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978-0-521-88957-5 - The Limits of Voluntarism: Charity and Welfare from the New Deal through the Great Society

Andrew J. F. Morris

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The Limits of Voluntarism

The Depression and the New Deal forced charities into a new relationship with public welfare. After opposing public “relief” for a generation, charities embraced it in the 1930s as a means to save a crippled voluntary sector from collapse. Welfare was to be delivered by public institutions, which allowed charities to offer and promote specialized therapeutic services such as marriage counseling – a popular commodity in postwar America. But as Andrew Morris shows, these new alignments were never entirely stable. In the 1950s, charities’ ambiguous relationship with welfare drove them to aid in efforts to promote welfare reform by modeling new techniques for dealing with “multiproblem families.” The War on Poverty, changes in federal social service policy, and the slow growth of voluntary fundraising in the late 1960s undermined the New Deal division of labor and offered charities the chance to deliver public services – the paradigm at the heart of current debates on public funding of religious nonprofits.

Andrew J. F. Morris is an assistant professor in the Department of History at Union College in Schenectady, New York. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Virginia, where he received a Miller Center Fellowship in National Politics. He has published several articles, including “The Voluntary Sector’s War on Poverty,” winner in 2006 of the Ellis Hawley Award from the *Journal of Policy History* for best article by a junior scholar.

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The Limits of Voluntarism

*Charity and Welfare from the
New Deal through the Great Society*

ANDREW J. F. MORRIS

Union College



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In 1933, grappling with the challenges of the Great Depression, President Roosevelt's New Deal extended a public safety net under many of the unemployed and destitute. A year later, Linton Swift of the Family Welfare Association of America (FWAA) declared "there is now a general recognition of the primary responsibility of local, state and national government for the relief of unemployment and similar types of need." Swift might have seemed an unlikely promoter of the welfare state, for the FWAA served as an umbrella organization of hundreds of local voluntary social service agencies across the United States, many of which decades earlier had declared opposition to public "relief" of poverty. But these charities had also experienced the crushing demand of hundreds of thousands of unemployed people during the early Depression, when communities attempted, and ultimately failed, to meet unprecedented need with voluntary resources. Now Swift called for the recognition of "New Alignments": the public sector would provide the financial safety net, and the voluntary sector would push on to "meet human needs not yet recognized by a majority of the public as vital or meriting community support."¹

This book explores how Swift's New Alignments functioned as a guide for charity to reconcile itself to the welfare state. In the wake of the Great Depression, many charities formed a new relationship with nascent welfare programs that has been overlooked by most historians and social scientists. Many charities came to depend on welfare – not for funding, but for taking responsibility for the poor. Voluntary organizations accepted a more modest

¹ Linton Swift, *New Alignments between Public and Private Agencies in a Community Family Welfare and Relief Program* (New York: Family Welfare Association of America, 1934), 2, 12.

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role in social provision, and many found it to their advantage, at least initially. They crafted a new voluntary sector based on the provision of specialized, professional services that complemented the material provision of the public sector. This, in turn, led them to become defenders of the welfare programs that helped make it possible for them to offer these new services. The instability and tensions of this regime, which lasted roughly from the New Deal through the Great Society, contributed to the willingness of established charities to contemplate direct support from government in the 1960s and 1970s.

At the same time, the voluntary sector retained influence disproportionate to its financial significance throughout the postwar period. Voluntary agencies helped popularize services such as marriage and family counseling and in general contributed to the spread of a “culture of therapy” in the 1940s and 1950s.² These therapeutic interventions provided models for both leaders in voluntary social welfare planning organizations as well as welfare policy makers to address emerging public policy problems – in particular, that of the “multiproblem” family, which absorbed disproportionate social welfare dollars, including public assistance programs such as Aid to Dependent Children (ADC). Such work in the voluntary sector fed directly into the Kennedy administration’s efforts to reform ADC for the first time since 1935.

The link between voluntary agencies and welfare reform is one that resonates in the early twenty-first century. The growing attention to voluntarism in the same period in which the New Deal era commitment to welfare ended was no accident – most debates over major expansions or retrenchment of American social welfare have invoked voluntarism of one form or another. In establishing the Office of Private Sector Initiatives in 1981 at the same time as he proposed massive social service spending cuts, President Ronald Reagan argued, “The size of the Federal budget is not an appropriate barometer of social conscience or charitable concern.” He called instead for a resurgence of voluntarism, claiming, “That energy will accomplish far, far more than government programs ever could.”³ The intellectual justification for Reagan’s argument gained strength as advocates reached back into history to gather examples of morally stringent charities, offered as an

² This phrase is most closely associated with the work of Philip Rieff and Christopher Lasch; see Philip Rieff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of Faith after Freud* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966); Christopher Lasch, *Haven in a Heartless World: The Family Besieged* (New York: Basic Books, 1977); and Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminished Expectations* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1979).

³ Ronald Reagan, “Speech to the National Alliance of Business, October 5, 1981,” *The Public Papers of President Ronald W. Reagan*, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library. www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1981/100581a.htm.

