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Reconstructing the Underclass

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In late 2011, the Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition government announced the launch of a new programme on 'troubled families' – a term used to describe the estimated 120,000 most behaviourally anti-social families in England and Wales. To many social scientists, this appeared to be yet another reconstruction of the broad 'underclass' concept that has run like a thread of analysis through UK poverty discourses over the last 150 years. The symbolic nature and coded meanings of this particular concept of poverty are very interesting, as is the way it has been reconstructed periodically. This paper summarises these reconstructions, and the analytical issues raised by them: the 'residuum' concept of the 1880–1914 period; the 'social problem group' of the inter-war years; the 'problem family' of the 1940s and 1950s; the 'cycle of deprivation' of the 1970s; and the 'underclass' of the 1980s and 1990s.

Keywords: Underclass, poverty, social problem group, inequality.

Introduction

Reconstructions of the broad 'underclass' concept are as many and as varied as there are participants in the whole debate. No two persons appear able to agree on this troubling and vexatious issue, and it undergoes periodic reconstructions in accordance with a myriad of background factors. It seems to reappear in public debates with a regularity that is uncanny. It was against this contextual background that many social observers noted with some dismay that, in late 2011, the Conservative/Liberal Democrat Coalition government announced the launching of a new initiative on 'troubled families' – a term used to describe the estimated 120,000 most behaviourally anti-social families (2 per cent of all families with dependent children) – which are allegedly costing the taxpayer some £9bn per annum. Anti-poverty policy under both New Labour and the Conservatives had for some years been moving away from strictly economic definitions of poverty – particularly child poverty – and towards non-economic, behavioural and individualist definitions. Therefore, the signs of a paradigm shift were already present. Nevertheless, the announcement still caused something of a sharp intake of breath on the part of many social scientists and poverty researchers because it seemed yet another obvious recycling of the broad 'underclass' concept that has been a thread of analysis running through the UK poverty debate for at least 130 years, and has been subject to periodic and intriguing reconstructions.

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Reconstructions of the concept of an 'underclass'

It may be possible to trace an even longer history. A striking example of an 'underclass' analysis of poverty and unemployment can be found as far back as 1834, with the famous *Poor Law Report*. It stands as an ambitious if deeply flawed example of neoclassical economics as applied to welfare, particularly in its claims for the effect of the Speenhamland allowances-in-aid-of-wages on the work ethic and fertility behaviour of agricultural labourers and their wives in the depressed southern counties of England. In a very 'rational choice' analysis, now largely discredited by economic historians, the *Report* claimed that the allowance system destabilised wage–price equilibrium and resulted in the growth of a new welfare dependent pauper class (Checkland and Checkland, 1974).

In the 1880–1914 period, the 'underclass' concept was vaguely formulated as the 'residuum' (Welshman, 2006: chapter 1), which figured in the writings of several social observers (including Alfred Marshall, 1890: 2), and may well be what Charles Booth envisaged when he made his disparaging comments on classes A and B at the bottom of society. Of class A – admittedly, only 1.2 per cent of the London population surveyed – Booth observed that:

> Their life is the life of savages, with vicissitudes of extreme hardship and occasional excess . . . They render no useful service, they create no wealth: more often they destroy it. They degrade whatever they touch, and as individuals are perhaps incapable of improvement.

Class A was 'hereditary to a very considerable extent'. Class B was a higher proportion (11.2 per cent) and contained many 'who from shiftlessness, helplessness, idleness, or drink, are inevitably poor. The ideal of such persons is to work when they like and play when they like' (Booth, 1892: 34–43). Booth's controversial proposal was that Class B should be removed from society and segregated in labour colonies.

Concern over the existence of a 'residuum' was very much an urban discourse, associated with male casual labour, social disorder and political volatility in the overcrowded late-Victorian labour market, particularly in the dock areas of East London. Then in the inter-war years, the concept was recast yet again as the 'social problem group' and infused with the apparently scientific claims of eugenics: the persistence of mass unemployment was taken to be evidence of a genetically flawed group at the bottom of society that was growing in size. In essence, eugenics involved the biologisation of poverty, and appeared to invest the underclass concept with greater scientific rigour. However, the main survey of the time, Ernest J. Lidbetter's *Heredity and the Social Problem Group* (1933), was speculative, methodologically flawed and, as a result, unconvincing. Not the least of Lidbetter's problems was that the full-employment period of the First World War caused many of his longitudinal sample to find jobs and cease their membership of the social problem group: thus, an external economic stimulus could undermine the seeming certainties of Lidbetter's hereditarian analysis (Lidbetter, 1933; Macnicol, 1987: 307–9).

