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The Right's Attack on Aid to Families with Dependent Children

BY LUCY A. WILLIAMS

Recently the Republican-controlled Congress passed and President Clinton signed the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Block Grant of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996—the “welfare reform” bill—which ends Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), a sixty-year old federal entitlement program. It is estimated that 1.1 million children will sink below the poverty line as a result of this bill.¹

Often it seems that this attack on welfare (euphemistically called “reform”) is a new political phenomenon. Because it is so closely associated with the Newt Gingrich Congress, it is easy to see it as the brainchild of the New Right and the “new Republicans” who dominated the 104th Congress.

However, the targeting of welfare dates to the “Old” Right of the 1960s—the movement headed by Barry Goldwater and identified with the John Birch Society. In the 30 years since the 1960s, right-wing think tanks and intellectuals have polished and refined the critique, and developed the policies that were captured in the current bill. Often the actors who advocate welfare reform represent different sectors of the Right, all converging in a multithematic, thus powerful, attack on welfare.

The AFDC or “welfare” program, which provides sub-minimal cash assistance for poor children and primarily their mothers,² was enacted in 1935 as part of the Social Security Act. Initially, it served primarily white widows and orphans seen as the, albeit complicated, “deserving” poor, for whom society had a responsibility. Central to the recent welfare debate, however, were assumptions that AFDC was largely a program for African Americans and that a consensus existed that it needed to be thrown out, without recognizing that the current “consensus” was in large part the result of a concerted attack by the Right. How did such a dramatic change in public perception occur?

This article will track the ideological evolution and policy developments that have led us to this point. It situates the Right's attack on welfare within the broader framework of the agendas of the submovements of the Right, analyzes the confluence of the themes targeting welfare recipients as responsible for societal problems, and discusses how these various submovements have over 30 years transformed their discourse into mainstream discourse culminating in President Clinton's signing of the “welfare reform” bill. Underlying this transformation is the powerful coincidence of two events: the growth of the Right's attack on welfare, and the arrival of African Americans and other people of color on the welfare rolls.

Prior to the 1960s, a number of states had found methods to exclude large numbers of African Americans from the AFDC program. In the early 1960s, several factors contributed to opening the rolls to people of color, although the vast majority of recipients continued to be white.³ The evolution of a right-wing critique of welfare in the early 1960s coincided with this shift in the racial composition of the AFDC population.⁴

The Old Right's critique associated the War on Poverty with communism, particularly focusing on the AFDC program as a case study of how “liberalism” destroys society.⁵ At the same time, the Old Right used explicit racism to promote its message that the civil rights movement was resulting in the breakdown of law and order. By combining these two messages, it becomes possible to single out a vulnerable sector of the population, welfare recipients (increasingly seen as African American and Latino), as scapegoats to perpetuate an agenda of limited government and rugged individualism.⁶

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From the Director

When Congress passed and President Clinton signed the Welfare Reform Bill, it was over the protest of welfare rights, women's rights, civil rights, and children's rights advocates. Their protests failed to turn back the anti-welfare tide of public sentiment.

Much of the coverage of that struggle paints progressives as silent, walking away from a defense of welfare. I don't believe it. Caught by surprise? Perhaps. Not enough political capital to swing the outcome? Certainly. But I don't believe it is the activists' fault. And I don't believe it is the recipients' fault. I believe it is the Right's fault.

In this issue of *The Public Eye*, we are pleased to publish a detailed account of how they did it. "The Right's Attack on Aid To Families With Dependent Children" has been a two-year project directed by Lucy Williams, professor of law at Boston's Northeastern University and a member of PRA's Board. We are grateful to her, and for the funding support of the Ms. Foundation for Women.

We learn several important lessons from this research. First, the anti-welfare theme was not "new" to the New Right. There is a clear through-line from the Old Right to the present. This reinforces PRA's long-standing assertion that the name the New Right gave itself in the 1970s was deceptive. Its ideology and policy agenda were that of the Old Right. In fact, in the 1990s, we have seen the triumph of the principles of the John Birch Society.

We also see that Neoconservatives played a major role in developing and refining the intellectual grounding for the anti-welfare message. More than 20 years ago, this sub-movement of intellectuals emerged, most of them former liberals. They were vehemently anti-communist and, as such, supported a rightist agenda in foreign policy. They tended, however, to be more liberal than most rightists when it came to domestic policy. Their roots in the Democratic Party showed for some years.

This, I thought at the time, is a movement that will go places. However, the Neoconservatives were sidelined in 1980 by the steamrolling New Right, sweeping into Washington on the coattails of Ronald Reagan. They became a political curiosity that warranted an occasional article in the Sunday supplement. Only those who watched closely saw how markedly they moved to the right on domestic policy.

Now we see, thanks to Lucy Williams' research, that Neoconservatives, though less in the public spotlight than others, have in fact been extremely influential. Never more so than in the area of "welfare reform." Throughout her chronology you see the hand of Neoconservatives, refining and repackaging the Old Right's crude anti-welfare message.

We also see the enormous influence of The Heritage Foundation and its blockbuster think tank style. Heritage has become synonymous with the Right. It is good to be reminded that that simplification is grounded in the reality of its sheer size and impact.

Read this issue and gasp—for the missed opportunities, for the children who will be driven into poverty, for the end of an ethic of caring for the poor, for the shredding of the social contract. Here, we bring you a shameful story of our lifetime.

—Jean Hardisty

P.S. Because so much of the "story" of the Right's attack on AFDC is in the footnotes, we have enclosed them in loose-leaf form, making it possible to place them next to the page you are reading.

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In the 1970s, the New Right updated the Old Right's focus, shifting it from anti-communism and explicit racial segregation to social issues. This shift in political priorities—a brilliant marketing strategy—opened new possibilities in the attack on welfare. It allowed the New Right to develop and elevate the stereotype of the “welfare queen,” which was then skillfully used to full political advantage by Ronald Reagan.⁷ This resulted in a singular, non-normative, and non-contextualized image of the welfare recipient as a socially deviant woman of color (unwed teen parent, non-wage worker, drug user, long-term recipient). With shrewd use of dissembling imagery, exaggeration, and stereotyping, the New Right played to fears of the welfare recipient as “other.”

This rearranging of the agenda has diverted attention from the multiple economic, structural, and institutional factors which contribute to shifts in societal behavior and economic decline,⁸ thus creating a discourse which connected many, if not most, societal ills to the presence and receipt of welfare.

THE DIVERSITY OF THOSE RECEIVING AFDC

To understand how the Right cornered the debate, we must first understand how many of our own images and beliefs incorporate a carefully constructed singular portrayal of welfare recipients as socially deviant. Most of us care about certain definitions of teen pregnancy, crime, drug abuse, and child abuse, but somehow many of us have come to believe that the causal connection of the receipt of welfare and these social ills is a given and, in fact, a centrist position. Mainstream media and policy discussion discounts the welfare system as failed, without recognizing the complexities of such a critique. It is essential to our analysis that we understand how we have been duped into simplistically believing on some level that AFDC has fostered many of the “evils” of our society.

The population of families receiving AFDC is highly diverse; therefore any attempt to generalize results in an

essentialized depiction which then leads to a rigid and narrowly defined, rather than comprehensive and nuanced, welfare policy.⁹ However, a few basic statistics provide a backdrop for understanding the deception of the Right's attack.

In 1992 (the most recent year for which data is available), 38.9% of AFDC families were non-Hispanic white, 17.8% Hispanic, and 37.2% were African American.¹⁰ The average AFDC recipient has 1.9 children, slightly less than the number which the general population has. In 1992, 72.7% of all AFDC families had two children or less; the average AFDC family size had dropped 28% since 1969.¹¹ The poverty rate in nonmetropolitan areas was 16.8%, while the poverty rate in metropolitan areas was 13.9%, including 20.5% in the central cities.¹² Depending on the method of calculation, 29-56% of all AFDC recipients leave the rolls within one year, 48-70% leave within two years, and only 7-15% stay on for eight consecutive years.¹³ These percentages do not reflect an increasing “dependency” on AFDC. A 1952 nationwide study of AFDC found that 20% of families received AFDC for less than one year, only 11% received benefits for seven years, and only 3% received

benefits for more than eleven years.¹⁴ Sixty-four percent of young women who grew up in families that received welfare during their adolescence receive no welfare during young adulthood.¹⁵

Only 7.6% of AFDC families are headed by teens.¹⁶ Of these, most are 18 or 19 years old. Only 1.2% of all AFDC mothers are less than 18 years of age.¹⁷ Teen birth rates in fact are significantly lower than they were in the 1950s. In 1955, the adolescent birth rate (ages 15-19) was 90.3 per 1,000 females.¹⁸ It reached an all-time low of 50.2 in 1986 and has risen since then to 62.1 in 1991.¹⁹ Between 1970 and 1992, the total number of births to teenagers dropped from 656,000 to 518,000, with the birth rate per thousand women 15-19 years old dropping from 68.3 to 60.7. One out of six mothers was a teen in 1970; by 1992 that figure had dropped to one in eight.²⁰

The increase in childbearing by unmarried women²¹ cuts across class, education attainment,²² and age lines. Most of this increase is in births to adult unmarried women, not adolescents.²³ Two-thirds of all women who give birth outside marriage are not living below the poverty level during the year prior to their pregnancy.²⁴ Most of them—



teen and adult— are white.²⁵ Finally, teen mothers do not inevitably end up as long-term welfare recipients.²⁶

Thus a reductionist view of welfare as an inner-city, long-term, intergenerational, teenage pregnancy, or illegitimacy problem does not capture the experiences of the vast majority of mothers and children who have been receiving those benefits. How has this disjuncture in the thinking of the American electorate come about?

THE DESERVING POOR

The United States has always been ambivalent about assisting the poor, unsure whether the poor are good people facing difficult times and circumstances or bad people who cannot fit into society. Public welfare programs in the United States originated as discretionary programs for the "worthy" poor. Local asylums or poor-houses separated the deserving poor, such as the blind, deaf, insane, and eventually the orphaned, from the undeserving, comprising all other paupers including children in families, with wide variation and broad local administrative discretion.²⁷ "Traditional" family values have always been part of the discourse. They were part of the debate in the early 20th century about the undermining of initiative and dignity by outdoor relief, the aspect of the reformists' movements that tried to control the behavior and "better" immigrant poor women, and in the 1971 Supreme Court discussion of the plaintiff welfare recipient in *Wyman v. James*.²⁸ There have always been those who thought poverty was caused by individual fault and that the receipt of any governmental assistance was debilitating.

