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**POOR METAPHORS: HOW LANGUAGE MAKES, AND HOW
ANALYZING POPULAR STEREOTYPES CAN CHALLENGE, SOCIAL
ATTITUDES THAT QUESTION THE VALUE OF THE
ECONOMICALLY OPPRESSED IN A DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY**

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I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Jacob Patrick Sharbel entitled "POOR METAPHORS: HOW LANGUAGE MAKES, AND HOW ANALYZING POPULAR STEREOTYPES CAN CHALLENGE, SOCIAL ATTITUDES THAT QUESTION THE VALUE OF THE ECONOMICALLY OPPRESSED IN A DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in English.

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POPULAR STEREOTYPES CAN CHALLENGE, SOCIAL ATTITUDES THAT
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DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY

A Thesis Presented for the
Master of Arts
Degree
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Jacob Patrick Sharbel

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Abstract

This rhetorical project analyzes the historical and contemporary prevalence of some of the popular metaphors that have come to characterize recipients of government assistance programs such as food stamps, also known as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. By synthesizing the metaphor theory of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson with the sociological concepts of *doxa*, *habitus*, and heretical discourse posited by Pierre Bourdieu, this project not only spotlights these negative metaphors but also offers ways of disrupting their tacit influence over people's perceptions, which otherwise are in danger of reproducing themselves. The metaphors discussed seek to reduce the poor on government assistance to the level of parasites, animals, and sinner criminals. In the American political landscape of the latter half of the twentieth century and into the early twenty-first century, these rhetorical attacks have become more frequent, and a good reason for this increase in frequency has to do with an anthropological theoretical framework known as the "culture of poverty," which many agree was an institutionalized effort to blame the victims of poverty for their own oppression. However, despite the overall failure of the War on Poverty to lift all Americans into prosperity, some of the ideas that flourished during the late 1960s were acts of heretical discourse and can be adapted to help those on government assistance today challenge the assumptions that the wider society holds regarding the poor. Heretical discourse can be an effective way of enhancing democratic engagement in a given population, with the ultimate aim of challenging stereotypes by questioning the metaphors that undergird them.

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INTRODUCTION

Context

Language is a powerful tool that human beings use to define their various realities. This is because a person's language choices can reinforce his or her assumptions, which structure the way reality is perceived, and this can be a force either for good or for ill, though the understanding of "good" and "ill" can of course vary based on the individual or community in question. In the United States, a troubling belief held by certain public officials, and presumably by extension their constituents, is that those who are defined by the precariousness of their socioeconomic situations (and therefore need to access government assistance to get by) exhibit characteristics that are somehow different from those who are perceived to conform to a society's norms—for instance, the American middle class. Whether intentionally or not, these beliefs lead to the implicit assumption that the person who is deficient in one characteristic or another (in this case, good financial footing) is thus less than human. The value of the human being in a capitalistic society, in other words, is largely based on his or her net worth. An analysis of the language practices that control how people perceive one another and the world around them will show the prevalence and seeming "naturalness" of a belief system that holds that certain groups are subhuman. However, the very qualities that are perceived to define these groups are socially constructed. For instance, as a group, the poor¹ are

¹ This project will refer to two generalized populations, "the middle class" (or "middle earners") and "the poor." Because these simplified terms will be used throughout this project and for the sake of brevity, an effort will be made here to define them. The middle class, in this analysis, should refer to a household of any size and in any given community that makes a living wage but still has at least one household member working. According to an MIT project entitled *The Living Wage Calculator*, a living wage in Knox County, Tennessee, in 2015 and 2016, is considered \$9.60 an hour for a household composed of one adult only; adding a child to that household increases that figure to \$20.16, and for two children, it increases to \$23.31. For a household with two adults in which only one is working, the figure is \$16.70, and \$20.22 when a child is added to the home or \$22.53 for two children. The term "poor" is an even more general term, but

sometimes described with adjectives such as “lazy,” “parasitic,” and “animalistic.” In recent years, politicians on the national stage such as Mitt Romney and Paul Ryan, as well as state and local public figures, have used language classifying the poor in these ways; such rhetoric is not reserved for conservatives, however, as even liberal politicians, who purport to help those who are struggling, have dehumanized the poor with their language choices.² Their powerful modifiers strip already disadvantaged human beings of their humanity, even to the point that the poor begin to question their own self-worth. Keeping in mind concepts such as “value” and “worth” will be essential to this discussion that grapples with the ways people define the humanity of the impoverished, especially because one may wonder what the value is in supporting government programs that help the poor, if the poor are seen as worthless. This discussion of the worth of the poor person (especially the poor person on government assistance) plays itself out over and over again from the campaign trail to the checkout line at the grocery store, as will be shown.

Purpose

Though not always a popular solution, one way of confronting systemic poverty is through government assistance programs. Critical theorist Peter McLaren makes a stirring argument when he reflects on why Americans fail to question their ambivalent,

here it will be used to mean any community member or household who, working or not, meets the technical and income eligibility requirements for the government’s Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as food stamps. For a household of one to qualify for SNAP, the gross monthly income for a recipient must be at or below \$1,276; for a household of two, the figure is \$1,726; for three, \$2,177; this pattern can be continued with a reasonable expectation of accuracy by adding either \$450 or \$451 for each new family member added (USDA, “Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP): Eligibility”).

² Most of chapter two analyzes some of the conservative rhetoric that has, in recent years, dehumanized the poor. Chapter three, on the other hand, is more focused on examples of how liberal rhetoric from the 1960s failed to grasp the plight of the poor, reproducing and even institutionalizing stereotypes that questioned the humanity of the impoverished, which rendered some antipoverty initiatives ineffective.

and sometimes even antagonistic, attitudes toward the poor, especially as these attitudes pertain to poor people's receipt of so-called entitlements: "They [Americans] rarely view their country as lagging behind other industrialized economies in the world in providing security for its citizens in such areas as health care, family allowance, and housing subsidy programs" (68). One may argue that America, "the wealthiest country in the world," as McLaren correctly notes, is not very generous (at least from the standpoint of governmental assistance) toward its citizens struggling with financial insecurity because of the way the more affluent citizens have been trained, and have trained themselves, to define the poor (68). From the standpoint of someone who has never lived through financial instability, to be poor is to embody a variety of negative metaphors, some of which were listed above; to be poor is to have a literal lack of one or more essential qualities that make a person fully human. These ungenerous stereotypes have their basis in metaphor, which is much more intimately tied up in the creation and comprehension of language than perhaps most people realize. If the more affluent in society have trained themselves to view the poor with less-than-generous metaphors that reinforce harsh stereotypes, then what remains to be seen is how they (the more affluent) have accepted these metaphors and pass them onto the poor, who then continue to accept their own socioeconomic oppression. That self-oppression—and how to overcome it—is the topic of this project.

Some may wonder why a discussion of the linguistic treatment of the poor is relevant in a nation that is largely middle class. The fact is, there are some worrying signs in the world at large and in America specifically. Commentators and experts in a variety of fields have observed that the American middle class is eroding. This is despite the

United States' persistent tendency to define itself as the greatest nation in the world, based on the success of its economy, which is of course driven by the strongest economic engine the world has ever seen (capitalism). A popular narrative has emerged of late; many say that superrich CEOs (what Thomas Piketty has called "super managers") are taking more than their fair share, leaving very little for the rest of society—again, what some see is the diminishing of the middle class. A recent story in *NPR* reported that the middle class no longer constitutes half of all Americans; now the poor and the rich combined make up a majority of all American citizens (Geewax). Some say the reality is much grimmer than just a handful of rich people stockpiling wealth while the rest learned to subsist on less. On another recent *NPR* daytime talk show entitled *On Point*, economist Robert Gordon asserted that the American century (roughly 1870 to 1970) is long over, thanks in large part to the ending of the innovation boom that defined that era; even though there is a stubborn expectation that wages (and thus quality of life) will continue to double roughly every thirty to thirty-five years, the available data from the last forty years do not support this optimistic assessment ("Is American Growth Over?").

Capital in the Twenty-First Century, Thomas Piketty's famous book on the cancerous growth of income inequality in the developed world, likewise makes arguments along the same lines: in the coming decades, he says, inequality will exceed that which was seen during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These were the days of the Gilded Age in America, of the Victorian Age in Britain, and La Belle Époque in France. This was the Western experiment (in America and elsewhere) known as Social Darwinism when the boot heel of capitalism stomped the lower class even lower so that the wealthy few could reach an even higher economic echelon (263 – 4).

