Beyond Deservingness: Congressional Discourse on Poverty, 1964–1996

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Much of the research explaining the generosity of antipoverty programs has focused on the perceived deservingness of the poor. While the notion of deservingness is useful in explaining the scope and general outlines of policy, it does not help us understand the development and change of the specific policy instruments that constitute antipoverty policies. The author argues that to better understand the development of antipoverty policy tools aimed at changing the behavior of the poor, we need to analyze how policy elites frame both the causes of poverty and the nature of the poor. He illustrates the utility of this approach by analyzing congressional antipoverty discourse in two periods, comparing the "Great Society" period of 1964 to 1968 and the "neoliberal" era of 1981 to 1996, and shows how policymakers' frames about the causes of poverty and about the capacities and desires of the poor shaped the specific antipoverty policies adopted in each period.

Keywords: welfare policy; frames; discourse; culture; deservingness

The contributions in this volume have provide important insights into the ways in which "culture" affects the actions of people living in poverty. But cultural factors also affect the actions of the nonpoor, including—perhaps most important for the study of poverty—the ways in which the nonpoor respond to the problem of poverty. In this article, I explore how the ideas of policy elites have influenced antipoverty policy making since the 1960s. New interest in how policy making is influenced by cultural factors—in the form of frames, categories, and paradigms—has sparked a growing

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literature on the relationship between ideas and social policy (Bleich 2003; Campbell 1998, 2002; Dobbin 1994; Hall 1993; Mohr and Duquenne 1997; Skrentny 2006; Steensland 2006, 2008; Stone 1988/2002). This research has generally focused on the mutually constitutive relationship between social policy and perceptions of whether recipients are viewed as "deserving" or "undeserving." Whether cross-national differences in social policy affect public support for the welfare state (Blekesaune and Quadagno 2003; Jaeger 2006; Papadakis and Bean 1993) or whether conceptions about the poor affect the construction of antipoverty policy (Gilens 1999; Handler and Hasenfeld 1991; Katz 1989; Schneider and Ingram 2005; Skocpol 1988; Steensland 2006, 2008), these studies have linked the scope and generosity of social welfare to the perceived "deservingness" of recipients.

This attention to recipients' perceived deservingness has greatly improved our understanding of broad social policy outcomes, especially the stability of policy regimes and the barriers to significant policy change. However, this perspective is limited in two important respects: it does not help us understand policy change, and it does not help us understand the development of policy tools—the specific policies that make up the nuts and bolts of broader social policy regimes. To give one example, Gilens (1999) and Handler and Hasenfeld (2007) argue that Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) was dismantled in large part because welfare recipients were viewed as being undeserving. Why, then, did Republican backers frame the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) that dismantled AFDC and replaced it with Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) as an act of compassion (Stryker and Wald forthcoming)? Instead of simply arguing that welfare recipients were undeserving of public assistance, they argued that welfare recipients were essentially victims of an overly generous welfare system who had grown dependent on aid, and the most compassionate thing to do was to set time limits on welfare so recipients could learn self-sufficiency. Like Democrats, they professed concern for those living in poverty. Like Democrats, they proposed a policy solution to the problem of poverty, albeit a somewhat different one. Furthermore, the legislation that ended AFDC was composed of nine titles and 213 sections, many of which cannot be summarized simply as an attempt to dismantle welfare. The categories of "deserving" and "undeserving" help us understand neither this dramatic policy shift nor the nuts and bolts of the actual legislation.

The problem, ultimately, is that antipoverty policy is not predicated on deservingness per se. "Deserving" and "undeserving" are not categories that politicians and bureaucrats use when devising social policy. Deservingness is instead a second-order analytic tool used by researchers to help make sense of social policies—their scope, their generosity, and their political appeal. While this concept has yielded fruitful insights, there is much to be gained by unpacking and moving beyond the categories of "deserving" and "undeserving" to examine—and take seriously—policy-making discourse itself.

In this article, I analyze policy-making discourse by examining how policymakers' frames about poverty and the poor are related to the policy tools they adopt to

combat poverty. Although there is little consensus over what constitutes frames, for these purposes they can be thought of as shared, negotiated cognitive schemas that enable us to "locate, perceive, identify, and label" phenomena, providing individuals with a framework for interpreting the world around them (Goffman 1974, 21, cited in Benford and Snow 2000, 614). But which frames should we examine when analyzing policy-making discourse? Studies of problem definition have highlighted the importance of "diagnostic framing" (Snow and Benford 1988) for understanding policy outcomes: simply put, the causes that policymakers attribute to a problem are related to the policies developed to solve it (Benford and Snow 2000; Burstein and Bricher 1997; Cobb and Rochefort 1994; Gusfield 1981; Spector and Kitsuse 1977; Stone 1988/2002).[1] At the same time, research on policy tools and the construction of target populations has focused on the ways that policymakers frame the targets of policy—in this case, the poor—and how the framing of target populations affects policy outcomes (Schneider and Ingram 1990, 1993, 2005; see also Skrentny 2006).

Synthesizing insights from these two lines of research, I analyze two very different periods of social policy making in the United States: the "Great Society" period of 1964 to 1968 and the "neoliberal" era of 1981 to 1996.[2] I show that the very different policy responses to poverty in each period corresponded to the way policymakers framed the causes of poverty and the capacities and motivations of the poor. During the 1960s, poverty was viewed as caused by the breakdown of poor urban communities due to a lack of opportunities, and the poor were conceived primarily in psychological terms as becoming unmotivated, hopeless, and resentful due to their limited opportunities, though occasionally they were described as reacting in a rational way to their circumstances. With this understanding, initiatives such as community action programs and job corps made sense as tools for ending poverty. In the later period, 1981 to 1996, poverty eventually came to be viewed as a result of the breakdown of the family due to out-of-wedlock births, which were encouraged by the welfare system, and the poor were viewed simultaneously as rational and immoral actors who did not make the right choices because they lacked family values. Time limits on benefits and stiffer enforcement of child payments were viewed as sensible, even compassionate, policy tools for curing poverty.

Diagnostic and Target Frames

Diagnostic frames and problem definition

The construction of a social problem is often a starting point for the formulation or selection of public policies (Hall 1993; Kingdon 1984; Stone 1988/2002, 1989). Policymakers spend a great deal of energy wrangling over how to define a given problem, for two reasons: first, because problem definition is critical to determining whether a problem ends up on the congressional agenda (Kingdon 1984), and second, because policy solutions tend to follow from how the problem is framed (Cobb and Rochefort 1994; Gusfield 1981; Spector and Kitsuse 1977).[3]

But what exactly does it mean to "define" a problem? Arguably the most important element of any problem definition is the cause that is attributed to explain the problem. For Deborah Stone (1989), the principal reason this is important is that diagnosing the causes of a problem allows policymakers to assign responsibility for the problem and begin to address it: "Problem definition is a process of . . . attributing cause, blame and responsibility . . . and thereby claim[ing] the right to invoke government power to stop the harm" (p. 282). At the most basic level, causal attributions can define a problem as something that the government can and should address, which is a necessary condition for moving problems onto the policy-making agenda. For example, Congress was moved to deal with automobile accidents when they became viewed not as a result of mechanical failure or human error but instead as a result of "manufacturers' decisions to stint on safety in car design" (Stone 1988/2002, 199).