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antidote to permissive welfare policies.⁴ The “charitable choice” provisions of the 1996 act that terminated the Aid to Families with Dependent Children public assistance program embraced the contrast of charity to welfare, an idea that was extended during the presidency of George W. Bush.⁵

While there is much to celebrate about the charitable acts of individuals and organizations, it may be useful to remind ourselves of the limits of voluntarism as well – revealed most acutely during the economic collapse of the Great Depression. This most spectacular example of what political scientist Lester Salamon calls “voluntary failure” left a searing impression on a generation of voluntary and public sector leaders and set the stage for Swift’s “New Alignments” – where private agencies accepted the legitimacy of public institutions and welcomed the public sector’s assumption of responsibility for the economically deprived, while at the same time drawing clear boundaries between the reach of a (chastened) voluntary sector and the domain of public policy.⁶

What this study reveals is a dramatic period when voluntary agencies went from being opponents of many forms of public welfare to being supporters. Rather than seeing the expansion of welfare as zero sum, where voluntary agencies were the losers, many charities viewed increasing public responsibility, particularly for maintaining a financial safety net, as a relief. The national leadership of a variety of voluntary agencies quickly became part of a liberal coalition to strengthen public assistance and other public social programs, and they urged their local agencies to do the same. Although their support for the public sector was rarely full throated, charities became constituents for the

⁴ Marvin Olasky, *The Tragedy of American Compassion* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1992); also see the praise for Octavia Hill, one of the founders of the London Charity Organization Society, by Amy Sherman, a prominent advocate of the superiority of “faith-based” social services: Amy Sherman, “Learning Charity from an Exemplar,” *Religion and Liberty* 7 (May/June 1997), 11–12. See Stephen Pimpare, *The New Victorians: Poverty, Politics and Propaganda in Two Gilded Ages* (New York: New Press, 2004), on contemporary welfare critics’ fascination with the nineteenth century.

⁵ Laura S. Jensen, “The Rhetorical Dimensions of Charitable Choice: Causal Stories, Problem Definition, and Policy Outcomes,” paper presented at the 2002 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Boston, available online at http://ccr.urbancenter.iupui.edu/findings_nr.htm; Ann Ferris, Richard Nathan, and David Wright, *The Expanding Administrative Presidency: George W. Bush and the Faith-Based Initiative* (Albany, NY: Rockefeller Institute of Government, 2004).

⁶ Lester Salamon, *Partners in Public Service: Government-Nonprofit Relations in the Modern Welfare State* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 44–5. The collapse of charity during the Great Depression has been widely chronicled; a convenient review with an eye toward current debates is Ellis Hawley, “Herbert Hoover, Associationism, and the Great Depression Relief Crisis of 1930–1933,” in Donald Critchlow and Charles Parker, eds., *With Us Always: A History of Private Charity and Public Welfare* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998), 211–40.

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maintenance of government welfare programs – in a period *before* most were receiving contracts from those programs, as would be the case by the 1970s. Charities remembered the failures of the voluntaristic response to the Depression and feared welfare's opponents would try to shift responsibility back to the voluntary sector, and thus became defenders of the welfare state. By understanding the role of the voluntary sector in this period, we gain new insight into the politics of welfare.

Historical scholarship has done little to shed light on this period. Historians and historically minded social scientists have criticized the overly romantic image of nineteenth-century charity used in contemporary debates.⁷ They have pointed out that the voluntary associations in this period were often not as small scale and independent of government as they have been assumed to be.⁸ But most work by historians on the voluntary sector focuses on the period before the New Deal.⁹ The collapse of voluntary institutions during the Great Depression and the rise of the federal welfare programs under the New Deal are rightly seen as watersheds in the relationship between charity and welfare. The interest of most historians of the postwar period has been drawn to the contour and limits of postwar public social policy and the reasons why the United States never fully realized a public welfare state similar to that of other industrialized democracies. This is a logical choice; voluntary social welfare expenditures in the United States

⁷ David Hammack, "Review of Marvin Olasky's *The Tragedy of American Compassion*," *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 25 (June 1996): 259–68.

⁸ Theda Skocpol, "The Tocqueville Problem: Civic Engagement in American Democracy," *Social Science History* 21 (Winter 1997): 455–79.

⁹ Prominent examples, from a range of perspectives, include Paul Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order, 1820–1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973); Robert Bremner, *American Philanthropy* (Chicago IL: University of Chicago Press, 1960); Clarke Chambers, *Seedtime of Reform: American Social Service and Social Action, 1918–1933* (Minneapolis MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1963); Elizabeth Clemens, "Lineages of the Rube Goldberg State: Building and Blurring Public Programs, 1900–1940," in Ian Shapiro, Stephen Skowronek, and Daniel Gavin, eds., *Rethinking Political Institutions: The Art of the State* (New York: New York University Press, 2006): 187–215; Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919–1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Matthew Crenson, *Building the Invisible Orphanage: A Prehistory of the American Welfare System* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998); Allen Davis, *Spearheads for Reform: Social Settlements and the Progressive Movement, 1890–1914* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967); Lori Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics and Class in the Nineteenth Century City* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990); Linda Gordon, "Black and White Visions of Welfare: Women's Welfare Activism, 1890–1945," *Journal of American History* 78 (Sept. 1991): 559–90; Peter Mandler, ed., *The Uses of Charity: The Poor on Relief in the Nineteenth Century Metropolis* (Philadelphia PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990); Elna Green, *This Business of Relief: Confronting Southern Poverty in a Southern City, 1740–1940* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2003).