And so, inequality caused by greed and a flagging economy is obviously a popular topic of discussion as the U.S. progresses (or perhaps, to keep the tax metaphor alive, regresses) through the early twenty-first century.

Organization

In chapter one, this project will introduce the theoretical framework that has guided it. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's metaphor theory will be detailed as a way of understanding how language reinforces the metaphors that construct people's perceived realities. Pierre Bourdieu's theories of *doxa* and *habitus* will enhance this discussion by showing that these metaphors, which people use to comprehend the reality around them, are at once unconscious and self-reproducing, and are therefore difficult to recognize and overcome. With Bourdieu's theory of heretical discourse, however, there is hope that these metaphors can be identified and questioned so that a more fully developed conception of reality might be crafted. Chapter two will look into the historical archives of popular media, such as daily newspapers from recent decades, to collect the nation's perspectives on poverty programs and the people who access them. This chapter will analyze recent political discourse that is fed by ungenerous metaphors, which seek to depict the poor who are on government assistance as somehow less than human. Chapter three will look at the history and current legacy of the "culture of poverty" theory, which helped policymakers develop the federal initiatives that became the War on Poverty; the most detrimental characteristic of the culture of poverty theory was that its conceptions of the poor tended to be formed from underdeveloped stereotypes, which undermined the efforts of antipoverty workers in the United States' so-called problem areas, Appalachia among them, which will be the subject of this chapter's case study. The significance of

this chapter is to show that if one hopes to alleviate poverty in a given region, then he or she must not expect only the poor to change; the social structures that keep people poor must also be critiqued, language among them, including the underdeveloped stereotypes that are buttressed by anti-poor metaphors. Finally, chapter four will delve deeper into how language can perpetuate poverty—as well as challenge those perceptions. This chapter will explore various methods for questioning stereotypes, including the study of satire and fiction. An open-ended question that this chapter hopes to ask, though not necessarily answer, is: How can those on governmental assistance put into practice Bourdieu’s theory of heretical discourse, thus helping both the oppressed and their oppressors break the cycle of language-reinforced poverty? To further that discussion, this final chapter will be a case study of an Appalachian organization called the Highlander Research and Education Center that has, since its founding, practiced the very form of heretical discourse that Bourdieu calls for, helping people from different socioeconomic strata come together to resolve some of society’s most stubborn systemic problems, including by questioning the stereotypes that have come to characterize certain groups of oppressed individuals.

CHAPTER I: METHODOLOGY

An Introduction to Metaphor Theory

Metaphor theory is based in part on the premise that our neurological states define and “create” our worlds. In George Lakoff and Mark Johnson’s words, “Our concepts structure what we perceive, how we get around in the world, and how we relate to other people. Our conceptual system thus plays a central role in defining our everyday realities” (3). These conceptual systems, they assert, are undergirded by the metaphors that we use to comprehend the world. Metaphor theory is important because it allows the critical thinker the opportunity to consciously look at how language shapes conceptual systems, which is not something that happens regularly. Indeed, Lakoff and Johnson argue that people understand the world by unconsciously accepting the metaphorical concepts that they use to construct reality: “[O]ur conceptual system is not something we are normally aware of. In most of the little things we do every day, we simply think and act more or less automatically along certain lines” (3). Studying metaphors, therefore, provides a glimpse into a conception of reality that a person tacitly accepts as true. Ultimately, understanding why one thinks one way versus another can be integral for understanding why social justice initiatives and governmental assistance programs are or are not supported by a majority of citizens. If, for instance, the beneficiaries of these initiatives and programs are linguistically perceived to be less than human, then perhaps they should not be entitled to them.

Lakoff and Johnson begin *Metaphors We Live By* by analyzing the everyday metaphorical concept “ARGUMENT IS WAR.” They point out that another culture, one that does not insist on viewing argument as a combative endeavor, might understand debate

differently than those that use that metaphor. They contend that if instead of hitting one's mark and destroying one's opponent's defenses, a person viewed the act of discourse more as a dance, he or she would not even be able to recognize this act *as* argument. It would be something altogether different. This example is given because it demonstrates just how slippery language can be, especially metaphors: "*The essence of metaphor*," say Lakoff and Johnson, "*is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another*" (5, italics in the original).

Another metaphor, central to *this* project, is that TIME IS MONEY: "You're *wasting* my time" and "You need to *budget* your time" are just two examples given in Lakoff and Johnson's analysis. The theorists explain,

Because of the way that the concept of work has developed in modern Western culture, where money is typically associated with the time it takes and time is precisely quantified, it has become customary to pay people by the hour, week, or year. [...] These practices are relatively new in the history of the human race, and by no means do they exist in all cultures. They have arisen in modern industrialized societies and structure our basic everyday activities in a very profound way. [...] TIME IS MONEY, TIME IS A LIMITED RESOURCE, and TIME IS A VALUABLE COMMODITY are all metaphorical concepts. They are metaphorical since we are using our everyday experiences with money, limited resources, and valuable commodities to conceptualize time. [...] There are cultures where time is none of these things (7 – 9).

These observations are especially relevant to this project because they provide a better understanding of how metaphors shape biases regarding the poor, especially biases based

on underdeveloped perceptions. Language has the potential to shape these underdeveloped perceptions because metaphors, which people use to understand reality, do not always help them grasp the full scope of a situation. In explaining how metaphor can hide certain aspects of a concept, Lakoff and Johnson say, “It is important to see that the metaphorical structuring involved here is partial, not total. If it were total, one concept would actually *be* the other, not merely be understood in terms of it. [...] So when we say that a concept is structured by a metaphor, we mean that it is partially structured and that it can be extended in some ways but not others” (12 – 3). Again, this can be applied in terms of a socioeconomic analysis. The poor are not just lazy, in other words. They are also sinners because their receipt of government assistance is an act of *stealing* time from the people who go to work every day and are able to make a decent wage. They are sinners, and the proof of their sin is that they have failed to make the system, one that values time and productivity above all, *work for them*. In other words, their much-deserved punishment (poverty) is further proof of their sinfulness. The poor are animals or *others* because that very system of time and productivity has become *foreign to them*, as it is to lesser creatures or to people from a different time and distant place who do not even possess the ability to comprehend this society’s language and norms. When one takes Lakoff and Johnson’s theories on linguistics into account, in some ways, a metaphor is like painting a picture: a person chooses not only which colors to use, but also which scene to depict as well as which angle to view that scene from.

Offering a strong theoretical framework with which to dissect public discourse, metaphor theory’s greatest strength is that it helps demonstrate how easy it is to get stuck in a sort of feedback loop in which perceptions are self-perpetuating. Metaphor theory

can thus provide some insight into how anti-poor perceptions are developed. The theory delves deeply into the choices of language and might encourage questions such as, “What assumptions have led society to support this particular linguistic construct?” and “How can language be used to deconstruct this linguistic construct?” In this way, metaphor theory is central to critical thinking, but it does not always offer alternative modes of thought. It does not, in other words, insist that people question how the use of language perpetuates particular perceptions and systems of oppression.

For that reason, this project also introduces another theoretical construct to suggest that there are, indeed, different ways of seeing the world—and the poor—than those with which people have conditioned themselves. In an effort to better understand how people can use language to structure and reinforce their own oppression or the oppression of those in a community who are perceived to be “other,” this project will analyze some of the key terms defined by the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu in two of his most important works, *The Logic of Practice* and *Language and Symbolic Power*. These terms are *doxa*, *habitus*, and heretical discourse. Bourdieu’s theories offer a more detailed account of the effects of language’s choices in the construction of reality, and these additional theories can therefore be windows into new modes of thought.

Doxa and *Habitus*

In *The Logic of Practice*, Bourdieu discusses the creation and perpetuation of the power relationships between society’s dominated and dominators. How, in other words, do some people come to be dominated? How do other people come to dominate? And what roles, Bourdieu asks, do language and daily habit play in this process? One of the most interesting observations of his analysis is how difficult many daily habits, in any

given population, are to break. As mentioned above, they become unconsciously embodied in the way one acts or speaks. He says,

The conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence produce *habitus*, systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them. Objectively 'regulated' and 'regular' without being in any way the product of obedience to rules, they can be collectively orchestrated without being the product of the organizing action of a conductor (53).