Once a problem has made its way onto the agenda, policymakers consider and select from a range of alternative policy solutions (Kingdon 1984, 2-3). By highlighting certain aspects of a situation as important causes while downplaying others, the diagnostic framing of a problem implies particular solutions or at least tends to "constrain the range of possible 'reasonable' solutions and strategies advocated" (Benford and Snow 2000, 616). For example, if a lack of safety features is seen as the leading cause of injuries and deaths in car accidents, then requiring manufacturers to install seatbelts or offering tax breaks to companies that do so are far more sensible solutions than trying to reduce traffic congestion or improve driver training.

Target frames and policy tools

Potential solutions often involve changing the behavior of someone or something, such as individual drivers or large corporations in the case of automobile safety. In crafting legislative solutions, policymakers employ not only diagnostic frames but also their notions about how to bring about a desired behavior in the target population. To gain a better understanding of policy development and choice, we therefore also need to understand the ways that policymakers frame targets of policy and how this interacts with their causal diagnoses. Here I draw on studies of the construction of target populations (Schneider and Ingram 1993, 2005),[4] on the behavioral assumptions of policy tools (Schneider and Ingram 1990), and on the notion of "governmentality" (Foucault 1981, 1991; see also Burchell, Gordon, and Miller 1991; Dean 1999). This perspective rests on the argument that "public policy almost always attempts to get people to do things they otherwise would not have done, or it enables them to do things they otherwise would not have done" (Schneider and Ingram 1990, 510); in Foucault's (1982, 221) terms, government can be understood generally as "the conduct of conduct." The way that policymakers frame the target population will affect the policy tools they adopt to manage this population's conduct in order to achieve policy goals.

Thinking in terms of policy tools thus focuses our attention on the ways that policymakers construct or frame the populations that are targets of the policy. In particular, we need to be attentive to the attributes of individuals that policymakers view as "causally related to decisions and actions but that can be manipulated or influenced by policy" (Schneider and Ingram 1990, 514). If, as the literature on governmentality suggests, governments seek to shape conduct by working with and through the capacities of individuals and their "desires, aspirations, [and] interests" (Dean 1999, 11), then capacities and motivations should be important elements in the construction of target populations. In other words, how policy-makers go about fostering desired behavior in a target population may depend in part on their ideas about the *capacities* and *motivations* that the target population is seen to possess or, perhaps more important, to lack.

Rethinking deservingness

Studies of welfare have examined how policies differ depending on whether the population is viewed as "deserving" or "undeserving" (Gilens 1999; Handler and Hasenfeld 1991; Katz 1989; Schneider and Ingram 2005; Skocpol 1988; Steensland 2006). Policies are universal in scope and generous when the target population is deemed deserving, means-tested and stingy when they are seen as undeserving.[5]

While the notion of "deservingness" is often useful in helping to explain the scope and general outlines of policy (who gets benefits? how generous are they?) and the potential (or lack thereof) for policy change, it goes only so far in helping us understand how to get from policymakers' views of a population to the policy tools targeted at that population. A closer examination is needed of the specific ways policymakers frame target populations and how this interacts with causal diagnoses to influence and limit the range of policy options. Of course, these two levels are not unrelated: specific target frames combine to form notions of deserv-ingness, and specific instruments concatenate to form broader policy outlines that we define as more or less generous and measure in terms of de-commodification, income transfers, or percentage of GDP.[6]

For example, if you believe a cause of poverty is that people do not work, do you get them to work by allowing them to keep a portion of their welfare benefits if their initial wages are too low (using what is known as the "earned-income disregard"), or do you get them to work by placing a time limit on their benefits? If you think that welfare recipients *can* (capacity) and *want to* (motivation) work, then the first solution makes more sense; if you believe instead that people on welfare can work but are *lazy* (motivation), then the latter solution is more sen-sible. Thus, holding causal attributions constant, policymakers' ideas about the capacities and motivations of the poor channel policy development and choice. In this example, when the poor are viewed as motivated to work, they are deemed "deserving," when unmotivated they are "undeserving," and the policy choices that make sense given a particular view of their motivation may subsequently be described by researchers in broader terms as being more or less generous. But

note that the logic of the policy tool is not derived from the poor's lack of deservingness ("let's cut them off because they don't deserve it") but, rather, from an understanding of how to get the poor to behave in a desired fashion ostensibly aimed at reducing poverty ("let's cut them off so they'll start working").

Moreover, while we may be able to correlate deservingness with generosity, there are many different ways to create a generous or ungenerous social welfare policy, and "deservingness" does not help us understand the logic that guides the creation and selection of specific policy tools. Only by exploring the specific notions about the target population—in this case the will to work versus laziness—can we understand the specific policy course taken. The above example involves conceptions that align very closely with the concept of deservingness (willingness to work), but there are other elements of these conceptions that are relevant for understanding policy development. Moreover, as will be discussed below, willingness to work is not the sine qua non of deservingness: the reason *why* someone is unwilling to work also matters. This is one way in which causal diagnoses interact with target frames, a point that I will return to in the conclusion.

"Deservingness" can help us understand the barriers to significant policy change, but it is a limited analytic tool for understanding when and why policies change or significant policy innovation. For example, Theda Skocpol (1988) has argued that the early bifurcation of U.S. social policy into social insurance and AFDC institutionalized a distinction between deserving and undeserving recipients that has significantly constrained the possibility of creating a more universal, and therefore more generous, welfare state (see also Steensland 2008). Presumably, then, the trajectory of AFDC from enormous growth in the 1960s to its eventual dismantling with the 1996 PRWORA can be at least partly attributed to recipients' being viewed as more deserving in the 1960s and as much less deserving thirty years later. But if recipients were viewed as much less deserving, then it is difficult to understand why Republican politicians framed welfare reform as an act of compassion, which implies that recipients were deserving of compassion (Stryker and Wald forthcoming). We need to unpack the notion of deservingness and develop a more nuanced understanding of what Steensland (2006, 2008) has called "cultural categories of worth."

In this article, I describe how the policymakers' frames about poverty and the poor informed specific policy tools aimed at fighting poverty and argue that we can gain important insights into the development and choice of social policies by analyzing the cultural templates through which policymakers develop and choose specific policies.