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pale in comparison to what the public sector provided from the 1930s onward. Because of the scale of public programs, and the sympathies of many chroniclers of the welfare state toward increasing public social provision, questions about the voluntary sector seem less significant.¹⁰

The aim of this book is to reintegrate the history of the voluntary sector into the history of the welfare regime framed by the New Deal and Great Society.¹¹ It shares a similar inspiration to recent work on the “mixed” welfare state. Historians and political scientists dissatisfied with the reigning explanations of the limited role that public benefits appear to play in the United States have emphasized the importance of the private sector in providing pension and health care benefits. In addition, they have shown how these putatively private sector benefits have benefited from and sometimes depended on the existence of public sector programs such as Social Security.¹²

¹⁰ Representative examples include Mimi Abramovitz, *Regulating The Lives of Women: Social Welfare Policy from Colonial Times to the Present* (Boston MA: South End Press, 1996); Edward Berkowitz, *America's Welfare State: From Roosevelt to Reagan* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991); James Patterson, *America's Struggle against Poverty in the Twentieth Century*, rev. ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000). An important exception is Jennifer Mittelstadt, *From Welfare to Workfare: The Unintended Consequences of Liberal Reform* (Chapel Hill NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), whose analysis of midcentury welfare reform efforts, although not centered on voluntary institutions, nonetheless includes substantial discussion of the role of several influential voluntary sector organizations and actors in this process. Peter Dobkin Hall, *Inventing the Nonprofit Sector* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), is a pioneering work that examines the history of nonprofits and nonprofit research, although his discussion of midcentury voluntarism focuses primarily on large-scale philanthropic foundations. Lawrence J. Friedman, “Philanthropy in America: Historicism and Its Discontents,” in Lawrence J. Friedman and Mark McGarvie, eds., *Charity, Philanthropy, and Civility in American History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 1–10, reflects on other reasons for the neglect by historians of the broad field of philanthropy.

¹¹ I have appropriated the term “welfare regime,” describing the set of interrelated, public and private social welfare systems, from Jacob Hacker, *The Divided Welfare State: The Battle over Public and Private Social Benefits in the United States* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), and Gösta Epsing-Andersen, *Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990).

¹² The works I have relied on most heavily include Beth Stevens, “Blurring the Boundaries: How the Federal Government Has Influenced Welfare Benefits in the Private Sector,” in Margaret Weir, Ann Shola Orloff, and Theda Skocpol, eds., *The Politics of Social Policy in the United States*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), 123–48; Stevens, “Labor Unions, Employee Benefits, and the Privatization of the American Welfare State,” *Journal of Policy History* 2, no. 3 (1990): 233–260; Sanford Jacoby, *Modern Manors: Welfare Capitalism since the New Deal* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997); Marie Gottschalk, *The Shadow Welfare State: Labor, Business, and the Politics of Health Care in the United States* (Ithaca, NY: ILR Press, 2000); Hacker, *The Divided Welfare State*; Jennifer Klein, *For All These Rights: Business, Labor, and the Shaping of America's Public-Private Welfare State* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003).

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Here too, however, scholars have neglected the voluntary sector. As with other historians of the welfare state, research has largely been a result of following the money – voluntary spending on social services is a mere fraction of spending in these other domains of social welfare.¹³

Social scientists, by contrast, have developed a rich literature on contemporary voluntarism, but its focus is almost exclusively on developments since the 1970s. The political prominence given the voluntary sector, starting with President Reagan, explains some of this interest.¹⁴ It is also a result of the rise of “purchase of service” in this period, that is, government contracting with nonprofit organizations to provide services or goods to clients of public programs. Consequently, one of the central questions of social science scholarship has been the impact of public funding on the independence and flexibility long held to be the hallmarks of the voluntary sector.¹⁵ This focus has been accentuated by debates about the constitutionality of funding religious charities through charitable choice programs.¹⁶

However, this has left us with a period between the New Deal up until relatively recently in which the relationship between the voluntary sector and public welfare has gone largely unexamined. Although contemporary nonprofits are now thoroughly entangled with public programs, this was atypical of relations between charities and welfare in the three decades following the expansion of federally funded welfare

¹³ Hacker, *The Divided Welfare State*, 344.

¹⁴ Lester M. Salamon and Alan J. Abramson, *The Federal Budget and the Nonprofit Sector: Implications of the Reagan Budget Proposals* (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 1981); Lester Salamon, *Partners in Public Service: Government-Nonprofit Relations in the Modern Welfare State* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).

¹⁵ Steven Rathgeb Smith and Michael Lipsky, *Nonprofits for Hire: The Welfare State in the Age of Contracting* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); Laurence E. Lynn, Jr., “Social Services and the State: The Public Appropriation of Private Charity,” *Social Service Review* 76 (Mar. 2002): 58–82. Salamon and other nonprofit theorists have been taken to task for insufficiently historicizing their work; see Susannah Morris, “Organizational Innovation in Victorian Social Housing,” *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 31 (June 2002): 186–206. Some historians also see the contracting relationship as the most important element of the voluntary sector’s relationship to welfare after the New Deal. Michael Katz, *The Shadow of the Poorhouse: A Social History of Welfare in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1996) devotes three pages to voluntary agencies after World War. Two, mostly with regard to contracting with government; his subsequent *The Price of Citizenship* includes a substantial discussion of the recent politics of the nonprofit sector and welfare; see Katz, *The Price of Citizenship: Redefining the American Welfare State* (New York: Henry Holt, 2001).

¹⁶ Martha Minow, *Partners, Not Rivals: Privatization and the Public Good* (Boston MA: Beacon Press, 2002).

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programs.¹⁷ Nonprofits today face very real concerns about the implications of contracting with government, but many charities in the 1930s faced a more fundamental existential struggle. The ways in which they responded to the expansion of public programs, for good and for ill, serve as useful examples as policy makers currently regard the strengths and limits of voluntary and public social welfare institutions.