The Social Security Act of 1935 emerged from the Great Depression, when the massive unemployment of previously employed, white male voters made it politically impossible to dismiss the poor as responsible for their own situation.²⁹ The AFDC program, only a small part of the Social Security Act, covered children living with their mothers.³⁰ The legislative history of the Social Security Act allowed the states, which administered the AFDC program, to condition eligibility upon the

sexual morality of AFDC mothers through suitable-home or "man-in-the-house" rules.³¹ These behavioral rules were often intentionally used to exclude African Americans and children of unwed mothers from the rolls.³² One Southern field supervisor reported:

The number of Negro cases is few due to the unanimous feeling on the part of the staff and board that there are more work opportunities for Negro women and to their intense desire not to interfere with local labor conditions. The attitude that "they have always gotten along," and that "all they'll do is have more children" is definite....There is hesitancy on the part of lay boards to advance too rapidly over the thinking of their own communities, which see no reason why the employable Negro mother should not continue her usually sketchy seasonal labor or indefinite domestic service rather than receive a public assistance grant.³³

However, in the 1960s, the civil rights and welfare rights movements resulted in the inclusion of many who had been excluded from the original AFDC program.³⁴ Aggressive lawyering on behalf of poor people removed many of the systemic administrative barriers used to keep African American women off the welfare rolls.³⁵ As a result, the number of African Americans on the AFDC rolls increased dramatically, by approximately 15% between 1965 to 1971, although the vast majority of those receiving welfare continued to be white.³⁶

HIGHLIGHTING THE "UNDESERVING" POOR

The Republican candidacy of Barry Goldwater for President in 1964 was a turning point for the Old Right.³⁷ During that campaign many of the themes which later would form the multiple bases for the New Right's attack on welfare were explicit; rightist publications attacked the welfare state for undermining rugged individualism and private property, foster-

ing immorality and non-productive activity,³⁸ contributing to crime (particularly associated with urban riots and the Civil Rights Movement), and ultimately leading to communism.³⁹

The Old Right drew a classic parallel between conditions in the US and the decline of the Roman empire,⁴⁰ drawing especially from the work of neoclassical economists like Friedrich Hayek, Ludwig von Mises, and Milton Friedman. Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom* warned of the consequences of collectivism and that Western civilization was abandoning "the foundations laid by Christianity and the Greeks and Romans."⁴¹ In its 1959 founding documents, the John Birch Society warned of how the Roman Empire died from the cancer of collectivism.⁴² Believing that the welfare state destroyed individualism and supported the growth of collectivism,⁴³ Goldwater stated "government policies which create dependent citizens inevitably rob a nation and its people of both moral and physical strength."⁴⁴

More militant Christian groups further to the right expressed the same equation more bluntly. *Destiny* magazine stated in a 1961 article that "[o]ne has only to read history to mark the awful price exacted from the nation whose people followed a course that destroyed individual initiative and ambition [the welfare state]." In 1962 *The Cross and the Flag* saw the welfare state as "taxing away the rewards for responsible behavior."⁴⁵ The welfare state would lead to socialism and socialism would lead to communism.

Receipt of welfare was also seen as encouraging behavioral problems. The John Birch Society *Bulletin* stated that governmental welfare programs led to "the subsidization of illegitimacy, laziness, and political corruption."⁴⁶ Goldwater stated "I don't like to see my taxes paid for children born out of wedlock."⁴⁷

The racism in the Right's rhetoric of this period was blatant in many subject areas,⁴⁸ including welfare. Thus laziness and immorality were frequently explicitly tied to an image of AFDC recipients as African American, e.g., the immoral sexual practices of a

"growing horde of lazy Negroes" living off the public dole,⁴⁹ "the unmarried Negro women who make a business of producing children...for the purpose of securing this easy welfare money."⁵⁰ Goldwater stated that welfare "transforms the individual being into a decadent animal creature,"⁵¹ evoking traditional European American caricatures of African Americans.⁵² Distribution of welfare was designed to buy votes at the taxpayer's expense,⁵³ with the implication that recipients were African American voters.⁵⁴

Crime was seen as an individual, rather than a social, problem, and was another opportunity to raise the theme of individual responsibility. "The Conservative excuses nobody."⁵⁵ Therefore the welfare state would not alleviate the "lawlessness" which our nation was experiencing; only a return of respect for authority could accomplish that.⁵⁶ Goldwater stated "on our streets we see the final, terrible proof of a sickness which not all the social theories of a thousand social experiments has ever begun to touch."⁵⁷ Indeed by teaching that "the have nots can take from the haves" through taxation, Goldwater portrayed the welfare state as contributing to crimes of property and riots.⁵⁸

After Goldwater's defeat, the Right consciously focused⁵⁹ on the "white backlash," particularly in the South,⁶⁰ as a means of exploiting the racial tensions of the 1960s for political gain.⁶¹ Thus, at this critical time when welfare rolls were finally being opened to African Americans, AFDC, along with street crime, non-discriminatory housing, deteriorating neighborhoods, declining property values, school busing, and affirmative action, became banners which could popularize the Right's agenda.⁶²

An example of the evolution of this strategy can be seen by following the coverage of welfare in *Human Events*, a leading Old Right publication which began in 1944 as a voice of the reactionary wing of the Republican Party. In the early 1960s, articles in *Human Events* routinely attacked many aspects of the War on Poverty, arguing that it took power away from local governments, brought with it all the associated prob-

lems of big government, contributed to business investment decline, and created counter-productive behavior on the part of recipients.⁶³

The Johnson Administration's Great Society programs were accused of leading to "the virtual extinction of local government except as a minor bureaucratic instrumentality of federal power," and would "impose coerced conformity" instead of free enterprise, individuality, and personal freedom.⁶⁴ Poverty programs would result in consolidated power in the hands of a few men who might abuse the system.⁶⁵ The programs were portrayed as inefficient,⁶⁶ primarily creating high salaries

THERE HAVE ALWAYS BEEN THOSE WHO THOUGHT POVERTY WAS CAUSED BY INDIVIDUAL FAULT AND THAT THE RECEIPT OF ANY GOVERNMENTAL ASSISTANCE WAS DEBILITATING.

for bureaucrats,⁶⁷ and resulting in political corruption.⁶⁸

Therefore, federal grants to states for relief should be reduced or eliminated, and those who receive benefits should not be allowed to vote until they paid back the "loan."⁶⁹ Government had only three legitimate duties: national defense, personal freedom from attack by another, and "certain functions that it is not in the interest of any single individual or small group of individuals to undertake."⁷⁰

A 1965 *Human Events* article argued that business expansion within the free market structure is the appropriate method to fight poverty and unemployment.⁷¹ The reliance on Keynesian economic theory in development of Great Society programs is misplaced.⁷² Poverty can be conquered

by individual responsibility and thrift: e.g., if the \$20 billion spent each year on liquor and tobacco, not to mention gambling, were invested in United States industrial development.⁷³

The theme that receipt of benefits creates counter-productive behavior recurs. Programs for high school dropouts encourage teens to leave school.⁷⁴ The rise in the numbers receiving welfare is attributed to "illegitimate children fathered by men who wander from woman to woman, unworried about who will care for their offspring because they know that Aid to Dependent Children payments will."⁷⁵ In criticizing New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller's welfare plan for women with children with "no male member of the household," the author comments that "[I]t certainly does seem that most of the aid recipients are skilled enough to know every trick of the trade in getting relief and staying on it."⁷⁶ People receiving welfare don't want to work.⁷⁷

However, the tenor of the articles begins to shift in 1966. A connection between poverty programs and the rise of the Civil Rights/Black Nationalism/anti-Vietnam War Movements becomes a theme, playing to the fears of many whites.⁷⁸ While discussion of waste, corruption, and political patronage still form the basis for some of the discourse,⁷⁹ urban riots and poverty programs are directly linked. *Human Events* reports: "Evidence suggests that part of the reason for the riots are militant 'anti-poverty' officials and Negro agitators preaching hatred against the whites."⁸⁰ Grants to "questionable" African Americans are increasingly reported.⁸¹ This "army of welfare warriors,"⁸² has strong ties with labor unions⁸³ and organizes partisan voter registration drives, often in African American neighborhoods.⁸⁴ While socialism was blamed for much of the world's poverty by "paralyzing human initiatives,"⁸⁵ articles document the connection between War on Poverty programs and staff and communism.⁸⁶ In addition, the populist notion of giving a voice to people receiving the benefits is criticized.⁸⁷

Human Events articles begin to

portray poor people in more derogatory terms. A typical example is the story of a Puerto Rican poverty program trainee who failed to keep regular hours and when fired "flounced away, but only after having told Syd's workers that they were fools to stay on the job when they could take the first subway to the Bronx and 'make as much money from the Program for half the work you're doin' here.'"⁸⁸ An AFDC mother demonstrating for children's clothing allowances complains that her son is "deprived of even a cotton undershirt to go to school," while smoking a cigarette.⁸⁹

At the same time, the "marketing of dissemblance" is evident, as *Human Events* articles begin to undermine the validity of the existence and extent of poverty.⁹⁰ In critiquing a judicial decision that struck down residency requirements for receipt of welfare, unnamed "experts" are cited to underscore the ludicrousness of the "long-time judicial activist," and "liberal" judges' majority opinion:

Court decrees that welfare residency requirements are "unconstitutional" are not only absurd, say judicial experts who believe there is no constitutional right to welfare whatsoever, but will heavily penalize those states and localities which provide substantial welfare for the poor.⁹¹

Thus the Old Right constructed a message based on the confluence of poverty, race, labor unions, violence and communism. In this way, the Old Right was able to promote its agenda of lower taxes and reduced government by beginning to use welfare and the War on Poverty⁹² to capture the increasing racial fears of much of white America at a time when African Americans were asserting their rights in new ways. This increasing use of welfare as a means of crystallizing and legitimating racism was a particularly successful ploy in breaking open the Democratic white South.⁹³

RACISM AND WAGE WORK

The impact of this rhetoric and its racist underpinnings is evident in the 1967 amendments to the Social Security Act, which for the first time

placed mandatory work requirements on AFDC recipients. As more white women moved into wage work, at least on a part-time basis, and that became more acceptable,⁹⁴ and as the states were finally required to open the welfare rolls to women of color,⁹⁵ the image of "productive" became more complicated. In the rhetoric of the Right, "good" (i.e., white) women were still relegated to their calling as mothers and homemakers;⁹⁶ although for many "liberal" women, their self-definition and the resulting partial societal understanding of them now included a career.

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However, African American women had always been expected and required to do wage work in US society, predominantly as domestic and agricultural workers.⁹⁷ Thus as the new image of welfare recipient was constructed as African American, it was only to be expected that they (unlike white women) should be required to work.⁹⁸ Note the assertion in *Human Events* that relief recipients were not willing to take crop picking work in California.⁹⁹

Thus the images in the Congressional debate were of unmarried illiterate women with a massive number of children and a lack of appropriate parenting skills.¹⁰⁰ Most of these women lived in inner-city slums, particularly the largely African American neighborhood of Harlem.¹⁰¹

This is only one example of the Right's two-sided attack on women. On one hand, a woman's "natural place" is

in the home; she finds dignity and security beneath the authority of her husband;¹⁰² and daycare is opposed because it keeps children away from their mothers.¹⁰³ On the other hand, a woman without a man (i.e., a single mother welfare recipient) should be in wage work. The implications of these two arguments, as manifested in welfare policy, are racially based.¹⁰⁴ A similar tension exists between the Right's commitment to limited government intervention in individual's lives and the recommendations regarding welfare policy as a mechanism for economically mandating "intact marriages."¹⁰⁵

THE ROLE OF NEOCONSERVATIVES

It is important to distinguish between the rhetoric of the *Human Events* branch of the Right and the incipient Neoconservative movement during the 1960s.¹⁰⁶ While each contributed to the building of contemporary welfare discourse, they did so from different perspectives. The Neoconservative movement, comprised largely of intellectuals with roots in the Democratic Party, were initially "moderately liberal" in domestic policy but hard-line anti-communist in foreign policy.¹⁰⁷ Out of this complex ideology evolved much of the rhetoric of the breakdown of the African American family, constructing a racial pathology which obscured economic inequality.¹⁰⁸ This portrayal contributed to the demise of AFDC, by connecting the receipt of welfare to the rise of a behaviorally deficient African American "underclass."