Research Design

Because my principal aim here is to unpack the arguments made by policymakers and analyze the logic that has guided antipoverty policy making in the United States, the method of analysis I adopt is more akin to a qualitative "close reading" than a quantitative "content analysis." I also want to understand how this

TABLE 1
List of Antipoverty Legislation Examined

Legislation	Year Enacted
Economic Opportunity Act (EOA)	1964
Amendments to Economic Opportunity Act	1967
Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act	1981
Family Support Act	1988
Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA)	1996

discourse has changed over time, since the notion that the U.S. welfare state is ungenerous because the poor are considered undeserving cannot account for such significant change in U.S. social policy. Therefore, I select two very different periods in U.S. social policy, comparing the "War on Poverty" era, when U.S. social policy was at its zenith in terms of scope and generosity, to the "neoliberal" era, a period of sustained attack on the U.S. welfare system that began with the Reagan presidency in 1981 and reached its apotheosis in the PRWORA of 1996.

My analysis is based on transcripts of congressional hearings concerning poverty and welfare. I used Lexis-Nexis Congressional Universe to find relevant hearings, using "welfare" and "poverty" as separate keywords. From this list, I selected hearings pertaining to significant pieces of legislation and hearings in committees that had jurisdiction over the legislation. The pieces of legislation I examined are listed in Table 1. I also examined hearings that were convened to discuss problems or other questions that did not necessarily have direct bearing on a specific piece of legislation. In all, I analyzed fifteen hearings related to poverty and welfare. Some of these hearings were only a few hundred pages long, while others exceeded a thousand pages of testimony and questioning.

While the bulk of research on social policy in the United States focuses on AFDC, the program, which was established by the Social Security Act of 1935, remained virtually unchanged during the 1960s (Mink and O'Connor 2004, 76-84).[7] Instead, the cornerstone of President Johnson's War on Poverty was the Economic Opportunity Act (EOA) of 1964, which was reevaluated and thoroughly amended in 1967. My analysis of policy innovations during this period thus focuses on the innovations embodied in this legislation.[8]

I focus on hearings, because they are—or can be—"critical discourse moments" where the "beliefs or values of either the speaker or hearer or both" are contradicted (Chilton 1987, 12; see also Boltanski and Thévenot 1991; Gamson and Modigliani 1989). Hearings are locations in the legislative process where the reasoning behind particular policy proposals is made most explicit and where the views of a wide range of actors involved in the policy-making process can be heard. These individuals include what Skrentny (2006) refers to as the policy elite. One of the useful aspects of studying policy elite discourse is that it does not necessarily correspond to the discourse of the wider society or mass media. While certainly

influenced by public opinion and the media, policy-making discourse is a world unto itself, with specialized knowledge, taken-for-granted assumptions, and changing degrees of agreement across party lines (see Naples 1997).

This is not a study of policy implementation—we know there is a disconnect between legislative intent and policy implementation. Nor am I attempting a political or institutional analysis of policy making, though clearly political and institutional factors play an important role in problem definition, policy development, and choice of alternatives (Kingdon 1984). Significant for me here are the causes that policymakers attribute to the problem of poverty, how they conceive of the poor, and how these conceptions inform specific policy proposals.

Finally, it should be noted that one premise of this article is that policy elites do not actually use the category of "deservingness" in policy debates. To corroborate this point, I conducted a full-text search for the term "undeserving" for all congressional-related documents from 1960 to 1997. The term was almost never used in reference to the poor or to welfare recipients, and the majority of times that it was used in that context, it was by welfare proponents characterizing the views of welfare opponents. This is exemplified by the hearings over the welfare reform provisions of the Republicans' Contract with America, which served as a legislative starting point for PRWORA. In nearly one thousand pages of testimony, the term "undeserving" was used exactly four times, each time in discussion of children's Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits, and each time by supporters of the program to characterize the opposition. For example, disability lawyer Thomas D. Sutton observed, "It has been said that the IFA [Individualized Functional Assessment] is too lenient, and allows benefits to be granted to undeserving children. To understand just how misplaced these concerns are, consider . . ." (U.S. Congress 1995a). While deservingness may be a useful analytical construct, it does not typify congressional discourse over social policy or the reasoning behind policy deliberations.

Framing of Poverty in the 1960s

In the following section, I describe the primary causes attributed to poverty by policymakers in welfare- and poverty-related hearings in the 1960s, the dominant conceptions of the poor, and the most significant solutions proposed to confront these problems. In the interest of brevity, I use quotations selectively to represent the general discursive patterns that emerged from an exhaustive examination of the hearings.

The causes of poverty: Community breakdown

In the 1960s, officials and concerned citizens appeared to attribute a panoply of associated causes to poverty. U.S. Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy's testimony over the EOA of 1964 (the centerpiece of the War on Poverty) provides a characteristic illustration of this tendency. He begins by arguing that "lack of

education, old age, bad health or discrimination—these are the causes of poverty and the way to attack it is to go to the root." After describing Harlem's failing schools, he suggests that if one adds "these school conditions to the high rates of crime, addiction, infant mortality, venereal disease, and broken homes . . . you begin to see what a child—and the community—is up against" (U.S. Congress 1964, 303).

The apparent variation in explanations reflected a common understanding that all these ills grew out of the problematic conditions of urban "slums" and their breakdown. According to Sargent Shriver, future director of the Office of Economic Opportunity, "for some boys and girls in the communities of the United States where they live today, it is almost impossible for them to make the escape from poverty. The community itself contributes to the condition which has created these boys in this shape" (U.S. Congress 1964, 69). For Abraham Ribicoff, secretary of health, education, and welfare in the Kennedy administration, it was a symptom of "community life wholly out of control, community failure in its purest form" (U.S. Congress 1961, 15).

Unemployment was commonly cited as the reason for ghetto communities breaking down, within which three interconnected mechanisms can be discerned in the discourse: blocked opportunities due to discrimination, lack of opportunities due to lack of jobs, and inability to take advantage of opportunities due to lack of education or skills. Within the ghetto, poverty in turn led to the deterioration of schools, buildings, families, health, and "the community" in general. These three factors—all beyond the control of any individual—helped perpetuate the "cycle of poverty" by promoting community breakdown.

This concern about the breakdown of the community—itself the product of blocked and limited opportunities—as a cause of poverty is significant for two reasons. First, it shifts blame away from individuals. And second, not unrelated, it figured prominently in policy solutions, as we will soon see.

