

**Workfare and Women:
Work Requirements and
Sexism**

PRESENTER:

Lauren Barrett

BACKGROUND

- Administration of welfare has been around since 14th century
- Welfare has always been contentious, with critics attempting to attach work requirements to welfare for centuries
- Britain replaced their more generous welfare system with workfare in 1834
- The US repeated this in 1996, moving to a stricter work-reliant program

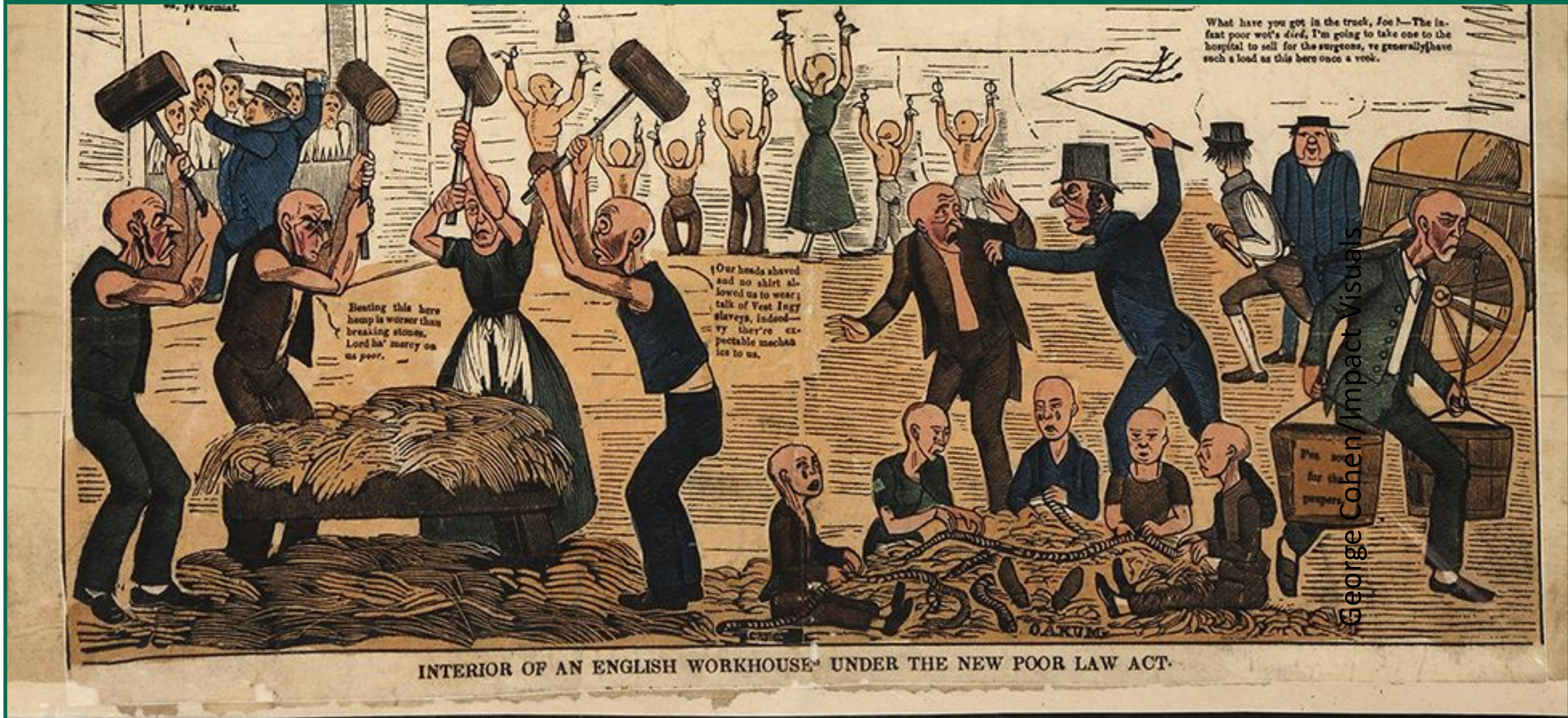
Methods

1. Examined welfare reform legislation, parliamentary reports, feminist newspaper articles
2. Investigated classic economists' writings, speeches, and ideas related to poor relief
3. Analyzed similarities in motivations, implementation, and public reception between workfare in 1834 and 1996

1834: Poor Law Amendment Act

- Created the workhouse “test” to sort the needy poor from the idle poor and reduce welfare rolls.
- Legislators, influenced by misogyny, placed the full economic burden of “bastards” on mothers by citing Natural Law
- Excused men's responsibility in the creation of illegitimate children by portraying them as victims

Workfare: A tool to encourage self-sufficiency? Or an excuse to impose moral standards on women?



Terminology:

Workfare: Welfare systems that require recipients to work or participate in job training

Impotent: The “deserving” poor, or paupers too young, old, or ill to work

Idle Poor: Those who are able to work but refuse to

Natural Law: Thomas Malthus argued that due to sex differences, society places greater shame on women’s unchastity because it reduces births out of wedlock

AFDC: Aid to Families with Dependent Children

PRWORA: Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act

TANF: Temporary Assistance for Needy Families

George Cohen/Impact Visuals



**1996: Personal Responsibility
and Work Opportunity
Reconciliation Act**

- Increased the toughness of time limits and work requirements, causing mothers to be unable to complete their education
- Limited opportunities for upward job mobility as mothers were forced to leave college
- Too many low-skilled, unemployed laborers competing over the same small number of low-paying, dangerous jobs
- These programs mold women into an “ideal worker”, or someone who prioritizes their job over motherhood

Conclusion:

- The US did not learn from Britain why workfare was flawed
- Legislators claimed their motivations for workfare were to increase self sufficiency, but in reality it was a tool to control and impose their own standards on women

George Cohen/Impact Visuals



Workfare workers in New York picket City Hall