The Second World War appeared to discredit eugenics, given the Nazi experiments, and the horror of the holocaust. However, during the War another reconstruction appeared in the form of 'problem families' – seemingly more optimistic, yet also a shift of emphasis from economic to non-economic poverty allegedly caused by behavioural factors. This

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concept continued to be quite influential on social work practice in the 1950s. In the 1960s and 1970s, both the 'culture of poverty' and the 'cycle of deprivation' had some effect on poverty discourses. The former was initially used to describe those in the USA displaced by automation, technological innovation and broader labour market changes, but subsequently it was used in a much more conservative way – yet another illustration of how 'pathological' and 'structural' analyses of the causes of poverty have always existed side-by-side, and have merged into each other. Finally, the 'underclass' concept of the 1980s and 1990s appeared against a background of mass unemployment and labour market restructuring. It was more pervasive in the USA, where it was associated with attacks on 'welfare', including Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), and concern over the decline of inner cities caused by deindustrialisation. As *Time* magazine put it, in rather grandiose fashion: 'Behind the crumbling walls lives a large group of people who are more intractable, more socially alien and more hostile than almost anyone had imagined. These are the unreachables: the American underclass' (*Time*, 1977: 14). This concept was more racialised and gendered, and at times some remarkable claims were made for it, such as the view that the 'underclass' had been largely responsible for the Los Angeles riots of May 1992 (Millar, 1992). New Labour's concept of 'social exclusion' was, on the face of it, an attempt to steer the debate away from underclass presuppositions, but many considered it very close. For example, in Prime Minister Tony Blair's support for the idea of 'problem families' and his confident declaration – which seemed to have intriguing eugenic overtones – that members of such families could be identified 'virtually as their children are born' (Murphy, 2006: 2). Once again, the ambiguity of analysis was very striking.

The recent debate

Today's 'troubled families' initiative thus stands in the long tradition of 'underclass' reconstructions, but, in addition, it has been shaped by two broader trends that have affected all social policies since the massive structural economic changes of the 1970s. First, there is the macroeconomic strategy of expanding labour supply in order to achieve sustained, non-inflationary economic growth, famously outlined in the theories of Richard Layard in the 1990s (Macnicol, 2015: 46–9) – on the face of it, a social democratic strategy, but one very much in accordance with the tenets of neoclassical economics. This strategy is also a rationalisation of labour market changes that are happening anyway, with the growth of low-paid, casualised, often part-time jobs. Control of inflation is absolutely central to neoclassical economics, and arguably what has emerged since the 2008 recession is an intensification of a process that began in the 1990s, with the slow employment growth that occurred in most industrialised societies. As Mark Blyth observes, 'austerity is a form of voluntary deflation in which the economy adjusts through the reduction of wages, prices, and public spending to restore competitiveness, which is (supposedly) best achieved by cutting the state's budget, debts, and deficits' (Blyth, 2015: 2). Second, there has been an increasing emphasis in the aetiology of social problems and the analysis of economic change on supply-side factors – culture, behaviour, choice, human agency, motivation, personal responsibility, moral autonomy and benefit incentives.

As a result, all economic problems are being recast as attitudinal. This is very apparent in the way that joblessness is now regarded by the Department of Work and Pensions

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(DWP) as caused overwhelmingly by the personal characteristics of the unemployed, rather than by economic restructuring. As one senior civil servant in the DWP recently stated, 'Our view is that regional differences in the distribution of economic inactivity are explained by the individual characteristics of the people living there. Economic inactivity is explained not by a lack of demand but by individual characteristics, and the recession has not modified the distribution of unemployment' (Daguerre and Etherington, 2014: 33). In many ways, we are now witnessing the final triumph of the neoclassical view that all unemployment is voluntary. However, an immediate question that arises is whether the post-war fluctuations in unemployment – both rises and falls – can be explained primarily in terms of the changing personal characteristics of jobseekers, and, indeed, what caused these alleged changes to take place.