In 1965, Daniel Patrick Moynihan softened the ground with his controversial "Report on the Black Family," which contributed to the credibility of the Right's racist portrayal of poverty and indolence by tying African American male unemployment to a perceived break-up of the African American family, and drawing a correlation between male African American unemployment and AFDC cases opened.¹⁰⁹

The Public Interest, a leading Neoconservative public policy journal edited by Irving Kristol, had more balanced discussions of the welfare system in the 1960s than those of *Human Events*. However, some articles reinforced the erroneous impression that

African Americans were the majority of current recipients of welfare. In a 1969 *Public Interest* article discussing how big government is not necessarily strong government, Peter Drucker connected race and welfare:

Our welfare policies were...perfectly rational— and quite effective— as measures for the temporary relief of *competent people* who were unemployed only because of the catastrophe of the Great Depression.... And small wonder that these programs did not work, that instead they aggravated the problem and increased the helplessness, the dependence, the despair of the Negro masses.¹¹⁰

In another *Public Interest* article published in 1969, Edwin Kuh discusses opposition to welfare plans:

Much of the white backlash, centered in the ranks of blue-collar workers, has been of this character. "Why," such workers ask, "should they (the poor Blacks) make nearly as much money as I do without working while we have to work?"¹¹¹

And in a *Public Interest* article which ultimately gives modest support to the concept of a negative income tax, Edward Banfield cites to the Moynihan report and from that draws his own conclusion that "it is high AFDC rates that are causing the breakup of the poor and hence the Negro family."¹¹²

Adding to the complexities of the Right's various movements and the lack of a single coherent agenda, note that the negative income tax concept originated with Milton Friedman, a self-styled libertarian,¹¹³ and was the centerpiece of Richard Nixon's Family Assistance Plan which failed to pass Congress in the late 1960s and early 1970s.¹¹⁴ One of the justifications for a guaranteed income¹¹⁵ was that it would reduce government interference in the lives of the poor, and would simplify the governmental system.¹¹⁶

Despite the many differences between the Old Right and Neoconservatives, these sectors of the Right sometimes reinforce one another:



U.S. SOCIAL SAFETY NET

in 1969, *Human Events* reported that Moynihan "was the darling of the liberals until he began speaking out for himself."¹¹⁷ In reviewing a book of Moynihan's, the article states:

Mr. Moynihan's book goes far beyond this [documenting waste and misuse of poverty funds], to the root error of the anti-poverty program and to results of that error with which we shall have to exist for years to come. If Mr. Moynihan's thesis is correct, then much of the violence and disorder which has marked these last years has stemmed from policies of social activism espoused by those who ran the poverty program and gave it its direction under President Johnson.¹¹⁸

Thus, since the 1960s, the Right has united its cultural or social populist conservatives with its free market advocates and right-wing libertarians, around an ideology that unites social conservatism with economic libertarianism.¹¹⁹ This unity, or "fusionism,"¹²⁰ was nurtured through an attack on welfare and defense of the work ethic.¹²¹ The Democrats were targeted as a party of affluent whites and minorities who did not care about bread and butter issues.¹²² As the power of old Democratic machines (often working class Catholic or Protestant

Southern evangelicals) was being challenged by 1960s New Left radicals and liberal reformers,¹²³ welfare was a pivotal symbol of Democratic Party acquiescence to African Americans at the expense of the white working class— a symbol to be constructed and manipulated by the New Right.

REFINING THE CRITIQUE

In the post-Vietnam era, the Neoconservative and libertarian movements were swelled with recruits (many with staunchly liberal backgrounds) reacting to the turmoil of the 1960s.¹²⁴ Another source of recruits after 1976 was large segments of the working class who also blamed the federal government for creating inflation.¹²⁵ At the same time, conservative Christians began to emerge as a political force, mobilized around issues of morality and family values.¹²⁶ The political rise of the Christian Right during this period was spurred by events which appeared to legally sanction an assault on the "traditional American family"— for example, the Supreme Court's 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision legalizing abortion, and the passage by Congress of the Equal Rights Amendment.¹²⁷ Welfare, portrayed as linked to "family dissolution," continued to provide an issue on which conservative Christians could align with Old Right, Neoconservative, and other Right

groups, albeit from different perspectives.¹²⁸ As the Right was able to trust more and more people to vote conservatively, right-wing strategists developed a "new found appreciation for populism."¹²⁹

In the early 1970s, President Richard Nixon was attacked by *Human Events* authors, who criticized Nixon's Family Assistance Plan (FAP) as an extraordinarily costly expansion of the AFDC program. They argued that the work requirements would not succeed and attacked the guaranteed income concept.¹³⁰ Skyrocketing caseloads¹³¹ and lax administration¹³² are regularly highlighted. (Again note the implicit connection to the rise in African Americans on the rolls).

Daniel Patrick Moynihan, as Nixon's principal counselor on FAP, was vilified as deviously rigging data to support FAP's enactment.¹³³ The anti-FAP message was graphically promoted by showing pictures of various appliances with the headline "Have you been saving for one of these?" and the reply: "If Mr. Nixon's new welfare plan passes Congress, *you may pay* to have one of these items delivered. Not to you, but to one of America's 12 million *new* welfare

'clients' (or one of our 10 million old ones)."¹³⁴

In contrast with the Nixon plan of the early 1970s, the "welfare reform" of California Governor Ronald Reagan is touted as "a program that would save nearly three-quarters of a billion dollars, put many welfare recipients to work and eliminate the chiselers,"¹³⁵ and California is cited as one of the states which had done "belt tightening."¹³⁶

Politicians are intimidated—squeamish about resisting its [the welfare establishment's] demands. Gov. Reagan is almost the sole exception, and he is feeling its wrath.¹³⁷

Reagan is quoted as "being horrified" at the implications of the Nixon Administration's FAP program for California,¹³⁸ and as urging that the key to reform is state and local control.¹³⁹

In the same spirit, conservative economics journalist Henry Hazlitt, in his book titled *Should Welfare Recipients Be Denied the Vote?*, states:¹⁴⁰

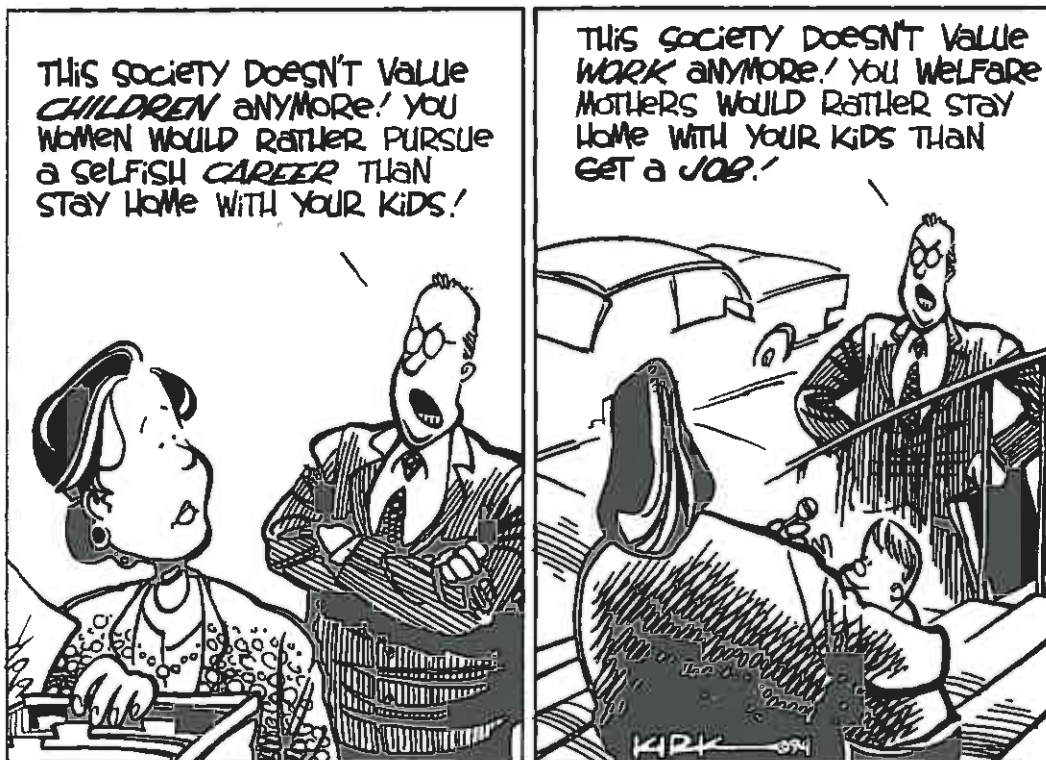
We have to ask, for example, whether liberty, economic progress, and political stability can be preserved if we continue to allow the people on relief—the

people who are mainly or solely supported by the government and who live at the expense of the taxpayers—to exercise the franchise.¹⁴¹

The advertisement for this book in *Human Events* calls its thesis "a daring idea which could reverse the trend that is destroying us..."¹⁴²

Further developing the general critique of welfare, a number of articles in *Human Events* during the early 1970s cited to behavior (rather than poverty) as the welfare recipient's "problem,"¹⁴³ and continued to report on waste and fraud within the poverty programs themselves.¹⁴⁴ *Human Events* articles described recipients as "bums, parasites and leeches,"¹⁴⁵ and discussed recipient fraud¹⁴⁶ and immorality.¹⁴⁷ During this period, the ongoing gender-role tension over whether mothers should be in wage work (as Reagan's proposal advocated), or at home, reemerged.¹⁴⁸ As evidence of this tension and confusion, a portion of Nixon's FAP which would provide child care for welfare recipients was criticized, along with other child care bills, as "social engineering programs for children."¹⁴⁹

In the mid-1970s, *The Public Interest* once again aired some of the more complex of the Right's arguments against welfare. Nathan Glazer, stating that welfare is an "attractive alternative to work" and that there is "a dynamic interplay between welfare availability and attractiveness and family breakup," argued that making work more competitive with welfare could be done through health insurance, children's allowances, more vacation time, and unemployment insurance coverage for all jobs.¹⁵⁰ Chester Finn, legislative assistant to Senator Daniel Moynihan, wrote a scathing review of *All Our Children: The American Family Under Pressure*, a study by the Carnegie Council on Children, in which he



attributes the deterioration of the American family to "this society in which no one is truly accountable for his own behavior, culpable for his own shortcomings, or responsible for his own well-being," rather than considering economic explanations, such as poverty.

In 1978, Martin Anderson of the Hoover Institution¹⁵¹ published *Welfare*, an attack on the concept of a guaranteed income, or a negative income tax, based on the premise that people's lives are governed exclusively by rational economic decisions.¹⁵² By documenting a high effective marginal tax rate for the poor entering wage work, he argued that, as a matter of economic theory, a guaranteed income would bring about a reduction in work effort and labor supply.¹⁵³ In addition, this economic incentive would bring about other social consequences, such as wives leaving marriages to which otherwise they were financially bound.¹⁵⁴ He lauds the welfare reform programs implemented by Reagan as Governor of California in 1971, as "'purifying' the welfare rolls of those who were ripping off the welfare system," and urges "a return of responsibility for welfare to state/local governments and to private institutions."¹⁵⁵

In criticizing President Jimmy Carter's Program for Better Jobs and Income (PBJI), which would have cut benefits to AFDC recipients with children over the age of six,¹⁵⁶ Anderson says, "The states would, of course, not allow benefits to be cut for ... mothers with small children."¹⁵⁷ Yet his reform proposals are based on cutting benefits to the non-needy or to certain "unworthy" categories, eliminating fraud and enforcing a strong work requirement.¹⁵⁸

One year later, Jack Kemp, who has been described as representing "big government conservatism,"¹⁵⁹ published his *An American Renaissance*, articulating many of the same themes: criticizing the negative income tax as creating less work effort, discussing the high effective tax rate of the poor, and urging a return of control to local governments.¹⁶⁰ Assuming economic motivation for all acts, he argues that "tax reform" will change behavior.¹⁶¹ While arguing for tax cuts, however, he does not see those cuts as inevitably leading to cuts in pov-

erty programs.¹⁶²

It is useless to argue, as some libertarians do, that we do not need redistribution at all. The people, as a people, rightly insist that the whole look after the weakest of its parts.¹⁶³

Kemp's solutions are based on the need to reward savings and work instead of consumption and leisure.¹⁶⁴ Tax cuts, he argues, would encourage welfare recipients to do wage work;¹⁶⁵ "the positive approach of income incentives and growth has the effect of reducing the welfare rolls and federal spending without lowering the safety net."¹⁶⁶ Thus, Kemp rests his theories on pure economic motivation. However, he dif-

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fers from the social scientist Charles Murray, who several years later based his influential reform proposals on benefit reductions rather than on incentives and growth.¹⁶⁷

In the late 1970s, a number of articles in *The Public Interest* attacked the concept of redistribution as not only inefficient, but immoral.¹⁶⁸ In a review of Anderson's *Welfare*, John Bishop joined Anderson in opposing the idea of a guaranteed income, but stated that Anderson's ideas for reform basically condoned the current welfare system and therefore had not gone far enough in "reducing dependency."¹⁶⁹ Other authors discuss how those who are more productive are "blessed with greater natural ability."¹⁷⁰

In the mid-1960s, the libertarian movement split with the traditional conservative movement over the draft and the Vietnam War, which libertarians opposed.¹⁷¹ However, in the 1970s, libertarians joined with other conservative movements over opposition to welfare. Their message was threefold: few people in the United States are really in poverty,¹⁷² the government should not tax those who work to give money to those who don't work,¹⁷³ and, consistent with their position that government should not control people's lives, "the welfare system is as arbitrary and demeaning to the recipient as to the unwilling donor."¹⁷⁴ The libertarian magazine *Reason* erroneously reports that AFDC "accounts for a large portion of today's huge welfare bill,"¹⁷⁵ and "encourages unemployed and low income fathers to desert their families and avoid work,"¹⁷⁶ focusing on the harm of government intervention rather than striking a moral tone.