The second contribution this book makes is to point out the continuing influence beyond their support for welfare that voluntary institutions had on both cultural and political life in the era when the New Deal held sway. In the case of the charitable agencies that this study deals with, the turn away from material provision resulted in a focus on therapeutic services such as marriage counseling and parent-child counseling.¹⁸ Their own efforts to promote counseling as a legitimate service put them squarely in the middle of broader efforts to promote therapeutic solutions to social problems. Historians have begun to document the crucial role that public programs and professional organizations during and after World War Two contributed to the culture of therapy, but again, the role of the voluntary sector in popularizing and providing such services for the most part has been neglected.¹⁹ As this book will show, despite their small financial size, voluntary institutions helped direct the distribution

¹⁷ The major exception in social services was among child welfare agencies, particularly in cities such as Chicago and New York City. See Nina Bernstein, *The Lost Children of Wilder: The Epic Struggle to Change Foster Care* (New York: Pantheon, 2001); Malcolm Bush, *Families in Distress: Public, Private, and Civic Responses* (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 1988); Joan Gittens, *Poor Relations: The Children of the State in Illinois, 1818–1990* (Urbana IL: University of Illinois Press, 1994).

¹⁸ Kristin Celello, *Making Marriage Work: Marital Success and Failure in the Twentieth Century United States* (Chapel Hill NC: University of North Carolina Press, forthcoming) and Rebecca Davis, *Saving Marriage: Couples and Conflict in Twentieth-Century America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, forthcoming) both call attention to the substantial role of voluntary organizations in providing marital counseling; Davis in particular dwells on the work of the family service agencies with which this book is concerned.

¹⁹ John Burnham, “The Influence of Psychoanalysis upon American Culture,” in Jacque M. Quen and Eric T. Carlson, eds., *American Psychoanalysis: Origins and Development* (New York: Brunner-Mazel, 1978): 52–72; James Capshaw, *Psychologists on the March: Science, Practice, and Professional Identity in America, 1929–1969* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Gerald Grob, *From Asylum to Community: Mental Health Policy in Modern America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991); Nathan Hale, Jr., *The Rise and Crises of Psychoanalysis in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Ellen Herman, *The Romance of American Psychology: Political Culture in the Age of Experts* (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 1995); Eva Moskowitz, *In Therapy We Trust: America’s Obsession with Self-Fulfillment* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001); Andrew Polsky, *The Rise of the Therapeutic State* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991).

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of both public and private social welfare resources, particularly at the local level, toward therapeutic interventions.²⁰ They exercised influence beyond their financial resources, due to their prestige, their integration into local social service networks, and their connections to local elites – advantages that some public institutions did not enjoy.²¹ The role that these voluntary institutions played in local, public-private therapeutic networks not only helped build the popularity of these services in their own right. As this book will argue, these techniques also shaped welfare policy as a tool to reduce welfare rolls in the 1950s and early 1960s.

To address these issues, this book focuses on one particular set of voluntary social service providers as a means of exploring trends that affected a wide swath of the voluntary sector in the wake of the New Deal. Commonly known as “family service agencies” in the post–World War Two era, they were found in hundreds of towns and cities across the United States, although concentrated in urban-industrial areas in the East Coast and Midwest. They traced their origins back to the Charity Organization movement of the late nineteenth century, and by the 1920s they were among the most visible nonreligious private sources of monetary relief for poverty and unemployment in many cities. When the Depression deepened, and private fundraising was ramped up to try to meet the crisis, these agencies were often the conduit for emergency relief, and it was their reputation that suffered when that relief proved inadequate. In short, they were the poster children for the limits of voluntarism.

²⁰ Recent works that focus on the role of voluntary agencies in shaping postwar policy include Laurel Joy Spindel, “Strategic Care: Voluntary Child-Caring Agencies in Chicago and the ‘Discovery’ of the Emotionally Disturbed Child, 1945–1965,” paper presented at the Policy History Conference, Charlottesville, VA, 2006; William Bush, “Representing the Juvenile Delinquent: Reform, Social Science, and Teenage Troubles in Postwar Texas” (Ph.D. diss., University of Texas, 2004); Mary Mapes, *A Public Charity: Religion and Social Welfare in Indianapolis, 1929–2002* (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 2004). Valuable works that include an examination of other post–New Deal voluntary institutions include Judith Trolander, *Professionalism and Social Change: From Settlement House Movement to Neighborhood Centers, 1885 to Present* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987) and Ken Cmiel, *A Home of Another Kind: One Chicago Orphanage and the Tangle of Child Welfare* (Chicago IL: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

²¹ Melissa Middleton, “Nonprofit Boards of Directors: Beyond the Governance Function,” in Walter Powell, ed., *The Nonprofit Sector: A Research Handbook* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987), 145; Wolfgang Seibel, “Government-Nonprofit Relationship: Styles and Linkage Patterns in France and Germany,” in Stein Kuhnle and Per Selle, *Government and Voluntary Organizations: A Relational Perspective* (Aldershot, UK: Avebury, 1992), 53–70.

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These agencies represent only a fraction of the universe of charities and voluntary organizations, and an even smaller percentage of the amorphous “nonprofit sector.”²² They bear little resemblance to the self-help organizations such as mutual aid societies organized by immigrants²³ and are distinct from the philanthropic foundations, such as the Ford Foundation, that gained importance at midcentury.²⁴ The agencies were self-consciously nonsectarian, excluding from membership any relief organization operated by a religious congregation. However, they shared common cause with many organizations with religious roots, in particular Jewish family agencies – which tended to be organized on a community, rather than congregational, level and were subsumed into the “family agency” rubric.