The construction of the poor: Hopeless victims

The individuals who were the objects of the government's intended action, the poor, were predominantly constructed in psychological terms, and their psychological state of being was seen as a consequence of the social conditions discussed above. Hopelessness and despair were the touchstones of this view. Cut off from opportunities and "trapped" in the "slum," poor blacks became hopeless and desperate, which in turn engendered a lack of motivation to become educated. One witness, who was in charge of a government-funded domestic "peace corps" program in Harlem, evocatively describes the perceived impact of the social sources of poverty on the poor's psychology:

> Social and economic discrimination against the Negro manifested itself physically in the deterioration of his housing and his schools, and psychologically in the tension between his community and the outside world. The physical appearance of central Harlem thus became a monument to the psychological imprisonment of its residents. (U.S. Congress 1964, 514)

This psychological view constructed the poor as lacking not just social opportunities and education but, consequently, other psychological qualities and capacities: hope, dignity, self-respect, confidence, motivation, community, and a sense of belonging. They were economically disadvantaged and culturally deprived—stigmatized, but as objects of pity rather than scorn. This construction has important implications for attributions of blame. By conceiving of the poor as lacking these particular qualities, the discourse constructs them as essentially helpless in the face of adversity. Helplessness is the flip side of faultlessness. And the discourse is wholly infused with a language that treats them as passive: various problems are said to "plague," "overwhelm," "exploit," "chain," "discourage," "isolate," "deprive," and "trap" them. The metaphors of entrapment and disease were particularly powerful ways of organizing a coherent narrative wherein the poor were not to be blamed.

And as much as the poor lacked certain qualities and capacities, there were some who did not. They were willing to work. When you combined this with the helplessness generated by a lack of opportunities, you understood that they were not to blame. As Secretary of Labor Willard Wirtz informed the subcommittee considering the EOA,[9]

> One quarter of the families living in poverty in America are headed by a woman. A great many of these women . . . have been abandoned. [T]he principal cause of this type of desertion is prolonged unemployment on the part of the male head of the family. . . . These are . . . the "new poor"—families of able-bodied, willing, responsible fathers who, for lack of education and training required in the new labor market, suddenly, almost as if it were overnight, find they cannot get work. . . . Those children didn't have to be abandoned. If they continue to be, it will not be their fault. It will be ours. (U.S. Congress 1964, 19)

The poor were helpless to escape poverty, despite their efforts. Bishop Reuben H. Mueller, president of the National Council of Churches, noted that "a disturbingly large number of people and families" were "becoming trapped in certain sectors or pockets of underprivilege and neglect from which it is virtually impossible by their own effort to emerge" (U.S. Congress 1964, 69).

To the extent that some observers noted a lack of motivation on the part of the poor, it was clear that this lack of motivation (to get an education or find a job) was itself caused by limited and blocked opportunities. Therefore, while lack of motivation to work is typically associated with a population being viewed as "undeserving," the two are far from synonymous. Instead, this conception of the poor combines with a specific causal diagnosis to produce an explanation for poverty that implies certain solutions but is incompatible with others.

Another conception of the poor was employed with considerably less frequency during the 1960s, but it was compatible with the same set of proposed solutions. This conception viewed the poor as rational actors, weighing the costs and benefits of investing in education. But these rational actors were not to blame. They were born into immiserated communities, with opportunities for escape either blocked or illusory. Instead of suffering some psychological deficiency as a result,

in this perspective the poor were viewed as responding to their circumstances as would any other rational person. For example, former Harvard president James Conant remarked on the "youngster" who asks himself, "Why bother to stay in school when graduation for half the boys opens onto a dead-end street?" (U.S. Congress 1961, 58). Joseph Lohman, dean of the School of Criminology of the University of California, testified that the behavior of the poor "should more often than not be regarded as a normal reaction of a normal person to an abnormal condition" (U.S. Congress 1967, 438). In the 1980s, these rational actors would no longer be viewed as acting like every other rational person.

The policy solutions

Consistent with the views of who the poor are, the goal of the EOA was framed as bringing "new hope to the hopeless, dignity to the deprived, and self-respect to people who have none," as Robert F. Kennedy put it (U.S. Congress 1964, 302). Two components of the EOA epitomized the government's attempt to reform individuals and communities as a solution to poverty. The first was the Job Corps. This program, modeled on the Civilian Conservation Corps of the New Deal, set up residential centers to educate and train poor youth. It had two guiding rationales. First, since the poor were conceptualized as being "trapped" in broken communities and lacking certain qualities, surrounded by the pathologies symptomatic of poverty, the Job Corps was to remove them from these communities—if only temporarily—to help them "escape" from the cycle of poverty. Job Corps centers were thus to be located in rural areas, far from the "overwhelming" deprivations of the urban ghetto, and enrollees were to be primarily employed doing conservation work (though in practice, Job Corps centers were sometimes located in urban areas). The second guiding rationale was that these centers were not intended to provide job training—Congress had already passed a Manpower Training Act to increase training opportunities and included similar provisions in the Juvenile Delinquency Control Act of 1961. The Job Corps was intended for youth who were so "deprived" that they could not even qualify for those job training programs, which required a sixth-grade education. This was not a small group. During the hearings over the EOA, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara testified to the large percentage of young men—more than half in some states—who could not pass the exam to qualify for service in the armed forces. The Job Corps was thus conceived to infuse enrollees with precisely the qualities they presumably lacked. According to Secretary Wirtz, it was meant for young men who

> need most of all to be taken out of [their] surroundings, and given an entirely different kind of training and experience. It will include some who lack today the basic reading, writing, and arithmetic qualifications. It will include others who have that but who lack whatever it is that attracts an employer when that boy comes up to the door. It will be those who will profit most from coming out of the slum area . . . those who receive what may be in some ways the shock, but the favorable shock treatment of being moved into an entirely different training and work experience environment. (U.S. Congress 1964, 197)

Rep. Al Quie (R-MN) expressed the goal of Job Corps centers as being "not only to provide the basic education, skill, training, and work experience, but they will also change indifference to interest, ignorance to awareness, resignation to ambition, and an attitude of withdrawal to one of participation" (U.S. Congress 1964, 120).

The second component of the EOA that epitomized the reigning understanding of the causes of poverty was the provision for Community Action Programs (CAPs). The aim of the CAPs was also to bring hope, dignity, and self-respect—not just to individuals but to whole communities. If urban slum communities were disorganized, the CAPs would provide organization. The vision was to empower the poor by giving them a voice with the local institutions that governed them—to help poor communities help themselves. Their intended purpose, according to Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall, was to help the poor to "develop their own capacities, their capacity to organize their own communities, their capacity to make decisions, their capacity to develop their own resources" (U.S. Congress 1964, 370).

CAPs were originally conceived as a solution not to poverty, but to crime. They were patterned on an initiative started under the Juvenile Delinquency Control Act of 1961. Testifying on behalf of the EOA, Shriver outlined the connection:

> The juvenile delinquency program, starting off to attack primarily juvenile delinquency, early found out that you cannot alleviate juvenile delinquency or eliminate it by concentrating on it alone. By developing community efforts, they found out that the effort had to be more comprehensive if you were to get at the cause of juvenile delinquency. (U.S. Congress 1964, 67)

One of the characteristics of both CAPs and the Job Corps is the extent to which they were initially designed to change the poor's psychological outlook by empowering them. Kennedy testified,

> The institutions which affect the poor [operate] far outside their control. They plan programs for the poor, not with them. Part of the sense of helplessness and futility comes from the feeling of powerlessness to affect the operation of these organizations.
>   The community action programs must basically change these organizations by building into the program real representation for the poor. This bill calls for "maximum feasible participation of residents." (U.S. Congress 1964, 305)

What emerges from this analysis is a picture of policy tools (e.g., Job Corps, CAPs) aimed at the community breakdown and psychological damage afflicting the nation's poor. Clearly neither of these programs was sufficient to deal with the structural disadvantage of the urban poor. CAPs were amended in 1967 as they came under intense criticism from local politicians precisely due to the power they placed in the hands of the poor. Still, at the time of passage, these policy tools made sense, because they correlate closely with the causal diagnoses and conceptions of the poor expressed by policymakers.