**THE HERITAGE FOUNDATION
WEIGHS IN**

Although several Rightist think tanks had been in existence during the early 1960s, they proliferated in the 1970s.¹⁷⁷ In 1973, the Heritage Foundation was founded by a group of conservative legislative aides to serve as a "talent bank" for Republicans while they were in office, a "tax exempt refuge" when they were out of office, and a nationwide communications center among Republicans.¹⁷⁸ Heritage decided early on to target members of Congress and their staffs, producing everything from one-page executive summaries and twelve-page Backgrounders to full-length books.¹⁷⁹

The Heritage Foundation journal *Policy Review* quickly became an influential publication within policy circles of the Right. In a 1977 article, conservative economist Walter E. Williams argued that an African American and Latin underclass was being created because of excess government intervention (direct income transfer programs, as well as indirect costs in racial hiring quotas and busing), unions (labor support of income transfer programs disguises "true effects of restrictions created by

unions... by casting a few crumbs to those denied jobs in order to keep them quiet, thereby creating a permanent welfare class"), and minimum wage laws (by giving firms an incentive to only hire the most productive).¹⁸⁰ Williams asserts that one of the "best strategies to raise the socioeconomic status of Negroes as a group is to promote a freer market."¹⁸¹ Earlier in 1977, *Policy Review* author John A. Howard had struck a similar theme of rugged individualism in his critique of the welfare state.¹⁸²

Other *Policy Review* authors develop complimentary themes, such as the argument that the welfare state, by providing disincentives to produce in both employers and employees, keeps resources in low-productivity, and out of higher-productivity uses.¹⁸³ In criticizing capital gains and progressive taxation, *Policy Review* authors cite back to Martin Anderson's description in his book *Welfare* of the work disincentive created by the high marginal tax rates of the poor, and connect this welfare/tax policy to a self-interested theory of "power maximization by government."¹⁸⁴ The authors then tie Anderson's argument to many traditional Rightist themes:

Tax reforms strengthen the power of government relative to citizens generally when they destroy private wealth and lead to the creation of income claims that are dependent on government transfers....Substantial effort under the guise of promoting justice has gone into promoting guilt over economic success, but what the elimination of poverty really requires is a strong dose of middle class values....Nothing but widespread individual success can constrain the power of government.¹⁸⁵

Anderson himself, writing in the pages of *Policy Review*, argued that Carter's Program for Better Jobs and Income would have expanded the welfare rolls to assist families earning between \$5,000-10,000 (called "higher-income classes"), and would have given earned income tax credits to

families earning between \$10,000-15,000.

This is not welfare reform. This is a potential social revolution of great magnitude, a revolution that, if it should come to pass, could result in social tragedy.¹⁸⁶

He, along with others, made the now-familiar arguments that poverty statistics are faulty, poverty did not stop declining in the late 1960s, and there are few poor people in the United States¹⁸⁷ when one counts the value of in-kind benefits, such as health insur-

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ance (which is not counted for wage workers' earned income) or housing subsidies (received by only a quarter of families receiving AFDC).¹⁸⁸ Other *Policy Review* articles in the 1970s argued that unemployment statistics are inflated because many government benefit programs (e.g., AFDC and Food Stamps) require recipients to register for work "individuals who are either largely unemployable or have no need or desire to work."¹⁸⁹

And finally, Heritage publications argue that "the need for daycare was grossly exaggerated by its supporters and the presumed benefits of daycare to the recipients were not proven because the data were inadequate."¹⁹⁰ Informal daycare, neighbors or older children, should be able to provide the services.¹⁹¹ The daycare lobby was comprised of daycare providers who are advocating for their own interests.¹⁹²

Two Heritage "Backgrounders" written by Samuel T. Francis and published during the 1970s attack Carter's PBJI, asserting that there was no need to create jobs, because if there were a demand for jobs, "the private sector would already have created them,"¹⁹³ that the training component may not train for needed skills, resulting in failure to become employed "with possible dangers to public tranquillity,"¹⁹⁴ and that the concept of a guaranteed annual income violates "the American tradition of individual responsibility and the personal quest for opportunity and upward mobility."¹⁹⁵

Racial imagery is then subtly tied to this "danger." In discussing how the guaranteed income concept does not differentiate between geographical regions, Francis says:

A Southern Black may judge an adequate income and a successful lifestyle very differently from a Northern Black, not to speak of an American Indian or a Southwestern Mexican-American.¹⁹⁶

Finally, Heritage published a monograph by Charles D. Hobbs, a principal architect of Reagan's California welfare reform programs,¹⁹⁷ highlighting a theme later used during the Reagan presidential years. By again overstating the value of benefits by including multiple programs which only some poor people receive some of the time, Hobbs concluded:

Many welfare families are better off financially, by their participation in several programs, than are the families of workers whose taxes pay for the welfare....The key issue of welfare reform is the conflict between work and welfare, personified by the resentment of the tax-paying worker toward his welfare-collecting neighbor.¹⁹⁸

Thus we see the continuing framing of subtle themes and twisting of information to appeal to white working class resentment of the gains of the civil rights movement and fears of inflation, that ultimately divert "populist anger from Wall Street and the rich."¹⁹⁹

THE THINK TANK PRESIDENCY

Under Ronald Reagan's Presidency the Right's anti-welfare themes were sharpened and the message of personal responsibility (as opposed to communal support) became more pronounced. Reagan built on racial conflicts by popularizing the disingenuous image of the African American "welfare queen" who is a rich con artist.²⁰⁰

The Reagan Administration's public policy initiatives were substantially shaped by and dependent on New Right think tanks. Reagan's policy regarding AFDC was largely influenced by three books, each a product of these think tanks. *Losing Ground*, by Charles Murray,²⁰¹ and *Wealth and Poverty*, by George Gilder,²⁰² both were financially supported by the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research. *Mandate for Leadership* was published by the Heritage Foundation.²⁰³ All three echoed the themes developed in the 1960s and 1970s that the receipt of public assistance creates immorality and dependence, undermines values, and increases poverty.

George Gilder's *Wealth and Poverty*, edited by Neoconservative Midge Decter, was distributed to members of the Reagan cabinet as "intellectual ammunition."²⁰⁴ Best known for its supply-side economics theme, *Wealth and Poverty* described in great detail why the existence of AFDC is the root cause of poverty because, among other reasons, it destroys the father's key role and authority within the family.²⁰⁵ Gilder describes the "life of the poor" as "characterize[d] everywhere" by "resignation and rage, escapism and violence, short horizons and promiscuous sexuality."²⁰⁶

Charles Murray, in his 1984 book *Losing Ground*, popularized the idea that poor people are motivated primarily by economic incentives, and used the economic decisions of a hypothetical couple, Phyllis and Harold, to "prove" how illegitimacy, crime, and family deterioration are caused by AFDC payments and rules.²⁰⁷ In what at the time was viewed as a radical proposal, Murray advocated the abolition of AFDC.²⁰⁸ Ten years later, his pre-

scient words were cited by the libertarian Cato Institute in urging President Clinton to "end welfare as we know it."²⁰⁹

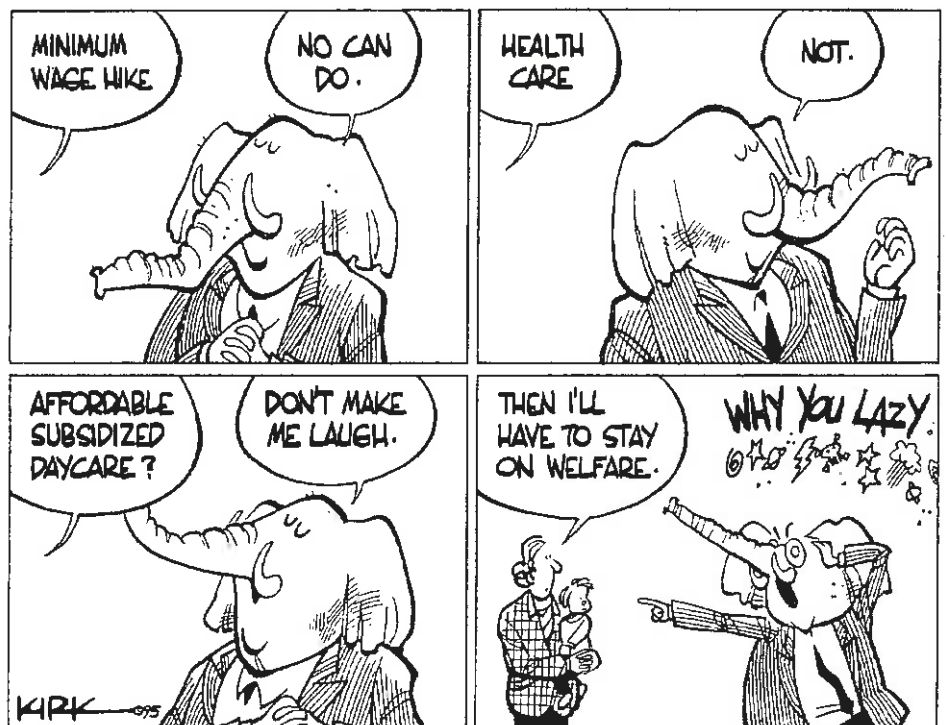
Although Murray's use of data and his conclusions were quickly destroyed by other researchers,²¹⁰ he has become a leading policy spokesperson on welfare issues since his book's publication. This is true largely because of a concerted marketing strategy on the part of the Manhattan Institute,²¹¹ which kept the book in the public eye for many months.²¹²

The Heritage Foundation's *Mandate for Leadership* is a 1,000-page tome that was presented to the Reagan transition team one week after Reagan was elected.²¹³ The success of this book as a Washington, DC best seller involved weeks of pre-marketing: advance briefings with sympathetic reporters and leaks of portions of the book to journalists.²¹⁴ While it did not contain detailed recommendations advocating for reductions and restrictions in most welfare programs, it discussed fraud, waste, and abuse in the Food Stamp program, the school lunch program, and all the programs operated by the US Department of Health and Human Services (including AFDC), often implying that "non-needy" individuals were receiving benefits.²¹⁵ It empha-

sized the importance of maintaining the distinction between "worthy" and "unworthy" poor in administering welfare programs versus social insurance programs.²¹⁶ Finally, it set the stage for Reagan's reliance on the Heritage Foundation for policy guidance.²¹⁷

In this role, the Heritage Foundation developed and marketed many of the welfare reform ideas adopted by the Reagan Administration. For instance, Stuart Butler, in a 1980 article, bolstered Reagan's imagery specifically connecting welfare and race. In discussing the removal of government intervention in urban "slums," and advocating Enterprise Zones in order to reverse the decline of American cities,²¹⁸ Butler stated that over half of the country's Black population now lives in the large cities, compared with only 25 percent of white Americans, and that over 20 percent of urban families are headed by women. The South Bronx, which has lost 20 percent of its residents during the last 10 years, has lost less than 3 percent of its welfare cases.²¹⁹