Even more extreme is the theory that success or failure in later life is attributable to early child rearing practices, with the brain size of a three-year-old primarily the function of parental care or neglect, advocated with enthusiasm by the Labour MP, Graham Allen (Allen and Smith, 2011). The fact that a Labour MP can now offer such a deterministic analysis redolent of the scientific racism theories of J. Phillipe Rushton, Richard Lynn and the Pioneer Fund (Rushton, 1990: 785–94) is a tribute to the way that biological determinism has combined with supply-side economics to provide a deeply conservative mode of social analysis that ignores structural economic factors. Labour market activation is seen as the key to economic growth and personal advancement, as in the statement by Chukka Umunna, then the Labour Party's Shadow Business Secretary, that cutting entitlement to Jobseeker's Allowance for those aged under twenty-five is necessary 'to plug the young unemployed into the global economy' (Ainley, 2015: 64).

Labour market participation is now viewed as the key to upward social mobility and, at the aggregate level, economic growth. One issue that remains unclarified is whether the upward social mobility envisaged is absolute or relative: if it is the former, the implication is that all can rise to the top; if the latter, then some will have to suffer downward social mobility in order to make room for the newly risen. Hence, all welfare benefits have come under attack as allegedly disincentivising the need to work. This is the broad ideological background against which the 'troubled families' initiative has emerged.

Problem families and troubled families

In drawing lessons from the past, the most obvious historical parallel is with the 'problem family' concept of the 1940s and 1950s. It was in many ways surprising that such a concept should have taken hold at this time, given the upswing in the national mood during and after the War. The late 1930s were years of considerable pessimism regarding several social and economic trends: imperial insecurities with the emergence of colonial independence movements, the threat of war, the declining birth rate since the 1870s, the possible dysgenic tendencies arising from differential fertility, the need to reform the social security system, the continuance of mass unemployment – especially long-term – among others. By contrast, the prevailing post-war mood was one of optimism, based upon economic growth, low inflation, full employment, a rising birth rate, intact families (after a brief post-war spike in divorce and extra-marital births) and the founding of a relatively comprehensive welfare state. The War had of course caused a massive stimulus to labour market demand such that all groups previously marginal to the labour market – and many of those considered to be the hard core of the 'unemployables' – found work

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and became, by that criterion, useful citizens. Suddenly, the personal characteristics of the unemployed were rendered irrelevant. The effect that this had on prevailing attitudes to unemployment was notable. Exactly the same happened in the USA after it entered the War. As an American respondent testified – a teacher at a black high school 'in the Far South Side of Chicago' – in Louis 'Studs' Terkel's oral history:

> I'm from Oklahoma and my whole subclass of culture of poverty happened to disappear with World War Two. All of a sudden us dumb Okies were not dumb Okies any more. We were capable of working in defence plants at two dollars per hour. I know a hell of a lot of people that felt guilty that it took a war to do it. (Terkel, 1989: 32)

In previous publications, John Welshman and I have suggested four immediate impulses behind the problem family concept, reflecting the different interest groups involved (Welshman, 1996; Macnicol, 1999). First, the evacuation of schoolchildren just before the start of the War, and continuing in subsequent waves, had the effect of revealing much more widely the condition of inner-city children. Many of the stories of the children's condition, particularly their alleged uncleanliness and anti-social behaviour, were highly exaggerated – in part, a consequence of the febrile atmosphere of the first months of the War – but even allowing for this, the revelations came as an enormous shock. The effect was, as the Women's Group on Public Welfare (WGPW) put it, 'to flood the dark places with light' (WGPW, 1943: xiii). Second, social work with evacuee and bombed-out families was conducted by the Pacifist Service Units (PSU), whose members tended to be non-judgemental and practical in approach: the outlook of PSU workers towards 'problem families' was cheerfully amateurish, optimistic, rehabilitative and avowedly unideological – quite the opposite of inter-war eugenics. However, after the War, accompanying a name change to become Family Service Units (FSU), some leading lights in the FSU – notably David Jones – espoused eugenics as an overall explanation for these examples of 'family failure'. The third interest group was the Eugenics Society, anxious to rehabilitate itself and present the newly revealed 'problem families' as the logical reconstruction of the inter-war 'social problem group'. The rising tide of wartime full employment seemed to have raised nearly everyone's living standards, seeming to reveal more clearly than ever those problem families incapable of economic self-reliance and owing their condition to hereditarian defects. Seebohm Rowntree expressed it thus: 'As the economic level of the poorest classes is raised and their standards of welfare are improved, the problem families stand out more clearly as a minority who do not benefit from the improved conditions, but remain a menace and a disgrace to the community' (Rowntree, in Stephens, 1946: vii). Finally, some Medical Officers of Health, who had been involved in the settlement of evacuees, were anxious to carve out a sphere of influence in the post-war National Health Service. This, of course, led to conflicts of perspective. The Eugenics Society sought to reinforce its genetic model of social failure, and held a broadly pessimistic outlook regarding the possibility of social work redemption; by contrast, the FSU workers were uninterested in the arcane mysteries of pedigree charts and laws of heredity. Their view was broadly optimistic: that problem families could be socialised back into economic usefulness.