I chose this particular set of institutions to focus on in part because their pre–New Deal prominence made them a vivid example of the struggles to readjust to the new realities of a welfare state, and in part because many still remain significant today in the provision of local

²² Peter Dobkin Hall with Colin Burke, “Nonprofit, Voluntary and Religious Entities,” in Susan Carter, Scott Gartner, Michael Haines, Alan Olmstead, Richard Sutch, and Gavin Wright, eds., *Historical Statistics of the United States: Earliest Times to the Present, Millennial Edition*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006): 837–50; Lester Salamon and Helmut Anheier, *Defining the Nonprofit Sector: A Cross-National Analysis* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1997), 280–319.

²³ David Beito, *From Mutual Aid to Welfare State: Fraternal Societies and Social Services, 1890–1967* (Chapel Hill NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Cohen, *Making a New Deal*, 53–97.

²⁴ For an overview of recent scholarship on foundations, see Ellen C. Lagemann, *Philanthropic Foundations: New Scholarship, New Possibilities* (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 1999), and the relevant essays in Friedman and McGarvie, *Charity, Philanthropy, and Civility in American History*. Studies of philanthropic foundations and post–New Deal public policy are expanding. Peter Dobkin Hall provides a broad overview of the impact of public policy on philanthropic foundations in “The Welfare State and the Careers of Public and Private Institutions since 1945,” in Friedman and McGarvie, *Charity, Philanthropy, and Civility in American History*, 363–83; Alice O’Connor, *Poverty Knowledge: Social Science, Social Policy, and the Poor in Twentieth Century America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002) demonstrates the vital role that national level philanthropic foundations such as the Ford Foundation played in shaping research and welfare policy in this period; Donald Critchlow, “Implementing Family Planning Policy: Philanthropic Foundations and the Modern Welfare State,” in Donald Critchlow and Charles Parker, eds., *With Us Always: A History of Private Charity and Public Welfare* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998), 211–40, provides a similar analysis of postwar family planning policy. On philanthropy in the twentieth century, both within and beyond the boundaries of foundations, see Olivier Zunz, *Giving: Philanthropy and Democracy in the Modern United States* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, forthcoming).

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social services.²⁵ Advocates and detractors alike recognized their prominence. It is no accident that, as the book will show, at two major points when the welfare state expanded – during the New Deal and in the Great Society – these specific agencies were held up as examples of the failures of the voluntary sector as a whole. Critics in both periods recognized the symbolic importance of these particular institutions and chose their targets deliberately.

Nonetheless, their experience is not a perfect proxy for the voluntary sector as a whole. Other charities' relationship to the welfare state varied by sectarian auspices, the type of service rendered, and by locality. For instance, the national leaders of Catholic social service in this period evinced very different attitudes toward certain elements of public policy than their colleagues in nonsectarian institutions.²⁶ Similarly, the story of private children's institutions (many of which were religious) is distinct in some ways from that of family service agencies. They were not displaced by public policy in the 1930s as were the institutions under study here, and the bright-line distinction between public and voluntary was less evident.²⁷ The wealth of a given state or city, the strength of its civic infrastructure, and the nature of its welfare policies also contributed to the diversity of relationships between public and private institutions.

Other studies suggest, however, that the transformation of many religious charities and child-serving institutions over the course of the twentieth century bear strong similarities to those studied here. All had to reconcile themselves, in one way or another, to the fact or prospect of the expansion of public services in their domain of specialty over the decades from the 1930s through the 1970s. Many turned to promote professional, therapeutically

²⁵ Family service agencies accounted for, on average, the second highest percentage of United Way allocations in the 1970s and 1980s. See Eleanor Brilliant, *The United Way: Dilemmas of Organized Charity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 237. With the advent of purchase of service by various government entities, many family agencies, often having merged with private children's institutions, have retained prominent roles in social service provision. For example, Children and Families First in Wilmington, Delaware, an outgrowth of one of the agencies examined here, remains one of the largest nonprofit social services providers in the state; see William W. Boyer, *Governing Delaware: Policy Problems in the First State* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2000), 273, n32.

²⁶ A broad survey of the post–New Deal Catholic experience that complements Dorothy Brown and Elizabeth McKeown, *The Poor Belong to Us: Catholic Charities and American Welfare* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), which carries the story up to World War Two, would be welcome; Mary J. Oates, *The Catholic Philanthropic Tradition in America* (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), lends some insights for this period.

²⁷ See Bernstein, *Lost Children of Wilder*; Bush, *Families in Distress*; Cmiel, *A Home of Another Kind*; and Gittens, *Poor Relations*.

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oriented services as the hallmark of the voluntary sector. Most understood their responsibility as relatively narrow compared to that of the public sector and either tacitly accepted or publicly argued for public programs to take responsibility for people in need that the private sector could not or would not care for.²⁸ Thus, the dynamics explored in this book resonate across a far broader array of organizations and policies than those it studies in detail.

I have also chosen to examine these dynamics at both the national and local levels. National welfare policy had a decisive impact on local voluntary organizations. These were often members of national organizations, and their national leaders were usually the most active in the attempts to think through the relationships between the voluntary and public sector. They operated within a broader community of generally liberal professionals and policy makers who promoted the steady, incremental expansion of the welfare state in the 1940s and 1950s, and who were dedicated to maintaining the New Deal commitment to welfare. Thus, national-level policy debates on welfare and on voluntary-state relationships, particularly in the 1930s and 1960s, are central to this story.