Also in *Policy Review*, a group of New Right and Reagan Administration authors, asked to consider an imaginary utopian conservative state, conclude that "the ideal conservative state keeps interference with our lives to a mini-



num because that maximizes our freedom to be whatever it is we are *intended to be*...individual rights come from God and the purpose of government is only to secure those rights."²²⁰ Yet in this utopia, welfare payments must be coupled with incentives to follow "traditional" values.²²¹ Further, the authors judge that our current "materially successful society" wants to give recipients more than they think they need themselves.²²² And again, showing a vast ignorance of the complexity of family relationships, as well as unquestioned patriarchal assumptions, the authors state:

In a conservative utopia, every man would have the opportunity to earn enough money to buy a home and enable his wife to be a full-time mother to their children. No laws or taxes would discriminate against the family or provide disincentives to the care of children by the family.²²³

CHANGING THE BEHAVIOR OF WOMEN

Using the momentum of his early days in office, Reagan propelled through Congress major welfare revisions contained in the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act. By revising the way in which earned income was counted and removing many work incentives, most recipients in wage work were terminated from receiving supplemental AFDC benefits.²²⁴ The result was that some wage earning poor now were economically poorer than they had been when they had received their AFDC supplement and Medicaid²²⁵ and were not able to augment their wages with benefits, a situation which allowed the Right to play to hostility and frustration against AFDC recipients who at that moment were not in wage work.²²⁶

In addition, by both constructing a racist stereotype of the AFDC recipient as an African American "welfare queen" and by playing to the historically contingent understanding on the part of many whites that African American women should be in wage work, Reagan was able to begin persuading

even many "liberal" white women who now were in wage work, and advocating for the right to do wage work that welfare recipients should not receive AFDC as a means of allowing them to parent. Thus Reagan's revisions, which increased the work requirements begun in 1967 in both the AFDC and Food Stamp Programs, found broader acceptance among the public.²²⁷

Although the Reagan (with Heritage Foundation guidance) welfare reductions were ostensibly designed to reduce government interference and

WELFARE BECAME A MAGNET FOR FRAMING THE DEBATE AND CONSTRUCTING AN IMAGE OF A COHERENT RIGHT-WING AGENDA.

return control to state and local governments, they laid the groundwork for the late 1980s and 1990s government intervention to change poor women's behavior.²²⁸ In 1989, *Policy Review* published:

The heart of such a position [the historic gains of the Reagan budget as holding a line on social spending] should be that the nation now spends enough on social programs and that the idea of "entitlements" should be supplemented, and in some cases replaced, as the underlying principle of American social policy, by the idea of benefits contingent on responsible behavior.²²⁹

Rightist publications attacked the media for unjustly criticizing the Reagan welfare cuts.²³⁰ After Bill Moyers's CBS Report, "People Like Us," which was "relatively sympathetic" to

welfare recipients, Reed Irvine's *Accuracy in Media* listed the sponsors of the show and urged readers to voice their disapproval.²³¹ Milton Friedman attacked *Newsweek* coverage in his column in that magazine.²³²

THE NEW RIGHT ADVANCES ITS AGENDA

As the Neoconservatives divided between the Democratic and Republican parties during the 1970s, Republican Neoconservatives initially remained committed to aspects of the welfare state and to the civil rights tradition:

In economic and social policy, [neoconservatism] feels no lingering hostility to the welfare state, nor does it accept it resignedly, as a necessary evil.²³³

However, by the 1990s, most Republican Neoconservatives had rejected their liberalism in economic and civil rights issues.²³⁴

Further swelling the ranks of those opposing welfare were increasing numbers of religious evangelicals and fundamentalists, who were emerging as the political force known as the Religious Right.²³⁵ The "pro-family" agenda was particularly appealing to this submovement; secular humanism was blamed for a multitude of social ills, from teen pregnancy to high divorce rates.²³⁶ Welfare became a magnet for framing the debate and constructing an image of a coherent right-wing agenda.

New Right single issue groups, such as Phyllis Schlafly's Eagle Forum, Rev. Donald Wildmon's American Family Association, or Rev. Louis Sheldon's Traditional Values Coalition, do not necessarily place welfare reform at the center of their agendas,²³⁷ but they frequently cooperate and overlap ideologically with groups that do. For example, while rarely discussing poverty and welfare, Eagle Forum's *Phyllis Schlafly Report*²³⁸ demonstrates the tension over the role of women *vis-a-vis* work and home that exists within the rhetoric of the Right.

Schlafly argues that fathers should support their children (thus the importance of child support enforcement),²³⁹ mothers should be at home (thus her

attacks on feminism, the Equal Rights Amendment, federal child care legislation, and comparable worth legislation, as well as tax code discrimination against "traditional" families),²⁴⁰ and AFDC is "a conduit to redistribute income from tax-paying Americans to nontaxpaying Americans"²⁴¹ and a disincentive for fathers to support their own children. She claims that government is subsidizing non-traditional families, while at the same time creating disincentives for the formation of the traditional family, which then results in more children in poverty.²⁴² And, according to Schlafly, economic issues cannot be separated from moral issues; the Great Society social spending programs were "morally wrong."²⁴³

Consistent with the agenda of federal government downsizing and decentralization of programs,²⁴⁴ the Reagan Administration in the early 1980s proposed to convert AFDC into a wholly state-run and state-financed effort,²⁴⁵ funded by block grants. When this failed to win Congressional approval, Reagan announced a total revamping of the AFDC program through "state-sponsored, community-based demonstration projects."²⁴⁶ A limited federal waiver statute²⁴⁷ (a waiver is a grant of "permission" by the federal government for states to ignore specific federal requirements in programs that are partially federally funded) had previously been used primarily to allow state administrative innovations to improve the service delivery of the program or small projects extending social services. However, the Reagan Administration began to grant states waivers from many of the federal entitlement eligibility criteria, allowing the states to terminate previously eligible welfare recipients.

In order to do this, the Reagan Administration established the Low Income Opportunity Advisory Board (LIOAB) to expedite requests for waivers of multiple programs.²⁴⁸ Waivers were to be consistent with the policy goals of the 1987 report issued by the Domestic Policy Council Low Income Opportunity Working Group, which specifically put forth the idea of withholding welfare as a means of controlling behavior.²⁴⁹ In addition, waivers were to be cost neutral.²⁵⁰



UNFUNDED MANDATES

As Stuart Butler of the Heritage Foundation stated: "[t]hrough the Board has attracted scant press and public attention since its creation in 1987, it is one of the most important gains for federalism in recent years."²⁵¹

The first waivers²⁵² included Wisconsin's Learnfare program, which reduced AFDC benefits for families whose teenagers did not attend a sufficient number of days of school. For the first time, a waiver was granted that allowed a state to reduce AFDC benefits solely to affect "deviant" behavior of welfare families outside of a labor market context. Subsequent waivers allowed the denial of increased benefits for additional children conceived while receiving AFDC (Family Cap or Child Exclusion), reduced benefits for children not immunized, and reduced benefits for families who moved from one state to another.²⁵³

In previous articles, I have documented how the premises upon which the waivers were based were flawed, relying not on the complexity of welfare recipients' experiences, but on the Right's ideologically driven reductionist, misleading, and racist political rhetoric.²⁵⁴ For example, seventy-six social scientists with varying political viewpoints issued a joint statement that previous research does not support the

conclusion that welfare is a primary cause of rising non-marital births.²⁵⁵ Yet, the "Report From the White House Working Group on the Family," headed by Gary Bauer, now director of the Family Research Council, stated:

Statistical evidence does not prove those suppositions [that welfare benefits are an incentive to bear children]; and yet, even the most casual observer of public assistance programs understands there is indeed some relationship between the availability of welfare and the inclination of many young women to bear fatherless children.²⁵⁶

Thus right-wing analysis increasingly focused the debate on issues of "immoral" behavior, rather than on an understanding of the complexities and nuances of poverty. In this way, illegitimacy became the primary cause of poverty not issues such as unequal bargaining power in labor markets or poor educational systems. Since welfare causes illegitimacy, welfare is the cause of poverty. The majority of New Right groups coalesced around this ideological formulation that welfare causes the breakup



of the American family, and decreases individual initiative and personal responsibility.²⁵⁷

In 1988, a major welfare reform bill, The Family Support Act, was enacted, providing additional requirements for job participation and child support enforcement.²⁵⁸ The Act's primary sponsor, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, articulated a rationale consistent with his previous "Report on the Black Family:"

Unlike the problems of children in much of the world; age-old problems of disease, new problems of ecological disaster, the problems of children in the United States are overwhelmingly associated with the strength and stability of their families. Our problems do not reside in nature, nor yet are they fundamentally economic. Our problems derive from behavior.²⁵⁹

However, not surprisingly, at the same time that rightist policymakers were targeting the minuscule AFDC budget as the cause of major systemic problems of poverty, states were not spending even the money appropriated under this Act to implement job programs to move AFDC mothers into wage work.²⁶⁰

The passage of the Family Support Act coincided with the release of *Issues '88: A Platform for America*, a three-volume study of "a political platform for a stronger America" jointly published by the Heritage Foundation and the Free Congress Foundation. The authors opposed "high" welfare payment levels which would bring welfare recipients to or above the poverty level, advocated for mandatory, full-time workfare programs, and strongly supported the "right" of women to work at home on cottage industry piecework.²⁶¹

Rather than limit government regulation, this platform proposed an enormous intervention in the lives of adults, supporting restriction of divorce, and advocating for school prayer and routine testing of schoolchildren for HIV and drugs.

Thus, rather than supporting the job training programs outlined and funded through the Family Support Act (with matching grants from the states), conservative think tanks such as the Heritage Foundation were designing and lobbying for many of the contemporary and still current behavior modification proposals.²⁶²

At the turn of the decade, a number of right-wing spokespersons were ar-

ticulating a new theory of "empowering the poor," freeing the poor from the shackles of their poverty and the demoralization of bureaucratic control through federal government incentives.²⁶³ As the threat of communism and the Right's opposition to additional growth of big government ebbed as issues around which the Right could effectively mobilize, the Right adopted a particularly American value-oriented brand of populism, with welfare as a central wedge issue.²⁶⁴ Thus the justification for the elimination of federal social programs shifted; they should be defunded not because they tax our pay checks, but because they destroy recipients' characters.²⁶⁵

THE RIGHT'S CORNERING OF THE DEBATE

In documenting the threads of right-wing rhetoric on welfare, I have largely focused on newsletters, journals, and think tank publications. I am unable in this article to fully document the multiple ways in which the rhetoric was then marketed. However, others have noted this marketing in great detail: the use of direct mail scare tactics, the use of the media through televangelists and talk shows,²⁶⁶ the pro-

cess of "selling" its propaganda,²⁶⁷ the rightist critique of media as "liberal,"²⁶⁸ the pressuring of mainstream media through boycotts of advertisers' products and letter-writing campaigns,²⁶⁹ the encouraging of think tank staff and "scholars" to write op-ed pieces²⁷⁰ all toward the goal of "stirring up hostilities" and "organizing discontent."²⁷¹

By the 1990s, the Right's "misinformation" on AFDC recipients and poverty had become mainstream discourse. While rightist Lawrence Mead²⁷² in his book *The New Politics of Poverty* was stating as truth that "[t]he main cause of poverty today...is the reluctance of increasing numbers of the poor to work,"²⁷³ Democratic DC Mayor Marion Barry was advocating mandatory Norplant injections for welfare recipients.²⁷⁴ As the Right's rhetoric on welfare became reputable, rather than fringe, Right spokespersons became regular media stars²⁷⁵ and newspaper columnists.²⁷⁶ Forums, conferences and briefings are held for members of Congress,²⁷⁷ with direct results in terms of Congressional proposals and debate.²⁷⁸ "Researchers" are asked on a regular basis to testify before Congressional committees on "welfare reform."²⁷⁹ The Heritage Foundation, and other New Right think tanks have been centrally involved in the development of Republican welfare policy and negotiations around the terms of various bills.²⁸⁰