Framing of Poverty in the 1980s and 1990s

Government in the 1980s and 1990s was still concerned with individual deficits, and it attempted to work with and through individuals. However, the perceptions of those deficits were transformed. This transformation did not occur overnight. It was the outcome of an ideological battle in which President Reagan led the charge. Early in his presidency, an exasperated critic, Congressman Augustus Hawkins (D-CA), complained that the "administration has finally acknowledged that our Nation's economy is in a recession, yet has remained insensitive to any link among the consequences of a recession: poverty, unemployment, and crime. . . . [T]he administration appears to have abandoned its ultimate responsibility for the negative social costs of its economic policies" (U.S. Congress 1981c, 1). Below, I analyze the emergence of a new discourse on the causes of poverty and conceptions of the poor that crystallized over the course of the 1980s and 1990s.

The causes of poverty: Teen pregnancy and drug abuse

In this period, the source of poverty was redefined. Yes, the economy was bad, and unemployment and poverty were on the rise, but, it was argued, government intervention itself was the cause of these social ills: social spending slowed economic growth and fostered welfare dependency. This was said to be true at the macro and micro levels. At the macro level, runaway government spending was viewed as the primary cause of national economic problems, poverty among them. As Richard Schweiker, secretary of health and human services, argued, "The astronomical growth of our social programs . . . is the problem this country faces today. . . . [I]f we do not stop that we are going to have an inflation rate that continues at 15 to 20 percent a year" (U.S. Congress 1981a, 4).

At the micro level, government spending created disincentives to investment and work on two levels. First, bigger government programs were paid for with higher taxes. Treasury Secretary Donald Regan explained, "As a result, there is less incentive for individuals to work. Why? Because the Government is taking more and more from that person's paycheck. The natural implication is, well, why bother to save or why bother to do anything? The Government is going to take it away from you" (U.S. Congress 1981c, 133). The second disincentive pertained specifically to antipoverty programs like AFDC, food stamps, and public housing. These programs fostered dependency because they provided an alternative to work. This criticism, voiced already in the 1960s, became louder and more persistent as the 1980s progressed. In effect, what this line of argument did was to transform the idea of the *cycle of poverty* into the *cycle of welfare*. Welfare, not poverty, became the trap, the disease. "The accumulation of program upon program," lamented Congressman L. A. Bafalis (R-FL), "has created generation after generation of welfare" (U.S. Congress 1981a, 3). Lowell Gallaway, an economist called upon to opine on whether or not the war on poverty had been victorious, concluded that "the behavioral changes induced by the growth in social welfare

programs have created the very thing that these programs were designed to eliminate, true structural poverty" (U.S. Congress 1985b, 4).

Even critics of the administration, who continued to conceive of the poor as needing government help, began to talk of the "cycle of welfare" and to conceptualize welfare as a trap. For these critics, however, the way to get people out of that trap was to help them, and vestiges of this concern are contained in many major welfare reform proposals throughout the 1980s and 1990s. But more predominant than this, as we will see, was a view that saw the removal of those disincentives (i.e., welfare benefits) and the creation of sanctions as the solution to poverty.

The growth in spending was blamed on recipients' having become dependent on welfare and also on "waste, fraud, and abuse." Secretary Schweiker made the distinction that these frauds, cheats and "welfare queens" were not "people who, through no fault of their own, have no choice but to rely on Government programs for their basic needs" (U.S. Congress 1981a, 25). The "social safety net" was intended for the "truly needy."[10] Thus, the first thrust of welfare reform in the early 1980s began by discursively reinforcing the demarcation between the deserving (i.e., "truly needy") and the undeserving poor and blaming the latter for driving up government spending. But even though the rhetoric here relied on a distinction similar to deserving versus undeserving, the logic of the cuts was related to cutting waste and abuse. Therefore, the primary rationale for cuts involved a problem definition that attributed rising costs to waste, fraud, and abuse. Furthermore, the rhetorical distinction had little widespread appeal at the time and did little to persuade opponents of the plan, who resisted the Reagan administration's attempts to paint the majority of recipients as not truly needy.

Midway through the 1980s, out-of-wedlock teenage pregnancy came to be seen as the primary link between welfare benefits and welfare dependency. For many, this showed that welfare also provided an incentive for out-of-wedlock births, which in turn led to the breakdown of the family. As a witness in a hearing convened on whether to declare victory or defeat in the war on poverty, economist Lowell Gallaway testified that "there is a significant relationship between the magnitude of social welfare programs in the United States and both the rate of divorce and the number of families with a female head" (U.S. Congress 1985b, 4).

The "problem" of out-of-wedlock births and family disintegration was by no means a new one. Indeed, it had already appeared center stage in Daniel Moynihan's 1965 report and the controversy that surrounded it (Rainwater and Yancey 1967). Despite the public controversy at the time of the report, the problem of family disintegration was of very minor concern in policy hearings. Moreover, Moynihan had emphasized the role of unemployment in causing family dissolution (Massey and Sampson 2009). In the 1980s, in contrast, the issue of teenage pregnancy was severed from this economic context. Teenage mothers in the 1980s were constructed more as masters of their own destiny than as helpless victims. Out-of-wedlock birth was no longer merely a symptom of poverty; it was a primary cause of it, one that doomed teenage mothers to a life of poverty and

"welfare dependency." In the words of Congressman Carroll Campbell (R-SC), "We are addressing one of the major causes of poverty in America today, teenage pregnancy. . . . It is a problem that has caused many other problems. In other words it is a root cause" (U.S. Congress 1985a, 8-9). Even liberal members of Congress like Harold Ford Sr. (D-TN) expressed concern that "so many of America's children are giving birth to children, and facing a future of poverty and welfare dependence" (U.S. Congress 1985a, 1).[11] There was, however, less consensus between the parties that welfare encouraged teenage pregnancy by giving recipients additional benefits for additional children.

By the mid-1980s, the litany of sources for poverty associated with urban "slums" that peppered the discourse of the 1960s had narrowed considerably. There was substantial consensus that teen pregnancy was *the* problem besetting "inner cities" and the main cause of poverty. Even those who argued for more incorporative solutions accepted these diagnoses. Congressman Alton Waldon (D-NY) asked, "Should there not be greater money made available . . . so there could be a sense of hope for the inner-city kid who may wish to extricate himself from drug abuse, from children having children?" (U.S. Congress 1986, 35). Whether or not teenage pregnancy was encouraged by government intervention was still a matter of some debate, though greater consensus over those questions was soon to emerge.