The argument here is that one's habits almost have a mind of their own, and Lakoff and Johnson echo this (as noted above) when they say that one's conceptual systems are usually created unconsciously. According to Bourdieu, the repetition of daily tasks is, in effect, the result of one's beliefs, or *doxa*, which are also strengthened by the repetition of those same daily tasks. This is important because the *habitus* makes achieving a critical perspective on mainstream perceptions difficult, though not impossible. Indeed, Bourdieu's theories enable this critical perspective. He continues,

Practical belief is not a 'state of mind', still less a kind of arbitrary adherence to a set of instituted dogmas and doctrines ('beliefs'), but rather a state of the body. *Doxa* is the relationship of immediate adherence that is established in practice between a *habitus* and the field to which it is attuned, the pre-verbal taking-for-granted of the world that flows from practical sense (68).

In other words, the beliefs that people hold are so deeply engrained in their bodies that they have formed these regular habits that are difficult, even *seemingly* impossible, to break. People reinforce their beliefs regarding the world around them by enacting those beliefs. “The *habitus*,” he says, “is a metaphor of the world of objects, which is itself an endless circle of metaphors that mirror each other *ad infinitum*” (77). Because one’s unconscious belief system reproduces habits that confirm those very beliefs, untangling language from habit becomes a frustrating endeavor. As Bourdieu puts it, “It is because agents never know what they are doing that what they do has more sense than they know” (69).

Bourdieu further explains how people use their bodies to reinforce their own habits. These habits, he says, have their “primary experiences of the body which, as is clearly seen in emotion, takes metaphors seriously. For example, the opposition between the straight and the bent [...] is central to most of the marks of respect or contempt that politeness uses in many societies to symbolize relations of domination” (71 – 2). To be straight or to be bent, in other words, literally (and certainly metaphorically) means to be good or to be bad, respectively. These socially and physically enacted metaphors, as Bourdieu points out, are typically stratified along gender lines, but they can certainly also be applied in terms of wealth to suggest (for instance) that economically advantaged people have found the straight path whereas the poor have wandered off the path entirely.

Bourdieu says people inscribe certain values to the ways others hold themselves, and to the ways they behave. Again, this is especially evident in sexual relations—“with the opposition between big and small to assign to women the tasks that are low and inferior, demanding submissiveness and suppleness, and minute, but also petty [...]”—

but it can also be applied to a nearly universal degree (71). Dissecting these stereotypes to analyze how they have been formed can be an effort applied to questions of wealth and poverty. After all, negative stereotypes seeking to blame the victim are, by their nature, engrained in the victim's perceptions of himself and then become self-perpetuating. These perceptions are also held by the dominant members of society—for instance, those in society who are more affluent—and so they get passed down and perpetuated by a system that affirms and then reaffirms them. The poor live in the poor parts of town, for instance, because that is where the poor live. Or the poor abuse drugs and alcohol because these are the habits usually reserved for the poor. Or the poor do not have good-paying jobs because these jobs are held for the people who are meant to have them. Challenging these perceptions can have material consequences, such as increased funding for housing, rehab, and job training. But first, the metaphors that undergird these perceptions must be confronted.

Confronting these metaphors, however, is difficult because, as stated above, they are so logical that they tend to perpetuate themselves. Bourdieu says,

It can be seen, incidentally, how such a logic tends to produce its own confirmation, by inducing a 'vocation' for the tasks to which one is assigned, an *amor fati* which reinforces belief in the prevailing system of classification by making it appear to be grounded in reality—which it actually is, since it helps produce that reality and since incorporated social relations present themselves with every appearance of nature—and not only in the eyes of those whose interests are served by the prevailing system of classification (71).

Again, what he means here is that one's very actions tend to reinforce his beliefs, and thus habits (some of which are highly detrimental to one's success in society, or the success of others) are reproduced again and again. Even people who are harming themselves with their own habits tend to perpetuate those habits. Importantly, this is how the oppressed people in a society can believe the unbelievable: they deserve their oppression.

In *The Logic of Practice*, Bourdieu speaks of the literally embodied metaphors in the physical actions of those he observed during his sociological studies in French-colonized Northern Africa. His analysis can be adapted to this project's study of the poor in America and how these enacted metaphors become not only learned, but also (and more importantly) habit. This project argues that viewing poverty as the result of a moral or intellectual deficit is itself a habit, and examples of this habit will be shown below. It is hard to deny the way that the *habitus* controls people's actions in these ways. *Habitus* keeps alive various cycles of oppression, including the acceptance of poverty. Bourdieu's theories can shed light on how the cultural beliefs and social assumptions (doxa) of middle income America become physically incorporated, from a very early age, into the daily lives both of those who *are* oppressed and those *who* oppress. The belief that a person using food stamps should not have nice possessions is one that some people hold implicitly, and they physically enact this belief with a scoff or a roll of the eyes when they see their fellow shoppers are nicely dressed and are nevertheless paying for their groceries with EBT cards. The idea that parents receiving cash assistance and government healthcare are moochers is another belief that causes people to look down on the poor and speak of them in disparaging terms, giving voice to the metaphors (parasite,

sinner) that support their deeply held beliefs. These beliefs and assumptions are therefore cemented in the repetitive habits that carry people through the day, which can lead them quite easily into feeding their own oppression or, on the other hand, to *not* questioning how they oppress others. As Bourdieu notes and as the word *habitus* suggests, a person does this and rarely realizes it.

These beliefs should be challenged because robust dissent practiced by the oppressed is a necessary attribute in a healthy democracy, and Bourdieu's ideas help explain why. If Bourdieu is right and the habits of a person's body are bound up inseparably with the act of language and the phenomenon of time, then every action one takes leads him further down the same road he has always been on. In other words, nothing changes as people go about their daily lives—at least not until they make conscious efforts to change how their lives are structured. People tend to practice their own oppression and the oppression of others, says Bourdieu, calling this act “the process of acquisition—a practical *mimesis* (or mimeticism)” (73). Because one tends to copy the actions of others, if the actions of others happen to be oppressing, then the observer naturally solidifies his or her own oppression or the oppression of others, be it socioeconomic, race-based, etc. “The body,” Bourdieu says, “believes in what it plays at: it weeps if it mimes grief” (73). This disarmingly simple observation, when considered a little more closely with the rest of his arguments, helps explain why the linguistic phenomenon of unconscious bodily reproduction (belief-fueled habit) makes the act of questioning negative perceptions so important for both oppressed populations and their oppressors.

But here this project must be careful, as one does not wish to stray too close to a theory that blames the victim. Such a theory might insist that the poor are poor because they have forgotten how to hold themselves up or how to fight back or how to act normatively in a largely middle class society. Instead of blaming the victim, one should consider how Bourdieu's theories help with the goal of critically analyzing the metaphors that reinforce acts of oppression. An understanding of the theoretical concepts of *doxa* and *habitus* will allow the middle class (which should be defined as those who earn a living wage yet still need to work) to perceive the poor differently by helping them recognize how their current anti-poor perceptions have come from deeply engrained metaphors that they both unconsciously accept as true. If members of the middle class look at their perspectives of poverty as self-reflexively as possible, then the causes of poverty do not seem to be one-sided at all. Instead of the poor being responsible for their own poverty, society itself is due a large share of the blame.

Heretical Discourse

Because *doxa* (beliefs) and *habitus* (habits that reinforce those beliefs) are so tacit, Bourdieu developed another way of explaining how linguistic dissent can occur given the conceptual and material forces that militate against it. He called this theoretical concept heretical discourse. Someone who wishes to enact heretical discourse, such as by questioning the metaphors that have come to tacitly define the poor, must first recognize that assumptions reproduce themselves through language and are widely accepted as true. They become, therefore, "authorized." "Indeed," Bourdieu says in *Language and Symbolic Power*, "since every language that makes itself heard by an entire group is an authorized language, invested with the authority of this group, it authorizes what it

designates at the same time as it expresses it, drawing its legitimacy from the group over which it exercises its authority and which it helps to produce as such by offering it a unitary expression of its experiences” (129). Heretical discourse, therefore, is the act of speaking up with the aim of challenging society’s tacit assumptions of the oppressed. The alternative to heretical discourse is not only an *acceptance* of these tacit assumptions, but also silent *approval*. Bourdieu specializes in studying the cost of silence. He says,

Every time they enter into an exchange with the holders of the legitimate competence, and especially when they find themselves in a formal situation, dominated individuals are condemned to a practical, corporeal recognition of the laws of price formation which are the least favorable to their linguistic productions and which condemns them to a more or less desperate attempt to be correct, or to *silence* (97).