The main outcome of all of this diverse interest was the slim volume edited by C. P. Blacker (General Secretary of the Eugenics Society), *Problem Families: Five Enquiries* (1952). The book was both very speculative in approach and quite arbitrary in judgement. The incidence of problem families was found to be very low. They were but a small

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proportion of all families in the localities studied: in North Kensington, 0.26 per cent of all families; in Bristol, 0.14 per cent; in West Riding, 0.12 per cent; in Rotherham, 0.35 per cent; in Luton, 0.62 per cent. In other words, the 'problem' was manifest in less than 1 per cent of all families surveyed – an insignificant proportion (Blacker, 1952). Archival research conducted by this author in the past revealed considerable private uncertainty over definitions and quantification (Macnicol, 1999: 69–93). Interestingly, the focus was highly gendered – on the domestically incompetent mother. Male heads of families made little appearance: in a full-employment labour market, they were nearly all at work. Hence, Blacker found that only 10 per cent of male heads of problem families were unemployed. Problem family definitions were in practice highly impressionistic, often consisting of lurid descriptions of household squalor, domestic chaos, incontinence and dirty children. 'Family failure' was hard to define with any precision: it was *not* births out of wedlock, since the overall extra-marital birth ratio was low at this time (around 5 per cent); it was *not* child neglect, which was seen as a separate problem; it was *not* lack of parental affection or emotional deprivation. Instead, reliance was placed on highly subjective and sensationalist descriptions of domestic chaos and squalor, or nebulous concepts such as personal 'immaturity'. In essence, the process of defining a problem family involved conflating what is often called the 'administrative' definition – for example, contact with social services, police and law courts – with eugenic assumptions regarding inherited social qualities based upon highly partial accounts of dysfunctional family dynamics. In fact, the two are not necessarily connected.

The problem family debate of the 1940s and 1950s still fascinates social scientists today, perhaps because it encapsulates so many interpretative controversies. However, three caveats need to be made. First, we simply do not know how 'influential' the concept of the problem family was in social work. Many caseworkers rejected the underlying assumptions, be they eugenic or behavioural: they might be happy to gain from the social work training offered by PSUs/FSUs, but remained out of sympathy with the ideological underpinnings. It has never been claimed that this was the dominant paradigm in the 1950s; merely that it was a strong thread of analysis running through poverty debates, and one that has been the subject of intriguing reconstructions. Second, in the problem family literature there is a tension between 'structural' and 'behavioural' analyses of poverty, and, indeed, much overlap between the two. We employ this conceptual division heuristically, but in practice the two have always been interconnected. Third, the top-down gaze and social distancing of many who supported the problem family idea was not necessarily out of line with much 1950s ethnographic research. A striking example is Brian Jackson and Dennis Marsden, *Education and the Working Class* (1962). Although remembered as sympathetic towards working-class aspirations and purporting to expose the ways in which the tripartite educational system of the time failed working class pupils, this text contained much that revealed a strong class distancing by middle-class social researchers of that era, particularly in the patronising way in which working-class culture was portrayed, as this extract demonstrates:

> Many husbands were well-shaven, red-faced men, rather small in stature. They had hairy arms, stubby nails and greying hair. Often their wives, though slightly younger, had been grey for some years. Many of the men sat through the interview in pullover and blue-striped flannel shirt, held at the top with a gilt stud. Working boots and shoes were replaced by slippers, and collar and tie lay on one side as they took their ease. The wives nearly always seemed much larger. They were mostly fat and bulky, with thick arms and legs. Their hair was frequently frizzy

