a man living with Sally Reynolds in 1938, but accepted that it was likely a rumor started by her estranged husband. Three years later she had a male roomer and his son living with her. The roomer paid rent, they shared child-care responsibilities, and he helped with home repairs. But again, caseworkers raised no questions about his status. The case was closed at Reynolds's request when she secured employment at a local factory. She worked days, and the roomer worked nights.⁹⁷ Other than the early report, which Reynolds attributed to her estranged husband, the case record has no hint of suspicion regarding the relationship. The case of Beulah Shoren, who was separated from her husband, was similar. Caseworkers found her relationship with her roomer questionable at one point, but did not pursue it.⁹⁸ Both women were white, as opposed to Jane Mansfield, but it is hard to know if race was a decisive factor, given the limited sample.

At times caseworkers sought to avoid labeling some closures an unsuitable home, particularly if another reason existed. Local officials actually did not favor those laws in many instances, as recipients denied or cut off from ADC had to turn to local relief, which did not receive federal funds. Fiscal localism, and a desire to minimize the obligations to use local funds, again appears. Local officials also tended to see other alternatives, including removal of children from homes, as expensive and not always warranted.⁹⁹ Caseworkers, therefore, may have sought to appease these officials by avoiding such classifications. In one Wayne County case, caseworkers did not tell the mother the closure was for unsuitability, "given her [mental] instability."¹⁰⁰ At times,

96. Wayne County ADC Case C8200569, case history April 16, 1943; April 28, 1943; April 30, 1943; September 17, 1943; September 30, 1943.

97. Saginaw County ADC Case C7300054, case history March 21, 1939; February 29, 1940; October 8, 1941; March 4, 1943.

98. Saginaw County ADC Case C7300135, case history from January 16, 1940.

99. See *Proceedings of the Annual Convention of State Association of County Social Welfare Boards and State Association of Supervisors*, 1946, 15–26. A 1962 law required counties to provide direct relief when ADC was denied or ended because of an unsuitable home, but the law had little effect on the direct-relief caseloads. *Thirteenth Biennial Report, Michigan Social Welfare Commission, July 1962–June 1964* (Lansing: December 1964), 17; Public Act 195 of 1962, *Public and Local Acts of the Legislature of the State of Michigan* (Lansing: Speaker-Hines and Thomas, Inc., 1963), 432.

100. Wayne County ADC Case C8204271, case history from February 23, 1942.

they simply avoided the label for reasons specific to the case. Gossip alleged that Susan Morrow, an African-American recipient in Saginaw, was living with a man employed at a local factory, a situation confirmed by the man. Caseworkers found that the man had listed Morrow as a dependent on his draft application, and closed Morrow's case because of sufficient income.¹⁰¹ Another Saginaw case involved Erin Hartz, a white mother of two children who was unmarried. The probate court record criticized the lack of training and guidance Hartz had given her children, but Hartz was approved for an ADC grant in part because of a lack of alternatives. Caseworkers had reports of men in the house and neglect of the children, and Hartz became pregnant again. A psychiatric evaluation said she had "no moral sense," and she also contracted gonorrhea. The case team—including the casework supervisor, Associated Charities staff, and probate court officials—agreed that the home was in no way suitable. Hartz eventually agreed to be sterilized after the child's birth, and to have her children placed, and the case closed. The reason listed, however, was not an unsuitable home, but "receipt of other public or private aid."¹⁰²

To caseworkers, ADC was one of several options for a child's care, and, in some cases, the preferred one, because the family's status as ADC recipients allowed caseworkers to supervise the household beyond its financial needs. Such was the case for James Bellwood, one of the few fathers in the ADC records. A resident of Saginaw and father of six, he had one son living with him in 1939. He worked irregularly due to arthritis and a nervous disorder, which doctors attributed to his service in World War I. Neighbors complained of his drinking and violent behavior. He had a housekeeper, who also received ADC for her daughter, to help with his son's care, and they planned to marry once her divorce was finalized. Caseworkers were concerned with the safety of both children in the home, but did not want to close the case because of unsuitability without an alternate plan for the children. A married daughter, who was caring for two of her older sisters, agreed to take the son into her home, but before that could occur, Bellwood received a veteran's pension and asked that his case be closed.¹⁰³ Caseworkers clearly did not think the home was suitable, but with the removal of Bellwood's financial need, they lost the ability to monitor the case. They did not officially close the case, in the hope

101. Saginaw County Case C7300379, case history from January 8, 1941; March 5, 1942; March 9, 1942; March 12, 1942.

102. Saginaw County ADC Case C7300630, case history from February 26, 1940; October 4, 1940; October 15, 1940; November 14, 1940; November 12, 1940; November 19, 1940.