At the same time, it would be a mistake to center this story only at the national level. Voluntary social service agencies, then as now, tend to be intensely local. They drew their leadership from the communities they worked in, and they served local clients. Similarly, in the post–New Deal era, the area of public policy that most concerned these family agencies was public assistance, which was the most localized element of public welfare. A mix of federal, state, and local monies funded the federal public assistance titles created by the Social Security Act in 1935. State and local

²⁸ Mapes, *A Public Charity*. Although evangelical Protestant churches tended to have fewer organized social welfare endeavors than mainstream Protestant churches, the Salvation Army was a conspicuous exception. Even here, despite the Army's blend of evangelism and social service, the Army's endeavors after World War Two shared in many of the broad trends described in this book – increasing use of therapeutic professionals and, later, an embrace of government purchase of service contracts. See Edward McKinley, *Marching to Glory: The History of the Salvation Army in the United States of America, 1880–1980* (San Francisco CA: Harper and Row, 1980), 212–14; Diane Winston, *Red-Hot and Righteous: The Urban Religion of the Salvation Army* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 247–8; and especially Stephanie Muravchik, “Come to Believe: American Faith in an Age of Psychology” (Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 2006), 259–337. Robert Wuthnow takes many discussions of “faith-based” social services to task for obscuring the differences between churches and religiously oriented social service agencies; he finds in many cases that the distinctions between the latter and nonsectarian agencies are “often thin”; Wuthnow, *Saving America? Faith-Based Services and the Future of Civil Society* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 7–8, 138–75.

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governments provided general assistance programs, which aided people not covered by the federal categorical programs. The bitterest disputes about these programs in this era were usually at the local and state levels. Moreover, the political choices of local agencies were more constrained than those of their national leaders. Although many supported the positions of their national leadership in support of welfare, they often faced more conservative political forces at the state and local levels and faced the prospect of alienating conservative members of their boards of directors or of voluntary fundraising organizations. Thus, local stories are critical to understanding how these relationships were actually negotiated on a day-to-day basis.

I have selected agencies in three cities – Wilmington, Delaware, Baltimore, Maryland, and St. Paul – to provide these local narratives. These three cities were all medium-sized industrial cities with strong pre-Depression traditions of voluntarism. In this period, all hovered around the average for payments in public assistance programs such as Aid to Dependent Children and general assistance – Delaware somewhat below, Minnesota somewhat above, and Maryland nearly at the center.²⁹ They were distinct in many ways that shaped their charitable and welfare systems. St. Paul and Baltimore had more progressive social welfare establishments, in both the voluntary and public sectors, than did Wilmington. St. Paul's African American community was tiny compared to that of Wilmington or Baltimore, race figured more prominently in the politics of welfare and charity in the latter two cities, and the list could go on. Although I draw on evidence from other cities across the country to contextualize these in-depth accounts, I believe these midsized Mid-Atlantic and Midwestern cities give a good sense of the common challenges facing the voluntary sector in the era of public welfare.

Two moments of rapid changes in voluntary-public relationships, the New Deal and the Great Society, frame the beginning and the end of this book, while the transformations and tensions that linked these periods are

²⁹ Richard F. Bieker, "Work and Welfare: An Analysis of AFDC Participation Rates in Delaware," *Social Science Quarterly* 62 (Mar. 1981): 170; Felix Gentile and Donald S. Howard, *General Assistance, With Special Reference to Practice in 47 Localities of the United States, 1946–1947* (New York: American Association of Social Workers, 1949), 42; Sharon Krefetz, *Welfare Policy Making and City Politics* (New York: Praeger, 1976), 89; and "Current Operating Statistics," *Social Security Bulletin* 23 (Nov. 1960): 55. Supporters of welfare, however, routinely excoriated Delaware in the postwar era for having one of the lowest ceilings of payment for Old Age Assistance; see, for instance, Edgar Hare, Jr., to Citizens' Conference on Social Work, Nov. 17, 1954, Folder 28, Box 1, Wilmot R. Jones Collection, Delaware Historical Society. Variations in generosity within different public assistance titles in a given state were not uncommon; see Gilbert Steiner, *Social Insecurity: The Politics of Welfare* (Chicago IL: Rand McNally, 1966), 244.

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explored thematically. A brief Prologue, which sets the stage for the upheavals of charity and welfare in the 1930s, explains the historic opposition of many charities to expanded public programs in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but goes on to demonstrate how these attitudes had softened considerably by the 1920s, even before the Great Depression. Chapter One emphasizes the severe blows dealt voluntary organizations by early efforts to cope with massive unemployment in the Depression through traditional voluntary channels. With President Roosevelt's election, public welfare advocates in the new administration set new terms for relief: public welfare would assume a greater burden of need, and public funds for relief would flow only through public agencies. Linton Swift, who led the national association of voluntary family agencies, responded with a manifesto of New Alignments for voluntary agencies: to recognize their own limits, to embrace these new public programs, and to use them to strengthen voluntary agencies.

Chapter Two demonstrates how such agencies initially thrived, rather than faded, with the expansion of welfare. Starting in the late Depression and World War Two, but most decisively after the war, they shifted their mission from disbursing material relief to offering the counseling services of their professional social workers to aid with any number of personal and family problems, in particular, parent-child and marital counseling. Their efforts to redefine themselves were buoyed by an increased public appreciation of expertise in the postwar period and by intense concerns over family stability. In reaching out to these new populations, these former charities helped build the legitimacy of therapeutic approaches to social problems.