The construction of the poor: Choosing immorality

As consensus coalesced around the causes of poverty, so did it around conceptions of the poor, especially in terms of the capacities or qualities they lacked. What they lacked was not education, hope, dignity, or self-respect but, rather, values. Government intervention had led to the breakdown of "the family," which took the place of "the community" as a subject of government concern. Thus broken, the family was unable to instill "family" values into its children. Continued illegitimacy was the result. Liberals as well as conservatives expressed concern over these developments. Congressman Ford observed that "we have seen in recent years mothers who are under the age of 15, in broken homes, and family values that 20 to 25 years ago were nowhere in the epidemic numbers that we're talking about today" (U.S. Congress 1985a, 89). Without fathers as role models, young men did not internalize a sense of "personal responsibility," one of the touchstones of "family values."

Another essential component of "family values" was the work ethic. Rep. Fortney Stark (D-CA) allowed that "it is very difficult for those of us who have the grandeur of an education and a past that includes caring parents, and perhaps parents who forced us to learn work habits . . . or perhaps a probation officer who forced us to go into the military and learn work habits there to understand the consequences of our actions" (U.S. Congress 1985a, 6).

Even the Maryland chapter of the NAACP had released a report concluding that "the ready access to a lifetime of welfare and free social service programs is a major contributory factor to the . . . problems we face today" (U.S. Congress

1995b, 50). Thus did poverty come to be seen as a result of welfare through the intervening mechanism of the breakdown of "family values."

At the same time that the poor were constructed as lacking mainstream values, they were also constructed as rational, choice-making agents. We saw this somewhat in the 1960s, too, but in the 1980s it was connected to a different worldview of the causes of poverty, and it led to a different perception of blame that eventually became the dominant way in which individuals were constructed in government discourse.[12] Often, this construction was implicit in the language used to discuss concern with the incentives and disincentives created by government policy. Welfare created "perverse" incentives for out-of-wedlock births and disincentives for work. Concern over the incentives created by government interventions implies the existence of an agent (the poor) that will respond rationally to those incentives.

Whereas in the 1960s the poor were occasionally conceived as responding rationally to their life circumstances, in the 1980s their life circumstances came to be viewed as a result of their choices. Society was not to blame. Instead, individuals were responsible. They were rational actors who willfully made the wrong (i.e., immoral) choices. The poor of the 1980s, according to Gallaway, responded to welfare benefits in a way that "even though . . . you or I might not opt for, it may be a more preferred one" (U.S. Congress 1985a, 158). For him, poverty in the 1980s was "poverty by choice." Welfare recipients were rational actors like the rest of us, only they had a higher utility for "leisure" and thus opted for welfare instead of work (U.S. Congress 1985a, 138). By translating "values" into utility functions, this scientific rhetoric neutralizes potentially contentious debates about "family values."

Charles Murray's (1984, 156-62) famous thought experiment in *Losing Ground* about the incentives facing young parents Harold and Phyllis follows a similar logic. In principle, they are rational just like everyone else, and their decision to go on welfare and not get married is the decision that any rational people in their situation would make. But if that were the case, then every similarly situated couple would have opted to go on welfare, which is clearly not the case. Ultimately, despite Murray's assurances otherwise, their choice to go on welfare is ultimately due to their lack of values, illustrated by Harold's quitting his job at the dry cleaner when he gets sick of the heat and Phyllis's preference for having a baby over having a job. For conservative critics like Gallaway and Murray, the supposedly rational poor were, all euphemisms aside, lazy.

Policy solutions

The 1980s began with the "Reagan Revolution," embodied in the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (OBRA) of 1981, which, among other provisions, called for significant cost-cutting measures for AFDC and other social programs. This initial push met with resistance but was transformed later in the decade into a "new consensus." Tracing this transformation of policy permits us to analyze how

policies reflected the emerging conceptions about the causes of poverty and about the poor.

OBRA. If the growth of social programs was the source of the nation's economic problems, poverty among them, then the first order of business was to restrain that growth. If welfare was now understood as a "trap," then the task of government was to dismantle the trap and set the poor free, and OBRA was the answer.[13] In addition to welfare cuts, OBRA also reduced the earned income disregard (EID)—the amount of money a person could earn and still be eligible for AFDC. However, the argument that welfare was a trap did not, by itself, entail welfare cutbacks and curtailing the EID. Indeed, the Kennedy, Nixon, and Carter administrations had attempted major reforms of AFDC largely on the grounds that it fostered dependency (Steensland 2006). Their proposals, however, called for an *expansion and reconfiguration* of the welfare system, not a retrenchment.

By focusing on the work requirements contained in the initial OBRA proposal, which laid the groundwork for subsequent welfare reforms, we can understand better the move to scale back welfare. Work requirements also provide an example of how we need to take into consideration conceptions about both causes of a problem (poverty) and targets of the policy (the poor) in order to better understand policy responses. As we saw, according to the dominant discourse in these hearings, the "cycle of welfare" was produced by rational actors who lacked the values that would lead them to make the right choices. The solution "required is a structuring of the alternatives available to the potential poverty populations that will encourage them to avoid the poverty condition where possible" (Lowell Gallaway, U.S. Congress 1985b, 5). If the poor were perceived merely as rational actors, like everyone else, the government could provide positive incentives (for example, by expanding job opportunities or the EID) just as well as it could impose negative sanctions. Yet invariably, welfare reform proposals took on a punitive dimension, which assumed that the poor needed to be coerced to work, consistent with the assumptions that because they lacked "family" values, welfare recipients would not respond to positive incentives. In this way, the active attempts of the government in the 1960s to provide opportunities and instill hope were transformed into attempts to enforce, impose, and instill the "right" values.

Dissenting voices in the hearings also enable us to see the way that social policy tools are developed on the basis of particular causal diagnoses *and* conceptions about the target population. OBRA critics, too, accepted the notion that the welfare system created perverse incentives. However, as Rep. Don Bailtey, (D-PA) put it, they did not accept the "the cruelest [myth] of them all. . . . People who have very sincere and very real human problems [are] being categorized as lazy, uncaring, unproductive, users" (U.S. Congress 1981b, 45). If one did not assume that welfare recipients have a greater utility for leisure, then the problem with the welfare system was "not that it rewards indolence, but that it penalizes effort," as Robert Friedman, director of the Corporation for Enterprise Development, put it (U.S. Congress 1995c, 24).