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from home perms, but it was very rarely tinted or dyed at all ... Both husband and wife had larger vocabularies than they could pronounce, and larger too than they would easily find in their daily paper. (Jackson and Marsden, 1962: 50)

Thematic continuities

What have been the recurring features of the broad 'underclass' idea? In a contribution of this length, only a brief summary can be offered. First, there is obviously a process of *social distancing, based on class, gender, ethnicity and age*. Class is immediately apparent, with strong behavioural condemnation of underclass lifestyles. Yet many of the characteristics said to be exclusive to the underclass – for example, Oscar Lewis's list of the behavioural traits displayed by those inhabiting the 'culture of poverty' – can be presented as shared by the aristocracy. The social distancing based upon gender is also striking, involving depiction of what Michael Harrington, with deliberate irony, called 'violent men and immoral women' (Harrington, 1984: chapter 8). At times, there has even been a prurient gaze into the private lives of single mothers, involving what has been called 'the eroticisation of social problems'. An intriguing example is George Gilder's *Visible Man* (1978), in which fears of black male sexuality are interwoven with condemnatory accounts of the alleged sexual profligacy of welfare mothers, all wrapped up in apprehensions over miscegenation: travelling to conduct an interview in an urban ghetto, Gilder nervously notes that 'except for the grocer, so far that morning on the Avenue, I had seen exclusively black men and white women' (Gilder, 1978: 13). Social distancing based upon ethnicity was a feature of the 1980s 'underclass' concept in USA, which was in many ways a racialised metaphor, although this dimension vanished completely when Charles Murray turned his attention to the British underclass. The extent to which the whole debate polarised opinion can be illustrated by the fact that, in the 1980s and 1990s, many black radicals in the USA believed that the underclass concept was yet another chapter in the long history of covert genocide against African-Americans (Massey and Denton, 1993). Age distancing may appear surprising, but it is worth considering: retired people are never members of the underclass, only those with direct present or future labour market value. Hence, Charles Murray, in *Losing Ground* (1984), firmly dismissed retirees and the cost of federal Social Security from consideration – 'social policy for the elderly is a completely different topic, demanding a full treatment of its own' – and children emerged as relatively blameless. The focus was on voluntary non-work on the part of those of working age (Murray, 1984: 59–60).

The extent to which underclass behavioural stereotypes reflected *prevailing norms of working-class 'respectability'* needs of course to be considered, in order to balance the view that it was only ever a top-down gaze: the distinction between the 'roughs' and the 'respectables' is woven into much working-class culture. For example, Ralph Glasser's searing memoir of working-class life in inter-war Glasgow is full of accounts of how ordinary people struggled to retain respectability in the face of overwhelming obstacles, such as six or eight flats sharing two toilets (Glasser, 1988; 8). This leads one to another long-standing issue: is it *an economic underclass or a behavioural one*? Some on the political left used the concept to describe the blameless victims of economic restructuring, seen in the first likely modern usage of the term by Gunnar Myrdal, in *Challenge to Affluence* (1963). However, more often the concept has been used to personalise issues that are primarily economic. There have been clear examples – notably, the 1930s and the

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1980s – when it has been applied to the conventional unemployed. Today, however, the 'troubled families' concept focuses on the impediment to labour supply that arises from an alleged reluctance to engage in paid labour. Interestingly, the 1950s exist as something of an outlier: a time when the concept was reconstructed against a background of full employment and economic confidence.

An enduring feature is that the underclass is said to be *intergenerational*. Sometimes the model of transmission has been based upon heredity, sometimes on socialisation. In practice, there has always been a considerable overlap between the two, the end result being a highly deterministic, pessimistic model of poverty and its effects. This can be seen in the current vogue for tracing the origins of social failure to early life factors. Interestingly, such a deterministic analysis raises the question of whether subsequent policies – for example, the labour market activation of adults – are too little, too late: the damage has already been done and cannot be undone. It also raises the question of whether adults can be held responsible for actions which have early life origins and therefore whether action by the state – for example, compulsory activation – is morally justified. There is, for instance, a powerful social movement maintaining that the consequences of economic inactivity in late middle age should be accepted by those who suffer it; yet employment rates at older ages show a strong class bias, indicating that choice may not be freely exercised.