The limits of this approach are evident in Chapter Three, which explores the relationship between voluntary agencies and public assistance in the postwar era. Public assistance programs, which most closely mirrored the historic mission of family service agencies, were underfunded and unpopular throughout this period. The changing demographics of the welfare population, and in particular the increase in unmarried, African American women among recipients of Aid to Dependent Children, eroded public support for welfare. In places where welfare was inadequate, voluntary agencies found themselves again targeted as sources of material rather than psychological relief. They found it necessary to help defend public welfare against attacks while trying to strengthen public programs, primarily by advocating more funding and fewer restrictions on public assistance.

Chapter Four explores the efforts of one set of voluntary institutions in St. Paul to meet some of the challenges of postwar welfare by using the

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therapeutic tools that family agencies had come to specialize in. The “St. Paul Study,” sponsored by a network of voluntary sector social welfare professionals, identified a hard core of “multiproblem families” that absorbed disproportionate shares of public and voluntary welfare dollars. Researchers in St. Paul went on to demonstrate, in an influential pilot program known as the Family Centered Project, that intensive counseling by professional caseworkers, such as was practiced in voluntary agencies, could help steer such families toward self-sufficiency and decrease welfare spending. This concept gained enormous currency among social work professionals and policy advocates and laid the groundwork for the Kennedy administration’s attempt at welfare reform in 1962.

The two final chapters shift the focus back to the interplay of national politics and policy and local practices. Chapter Five shows how the national politics of welfare and poverty in the 1960s again put voluntary agencies on the defensive. Responding to deepening criticism of public assistance in the late 1950s and early 1960s, prominent voluntary sector organizations participated in a liberal coalition that promoted counseling as a central element of the 1962 Public Welfare Amendments, the first substantial welfare reform since the New Deal. This effort was quickly discredited by the continuing rise of welfare rolls and by the rise of the War on Poverty. Poverty warriors and civil rights activists declared war not only on poverty but also on welfare bureaucracies and voluntary agencies that had underserved the poor, and, in particular, poor African Americans. Voluntary agencies, in turn, were determined to take advantage of the War on Poverty to prove their relevance in this new political environment. One War on Poverty program studied in detail here, Project ENABLE, demonstrates the difficulties that traditional social agencies had operating in this new political and policy milieu and in reaching out to poor minority communities.

The final chapter illustrates how the financial constraints of voluntarism and the War on Poverty fed the growing willingness of voluntary agencies and the public sector to blur their boundaries, eroding the New Deal principle of a bright-line separation between public institutions and the voluntary sector. This trend was sharply accelerated in the late 1960s as federal public policy loosened the restrictions on public funds being used by private agencies. Voluntary sector fundraisers working in tandem with state welfare authorities pushed voluntary agencies to take advantage of public sources of funding. By the mid-1970s, a new contracting regime had supplanted the New Deal era of relatively separate spheres.

Many scholars have dismissed voluntary family agencies after World War Two as having removed themselves from the world of welfare. Having given

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up material relief, they thus have become peripheral to the story of social policy.³⁰ That approach overlooks the continued entanglement of voluntary agencies in the welfare system, both indirectly and directly. It also misses the significance of the role of the voluntary sector in building the legitimacy of therapeutic services and the role that they played in shaping the welfare reform efforts of the early 1960s. Finally, it also leaves us with little means of understanding how and why voluntary agencies came to eventually embrace the prospect of using public funding.

Many of the best studies that treat aspects of the history of voluntary social service do so in the context of examining the history of the profession of social work. Roy Lubove's classic *The Professional Altruist*, which emphasizes the professional and bureaucratic forces shaping the creation of social work, examines in part the increasing dependence, by the 1920s, of voluntary institutions on a corps of professional workers who displaced the volunteers who had originally staffed the agencies.³¹ Other studies examine the almost obsessive concern with professional status that seemed to characterize contemporary social work in this period – to the detriment of the profession's commitment to social justice – and see voluntary agencies as the exemplars of that professional impulse.³² Recent advocates of “compassionate conservatism,” from a different political vantage point, have also derided the professional impulse in charity.³³

Professionals played a vital role in attempting to achieve the New Alignments sought by both the voluntary and public sectors after the New Deal. They were central to the strategy of family agencies to distinguish

³⁰ Steiner, *Social Insecurity*, 10–17; Walter Trattner, *From Poor Law to Welfare State*, 5th ed. (New York: Free Press, 1994), 307–8. An exception is Ralph Kramer, *Voluntary Agencies in the Welfare State* (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 1981), 65–70, who, although not dwelling on the history of family agencies, does recognize Swift's “New Alignments” as a noteworthy attempt to rationalize a new division of labor.

³¹ Roy Lubove, *The Professional Altruist: The Emergence of Social Work as a Career*, 1880–1930 (New York: Atheneum, 1973).

³² John Ehrenreich, *The Altruistic Imagination: A History of Social Work and Social Policy in the United States* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985); Stanley Wenocur and Michael Reisch, *From Charity to Enterprise: The Development of American Social Work in a Market Economy* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1989); Daniel Walkowitz, *Working with Class: Social Workers and the Politics of Middle Class Identity* (Chapel Hill NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1999). Andrew Polsky links the professionalization of social work to a repressive therapeutic impulse, rooted partly in Progressive Era voluntary organizations; however, his interest after World War Two is largely focused on public policy; see Polsky, *The Rise of the Therapeutic State*.