OBRA's reduction of the EID is a good example of the way in which the construction of the poor resulted in a specific policy proposal. Those who believed the poor preferred leisure over work wanted the EID abolished or reduced. If you were earning income, then it was clear that you were "able-bodied" and employable. The EID provided a disincentive to work. In contrast, those who believed the poor preferred to work but faced limited opportunities argued that the EID provided support for people transitioning out of welfare and into work, or for single mothers to balance work and raising a child. Thus, for them, the income disregard was an incentive to work. The debate over this feature of AFDC, then, had less to do with whether the beneficiaries were "deserving" or "undeserving" per se, and more to do with how to construct a policy tool that would encourage (or enforce) work over welfare given the poor's apparent capacities and motivations—or lack thereof.

The new consensus. The conceptions embodied in the EID (a policy innovation of the 1960s), namely, that welfare should support people's transition into work—along with the specific conceptions about causes of poverty and the poor—were not entirely replaced by a coercive solution to the problem of welfare. Instead, the solutions were welded together and partially transformed, because conservative proposals initially met considerable resistance from Democrats, who still argued that the basic problem was a lack of opportunities and education. OBRA's proposed mandatory work requirements were never enacted. Later in the 1980s, a "new consensus" emerged, summarized by Daniel Patrick Moynihan: "Conservatives have persuaded liberals that there is nothing wrong with obligating able-bodied adults to work. Liberals have persuaded conservatives that most adults want to work and need some help to do so" (U.S. Congress 1987: 5-6). Even if neither side was fully convinced by the other, it was apparent that future attempts at welfare reform would have to embrace this compromise position: *the government would help individuals who took the personal responsibility to help themselves*. "Self-sufficiency" was the touchstone of this consensus. Paralleling this compromise was the idea that the government would "assist" people to gain the values they lacked; if this failed, government would impose and enforce those values. This is well illustrated by an exchange between Moynihan and Lawrence Townsend, director of the Riverside County Department of Public Social Services. Townsend was testifying on his experience implementing California's new welfare program, Greater Avenues to Independence (GAIN). Moynihan recounted a recent visit he had made to a welfare office in Maryland: "At this social services office in Baltimore . . . the district manager said that the caseworkers cannot impose [their] values on the client. Now that is an old social work tradition, which really is at organizational odds with what we are talking about" (U.S. Congress 1995c, 11). Townsend assented that this was a problem, one that he had solved in Riverside County:

> I went around to all my staff in the district offices, and I said, "Well, whose job is it to talk about the 'W' word called work? And who talks about work ethics and values that I think helped found America?"

So they came up with 450 work ethic slogans. If you call Riverside County, and nobody answers the phone, you will get a work ethic message. We have posters in the waiting room. We have produced a compact disc with work ethic music. Yes, we are trying to impose our values with our clients. (U.S. Congress 1995c, 11)

In the mid-1990s, in discussions of welfare reform proposals, the terms "self-sufficiency," "personal responsibility," "values," and "choice" loomed large. An embodiment of the notion that individuals needed to take personal responsibility was the widely circulated proposal that welfare recipients would sign a contract with the welfare agency. One proposal was the Welfare and Self-Sufficiency Act.[14] According to one of its cosponsors, Sen. Tom Harkin (D-IA), it would require

a contract between the State and each individual family which outlines the steps that that person will take to become self sufficient. The terms of the contract are based on the unique circumstances of the family and is [sic] tailored to each individual. Recipients must meet the terms of the agreement or risk the . . . eventual termination of welfare benefits. I believe this individual approach is very important. (U.S. Congress 1994a, 4, 9)

Time limits were also common among proposals, to ensure that even the most recalcitrant welfare recipients would be "encouraged" to gain "self-sufficiency." After all, if individuals—not society—were to blame, then it was they—not government—who ultimately needed to take responsibility.[15]

The developing logic of welfare reform reached its apotheosis in the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunities Act of 1996.[16] It was premised on the notion that the government should help—and when appropriate, force—individuals to take personal responsibility, to make the "right" choices, especially about work.[17] For example, it permitted states to impose work requirements, included provisions to expand and strictly enforce child support,[18] and put a five-year lifetime maximum on benefits.

Conclusion

In the 1960s, poverty was seen to be caused by the breakdown of the community, which itself was the result of blocked and limited opportunities. In the 1980s, and even more so in the 1990s, poverty came to be framed as caused by the breakdown of the family, which itself was the result of the generosity of the welfare system. The poor in the 1960s were framed as hopeless, helpless victims of discrimination and economic transformations; in the 1980s and 1990s, the poor were viewed as rational actors who lacked the values that would guide them to make the right choices. In the 1960s, society was to blame for poverty, and it was government's duty to help by instilling hope, providing skills, and rebuilding communities; in the 1980s and 1990s, individuals were to blame for poverty, and it was government's task to enforce and impose the right values by helping—in fact, forcing—people to help themselves.

My primary goal in this article was to show how specific social policy proposals reflect specific diagnostic frames about the causes of a particular problem (in this

case, poverty) and target frames about the policy's target population (in this case, the poor). Rather than imputing categories like "deserving" and "undeserving" onto the policy-making process, viewing social policy as tools aimed at guiding people's behavior, or conducting their conduct, highlights the importance of analyzing how policymakers themselves view the policy's target populations. Deservingness gets us only so far in understanding the form that policies take: if the target population is viewed as deserving, then policies will be "generous"; but there are many different forms a generous policy can take, and the notion of deservingness tells us little about the specific form that a policy will take.

In some respects, the preceding analysis echoes Somers and Block's (2005) argument that welfare reform was crucially enabled by the "perversity" thesis, which is the argument that generous welfare benefits cause poverty by creating disincentives to work. While it is true that a key part of congressional discourse in the second period revolved around the perverse incentives supposedly created by the welfare system, the "perversity thesis" conflates diagnostic frames (about the causes of poverty) with target frames (about the poor). To see this, we need to recall that even when critics on the left argued that the welfare system created disincentives to work, they nevertheless supported more generous welfare benefits. The issue becomes clearest when we consider the debate over the EID. The EID was a component of AFDC where a certain amount of earned income was disregarded in calculating eligibility and benefits. Proponents of the EID argued that AFDC created disincentives to work because benefits were too quickly reduced or eliminated for recipients who were working but still unable to support themselves with wages, effectively penalizing recipients for working; the EID was viewed as a bridge to the labor force and a positive incentive for work. But this solution is viable only if welfare recipients are viewed as being willing to work. If recipients were unwilling to work, they would not respond to positive incentives but only to sanctions. Thus, because opponents of welfare framed the poor as unwilling to work, they consistently argued for eligibility restrictions, benefit cuts, and work requirements, rather than tweaking AFDC payment schemes to provide positive incentives to work.