In other words, it is difficult for the oppressed to practice acts of heretical discourse because “the holders of legitimate competence,” or those who accept and use a society’s authorized language, assume that the oppressed have little of value to talk about.

Heretical discourse, therefore, makes a fuller realization of the humanity of the oppressed possible by showing the dominant in society that the dominated also have legitimate perspectives to contribute.

The analysis of anti-poor metaphors shows how important heretical discourse is in breaking the tacit relationship between language and reality. Heretical discourse is important, in other words, because it allows for the recognition that society’s oppressive systems are impermanent and contingent on language. Bourdieu explains: “We know that the social order owes some measure of its permanence to the fact that it imposes schemes

of classification which, being adjusted to objective classifications, produce a form of recognition of this order, the kind implied by the misrecognition of the arbitrariness of its foundations” (127). In other words, that ancient form of oppression known as poverty is not only impermanent, but is also based on arbitrary language choices. Among those language choices are the metaphors society uses to understand the world it has created and the oppression of certain members of society. Negative language choices, such as underdeveloped stereotypes, confirm the truthfulness of the metaphors that define the poor, labeling them as lazy, undeserving, or broken. These are the assumptions that, while beginning in the minds of the more affluent in society, also become structured in the minds of the poor. They now view *themselves* in the same way that the more affluent view them. That is the danger of language and why revolutionary language choices can help shift perspectives. If language choices help to cement perceptions of the poor, then changing those perceptions can also begin through language.

Synthesizing Metaphor Theory and Bourdieu’s Concepts

Metaphor theory and Bourdieu’s theories are, in many ways, quite similar. They agree that reality is unconsciously defined by the language choices that people use. Bourdieu explicitly argues that analyzing metaphors is a way to recognize how society views the oppressed and to bring awareness to the fact that social systems of oppression are not permanent. The theories of Lakoff, Johnson, and Bourdieu allow for a similar argument: that language choices can further one’s oppression unless a critical analysis of those language choices occurs. Metaphor theory does not state this explicitly in *Metaphors We Live By*, but the implication is still clear: without critically analyzing language choices, these choices remain largely unconscious. The connections between

metaphor theory and Bourdieu's theories of doxa and *habitus* are also clear: with these theories, a person's value can be concealed by the words used to describe him ("The poor are broken;" "the poor are lazy"), and once the negative perceptions of the poor become permanent (or tacit, as Bourdieu would say), history will continue to replicate these perceptions ad infinitum. This is precisely how *habitus* works. However, Bourdieu *does* have hope that the cycle of *habitus* can be broken through language choices. In *Language and Symbolic Power*, he says,

Heretical discourse must not only help to sever the adherence to the world of common sense by publicly proclaiming a break with the ordinary order, it must also produce a new common sense and integrate within it the previously tacit or repressed practices and experiences of an entire group, investing them with the legitimacy conferred by public expression and collective recognition (129).

Here again, Bourdieu's theories resonate with metaphor theory. Here Bourdieu's theories, and metaphor theory as well, allow for an observation of the belief that the poor are somehow less than human—maybe they are animals; maybe they are parasites; maybe they are thieving sinners; etc. These metaphors become silently accepted by the middle class and, likely, by the poor themselves. Bourdieu's theories suggest that heretical discourse can break these silently accepted perceptions and forge new, more positive ideas regarding the dominated. In a way, studying how metaphors dehumanize the poor is itself a form of heretical discourse. If nothing else, studying the metaphors that dehumanize the poor can show how power relations can be reinforced and possibly even transformed by language. There is then a chance for people to recognize these metaphors

and to start a conversation, a way for the poor to see that the language that dehumanizes them is a part of a larger social structure that has existed for generations—not their fault.

But there are ways of staging acts of heretical discourse that go beyond what an academic paper can do. Heretical breaks can be enacted at the federal, state, and local levels with the help of groups that teach the art of leadership and help organize people for grassroots change. After discussing in chapter two some of the metaphors that dehumanize the poor and then demonstrating in chapter three how anti-poor metaphors were institutionalized in the 1960s, this project will conclude by studying some of the methods that allow people to advocate for the poor by questioning language choices, challenging negative cultural perceptions, and encouraging leadership.

CHAPTER II: POOR METAPHORS

Lakoff and Johnson argue that one of metaphor's greatest powers is the way it highlights some qualities in a given comparison and hides others: "The very systematicity that allows us to comprehend one aspect of a concept in terms of another [...] will necessarily hide other aspects of the concept. In allowing us to focus on one aspect of a concept [...], a metaphorical concept can keep us from focusing on other aspects of the concept that are inconsistent with that metaphor" (10). The world of politics provides some good examples of this exact phenomenon that metaphor theory expounds upon. Leonard Pitts Jr. begins a 2014 *Miami Herald* opinion piece entitled "The face of poverty" with a summation of the recent views of three different politicians. All three of these politicians utilize interesting metaphors in the language they choose to depict the poor. Pitts begins with Paul Ryan: "We have got this tailspin of culture, in our inner cities in particular, of men not working and just generations of men not even thinking about working or learning the value and the culture of work" (Pitts). The "tailspin of culture" is an interesting metaphor in that it is the logical extreme of a much more common metaphor hidden inside Ryan's rhetoric: the poor are parasites. In other words, too many moochers in society will lead to the very destruction (or crashing) of civilization. Pitts then features a statement made recently by another politician, South Carolina's former Lieutenant Governor André Bauer: "You're facilitating the problem if you give an animal or a (poor) person ample food supply. They will reproduce, especially ones that don't think too much further than that." It is important to note here that Bauer was talking not about adults who apply for food stamps, but children who receive free or reduced lunches through school programs (Robertson). This metaphor takes the parasite comparison in a

different and startling direction, comparing the poor person to a stray animal, unworthy of being fed, but also blaming the poor person for his own poverty. Bauer says that children who receive free lunches also have low test scores, the fairly explicit assumption being that because these children's parents do not have to work for this food, then the children are somehow less intelligent than their peers. And finally, Pitts recalls Mitt Romney's infamous words during his 2012 presidential bid: "There are 47 percent who are ... dependent upon government, who believe they are victims, who believe government has a responsibility to care for them." Though this is a subtler statement than the other two, it is another example of a politician comparing the poor to parasites.

These are just some examples of what Lakoff and Johnson mean when they say that metaphors can call attention to some qualities while hiding others. To call a child who is the beneficiary of a government food plan a parasite, for instance, glosses over how raising a well-adjusted and well-fed child will likely have positive ripple effects in society long into the future. There are other popular metaphors used by politicians to describe the poor as well, some of which will be surveyed below, and these similarly do not paint a full picture of reality. For example, calling poor people on government assistance sinful criminals, based solely on their receipt of that assistance, distracts from the fact that they have broken no laws in the act of seeking help from the social safety net. So, by comparing a poor person to an animal, a sinner, or a parasite, the speaker creates this less-than-fully developed conception that, to paraphrase Lakoff and Johnson, causes inconsistent metaphors to seem fully true (10). In Bourdieu's words, this is what fuels *habitus*; the implicit, unconscious beliefs in a specific reality tend to support the

metaphors that confirm that very same conception of reality, and these beliefs reproduce themselves in the daily habits of the people who believe them (*Logic* 77).

Comparing a poor person to an animal, a parasite, or a sinful thief is not such a simplistic comparison after all. Just as Lakoff and Johnson point out, by simply constructing the metaphor, one forgets how complex the reality that exists behind the metaphor really is. Just as it can cause the American middle class to question the value of other human beings, language can also overrule the dehumanization process that popular metaphors have set in place. By understanding that much of one's language is based on metaphors, some of them more apt than others, one might reconsider the ways that the relations of the *habitus* reproduce these metaphors. As stated above, the danger of these metaphors is that they tend to confirm a reality that has been filtered through language and accepted by the observer of that reality.

Deconstructing and refuting the negative stereotypes by which the poor are defined might challenge the view that the poor are objects that distract from business as usual and strengthen the view that they are equal human beings deserving of dignity and a standard level of fair treatment in society. A trend in anti-poor perceptions has reemerged, however, piggybacking on political movements such as the Tea Party but having roots in much earlier (and much more liberal) political movements such as the War on Poverty of the 1960s. The trend that has reemerged in the early twenty-first century is reminiscent of the War on Poverty days because, according to some views, the poor are once again solely responsible for the dire circumstances in which they find themselves, with little consideration going toward the systemic nature of poverty itself. When victims are blamed for their own victimhood, critical questions tend not to be

asked. People who find themselves the victims of layoffs due to economic downturns (the Great Recession, for instance) automatically open themselves up to public shaming, even though the benefits they receive (unemployment, public healthcare, and nutrition and/or cash assistance) are done so in private.