Central to the Right's current success in cornering the welfare debate is the selling of the American public on the notion that dramatic increases in illegitimacy is a central problem in the United States, particularly among African Americans, and that the existence of AFDC is largely responsible. The "selling" has been led in large part by Charles Murray, notably in his influential op-ed in the *Wall Street Journal*.²⁸¹ This argument gave the Right a cover to discuss race.²⁸²

Within the black community, the increase in the proportion of births to single mothers has been particularly dramatic: from 23 percent in 1960 to 28 percent in 1969, to 45 percent in 1980, to 62 percent at the beginning of the 1990s.²⁸³

Yet as Michael Lind, in his recent book *Up From Conservatism*,²⁸⁴ has pointed out, this portrayal of illegitimacy statistics produces a deceptive impression. Census Bureau data documents that four-fifths of the increase in the proportion of illegitimate births result from married, employed African American women deciding to have fewer children, and that "the rate of babies being born to unwed black teenagers, about 80 per 1,000 unmarried teen-agers, remained virtually the same from 1920 through 1990."²⁸⁵ Still, Heritage's Robert Rector highlights "America's No. 1 social

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problem: the catastrophic rise of illegitimacy."²⁸⁶ And Adam Wolfson, in the Neoconservative journal *Commentary*, cites to William Bennett for the proposition that illegitimate birth rates rose 400 percent since 1960.²⁸⁷

Thus a hoax, not an error,²⁸⁸ has been perpetrated on white Americans; the "conservative disinformation apparatus" used an African American illegitimacy "epidemic" to further culture war politics.²⁸⁹

For weeks after the publication of his *Wall Street Journal* op-ed, Murray himself appeared on numerous TV networks and his ideas were regularly referred to by other commentators.²⁹⁰ After deciding that the Republican "welfare reform" bill currently being debated was "too timid," William Bennett (Heritage Foundation fellow and co-director of Empower America) and others wrote follow up op-eds which appeared in 25 major newspapers, and Bennett ap-

peared on Rush Limbaugh's show discussing "welfare reform." Representative James Talent (R-Missouri), who proposed an alternative bill, ascribes the success of Murray's ideas both to the relative "moderate" status of Murray and Bennett (as opposed to Pat Buchanan or Senator Jesse Helms), and to at least a partial endorsement by President Clinton.²⁹¹

Building on that momentum, when President Clinton released his "welfare reform" plan in June 1994, Neoconservative Irving Kristol (who had played a central role in translating Murray's ideas into political action) orchestrated a Capitol Hill press conference featuring Bennett and Congressional conservatives to denounce the plan as "marginal tinkering" and "half joke-half fraud." Over the next week, Kristol, Bennett and others were media stars, presenting a vision of AFDC as responsible for the country's moral decay.²⁹² Representative Talent, Heritage's Rector, and the Christian Coalition were credited with driving the campaign against illegitimacy in the House.²⁹³

By articulating a definition of poverty that associated it explicitly with illegitimacy, then associating illegitimacy with race, the Right made it acceptable to express blatantly racist concepts without shame.²⁹⁴ For example, when Charles Murray wrote *The Bell Curve* 10 years after *Losing Ground*, he argued that welfare should be abolished, not simply because of the economic incentives it creates, but because it encourages "dysgenesis," the outbreeding of intelligent whites by genetically inferior African Americans, Hispanics, and poor whites.²⁹⁵

When the Republican welfare bill was being debated in Congress in 1995, Representative John L. Mica (R-Florida) holding up a sign that read "Do Not Feed the Alligators" stated:

We post these warnings because unnatural feeding and artificial care creates dependency.²⁹⁶

Representative Barbara Cubin (R-Wyoming) compared welfare recipients with wolves.²⁹⁷ Representative E. Clay Shaw, Jr. (R-Florida) said that poor teen mothers were "children you wouldn't

leave your cat with on a weekend."²⁹⁸

When a Latina mother in Massachusetts was charged with child abuse, her story became a cause celebre, not for expansion of child protection programs, but for welfare cutbacks.²⁹⁹ Governor William Weld sent all state legislators copies of the *Boston Globe* article about her family.³⁰⁰ He discussed the story with Jack Kemp and William Bennett (who "started to foam at the mouth").³⁰¹ Months later, when he spoke at the conservative American Enterprise Institute, he began his keynote address with a description of this family as the symbol for all welfare recipients.

THE THINK TANK FACTOR CONTINUES

The marketing of misleading and reductionist information continues to be a prominent part of the Right's attack on welfare. For example,

in September 1995, the Cato Institute, a right-wing Libertarian think tank,³⁰² issued a report concluding that welfare pays far more than a low-wage job in every state in the nation:

The value of the total package of benefits [received by AFDC recipients] relative to a job providing the same after-tax income ranges from a high of \$36,400 in Hawaii to a low of \$11,500 in Mississippi. In eight jurisdictions...welfare pays at least the equivalent of a \$25,000 a year job.³⁰³

However, in calculating the benefits that AFDC recipients receive, Cato counted WIC benefits³⁰⁴ which more than 80% of children receiving AFDC do not receive, housing assistance which three-quarters of AFDC families do not receive, and low-income energy assistance (LIHEAP) for which no reliable

data exists on the correlation between receipt of the two programs.³⁰⁵ Even in computing those benefits, levels of food stamps and LIHEAP are overcalculated.³⁰⁶ In addition, Medicaid is counted as *income* for AFDC families in the Cato study, although benefits from this program go directly to health care providers.³⁰⁷

The reverse occurs in the undercounting of income of low-wage families in wage work. Cato does not include employer-provided health insurance or Medicaid although census data show that 62 percent of children living in working poor families receive these benefits. It does not include Food Stamp benefits paid to two million working poor families (80 percent with children), and does not factor in the percentage of working poor who also receive WIC, energy assistance, and housing assistance.³⁰⁸

PRA Recommends...

Policy Review

November/December, 1996 issue (no. 80)

The Right's message that American society can renew itself only if it gives up its commitment to a "false compassion," and goes back to individualism and basic values of work, faith and family is echoed throughout the 1996 November/December issue of the Heritage Foundation's *Policy Review*. In this issue, one article after another endorses such social methods as the "three strikes and you're out" sentencing policy, because it "demands accountability, reflects common sense, presents a clear penalty and uncompromisingly invests in public safety." In an article by James L. Payne titled "Absence of Judgment," social workers are attacked for their attitude that poverty and neediness are "wrong." Payne argues that current welfare reform policies are intended to make each person responsible for meeting his/(her) own needs. But according to Payne, allowing clients to determine their own lifestyles (thus not imposing the correct, responsible lifestyle) is an abdication of responsibility on the part of the social worker. He concludes, therefore, that social workers are guaranteed to harm welfare reform.

In a brief article titled "State Groups That Fight for Mom and Dad," Charmaine Crouse Yoest describes Family Policy Councils (FPCs)—"a growing national movement of independent, state-based policy organizations which now operate at the local and state level in more than 30 states." Yoest reports that these groups have arisen in order to change "cultural trends that are undermining the stability of families—from no-fault divorce, to teen pregnancy to chronic welfare dependency."

This issue of *Policy Review*, which is available at larger newsstands, is helpful as an example of the Right's public education. It is targeted to policy elites and private decision-makers, while also serving as a public relations organ to promote the Heritage Foundation.

In spite of these distortions, the Cato study received widespread media attention. It has been cited by New York Governor Pataki and California Governor Wilson, both of whom have ties to the Heritage Foundation³⁰⁹ as justification for AFDC benefit reductions (as much as 26 percent in New York state).³¹⁰

Similarly, Heritage's Robert Rector argues in support of across-the-board benefit reductions because benefit levels "already put recipients well above the poverty level."³¹¹ The *Christian Science Monitor* states:

Liberals and conservatives alike agree on the problem of perverse incentives that mean a mother receiving...AFDC and Medicaid literally cannot afford to take an entry-level job...³¹²

Using equally inflated statistics, Heritage reports that aggregate government welfare spending over the past three decades is \$5.4 trillion in constant 1993 dollars, an annual average of \$3,357 for every taxpaying household in the country.³¹³

New Right think-tanks are actively involved not only at the national level,³¹⁴ but regularly brief state-level politicians on welfare policy. For example, a misleading radio ad run by Senator John Warner (R-Virginia) used Heritage Foundation data.³¹⁵ The previously discussed Cato Institute study, which found that Florida was one of 40 states whose benefits package is worth more than an \$8.00 an hour job, was used as the basis for discussion by Florida legislators at a seminar sponsored by the conservative think tank Foundation for Florida's Future.³¹⁶ The Hudson Institute not only testifies and advises the Indiana legislature on welfare,³¹⁷ but was retained by Wisconsin's Governor Tommy Thompson to advise the state Department of Health and Social Services on welfare issues.³¹⁸

The Heritage Foundation publishes an annual guide for media which lists 1,500 conservative "experts" catalogued in 70 policy areas, including welfare.³¹⁹ Thus it is not surprising that Heritage was cited by media sources more than any other major think-tank in 1995.³²⁰ In

addition, Heritage's *Policy Review* articles on welfare are both cited to and excerpted.³²¹ For an excellent example of how the New Right gradually advances its agenda, remember how Stuart Butler of the Heritage Foundation described the Low Income Opportunity Advisory Board as a critical step in the right direction on welfare reform because it would give states discretion.³²² Yet in 1995, Robert Rector of Heritage stated that "waivers are mostly a public relations gimmick:"

We've had a lot of waivers over the last five years, but the welfare

THE DEVELOPMENT OF A RIGHT-WING POPULIST MOVEMENT, BASED ON FEAR AND NOSTALGIA RATHER THAN ECONOMIC ISSUES, LED TO THE SCAPEGOATING OF WELFARE RECIPIENTS AS THE CAUSE OF ALL ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL WOES.

caseload has gone up 30 percent and illegitimacy rates are reaching epidemic proportions.³²³

COMPLEX AGENDAS WITHIN THE RIGHT

The success of the Right's campaign against welfare stems from its ability to weave together diverse anti-welfare themes from different submovements, creating a powerful synergism and unity among many sectors of the Right. AFDC proved a common theme that captured for the Right the resentment generated by the country's conservative religious revitalization, the contraction and restructuring of the economy, and white race resentment and bigotry.³²⁴ That is not to say, however, that there is always agreement over welfare reform among the Right's submovements.³²⁵ For example, I have

discussed earlier the ongoing tension over the proper role for women. The dominant formulation—housewife and mother for middle class women and wage-laborer for poor women, especially poor Black women—is not universally supported within the Right.

A spokesperson for the California-based Traditional Values Coalition criticized Governor Wilson's proposed welfare cuts because one result might be an increase in abortions among poor women.³²⁶ Yet the Christian Coalition criticized the "welfare reform" plan proposed by the National Governors Association in 1995 because it was "too soft on out-of-wedlock births."³²⁷

Representative Newt Gingrich, then a member of the Conservative Opportunity Society (COS), a group of "young Turk" Republicans in the House, argued in COS's "manifesto," *Window of Opportunity*, for tying welfare benefits to desirable patterns of behavior,³²⁸ but stated that "[r]unning a cheap welfare state cannot be our goal."³²⁹ The libertarian publication, *Reason*, criticized how "COS members have worked assiduously, often in alliance with the Moral Majority and other New Right groups, to erode individual freedom in several areas."³³⁰

CONCLUSION

The New Right has achieved popular acceptance for the annihilation of a federal entitlement to welfare by misleadingly portraying the very small AFDC program as the cause of a broad range of perceived social ills. As a result, public concern for material poverty has been transformed into a concern over the behavior of the poor. Understanding how this story passed from the margin to the mainstream, how Old Right ideas were turned into popularly acceptable public policy,³³¹ is key to unraveling the current discourse regarding welfare and formulating a counter strategy.