There has been endless debate over what causes an alleged underclass to be formed, and most critics of the concept argue that it is in fact *weak on precise causation* – particularly on how, why and exactly when these dysfunctional intergenerational processes commence. Recently, there have been frequent allegations that three-generation welfare-dependent families exist, accompanied by equally frequent protestations that they do not (Shildrick *et al.*, 2012). An interesting question to ask is: if such a trend exists, exactly how, why and when did it begin? If one traces back three generations, then the seeds of voluntary worklessness must have been planted in the mid-1950s – a time of full employment and economic confidence. At least the eugenists of the 1920s and 1930s offered a logical explanation: that differential fertility plus falling infant mortality permitted the survival of increasing numbers of babies with inherited defects. However, had their prognoses been correct, we would now be submerged by the social problem group. Indeed, we would all be members of it.

A big unresolved contradiction is the tension between *rational choice* and *subcultural* analyses. At times, the emphasis has been on the former, which is clearly rooted in neoclassical economics: rational, calculating Hobbesian men and women adjust their behaviour logically in response to the policy incentives on offer, particularly with regard to welfare benefits. This was the basis for the 1834 *Poor Law Report's* analysis, just as it was for Charles Murray. In essence, neoconservatives argued that, in the 1960s, there had occurred a 'change in the rules' to render claiming AFDC more attractive. Likewise, Simon Heffer's verdict in 2007 was that:

> [W]e have an underclass because we pay to have one ... 60 years of welfarism, far from raising people out of poverty and of the vices that sometimes (but not inevitably) go with it, has simply trapped them there. Welfarism has smashed the traditional, and vital, family unit. (Heffer, 2007)

However, at other times the model of behaviour has been derived from a biological determinism over which individuals have no control: their behaviour is said to be

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irrational. This brings one to a very important tension between interpretations of seemingly dysfunctional behaviour: are those modes of behaviour *pathological and causal, or functional and adaptive*? Some, such as Eliot Liebow (1967) or Douglas Glasgow (1980), viewed allegedly dysfunctional behavioural traits as part of a 'survival culture' in the inner-city areas; others have argued that it is those very behaviours that cause such areas to decline and become dangerous places.

The mixture of *behavioural* and *administrative criteria* has been alluded to already: it is often said that members of the underclass are united by shared modes of dysfunctional behaviour, but in practice the 'administrative' definition has predominated, relating to receipt of benefits, contact with social services, having a police record – in other words, coming to the attention of the local or central state. This, of course, is deeply flawed, since it is a construct of the availability of those services and agencies. It does not have any necessary connection with modes of behaviour. By the standards of conventional social science empiricism, proponents of the underclass concept have operated from a *contentious evidence base*. For example, Lidbetter's sample disappeared in the First World War, when wartime prosperity resulted in virtual full employment; so also did the social problem group in 1940. The 1980s underclass debate was characterised by arid empirical controversies over welfare spell duration, but at heart was the inconvenient truth that the total number of mothers and children in households receiving AFDC in the USA remained more or less constant, at around 11 million, for the period in which the welfare-created underclass was said to have grown. Of course, it is worth bearing in mind that devotees of neoclassical economics operate from what is essentially an *a priori* position based on eternal principles of human nature, and then that evidence is adjusted to fit those principles. In practice, definitions of the underclass have been *vague on precise quantification* and have instead relied on *impressionistic, composite definitions* which generally consist of vivid descriptions of degraded social life in a kind of ethnographic overload.

Conclusion

Finally, it is instructive to return to 1960s sociology and ponder on the truism uttered by Howard Becker in 1966 that 'the definition of a social problem usually contains, implicitly or explicitly, suggestions for how it may be solved' (Becker, 1966: 10). In other words, the definition of a social problem *anticipates particular policy solutions*. This has been true of every reconstruction of the 'underclass' concept, and it is a feature of the current debate. Today's anticipated solution, for macroeconomic reasons, is to expand labour supply, and the definition of troubled families is constructed to fit that. Hence, troubled families today are said to be the product of lax and over-generous welfare benefits; predetermining the obvious solution of cutting those benefits (Winnett, 2012: 1). All in all, therefore, when one examines the troubled history of the 'troubled family' concept, one has to conclude that today's politicians have learned nothing and forgotten nothing.

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