In the sections below, this project underscores some of the anti-poor rhetoric that has flourished in the hyper-partisan landscape of American politics in recent years. After focusing especially on the idea that the poor are living sinful, animalistic lives mooching off the state, or not using time to its fullest advantage—i.e. to make as much money as possible—this project will then suggest ways the poor can counteract these perceptions that have been unfairly brought against them. Some of these linguistic counteractions can be achieved by using the very governmental programs that already exist, though with the way SNAP policy has been written, there will likely be an expectation of heightened community involvement from the poor themselves. As with any issue in a republican democracy, the community must be willing to work to change their perceptions, but this change will likely never come about unless those who are the targets of these perceptions are also involved and engaged. Finally, in the hyper-partisan landscape that characterizes American politics in the early twenty-first century, any attempt to confront and change negative perceptions of the poor should be bipartisan and led by local organizations. Community groups that have deep roots in their respective regions would likely be more effective (and palatable) than a top-down federal approach that seeks to change people's language choices on a large scale.

The Poor Are Animals

One particularly insensitive metaphor is that the poor are animals, which is an exaggeration of stereotypes that have long dogged the poor. Indeed, these stereotypes, especially those that characterize the poor as careless and refusing to think of the future, might be familiar to people in the rural Southeast of the United States. Even Harry M. Caudill, an educated advocate for the poor in Appalachia, saw “welfarism” as a big problem in the mountains in the 1950s and 1960s. In *Night Comes to the Cumberland: A Biography of a Depressed Area*, he has much to say against the hazards of poverty, and his rhetoric against the poor themselves seems sometimes biting and quite cruel. Specifically, he says,

Fertile and amoral females resided in every camp and on every creek. Illegitimate pregnancies increased at an ominous rate. The new unwed mothers promptly appeared in the Welfare offices and applied for their monthly assistance checks. In due course, and in all too many instances, the first “mistake” was followed by another and the monthly stipend grew. Some of these uninhibited women have blessed the state with a half-dozen new citizens, all of them supported by the nation’s taxpayers. One pair of sisters living in the same house began bearing children before their twentieth birthdays (286 – 7).

Thus, even those who are sympathetic to the plight of the poor, as Caudill was, may use harsh language when discussing poverty’s deeply structural problems. The idea that welfare by itself fosters dependency is not a new observation, but what is striking about some of the new rhetorical flourishes from U.S. politicians is that their words turn recipients of government assistance into animals.

As already noted above, in 2010, the Lieutenant Governor of South Carolina, André Bauer, said that welfare programs not only lead people into immediate dependency on the system, but they also create generational dependency. This is because children who receive free lunches will then grow up and “reproduce, especially ones that don’t think too much further than that” (Robinson). According to an article on *CNN*’s website, he said that he had been warned about this phenomenon while growing up. “‘My grandmother was not a highly educated woman, but she told me as a small child to quit feeding stray animals,’ Bauer told an audience in the town of Fountain Inn, according to the *Greenville News*. ‘You know why? Because they breed’” (Hamby). The implication here is clear: their children will also be on the system, creating generational dependency on entitlement program benefits. In April 2013, Missouri Representative Paul Fitzwater made a comment quite similar to Bauer’s. Trying to explain why it is a bad idea to give poor people government benefits such as public healthcare, Fitzwater said, “When you go to the zoo, there’s a sign, that says please don’t feed the animals.” And thus he, too, has likened poor people on governmental assistance to animals, noting that, like the creatures in a zoo, “they keep coming back” (“State Lawmaker”; Lussenhop). This nonsensical metaphor is nevertheless much the same indelicate idea that Caudill was trying to get at when he described the desperate “welfarism” that had exploded in Appalachia in the 1960s. People got hooked on free money, just as animals get accustomed to free food, and they could not help but return for more.

As Lakoff and Johnson might do, one can ask, “How is the metaphor that the poor person is an animal inconsistent with the full reality of that person’s situation?” To put it in terms of Bourdieu’s theories, one could go further and ask, “How does this implicit

belief (that the poor on government assistance are animals) replicate itself in the daily habits of people who hold such a belief?” The metaphor of poor people on aid being animals is inconsistent because it is overly simplistic, and it reproduces itself in the discussions that people have as well as the votes that they cast. How is the metaphor inconsistent? While there is a distinction between normalized, socially adjusted animals (such as the kind that can adequately take care of their young) and stray animals that people might kick away from their doorsteps, in the natural world such distinctions are not so easily drawn. Indeed, in the above paragraph, Bauer is comparing poor people to *stray* animals, which makes the metaphor all the more piercing to the person on the receiving end. Stray animals, according to humans living in a well-ordered society, have no purpose. They are animals whose sole meaning in life is to annoy, beg, and leach off society. To call a person a stray animal, therefore, is first to refuse that person his or her dignity and second to fail to see the broader picture of how nature works well inside its own globe. In other words, even a stray animal has a purpose somewhere, somehow. Yet still the popular perception persists: an animal *cannot* have a purpose equal to that of a human’s, because an animal is naturally *less* than a human. Fitzwater, meanwhile, is comparing the poor to zoo animals, which is also problematic. Zoo animals are helpless, and a sort of paternalism demands that humans care for them. Both stray animals *and* zoo animals are clearly less valuable than humans, according to these conceptions.

As noted above with the example of Caudill, one recognizes today’s rhetoric as having roots in earlier discussions, and the 1960s and 1970s in particular set the stage for many of today’s political battles. The question of how the government should help the poor is still a topic of heated debate, and much of this has to do with the fact that many

Americans are still speaking in the same language, understanding the poor with metaphors similar to the ones they did back then. Indeed, a lot of disparaging metaphors have come to characterize the poor in the United States, many of which appear to originate from a basic question of fairness.

The Poor Are Parasites

Another metaphor that politicians use, perhaps without even realizing they are invoking it, is that the poor are parasites, unfairly gaming the system or draining society of its resources. That they are not aware they are invoking this metaphor shows how unconsciously held these beliefs can be, which means they are especially difficult to overcome because they can slip out without their speakers intending them to. Perhaps most famous were Mitt Romney's disastrous comments about the forty-seven percent of Americans who depend on government in some form or fashion to get by. He made these comments at the height of the 2012 presidential campaign while being recorded by a hidden camera. His full quote, though certainly nuanced and perhaps not totally deserving of the backlash it engendered, was unfortunate and even thoughtless at times:

There are forty-seven percent of the people who will vote for the president no matter what. All right, there are forty-seven percent who are with him, who are dependent upon government, who believe that they are victims, who believe the government has a responsibility to care for them, who believe that they are entitled to health care, to food, to housing, to you-name-it. That's an entitlement. The government should give it to them. And they will vote for this president no matter what. And I mean the president starts off with forty-eight, forty-nine, forty—he starts off with a huge number. These are people who pay no income tax.

Forty-seven percent of Americans pay no income tax. So our message of low taxes doesn't connect. So he'll be out there talking about tax cuts for the rich. My job is not to worry about those people. I'll never convince them they should take personal responsibility and care for their lives. What I have to do is convince the five to ten percent in the center that are independents, that are thoughtful, that look at voting one way or the other depending upon in some cases emotion, whether they like the guy or not ("Mitt Romney's '47 Percent' Comments").

First of all, what disturbed people so greatly about these indelicate comments was how this presidential candidate, generally seen as a very compassionate man and a devout Christian, did not seem to care at that moment about roughly half of the nation's population. In fact, what was so shocking about this instance of political rhetoric was to see such a high-level candidate espousing this disparaging view of people in need. Of course, as has been seen with the sudden political ascendancy of Donald Trump, a candidate will say virtually anything to get noticed. And Romney's tilt to the Right during the 2012 Republican primaries and then the general election—to be the political chimera or shape-shifter his campaign team thought the American people needed him to be—may have ironically been a part of the same phenomenon, a sort of conservative fervor, now fueling Trump's ascendancy. But what is also troubling about Romney's comments is that they echo the popular (and oftentimes conservative) distrust of programs that help people in need. Usually a thoughtful man who chooses his words carefully, Romney made comments here that fed into the echo chamber of fiscally conservative politics that prey on people's fears and bring up issues of trust and fairness, depicting the poor person who accesses government aid as somehow gaming the system.