In many ways, the New Right's victory is the final victory of the Old Right. The evolution of a family values and behavioral poverty analysis as part of a consciously constructed "culture war" (which in part replaced the "class war"),³³² was a way of furthering the Old Right's previous agenda. These include



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The development of a right-wing populist movement, based on fear and nostalgia rather than economic issues, led to the scapegoating of welfare recipients as the cause of all economic and social woes. Race and gender played central roles in the promotion of the stereotype of the unworthy welfare recipient. The Right utilized welfare as a wedge issue, an issue which could pry voters away from their traditional allegiances.³³⁴ "Several different forms of prejudice can now be advocated under the guise of populism."³³⁵

The attack on welfare coalesced multiple ideological strands—protecting private property, maintaining traditional gender roles and protecting the family, and playing to encoded racism. It also provided a mechanism for recruiting many people and groups that had not been part of the Right in the past. In so doing, the New Right co-opted many voters at a time of intense economic anxiety because of a decline in buying power, economic restructuring and a dramatic upward redistribution of wealth.³³⁶

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ANTI-GAY SUPPORT GROUP

The ex-gay movement has launched a new support group to counter PFLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays). Known as PFOX (Parents, Family and Friends of Ex-Gays), the group debuted on October 10 at a press conference co-sponsored by the Family Research Council (FRC) and held at the National Press Club. The announcement was made in preparation for the "Second Annual Coming Out of Homosexuality Day" on October 11 which is otherwise known as Coming Out Day. The press conference was hosted by Michael Johnson, a "former" homosexual, and was taped for C-SPAN. Other speakers included FRC Cultural Studies Director Bob Knight, *Lambda Report* editor Peter LaBarbera, the Philadelphia Family Policy Council's Bill Devlin, and "ex-gays" Anthony Falzarano and Jane Boyer. Their efforts were timed to coincide with the AIDS Quilt which was displayed on the Mall in Washington DC during the same weekend.



broadcast journalism." The Institute also runs a conservative job placement service, the national Conservative Leadership Conference, as well as an internship program. The new training center which opened on September 18, includes staff offices for the institute and a 44-student dormitory.

FOCUS ON A ZIP CODE

The Colorado Springs-based Focus on the Family no longer needs a street address. With a reported 1995 budget of \$101 million, 10 radio programs, 12 magazines, and several books, the organization is so large that it has qualified for its own zip code.

FOCUS ON CHINA

Intent on expanding as much as it can, Focus on the Family has launched a sister organization, Focus on the Chinese Family. The new organization, led by co-founders Jesse and Clarissa Hsu, will focus on reaching "the Chinese world by applying biblical values to daily life..." Projects for the new organization include translating *Focus on the Family* magazine into Chinese for the new *Focus on the Chinese Family* magazine as well as adapting and translating selected commentaries from Focus President Dr. James Dobson for Chinese radio listeners in Asia and North America.

WOMEN MAKE PROMISES

Following in the footsteps of the Christian men's movement, Promise Keepers, a number of Christian women's groups have formed around the country. Some of the goals of these organizations sound strikingly similar to their male counterpart— "turning women into more godly resources for their families, churches, and communities." These organizations mimic Promise Keepers in their belief that women should be subservient to men. The organizations include: Promise Reapers, which was established in 1995 and has sponsored women's prayer meetings in Louisiana, California, Texas, California, and Minnesota; Women of Faith was

established in 1996 by Minirth Meier New Life Clinic and also hosts conferences across the country; Chosen Women: Daughters of the King was established in 1995 and expects 50,000 women to attend a spiritual renewal event to be held in May, 1997 at a sports arena in Southern California; Heritage Keepers, established in 1995, held its first conference on August 10; and Suitable Helpers, established in 1993, sponsored six conferences in 1996 in addition to conducting programs in the Philippines, Canada, Thailand, South Africa, and New Guinea.

PROMISE KEEPERS ON RADIO

New Man magazine, the official magazine of the Christian men's movement, reports that Promise Keepers is carried on more than 200 radio affiliates across the country with its weekly radio program, "Promise Keepers This Week." The one-hour program is produced by Promise Keepers and Westar Media Group Inc., both of which have also joined up to produce a daily 90 second radio vignette— in both English and Spanish— featuring excerpts from Promise Keepers conferences.

RECLAIMING AMERICA

James Kennedy's Coral Ridge Ministries has launched the Center for Reclaiming America (CRA). Much like the Christian Coalition, CRA will track anti-Christian and "anti-virtue" activities, draft legislation and lobby lawmakers.

LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE EXPANDS

The Leadership Institute has opened the Steven P.J. Wood building, a new training headquarters in Arlington, Virginia. The Institute was founded by Morton Blackwell in 1979 with the mission of increasing the number and effectiveness of conservative activists and has worked since then to identify, recruit, train and place conservatives in the public policy process. Since 1979, more than 14,000 conservatives have been trained by the Leadership Institute. Training programs include "public relations, political candidacies, campaign management, government staffing, youth education and mobilization, student publications, fundraising and



"As cruel as it sounds, if enough ex-welfare recipients set up house-keeping under bridges or begin killing themselves, it might result in jobs for people to clean up their shantytowns— even to dislodge the rotting bodies."

— Ken Hamblin, from his regularly syndicated column in the *Conservative Chronicle*, August 28, 1996.

LIMERICK

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What's Wrong with the Right?

Michael A. Milburn and Sheree D. Conrad
The Politics of Denial

MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 1996, 237 pages with bibliography, index and footnotes.

Marvin Olasky

Renewing American Compassion

Free Press, New York, NY, 1996, 195 pages with index, no footnotes.

I grew up in a right-wing, white, lower middle-class Southern Baptist world, where Mother tried desperately to raise her daughters to become "ladies." Both great-grandfathers had been poor foot soldiers for the slaveholding Confederacy. My father, however, was a "Yankee," a second generation German Lutheran transplanted from Cincinnati to the South. His legacy was to temper my mother's Southern Christianity with a hearty dose of Teutonic authority and self-control (except when a few drinks warmed his nature).

I always thought something was wrong.

As a freshman in Tallahassee, Florida, I was a Republican libertarian—a Goldwater Girl. I made the unusual trek down the hill from the university and up the hill to town to meet with typical Southern Republicans. There was a retailer who believed Communists had infiltrated the women's shoe industry: those pointy high heels created so much pain that women were left vulnerable to communist propaganda. The owner of the local Fountain Restaurant happily offered it as a meeting place for Republicans and the White Citizens' Council, but not such lowlife as the Klan. When Goldwater's Vice Presidential candidate William Miller came to town, I posed sitting on his lap.

I began to doubt my new-found Republican libertarianism when, in the campaign office, one guy railed against the United Nations. That didn't sound right, so off I went to the library to read about the UN. It sounded OK to me. Maybe I was more liberal than I thought, like Nelson Rockefeller.

The next time I was in the office I said something like this and my companion waved his cigarette-stained fingers at me: "Don't you begin to think

like that, little girl. Anybody who supports the UN supports one-worldism: that's liberal, and liberal is just another word for a cowardly communist. And they should all be shot."

I went back to the library and decided he was right. I wasn't a liberal. I was a socialist and would stay in the library like Karl Marx did. I never returned to the office, despite pleas that I pursue a future helping the Young Americans for Freedom organize girls on campus.

I knew for sure by then that something was definitely wrong. Now, more than 30 years later, I am still trying to figure out what it is.

Mainly, I have studied history, politics and social theory in order to figure out why the ideas of the various parts of the Right have so much staying power. As a teacher, writer and organizer I have tried to examine the strategies and tactics they use to gain influence. Social policy is my "field" because it is where the deepest, most radically reactionary currents of thought and action can be openly debated, and where people have the best chance of grasping both the ethics and the concrete stakes involved in different choices.

I now speak knowledgeably to academics, activists and students about the political danger when radical capitalist logic is buttressed by Christian fundamentalism and patriarchal authority, all premised on nativism and racism.

But somehow it isn't enough. There is always the nagging suspicion that the only people who understand are those who already agree. And that many who agree have never in their life actually met anyone like my relatives or fellow Goldwaterites. They wouldn't have any way to answer the ringing calls for "family, faith and freedom" still preached daily in the North Georgia county where Mother now lives— where a majority of the voters cast their primary ballots for Buchanan last Spring.

Often I think that none of our rational and strategic ploys make a dent in the presumptions that support right-wing activities. Look at the growing na-

tional movement of state-based policy organizations called Family Policy Councils, which now operate at the local and state level in more than 30 states. These groups exist to promote a rightist agenda of "stable families" with policies such as eliminating no-fault divorce, ending teen pregnancy, and punishing long-term welfare recipients.

Nobody ever talks about the price of "stability" in families like mine: the insufferable false politeness of women whose never-acknowledged ambition is deformed into deceitful interpersonal manipulation; the sarcastic brutality of men pledged forever to a militaristic ethic that never questions the very authorities who ruined their souls; the universal cover-up of children's pains and failures that could never have been as bad exposed as they seemed when hidden.

But can we talk about how wrong the Right is without going off some deep end of pop psychology character assassination?

In *The Politics of Denial*, Michael Milburn and Sheree Conrad suggest some answers. As social psychologists they are willing to go beyond necessary but insufficient structural explanations for right-wing thought. It is not just capitalist or patriarchal "necessity," they argue, that makes conservatives so rigid, punitive and consistent in their self-fulfilling determination that people will only act responsibly when threatened with punishment. Instead, they present powerful evidence showing that the seeds for a self-referential, rigid, right-wing world view are sown when individuals are raised in families and communities that are both physically and emotionally punishing to children. To compound the injury, that such treatment is wrong, painful or harmful is denied.

Miller and Conrad build on the work of Alice Miller and others regarding the long term effects of harsh, punitive parenting and the origins of authoritarian attitudes. They carefully examine the process whereby "when individuals deny the emotional component of an

experience—for example, the fear, pain and anger of childhood punishment—the meaning of the concept abuse is lost and the person has great difficulty accepting or understanding information relating to such abuse.” (p.40)

The authors painstakingly review study after study to show how the experience of abuse, coupled with the denial that it occurred and/or the insistence that if pain did occur it was for one's own good, produces “a rigid intolerance of mistakes” that is seen “both in impossible high standards for their own performance and anger toward those they perceived to be ‘screwing up.’” (p. 42) This produces a family dynamic “based on an underlying assumption that the parent-child relationship is one involving a contest of wills, of who will control whom and who will receive consideration and attention for their needs.” (p. 48)

I especially appreciate how much Milburn and Conrad move beyond the individual and family consequences of denial to speculate directly about the links between refusal to acknowledge dysfunction and right-wing political beliefs. They study the associations between childhood experiences with abuse and stern discipline and the presence of a range of political positions, such as school discipline, capital punishment, acceptance of diversity, and opposition to abortion. They review conservative Christian parenting guides and even the personal histories of Christian Coalition leaders to suggest that for fundamentalists, political discourse will always be a moral debate and that action in the public, as well as the private, sphere will often be motivated by anger and discharged only by a projection of one's own sexual, aggressive, rebellious, disrespectful and subversive impulses onto an out-group. The authors conclude that in order to maintain psychological equilibrium, fundamentalist political activists will always need out-groups they can define as distinct from the mainstream. (p. 87)

Miller and Conrad also examine the psychological roots of support for an extremely rigid and conservative social ethic in groups outside the relatively isolated world of the Christian Right.

They suggest that in many white families there are unspoken rules that forbid people from acknowledging how out of control life often feels. Consequently, many whites insist that Black people, if they want to succeed, must follow their lead and deny both their historic pain of slavery and the continuing abuses of racism.