³³ Olasky, *Tragedy of American Compassion*, 143–9; Charles Glen, *The Ambiguous Embrace: Government and Faith-Based Schools and Social Agencies* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 163–92.

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themselves from welfare, and to expand the range of social welfare into emotional as well as material support. However, I seek to temper the use of professionalization as the sole explanation for these changes. The social and political contexts that made these choices seem reasonable also play a major role in this book: the high regard that professional and scientific expertise achieved in the postwar period, the perceived need for voluntary agencies to present themselves as distinctive to both board members and potential clients, and the sincere belief that the public sector, and not charity, was the most logical answer to meeting the financial needs of the less fortunate.³⁴

This book, then, tells the story of the hesitant embrace of public welfare by a voluntary sector cognizant of the limits of how and whom they could serve. Within these limits, voluntary organizations crafted new methods of service that, in theory, would complement the promises of the welfare state. Their success helped create a wider audience for marriage counseling, parent-child counseling, and other therapeutic techniques. However, the instability of welfare, the relatively narrow range of these services, and the growing demands for more services for the poor helped undermine this period of New Alignments, creating the conditions for the profusely intermingled system of nonprofits and government in contemporary social service.

³⁴ See Brian Balogh, "Reorganizing the Organizational Synthesis: Federal-Professional Relations in Modern America," *Studies in American Political Development* 5 (Spring 1991): 119–72, on the usefulness of studying experts and their organizations in this period.

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Prologue: Charity on the Eve of Depression

It was easy in the 1920s for a middle- or upper-class American to believe in the capacity of charities to handle the needs of the poor and the helpless. If they lived in any city of reasonable size, particularly on the East Coast and in the industrial Midwest, they undoubtedly were solicited at home or at work for donations to help support a dense network of voluntary social service agencies. The range of charitable services varied widely between cities and states, but you could expect to find a fairly standard set of voluntary institutions in most cities. These would be devoted to health (charitable hospitals or Visiting Nurse Associations, for example), child welfare (Children's Aid Societies in many cities), recreation or "group work" (Young Men's and Young Women's Christian Associations, among others), and a variety of other causes, ranging from Florence Crittenton Homes for unwed mothers to Wayfarers Lodges for transient men. Working-class districts hosted a variety of self-help organizations such as mutual aid societies that also provided a safety net for working-class families.

These charitable networks generally had at their core one or more private organizations that granted "outdoor" relief – the term derived from the fact that aid was not provided within the walls of a poorhouse, old-age home, or asylum. In an era in which unemployment insurance did not exist, and public welfare programs were localized and welfare was doled out reluctantly, these agencies devoted a significant amount of resources to meeting the material and financial needs of the unemployed and the poor. Charities in this era tended to subdivide the task of relief to ethnic or religious institutions (such as Catholic Charities, Jewish Social Service Associations, Lutheran Welfare Societies, and the Salvation Army) in

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conjunction with a “nonsectarian” (although generically Protestant in character and in leadership) relief organization, generically known as “family agencies,” and often titled Associated Charities, Benevolent Societies, and the like. In a study of Buffalo, Cleveland, Dayton, Indianapolis, and Milwaukee in 1924, one researcher found that “contributed sources,” that is, voluntary funds, accounted for 42.3 percent of “family and relief services,” whereas public sources accounted for 38.1 percent.¹ This was somewhat exceptional. Most studies of the period emphasize that public expenditures for relief outweighed private expenditures, even in cities.² But public spending was often masked by the widespread practice of subsidizing private charities with tax dollars – for relief, for child welfare, for care of the aged, and for a host of other social services.³ The high concentration and visibility of voluntary relief in cities created the perception of a deep wellspring of voluntary resources. As one critic of voluntary agencies observed, “private relief loomed large in the consciousness of the socially minded citizen.”⁴

This perception of the strength of voluntarism was stimulated as well by another important fixture in the landscape of twentieth-century voluntarism: centralized fundraising organizations most commonly known as Community Chests. Chests relieved donors, and in particular businessmen, of multiple appeals from individual charities. The Chest would conduct one highly publicized fund drive a year and distribute the earnings to local charities in return for a promise from those charities not to conduct their own independent campaigns. Chests could trace their lineage back to the late nineteenth century but owed their popularity to the explosion of charitable appeals during World War One. The combination of war relief and normal charitable needs convinced many localities of the need to rationalize giving. However, as critics in the 1920s noted, one unintended consequence of the publicity associated with Community

¹ Figures for 1924 cited in Community Chests and Councils, Inc., *Expenditures For Community Health and Welfare in 31 Urban Areas* (New York: 1948), 3; this study derived its figures from Raymond Clapp, *Study of Volume and Cost of Social Work, 1924* (Cleveland, OH: Welfare Federation of Cleveland, 1926).

² Michael Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse: A Social History of Welfare in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1996), 159.

³ Arlien Johnson, *Public Policy and Private Charities* (Chicago IL: University of Chicago Press, 1931); Elizabeth Clemens, “Lineages of the Rube Goldberg State: Building and Blurring Public Programs, 1900–1940,” in Ian Shapiro, Stephen Skowronek, and Daniel Gavin, eds., *Rethinking Political Institutions: The Art of the State* (New York: New York University Press, 2006): 187–215.

⁴ Josephine C. Brown, *Public Relief, 1929–1939* (New York: Henry Holt, 1940), 424.