Second, Romney's comments were especially offensive because of the implicit metaphor hiding inside them: the poor are parasites. The idea that the poor are leaching off the government is not a new metaphor, and, in fact, "parasite" has been, for years, an especially popular label to use as a criticism of the poor who are on government antipoverty programs. Public figures like Romney are often understandably guarded with their opinions, and so catching a politician or a pundit in an offensive turn of phrase can be difficult. In fact, while Romney himself did not explicitly call government aid recipients "moochers" or "parasites," many people were able to read the subtext of his comments and responded forcefully. In an article in Florida's *Palm Beach Post*, Frank Cerabino looks at some political numbers to explain why both affluent and impoverished parts of Florida were likely going to vote for Romney in the 2012 election. In his article's opening, Cerabino sarcastically admonishes the poor people of Florida:

Listen up, moochers. / You know who you are. Don't be looking all innocent. Florida is among the top 10 states when it comes to the percentage of federal income tax filers who pay no federal income tax. / So I know you're out there. And the jig is up. All those good times you poor people have been getting away with are coming to an end. / Step away from the nursing home, Grandma. Give back that child-tax credit, low-wage working mom. And all you smart-aleck teens: Don't even dream of burdening us with your subsidized college educations. [...] Thinking nobody was recording his words, Romney really gave it to you moochers, the 47 percent of Americans who don't make enough money to owe any federal income tax.

Perhaps intelligent and powerful people such as Romney do not wish to make these metaphors explicit because they do not actually believe them; they may believe, however, that their constituents believe them. This is another one of metaphor's powers: sometimes only a suggestion of the image is needed before people will see the image fully developed in their minds. This is because they already believe the inherent truth of the metaphor, which allows politicians a level of deniability because they are speaking to their constituents in a sort of code, which makes identifying the actual audience quite difficult. "You see," Cerabino concludes, "when it comes to bad mouthing the moochers, it's best to be as vague as possible, so the moochers think you must be talking about somebody other than them." If this is true, then analyzing politicians' comments and pointing out the inconsistent metaphors hiding inside becomes all the more important.

Indeed, public figures may be guarded with their phrasing, but those on the receiving end of these metaphors clearly feel their sting. In a 1994 *Washington Post* editorial, for instance, contributor Kathryn James poses the question in a startlingly direct way: "Must those of us who receive social services really be subjected to stereotypes that categorize all of us as lazy, uneducated parasites, endlessly feeding off the welfare system?" (James). Media, especially the column, opinion, and editorial sections, offer snapshots in time such as these and give subtext to national dialogues. They tell the stories of people whose lives are touched by economic instability. "Jan Bach never imagined, 10 years ago, that she would end up on welfare, much less find herself being assailed in congressional hearings—like others in her situation—as some kind of social parasite." Thus begins a *Denver Post* article from June 1995 during the Clinton Administration's attempts to pass Welfare Reform, which ultimately put time limits on

cash grants to the poor. Bach was once a member of the middle class, the article explains, but after having a disabled child, her life changed. Not wanting to place her daughter into foster care, she made the decision to “descend into poverty” so that she could qualify for government healthcare, “joining the 20 to 25 percent of welfare recipients who need public aid mainly because it is the only way they can get care for serious long-term health problems.” Bach pushes back against stereotypes that she has perceived being leveled against her and others who are poor, and the metaphors that support these stereotypes are evident in her language: “‘I don’t look at myself as a moocher or a leech on society,’ says Bach, who lives with her daughter in a neat Adams County mobile-home park. ‘I view myself as one of the hardest-working members of the community, in trying to educate others to accept people with differences,’ she says” (Cox).

The Poor Are Sinners and Criminals

According to some political rhetoric, the poor who access government aid are not just animals and parasites, but they are also people of questionable morality. This assumption, though shocking, has deep roots in society’s popular perceptions of the poor. Even so-called “sin taxes” are typically levied against products that the poor are seen as disproportionately using. When used in excess, products such as cigarettes, alcohol, and lottery tickets can have deleterious effects on a person’s physique and psyche. Therefore, a “sin tax” is a way of discouraging the poor from taking part in self-destructive habits, a sort of paternalism adopted by the wider society that sees the poor as unable to take care of themselves. That paternalistic view may well be why “the poor are sinners” remains such a popular metaphor. Ironically, at the same time, this paternalism also accepts the

metaphors that reinforce negative views of poor people and allow for basic assistance to be withheld unless they conform (and reform) in ways that society deems appropriate.

The sin tax may seem like a modern-day invention, but the perception of poor people as sinners goes back much further than contemporary times. Where such a belief came from becomes clearer, at least in part, when one considers the history of this nation, as well as the history of Western capitalism itself. Perhaps no scholar on the success of Protestant individualism is more citable and emblematic than Max Weber, the author of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Weber explains that in a religion that favored only a small number of elite (or saved) souls, the practitioners of Protestantism, and especially of Calvinism, had to look for ways to prove to themselves that God had selected them for eternal rewards. He says,

For, in conformity with the Old Testament and in analogy to the ethical valuation of good works, asceticism looked upon the pursuit of wealth as an end in itself as highly reprehensible; but the attainment of it as a fruit of labour in a calling was a sign of God's blessing. And even more important: the religious valuation of restless, continuous, systematic work in a worldly calling, as the highest means to asceticism, and at the same time the surest and most evident proof of rebirth and genuine faith, must have been the most powerful conceivable lever for the expansion of that attitude toward life which we have here called the spirit of capitalism (116).

The argument that those who have accrued some measure of wealth have received God's blessings (and that, by contrast, those who are poor will suffer further, and even eternal, retribution) resurfaces in the contemporary American culture. It is a self-fulfilling

prophecy—or, as Bourdieu might say, a self-perpetuating metaphor. To those who are financially stable, the Protestant work ethic must indeed seem quite beautiful when considered alongside a doctrine of predestination. Under this paradigm, God chooses only a select few in every generation to succeed, and they will commit their lives to hard work and good, faithful deeds. All the while, the fruits of their labor prove that they are doing good work. The hardworking, entrepreneurial spirit characteristic of the Protestant is what made so many people in capitalistic nations—and by extension, the nations themselves—so rich, according to Weber (5 – 7). Unfortunately, this paradigm also leaves out a certain segment of the population—namely, those whose poverty seems to prove their immorality. Not only are the poor “broke,” meaning they have no money; they are also morally *broken*.

Indeed, according to some, the poor person on government aid is a type of transgressor who has supposedly broken such an innate law that now he or she is unredeemable. Or perhaps the person is only redeemable by a method that will both prove his or her sinfulness and then fix the problem. Mandating that welfare recipients take drug tests in exchange for their benefits is a perfect example of the assumption that poverty makes a person morally deviant. Those who espouse these views may scramble multiple metaphors into one image, equating welfare recipients with, for instance, thieves, sinners, and moochers in the same thought. In a March 2015 article in the Ohio-based *Lima News*, for instance, Thomas Lucente offers his commentary on the issue:

If you want the government to steal my money and give it to you, then stop whining about taking a drug test. / Seriously. / If you are a beneficiary of America’s growing welfare state, a recipient of the money government has stolen

from others to redistribute as it sees fit, then you need to be tested for drugs. / [...] This is not a violation of anyone's rights. The drug testing would not be mandatory. One is never required to take the stolen loot from the state. However, if one wants to enjoy the fruits of someone else's labor, then one should not be wasting that so-called largesse on drugs, liquor, and other luxuries. Basic subsistence and shelter. And basic means basic (Lucente).

A theme seen commonly in such critiques of government assistance is that the poor are using unfairly redistributed taxpayer dollars to live better than the hard-working middle class: "basic means basic." This is an attempt to equate the receipt of welfare with the sin of theft. The response to such a sin is often to publicly shame the recipients, which is an outmoded, even a puritanical, form of punishment. From this view, the very fact that the poor may need subsistence assistance is proof in and of itself that they have done morally wrong, and so some of their necessities (such as adequate food and shelter) should be taken from them unless they conform to certain standards. The opinion piece continues: "Your typical 'poor' person lives in a normal dwelling that is larger than that of the average non-poor European. Nearly 40 percent of the poor own their own homes. Poor children have the same protein and nutrient intakes as upper middle-class children" (Lucente). The implication here is clear: even though Lucente says that "basic means basic," the poor do not deserve to have even their basic needs met unless they can prove that they are worthy of receiving the assistance.

Indeed, the images conveyed by these metaphors may be over-the-top or even reminiscent of characters in literature who are, ironically, quite heroic despite the society of their day labeling them as sinners. Hester Prynne in *The Scarlet Letter* is an example.