Some of the authors' grounding assumptions are a bit sweeping, and force me to raise standard materialist doubts. For instance, in their drive to demonstrate how denied rage underlies so much of conservative political ideology, Milburn and Conrad sometimes forget to restate what they initially acknowledge: that material realities often make it impossible for people to overcome their denial. With capitalism, sexism and racism so profoundly powerful, it is hard to acknowledge one's weakness and still feel able to act at all.

It is hard not to look for outside enemies when the concrete means to change one's own life seem so profoundly unavailable. The authors' conclusions would have been stronger had they been supplemented by more developed strategies for “breaking through denial” and openly challenging its political consequences. We also need to know how we can do so while simultaneously making the personal and parenting changes the authors envision.

Despite such limits, one of the greatest benefits of *The Politics of Denial* is that it allows me to read books like Marvin Olasky's *Renewing American Compassion* without becoming incoherent with rage. Olasky, a senior fellow at The Progress and Freedom Foundation, had argued in an earlier book (also introduced by Newt Gingrich), *The Tragedy of American Compassion* (1993), that American society can renew itself only if it gives up its commitment to a “false compassion” and goes back to individualism and basic values of work, faith and family. “The perspective from 1990 shows that the social revolution of the 1960s has not helped the poor,” he had proclaimed... “Let's transport an able-to-work, homeless person back from the present to 1890 and ask the question, ‘Are you better off now than you were then?’” Olasky's answer was a resound-

ing “no” and he proceeded to defend poor houses, orphanages and permanent placement of children whose parents failed to support them.

In Olasky's current book we see a “softer” side of the story, with Olasky again preaching tough love, but this time with less attention to the toughness and more emphasis on his understanding of love as a voluntary, non-institutional process of providing opportunity. He argues that we only hurt people when we give them what they ask for because it violates both Christian principles of “love and discipline” and “orthodox Christian anthropology— that man's sinful nature leads toward indolence and that an impoverished person given a dole without obligation is likely to descend into pauperism.” (p.41)

With *The Politics of Denial* in my head, and years of radical politics and practical study under my belt, perhaps I can begin to answer such arguments in ways that large numbers of people can hear. I have learned that we can't always stop family members from spiteful actions or prevent bad things from happening to children. But maybe, instead of judging or denying, we can say out loud that harmful events occurred; that mean words and actions hurt and were not right; and that our best hope for a better world is one where we keep trying to avoid denial of our pain, and keep saying that it is OK to cry and to stand up for ourselves, it is healthy to ask for help, and it is good to be able to depend on others to deliver that help.

I have to believe that such values are right and better for humanity (and for my own family). Perhaps what is wrong with the Right is that its version of “faith, freedom and family” is a merciless taskmaster that does not allow for human frailty.

—Ann Withorn

Ann Withorn is an activist and professor of sociology at The University of Massachusetts/Boston and has written extensively on poverty and welfare issues. She is co-editor of the anthology, For Crying Out Loud: Women's Poverty in the United States (South End Press, 1996).

Letters to the Editors

GAY RIGHT STANDS ON SHAKY GROUND

I'm glad Surina Khan has shed some light on the gay right ("Gay Conservatives: Pulling the Movement to the Right," *The Public Eye*, Spring, 1996). It's rightly pointed out that gay conservatives and gay Republicans aren't always the same thing. But many muddle the distinction between those who self identify as conservative or right wing, versus the broader community that might buy into right-wing ideological premises over an issue or range of issues. But don't pin a conservative label on them. This mistake leads us to cede far too much to the Right, allowing conservatives to fill more of a void than they would otherwise be capable of.

Working class people and people of color, gay or straight, can and do get swayed by conservative ideological assumptions. But *this* gay right-wing movement is white, male, non-working class based, with decidedly anti-working class politics at its core. The "Gay Conservatives" piece breaks down the lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgendered (LGBT) community into political sub-groups, but I think we are compelled to look at the traditional breakdown of the LGBT community, which is still race, class, and gender.

Organized gay conservatives are masters at public relations. Making full use of their advantages, they get heard (as very entitled people do). And we all get convinced they're stronger than they really are. I don't think gay conservatives are insignificant. I have always taken them seriously. But I have always been convinced they can be beaten.

The Republican party establishment may have some discomfort with aspects of social and religious extremism of the Christian right, but the Republican moderates, so-called, in charge of the GOP share the homophobia of the religious right. Exceptions typified by Massachusetts Governor William Weld, are exactly that. Exceptions. Weld's seemingly more tolerant attitude toward homosexuality isn't catching on in the GOP. Log Cabin Republicans' (LCR) failure to make headway is clear to much of the

lesbian and gay community.

A look at Massachusetts gay politics, considered a gay Republican success story, is instructive. The Boston area became a hotbed of gay Republicanism with the election of Weld as governor in 1990. Weld in the governor's office gave gay Republicans enormous power and legitimacy. A major source of that power was access, political patronage and perks which had tremendous pull on the mainstream of the local gay movement.

The ideologues of LCR supported Weld's anti-labor, anti-social services program, which squeezed the poor, communities of color, and public employees. Divisions in the lesbian and gay community became exacerbated, and traditional alliances with communities of color, the women's movement, and other progressive constituencies became strained. As gay Republicans and mainstream gay leaders posed for photo opportunities with Weld, communities of color, poor people, labor unions, and the HIV/PWA community battled him. AIDS activists condemned Weld for his punitive policies toward the HIV/PWA community.

But it was ultimately the lesbian and gay union activists who provided much of the leadership and organization in a battle against the conservatives, dispelling the myth of unanimous gay support for Weld. The skirmishes that occurred off and on between progressives and the gay Right came to a head in the Fall of 1994 in a confrontation with the Lesbian and Gay Political Alliance over whether that organization would endorse Weld for re-election.

The pro-Weld leadership of the Alliance at the time, not wanting to risk a democratic process, essentially cheated. They got their endorsement, but it was so tainted it nearly destroyed the organization. A backlash resulted and a progressive leadership swept the Alliance, handing conservatives a major defeat in the largest mass gay organization in the state— one in which they had major influence. Ironically, many came to think of gay Republicans as unstoppable. Along with union activists were some people of color and activists on the

side who resisted the rightward tilt of the Alliance. It should be noted the effort was predominantly lesbian, but it should also be noted the dynamics of racism are horrendous in Boston.

LCR and others on the gay Right are quite clear about who is, and who is not, part of their community. Bruce Bawer's race, class and gender bias is clear as he laments scantily clad gay men at Pride marches, assuming we wear "suits and ties on all the other 364 days of the year." The bias of progressives is not so explicit. The report invokes the progressive coalition many of us aspire for, but class and labor don't make the list. It's no minor omission. Much of the traditional gay left has become irrelevant to the LGBT movement. The middle class-oriented progressive community is more responsible for their irrelevance than they care to admit. Many progressives forget that working class people are indispensable to beating the Right.

Probably the best expression of working class politics in the LGBT community is lesbian and gay labor activism. Lesbians and gay men have long contributed toward an inclusive and progressive labor movement. But having an organization is a new thing. A few years ago only a few local LGBT labor groups existed. Today, a growing national organization, Pride at Work, has affiliates in many states and cities. LGBT caucuses have sprouted in many unions, with large, powerful caucuses in the public and service sector unions.

The gay right recognizes the dynamic combination of labor, class, and queer politics. (Ironically, the right takes us more seriously than the left.) They've fought intensely to keep us out of the political dialogue in the lesbian/gay community. But the political wars in Boston have shown the vulnerability of the gay right, and the organization and leadership of working class activists in fighting them.

— Ed Hunt

Ed Hunt currently lives in Seattle and is active in the Out Front Labor Coalition. He previously lived in Boston, where he was a long time activist in the Boston-area labor movement and later became involved in the LGBT community and Boston's Gay and Lesbian Labor Activist Network.

RESOURCES

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people concerned about the concentration of wealth. Works to revitalize the US through a more fair distribution of wealth. Excellent public education, advocacy, political action, coalition building, and educational resources and training. Resources include a 34-page "Wealth-Fare Reform Organizing Kit."

Children's Defense Fund
25 E Street, NW
Washington, DC 20001
202.628.8787

A research and advocacy organization that provides a strong and effective voice for children. Pays particular attention to the needs of poor, minority and disabled children. Extensive resources include a monthly newsletter, CDF Reports, as well as numerous reports including, "Enforcing Child Support: Are States Doing the Job?" "Vanishing Dreams: The Economic Plight of America's Young Families," and "Falling by the Wayside: Children in Rural America." Call or write for a complete publications list.

NOW Legal Defense & Education Fund
99 Hudson Street
NY, NY 10013-2815
212.925.6635

Offers a "D. V. Welfare Fact Pack" which discusses the connection between domestic violence and women's poverty, specifically the implementation of the Family Violence Option, which allows states to exempt domestic violence victims from time limits, work requirements, and residency requirements, among other options. Also available is "Get Your Message Out—Get Your Message Heard," a guide to effective media tactics.

Welfare Warriors
2711 W. Michigan
Milwaukee, WI 53208
414.342.6662

A group of mothers on welfare making the voices of low-income mothers heard. With no training in the field of journalism, they learned to write, research, illustrate, lay-out, translate (into Spanish) and distribute their 24-page

quarterly publication, *Welfare Mothers Voice* which offers information and inspiration to mothers around the country who are suffering from poverty, isolation, and self-doubt.

National Center for Children in Poverty
Columbia School of Public Health
154 Haven Avenue
New York, NY 10032
212.304.7100

Identifies and promotes strategies that reduce the number of young children living in poverty in the US. Maintains a library, publishes materials and disseminates information about early childhood care and education, child health, and family community support to government officials, private organizations, and child advocates. Extensive publications include: "African American Single Mothers: Understanding Their Lives and Families;" "Escape from Poverty: What Makes a Difference for Children;" and "One in Four: America's Youngest Poor," an analysis of young children in poverty.

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THE PUBLIC EYE Resources

Center on Social Welfare Policy & Law
275 Seventh Ave., Suite 1205
New York, NY 10001-6708
212.633.6967

Works with and on behalf of poor people to ensure adequate income support. In addition to legal work, ranging from training and education for legal services and grassroots organizations to litigation in Supreme Court cases, the Center can be relied on for policy analysis. Resources include two newsletters: *Welfare News* and *Welfare Bulletin*, as well as numerous papers, quick overviews and research packets. A recent packet "Welfare Reform," includes the very useful "Welfare Myths: Fact or Fiction." Write or call for a publications list.

Poverty & Race Research Action Council
1711 Connecticut Avenue, NW
Suite 207
Washington, DC 20009
202.387.9887

Links social science research to advocacy work in order to successfully address problems at the intersection of race and poverty. Publications include

an excellent newsletter, *Poverty & Race*, which is a reliable source of analysis, referrals and resources.

Center on Budget & Policy Priorities
820 First Street, NE #510
Washington, DC 20002
202.408.1080

Considered a leader in analyzing budget and policy issues with an emphasis on the impact on low- and moderate-income Americans. The Center has a commitment to making its material both rigorous and readable, presenting it in a timely and non-technical manner. Call or write for an extensive publications list.

Coalition on Human Needs
1000 Wisconsin Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20007
202.342.0726

An alliance of more than 100 national organizations working together to promote public policies that address the needs of low income and other vulnerable populations. By sharing information and forging consensus positions, the Coalition develops and

implements collaborative strategies. It also serves as a clearinghouse of information for members and the general public. "Summaries and Analyses of the New Welfare Law" is an excellent list of literature of its member organizations. Write or call for a publications list that includes a bi-weekly legislative update, *The Human Needs Report*, action alerts, fact sheets and reports.

Center for Law and Social Policy
1616 P Street, NW
Washington, DC 20036
202.328.5140

A national public policy organization that seeks to improve the economic security of low-income families with children by promoting policies to improve income support programs, child care, job training and child support enforcement. Write or call for an extensive list of publications.

Share the Wealth
37 Temple Place, 3rd floor
Boston, MA 02111
617.423.2148

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