Of course, the conceptions of policymakers are only one piece of a larger puzzle for understanding policy making that includes policy windows, political opportunities, policy feedbacks, and institutional inertia. Moreover, the causal relationship between policymakers' conceptions and policy outcomes is a contentious issue and one that is worthy of future research. The "garbage can" model of policy making highlights the ways in which existing policy solutions later come to be matched to particular problems that enter onto the congressional agenda (Cohen, March, and Olsen 1972; Kingdon 1984). This suggests that, at least in some cases, policies precede the problems they come to solve. We saw this in the example of CAPs, which were originally developed to deal with juvenile delinquency. Still, some policies will make more sense than others in light of particular diagnostic and target frames. Therefore, these ideational elements place limits on the range of plausible or conceivable policy solutions, regardless of whether they guide policy development or the post hoc choice of a particular policy.

This naturally leads us to ask, Where do policymakers get their ideas about the causes of poverty and the poor? In the 1960s, many of their ideas seemed to be influenced by then-popular theories in social science. In the later period, they appear to have been influenced more by the conceptions promoted by think tanks like the Heritage Foundation or the Manhattan Institute. Clearly, the Reagan administration played a role in amplifying certain ways of thinking about the problems, but they faced initial resistance from Democrats and some Republicans. Past research has pointed to cultural, institutional, and political reasons why some ideas catch on while others do not, a topic that has been the focus of other studies (Kingdon 1984; Steensland 2006). The question of why and how diagnostic and target frames changed in welfare policy making is a topic for future research.[19]

Finally, it is worth asking why deservingness is seldom mentioned in congressional debates. And relatedly, why did congressional Republicans feel it necessary to depict welfare cutbacks as an act of compassion? Stryker and Wald (forthcoming) argue that compassion—in the form of a commitment to help the needy—is a value that was embedded in welfare policy and that any attempt to radically change that policy would also need to reconfigure the meaning of compassion in this context. This may be part of the broader basis of legitimacy in democratic societies, where elected leaders are expected to protect and provide for the well-being of the population (see Dean 1999; Foucault 1991). Public support for poverty relief, after all, is very high, even if support for welfare is less popular (Smith 1987). Politicians seeking to cut welfare by depicting welfare recipients as truly undeserving are likely to be met with limited success.

Notes

1. In the introduction to this volume, the editors refer to causal diagnosis in their discussion of narratives rather than frames. It is true that diagnostic frames typically come in the form of a narrative (Stone 1988/2002), but the apparent discrepancy can be reconciled by recognizing that narratives can be thought of as one way of framing an issue, which involves certain specific elements (like employment), but which also provides individuals with a framework for interpreting the world around them, highlighting certain elements as important explanations of a phenomenon while neglecting others.

2. Here the "neoliberal" era begins with the shift in policy objectives and worldview of the Reagan presidency, which was most clearly enunciated by Reagan's inaugural declaration that "government is not the solution to the problem. Government is the problem."

3. Note that this approach eschews the question of whether the "real" causes of a problem are identified, or even whether there is "really" a problem that needs to be solved. It is simply enough to recognize that "if men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences" (Thomas 1928, 572).

4. See also Skrentny (2006) and Steensland (2008) on the analytic payoff of examining how policy elites construct target populations.

5. Katz (1989) discusses historical changes in the criteria that are used to distinguish between "deserving" and "undeserving." In general, the line has been drawn between people who are able to (or should) work versus those who are unable to (or should not) work.

6. Of course, focusing on the scope and generosity of social policy may lead us to ignore revealing aspects of welfare policy. For example, a government could spend more on a workfare program than an income maintenance program, but the former could be much more coercive or punitive than the latter.

7. The most significant changes to the program were the result of judicial decisions and social movement activism, rather than legislative amendment, and they centered on the actions of how the program was administered at the local level.

8. While this focus somewhat limits the scope of my analysis, it does not detract from the central goal of this article, which is to move beyond the reliance on "deservingness" as a determinant of social policy by better understanding the relationship between ideas and social policy tools. It also acts as a corrective to the literature's focus on AFDC and other income transfer programs, which are in many respects based on a very different logic from the types of social policy tools embodied in the EOA (Steensland 2008, 46).

9. This testimony is notable, because sitting at the table with Wirtz was the assistant secretary of labor for policy and planning, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, who a year later would circulate an infamous report on the breakdown of the Negro family and the culture of poverty. However, testimony in these and subsequent hearings in the 1960s emphasized the primary cause that Moynihan himself attributed to family breakdown, namely, high levels of unemployment among blacks.

10. Official estimates put the number of people who would be removed from welfare at seven hundred thousand. During hearings on OBRA, one congressman presented figures showing that only twenty thousand had incomes above the poverty line (U.S. Congress 1981a). The administration's decision of who was "truly needy" was a declaration by fiat.

11. When I say that some degree of "consensus" exists around an issue, I am referring only to apparent consensus within the congressional hearings I examined in keeping with my desire to focus solely on the discourse. To varying degrees, dissent and division existed over the entire time period, both within and outside of legislative hearings, and any references to consensus should not be taken to mean that no disagreements existed. I return to the question of consensus in the conclusion.

12. This parallels the increasing individualization of the "analytic" approach to poverty knowledge traced by Alice O'Connor (2001).

13. Key provisions of OBRA included across-the-board budget cuts in government agencies, except for an increase in defense spending. AFDC and similar means-tested programs under the Department of Health and Human Services were especially hard hit by these budget cuts, because the department could not cut into Social Security to meet the budget reductions and so had to reduce spending on other programs even more to make up for the difference. The cuts were projected to remove seven hundred thousand people from AFDC rolls. OBRA also enacted a major tax cut and removed a number of business regulations.

14. This bill was modeled on welfare reforms in Iowa and Missouri. The contract idea had originally been implemented in California's GAIN program and became popular among other reforming states.

15. One irony of these proposals, according to Dean (1999), is that that the state, in effect, has struck a bargain: "If you make yourself into an active job seeker, we will support you and provide access to those services and expertise that will make you 'job ready.' . . . [W]e will assist you to practice your freedom, as long as you practice it our way" (p. 160).

16. Major provisions of the PWRORA were to limit lifetime welfare eligibility to five years and restrict eligibility for mothers under age eighteen and for additional children born while families were on welfare; convert AFDC and JOBS money, along with other welfare programs, into block grants to states; permit states to impose work requirements; enhance capacity for tracking delinquent child support payments; deny funds to some aliens; and create work requirements for food stamps.

17. See O'Connor (2001) for a similar conclusion regarding the similarity between the Republican- and Democrat-backed bills.

18. Lax child support enforcement was framed as a key reason why many (as much as 85 percent) of women were on welfare: they could not collect child support from "deadbeat dads." Therefore, enforcing child support was viewed as a key way to prevent women from entering the AFDC rolls.

19. One possible source of new ideas are the officials and representatives of state and local governments Congress frequently calls on to testify. Their testimony has sometimes flown in the face of dominant conceptions. At other times, it has hinted at innovations yet to reach national policy such as California's GAIN welfare reform in the 1980s—not to mention Reagan's attempt as governor of California to impose work requirements on state welfare recipients in the early 1970s. Clearly, the federal story is part of a larger picture.

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