In the same *Washington Post* editorial mentioned above, Kathryn James describes her interaction with a woman behind her in the checkout line who scoffs upon noticing that James is wearing a cashmere coat and paying with food stamps. The woman immediately assumes that a fellow shopper paying with government aid should not be able to afford such a nice coat. When asked where she bought it, James responds, “The Salvation Army.” After detailing the various ways that she was once successful before poverty unexpectedly upended her life, the editorialist concludes in sarcastic fashion:

Perhaps those of us who have fallen on devastating times and need the social services our tax money once helped fund, should wear signs pinned to our clothing each time we leave home—a scarlet letter for the '90s. The signs would outline—for all who feel they deserve to know—the reasons why we have resorted to collecting government entitlements. Further, the signs could inform readers of the place of purchase and cost of all our clothing, jewelry and accessories and whether they were obtained pre- or post-poverty. (James).

James then puts this sentence in parentheses: “(By the way, those who think the welfare system is a mechanism to get rich quick better check the facts.)” This parenthetical statement makes her point seem like a side note, but this is a fitting way to make such a statement because she is highlighting a metaphor that is oftentimes only *implicit* in anti-poor political rhetoric: to be poor is to be unethical, a criminal, a sinner, someone who is trying to game the system for personal gain, or even an evildoer.

Perhaps no one has put this more forcefully than Rush Limbaugh. “Welfare,” says Limbaugh, “is the willful absconding of money owned by others and giving it to other people for your benefit, not theirs.” Not only is this theft, he says, but he also points out

that welfare never works anyway. “Liberals are not giving people money to [...] improve their lifestyles. It doesn’t happen, does it? The poor are still poor. The homeless are still homeless. Despite all these great liberal programs, the numbers, the percentages never change” (Limbaugh). However, Limbaugh fails to offer any proof of his own that the statistics do not change, that government assistance programs do nothing to help lift people out of their own poverty. Limbaugh does not stop there, however, and he even turns welfare into something of a sinner’s institution, comparing it to the theft of one to give to another (or others).

If I may be blunt, the purpose of welfare is to create as many people as possible who refuse to help themselves because they don’t have to anymore. They’ve got welfare plans. Welfare is robbing Peter to buy Paul’s vote. It’s insidious. It destroys people’s humanity and their dignity. It takes away their ambition, their desires and gives them a life of squalor, under the guise of big-heartedness and charity and so forth.

Advocates of antipoverty programs, however, might refute the people who argue along the same lines as Limbaugh. According to a report entitled *The Effect of SNAP on Poverty*:

In summary, the SNAP program currently costs one half of one percent (.5 percent) of GDP (Moffitt, 2013). For that amount we get a 16 percent reduction in poverty (8 million fewer poor people) after an adjustment for underreporting, based on USDA administrative data. Moreover we get a 41 percent cut in the poverty gap, which measures the depth of poverty and a 54 percent decline in the severity of poverty, when we add SNAP benefits to Census money incomes and

recalculate the official poverty rate. No other program for the nonelderly does such a great job preventing poverty, or alleviating poverty's weight on those who remain poor. We should be heralding and celebrating this success, not trying to reduce the program because it goes to those who don't need it (Tiehen, et al 20). Clearly, antipoverty initiatives such as SNAP, while not perfect, do appear to help keep people out of poverty. There may be some fraudulent recipients, but the available data largely point to a well-run program. According to the website of the USDA, which is the federal agency that administers the SNAP program, "Payment accuracy has never been higher: in FY 2010, 96.19 percent of all benefits were issued correctly." Welfare programs such as SNAP help people in great need, many of whom are either hard workers in their own right or unable to work. The USDA also points out on its website: "Most SNAP recipients were children or elderly. Nearly half (48 percent) were children and another 8 percent were age 60 or older. Working-age women represented 28 percent of the caseload, while working-age men represented 16 percent" (USDA, "Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP): Section 824 - Work Requirement (ABAWD)").

However, a belief persists that the act of being poor makes the poor criminals, even sinners. This is clear in a variety of articles in the historical archives. In a *Washington Post* opinion piece from March 1981, columnist Richard Cohen argues that government has a mandate to provide certain basic services to all people, no matter their socioeconomic status. He is ashamed and angry to witness the termination of some programs (such as guaranteed legal services for the poor) accompanied by the implementation of new policies (such as requiring the poor to work for welfare). He says that targeting the poor in this way "is neither new nor rooted in economics. It is as old as

holding the poor, all the poor, accountable for their own poverty, for seeing them as somehow having chosen to be poor, to live off the government, to bum, to be parasites. It is a demon theory of the poor—evil that must be punished. It seems that being poor is never punishment enough” (Cohen).

The metaphors that the poor are animals, parasites, criminals, and sinners are fascinating ones, especially when they tend to blend into one another. For instance, Romney’s forty-seven percent comment could easily be characterized as both espousing the “sinner” as well as the “parasite” metaphor. These metaphors are also exaggerations of prevalent stereotypes, and they do a good job of justifying these same stereotypes: the poor are lazy, unwilling to work, and therefore undeserving. The stereotypes of the poor person on government assistance are often cruel and inaccurate, but what’s more is that they tend to make sweeping, even dangerous generalizations. For instance, if a small number of people in a given system (such as those on the food stamp program) are corrupt, then the entire system must also be corrupt, or so the generalization assumes. This is a fascinating (not to mention fallacious) stereotype that shows just how powerful a metaphor can be. Just a few “bad apples” (i.e. those receiving government assistance fraudulently) become the standard representation of all those who are in need of financial assistance. In this way, society’s business-oriented expenses (such as the funding of roads) can still be called “investments,” whereas a program such as food stamps becomes a “subsidy,” which may have more of a negative connotation in some people’s minds.

The Modern Origins of the Negative Perceptions of Government Aid Recipients

Since at least the early sixties, newspapers have been confronting—and in some cases perpetuating—the stereotype that certain members of the poor are lazy and should

therefore not receive government handouts. Before that, the food stamp program appears to have been perceived as a fairly innocuous federal subsidy program. Milo Perkins, who directed the program in its earliest days, used an apt metaphor to describe what food stamps sought to accomplish: ““We got a picture of a gorge, with farm surpluses on one cliff and under-nourished city folks with outstretched hands on the other. We set out to find a practical way to build a bridge across that chasm”” (Pepperl). It wasn’t until the 1960s, when President Lyndon B. Johnson began his social welfare campaign known as the War on Poverty, when the food stamp program—and, by extension, its recipients—was used as political fodder in antipoverty budgetary battles.

This should not be surprising. Johnson’s attempts were an unprecedented expansion of federal funding for the purposes of lifting millions of people out of poverty. From the very beginning, it received massive conservative pushback, and, as always, newspapers of the day do a good job of documenting the political rancor. “President Johnson today defended his anti-poverty program against charges by Sen. Barry Goldwater that it is destructive of individual responsibility and initiative,” says Mary Pakenham in a *Chicago Tribune* article from 1964. In the article, Johnson holds up the food stamp program as a good example of what federal funding can do in the lives of the poor. Goldwater pushes back, saying that federal funds would be better spent creating jobs for the poor. “He [Goldwater] said, in another speech the same day, that ‘the dreadful “great society” is one in which there will be no penalty for failure, because in it there will be no reward for success. In it there will be no individual responsibility and, therefore, no freedom.’” Johnson retorts that ““Giving a man a chance to work, and feed his family, and provide for his children does not destroy initiative. Hunger destroys

initiative. Ignorance destroys initiative. A cold and indifferent government destroys initiative” (Pakenham). This argument was an act of political theatre, playing out over multiple speeches between the two men, and it paints a picture of the same partisan divide that we see in today’s politics.

By the 1970s, the food stamp program itself has come under considerable political attack. In a *Washington Post* editorial, Jodie T. Allen and Robinson G. Hollister Jr. defend the program against its detractors, using a humorous animal metaphor in the beginning of the piece: “One in 11 Americans uses food stamps. One out of five is eligible to use them. Is a ‘food stampede’ underway which will dwarf the ‘welfare explosion’ of the ’60s?” (Allen and Robinson). As if to push back against detractors of government assistance who imply that the poor are criminals for accessing that assistance, they go on to argue that a federal food stamp program is not only necessary, but also in line with certain Judeo-Christian religious morals. “Naturally, the never-ending debate about the program has grown in volume. But coming out frankly in favor of abolishing a program to feed the poor is like opposing the Ten Commandments. So, instead of attacking the program’s principles, critics tend to talk about abuses or fatal faults.” But these attacks against the “abuses [and] fatal faults” of the food stamp program are exactly how certain anti-poor stereotypes are engineered and then perpetuated:

Decades-old complaints about welfare cheats were revived during a recent congressional battle to check the rise in food stamp prices. Sen. Milton Young (R-N.D.) said the program’s participants included “hippies in communes who don’t

want to work.” Sen. Herman Talmadge (D-Ga.) described a man in a Cadillac who bought \$189 worth of steak with food stamps (Allen and Robinson).