103. Saginaw County ADC Case C7300017, case history from April 14, 1939; May 13, 1939; February 16, 1940; March 29, 1940.

that they could still have some influence, but Bellwood then retrieved his daughter from the older daughter's home. While caseworkers could not prevent this, they referred the matter to the probate court. What makes this case interesting is that caseworkers clearly ignored the "woman in the house," the housekeeper. Their relationship was not simply employer and housekeeper, given their intention to marry, but the caseworkers did not even allude to it. This could point to the gender double standard, in what they expected of their female recipients in contrast to the men, whose numbers were much smaller. The safety of the children in the house likely overrode the moral concerns, in part because the housekeeper provided Daniel's care, serving as a buffer between him and his father. Again, no better alternative existed, in the eyes of caseworkers, who thus adjusted their expectations.

Trying to provide what was best for the child within ADC guidelines emerges in another Saginaw County case. Rose Garner was a long-term recipient about whom caseworkers had very little positive to say. They criticized the family's intelligence, labeling most "feeble-minded," and had numerous conflicts with the older son, Warner, about his financial contributions to the family. Anonymous letters told caseworkers of men living in the home and unexplained luxuries not possible on the family's reported income. Several of the children had conflicts with the law, and more than one spent time in juvenile detention homes. Budget cuts, however, prevented the court from removing the children entirely as long as ADC was allowed. The case was the subject of a staff conference, but caseworkers agreed that ending ADC with no other plan was not in the children's interest, since the receipt of ADC allowed caseworkers to supervise the family. Although caseworkers clearly believed the home was unsuitable, the ADC grant continued.¹⁰⁴

Recipients could protest decisions by the agency via requesting a fair hearing, which involved a state field representative, as well as the county administrator, case supervisor, and caseworkers.¹⁰⁵ A transcript of the hearing was then sent to the state office, which either upheld or reversed the agency's action. Generally a copy of the case history was also enclosed—a vivid example of when caseworkers were under scrutiny for their handling of a case. Very few recipients in the sample requested fair hearings: less than 1 percent in both Saginaw and Wayne counties, and none in the Marquette County sample. Recipients requesting one of the three hearings in the Wayne sample, and one of the five in Saginaw County, withdrew their respective requests before a hearing was held. What made the fair hearings unique were both the chance

104. Case C7300003, case history dated February 8, 1940; February 23, 1940; April 9, 1940; April 11, 1940; May 1, 1940; May 2, 1940.

105. *A Manual for Aid to Dependent Children*, 16.

for the recipient's view to be recorded unfiltered through the caseworker—the transcript was to be verbatim—and the type of evidence considered. Weight was generally given to either direct observations of caseworkers or evidence presented by either the courts or the police; gossip from neighbors, landlords, or family members was not given the credence it might have been in an investigation.

The sample is small enough to render broad generalizations difficult, but the reasons for the hearings are illuminating. All three cases in Wayne County were categorized as unsuitable homes, while just one of five in Saginaw County dealt with an unsuitable home. Two of the three in Wayne involved black women, while just one of the five in Saginaw was black, but that case also involved issues of morality and unsuitability. The more common reason in Saginaw was budgetary; either recipients contested the budget allotted them or disputed the closure of cases based on sufficient income. Here the fair-hearing process intersects with the enforcement of family support. Recipients used the fair hearing, at times, to contest the responsibility of their children to support the family.¹⁰⁶

Questions of morality were central to the fair hearings in Wayne County. The case involving the withdrawn request focused on the mental stability of the mother, who was deemed of “low intelligence.” Caseworkers believed her mental health precluded her employment, and the case record documents caseworkers’ concerns about the son’s lack of attendance at school and the care his mother provided. The case was closed and referred to the DPW with a suggestion to remove the child.¹⁰⁷

Court findings concerning accusations of running a house of prostitution proved key in the state’s validation of the agency’s closure in the case of Tammy Dunbar, an African-American. The Department of Public Welfare record contains several references to such accusations, although the ADC caseworker in this instance noted that he had seen nothing to indicate prostitution. A court case involving a paternity suit filed by a woman who said she had conceived the child in that house prompted the case closure. Again, the caseworker wrote that he had seen nothing, and that Dunbar denied the allegations, but the case was nevertheless closed. The state based its decision on the court record, finding the court testimony compelling, despite the caseworker’s comments. Dunbar may have been guilty, but also may have been

106. A 1954 law allowed recipients to request a review, through the probate court, of the contributions expected of relatives. The contribution would not be budgeted until the court review was complete. *Eighth Biennial Report, Michigan Social Welfare Commission, July 1952–June 1954* (Lansing: December 1954), 15.

107. Wayne County ADC Case C8204271, case history from May 31, 1940; February 23, 1940; April 20, 1942.

the victim of a racist court system, which provided the basis for the closure of her case.¹⁰⁸

Carol Barnes, an African-American ADC grant recipient in Saginaw, endured similar charges and also had her case closed because of unsuitability. In her case, the testimony of a black police officer was central to the state's decision. The officer believed she was running a "sporting house" and testified that the red light and jukebox in her apartment were evidence enough. According to the caseworker, Barnes had also posed as the wife of her boyfriend on more than one occasion. The state supervisor criticized much of the information presented by the caseworkers, finding it largely hearsay, circumstantial in nature, but he did find the police officer's "evidence" compelling. He upheld the agency's decision.¹⁰⁹

The alternate discourse of welfare emerges vividly in these cases. Labeled immoral and unsuitable by caseworkers, these women saw themselves in a different light. Dunbar and Barnes likely were engaging in what Victoria Wolcott describes as illicit leisure businesses, which included liquor trafficking, buffet flats, and houses of prostitution. (Barnes had served jail time in Georgia for alcohol violations before moving to Michigan.)¹¹⁰ But Wolcott argues that such businesses were a means to fight the low wages and high rents endured by black women; Dunbar and Barnes rejected day work, the most common occupation open to black women, and sought different and more lucrative means to support their children. Such entrepreneurial efforts, however, contradicted the goals of respectability set forth by black reformers, including the Detroit Urban League, as well as by the public welfare system.¹¹¹ Thus both women ultimately lost their aid.

Another fair hearing involving Martha White, also a black recipient, resulted in the reversal of the agency's decision. Caseworkers asserted that White had hidden income and also had represented herself as the wife of her boyfriend on more than one occasion, once to an agency employee. The hearing transcript unfortunately did not survive, so we do not know the basis for the state's reversal, but clearly they found some error in the county agency's policy. White was reinstated to the ADC program, and no further morality issues appear in the record.¹¹² In this instance, she pushed her case and won.

108. Wayne County ADC Case C8210470. Virginia Wolcott documents the racist bias in the court and police system in Detroit in the interwar period. Wolcott, *Remaking Respectability*, 103–5.

109. Saginaw County ADC Case C7300312, case history from January 8, 1942; January 15, 1942; hearing transcript.

110. Saginaw County ADC Case C7300312, case history from March 7, 1940.

111. Wolcott, chapter 3, "The Informal Economy, Leisure Workers, and Economic Nationalism in the 1920s."

112. Wayne County ADC Case C8205611.

Financial issues were at the center of some hearings, and while not all recipients were reinstated, their suits did prompt some behind-the-scenes action. The effects of the responsible-relative clause, and the flexibility within that policy, appear in Rachel Wood's case. When Wood's son, Donald, quit the WPA, in early 1939, caseworkers removed him from the family budget and reduced the grant; this decision was the final straw for the Saginaw widow, who was already upset at the small grant she was receiving, and blamed her son's convictions for stealing on the agency's expectations that he support the family.¹¹³ Caseworkers did allow Donald to keep twelve dollars of his monthly fifty-dollar WPA wage, which contrasted the usual practice of having the entire salary go to the family. Because of the son's history, the caseworker clearly felt this might appease him. It did not, and he came to the office to confront the caseworker. His mother backed him; it was not Donald's responsibility, she contended, to support the other children, three of whom were only his half siblings. The caseworker suggested that she request a fair hearing, and she did.¹¹⁴ The state agency upheld the budget decision, and Wood continued to receive ADC. But in the hearing summary—although not in the letter to Wood—Philip Schafer, director of social services, questioned the caseworker's attitude and handling of the case. He directed the field representative to look into the situation "relative to the adequacy of this worker to deal with problem cases." Although it did Wood no good in her situation, she did succeed in raising questions about the caseworker's actions. Unfortunately, Wood died a year later from a severe heart attack, at the age of forty-five, and her children became wards of the state, as no relatives could take them.¹¹⁵

Recipients sought to maintain an active role in the planning of their cases. They spoke out when they felt wronged, and often rejected the caseworker's or the agency's assessment of their need, or lack of it. They did not see themselves as dependents spreading their disease in American society, and many believed that their own circumstances or behavior entitled them to state aid. While they exhibited a range of reactions to the relief process, and put forth a variety of justifications for aid, they were agents in that process. They took full advantage of new avenues of appeals, including petitioning officials in state and federal agencies. The recipients' narratives of relief contrast markedly with the picture painted by local officials, a situation described in the next chapter. Local officials depicted state and federal regulations, including the hiring of

113. Saginaw County ADC Case C7300354.

114. Saginaw County ADC Case C7300354, case history from February 21, 1939; March 14, 1939.

115. Saginaw County ADC Case C7300354. Hearing summary dated May 16, 1939; case history from May 27, 1940.

professional social workers, as the key problems with emergency relief; they were inefficient and fostered dependence, these officials maintained. County supervisors, superintendents of the poor, and other proponents of home rule saw themselves as the last defense against a monster centralized government intent on subverting the democratic process and local autonomy. Only in defeating the monster, in their eyes, could home rule advocates prevent the spread of dependence, and they mobilized effectively in the late 1930s to do just that.