These are the people, as Mitt Romney said in more recent years, whom conservative politicians need not worry about; these are the people, in other words, who do not matter, or whose votes do not matter, because they will never be persuaded to see the issues from the viewpoint of the political Right.

That is exactly why these rhetorical metaphors are so dangerous: the poor are generally stuck in their ways because *to be* something (such as a parasite or a sinner) is to be that thing permanently. The poor who are on government aid therefore cannot lift themselves out of their own poverty because they do not want to, and so, in a way, they are a hopeless cause; the senator in the above example called them “hippies in communes who don’t want to work.” They are not worth the time and effort—again, time is money—to save. In the end, their government aid should be stripped from them because there is no better way to motivate them than to get them back to work.

This is a seductive argument that, firstly, blames victims for their own oppression and, secondly, does not enter into deeper questions about how the observer’s own views of the poor could change if some consideration were made to the language choices that support those views. If the poor on government aid can be said to be less than human in some way, then one can argue that this characterization relies solely on people’s ability to turn time and effort into money. If people are not very good at managing money or if they have no idea how to make money at all, then they will suffer under a variety of pejorative labels. They might be lazy animals who find themselves relying on government assistance. Then, too, they will be seen as parasitic animals for permanently sapping the

resources of society, and criminals or even sinners for stealing the hard-earned money of others. Perhaps, in the end, they even contribute to the destruction of society. These are all metaphors that have been spoken at one time or another. These metaphors (the poor as criminals and sinners, parasitic animals, destructors, etc.), despite being bombastic, are seductive because they seem to have an element of truth to them. The speakers who speak these metaphors, the voters who vote with these beliefs in mind, do so unconsciously. They believe that if no one works and everyone expects to get free stuff, then society itself will cease to work. They believe that people on the system are getting by without having to work, which, if true, would be unfair. Rarely entering into this mental calculus is the realization that many people on government aid were, and still are, hard workers who have fallen on difficult times. Also not entering into such a discussion is a consideration of how incomplete these metaphors might be.

CHAPTER III: “THE WAR ON POVERTY” AND “CULTURE OF POVERTY”

THEORY

The habit of speaking in ways that dehumanize the poor ironically came to national prominence in the 1960s with the popularization and then bureaucratic implementation of the culture of poverty theory, which was a framework that could have been Bourdieu’s case in point. It was a framework attempting to explain the habits of the poor, but because of the underdeveloped understanding of the poor that it promoted, it did an insufficient job of easing poverty in chronically depressed areas. Looking at the history of the culture of poverty theory is important because the overall goal of this project is to show how using certain metaphors to understand the poor is actually a way of transposing one’s own cultural assumptions onto the experiences of others, which is a worthwhile phenomenon to recognize if one’s ultimate aim is to overcome his or her preconceptions of the oppressed. One of the ways of reordering one’s conceptions of reality is to recognize that the metaphors that reinforce that reality came into existence at a certain time and a specific place. In other words, as Bourdieu says, the structuring structures that feed oppression are only tacit, not permanent; they had a beginning, so they could have an ending as well.

There may be hopeful signs on the horizon. The preceding chapter focused on contemporary attacks on the poor, which typically come from fiscal conservatives. However, even some of these opponents of government assistance have been backpedaling their fierce rhetoric from recent years. Paul Ryan, the current Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, recently came out against some of the harsh attacks that have come to characterize the 2016 presidential campaign. According to an article in

The Boston Globe, “In the most striking part of his speech, Ryan was self-critical, saying that he should not have referred to the ‘makers and takers’ in society when he was the Republican vice presidential nominee in 2012. ‘As I spent more time listening, and really learning the root causes of poverty, I realized I was wrong,’ said Ryan, who has made attacking poverty a central goal of the House” (“Paul Ryan”). The most important and promising part about such revelations is that when powerful people begin to understand how their rhetoric can shape the national dialogue, then the tone of the conversation might start to change as well. Both Democrats *and* Republicans are guilty of espousing anti-poor rhetoric, whether they mean to or not, and so, as Lakoff, Johnson, and Bourdieu would note, one of the most nefarious characteristics of oppressive rhetoric is that those who employ it may not realize that, in doing so, they are dehumanizing the oppressed.

The focus of this section now turns to the way negative perceptions of the poor, reinforced by language choices, can become legitimized and even institutionalized by the dominant speakers in society, such as the media and government. In some cases, as will be shown below, this institutionalization of anti-poor assumptions even led some antipoverty workers, such as those who swept into the Appalachian Mountains during the War on Poverty, to attempt to convince the poor that they were inadequate and inferior. As a concept, the culture of poverty theory was a widely accepted cluster of metaphors and stereotypes, including the idea that the poor were caught in a “tangle of pathologies,” used as a convenient way to view the impoverished and explain their habits (Gale).

According to the *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*,

The culture of poverty theory states that living in conditions of pervasive poverty will lead to the development of a culture or subculture adapted to those

conditions. This culture is characterized by pervasive feelings of helplessness, dependency, marginality, and powerlessness. Furthermore, [the anthropologist Oscar] Lewis described individuals living within a culture of poverty as having little or no sense of history and therefore lacking the knowledge to alleviate their own conditions through collective action, instead focusing solely on their own troubles. Thus, for Lewis, the imposition of poverty on a population was the structural cause of the development of a culture of poverty, which then becomes autonomous, as behaviors and attitudes developed within a culture of poverty get passed down to subsequent generations through socialization processes (Gale). This framework assumes that people are poor because they have learned to be poor, and their culture perpetuates their poverty. They will likely not help themselves—that is, will refuse to stop being poor—because they are more comfortable living in situations they recognize and understand than risking having their cultural norms challenged, even if acts such as questioning why they are poor and *what made them poor* could make their lives better.

Interestingly, the culture of poverty was reinforced by some of the same stereotypes that this project has already identified in the contemporary political climate. Among these stereotypes is the one that assumes that the poor person is a maladjusted strain (or parasite) on society's resources: "This culture is characterized by pervasive feelings of helplessness, dependency, marginality, and powerlessness" (Gale). The poor are also criminals, and their poverty makes this necessarily true: "The culture of poverty theory presumes the development of a set of deviant norms, whereby behaviors like drug use and gang participation are viewed as the standard (normative) and even desired

behaviors of those living in the ghetto” (Gale). The culture of poverty also embraced other stereotypes, including the idea that the poor are broken: “[Assistant Labor Secretary Daniel Patrick] Moynihan argued that the origins of this deviant family structure lay in slavery, where the destruction of the ‘traditional’ family ‘broke the will of the Negro people,’ particularly black males” (Gale). The above examples clearly illustrate that metaphors similar to the ones this project has already uncovered in more recent instances of political rhetoric were in widespread use and were, at least at first, largely recognized as true in the 1960s.

The culture of poverty theory was also reinforced by many other metaphors that have not yet been explored in this analysis. *Reformers to Radicals: The Appalachian Volunteers and the War on Poverty* is a book by Thomas Kiffmeyer about the government-funded poverty workers who came to chronically depressed areas such as Appalachia. Kiffmeyer provides examples of troubling metaphors used by media to depict the poor, emphasizing them with quotation marks in the original text. He says,

What is interesting about [*Louisville Courier-Journal* reporter Jim] Hampton’s article is that it constitutes a graphic illustration of the way in which many Americans saw Appalachia, the region’s problems, and the solution to those problems. In short, Hampton provides more information about the modern American than about the Southern mountain region and its people. Propagating a view that was by the early 1960s nearly a century old, he characterizes Mill Creek as a “settlement” that was “locked” in the “mold of yesterday” and would clearly remain so until outsiders, representative of the modern world, intervened to “lift” it “out of its backwardness.” Clearly, a setting such as Hampton’s Louisville

represented better than anything Mill Creek had to offer proper American culture and values (56).

Reports such as this one are rich in metaphors that clearly define the poor as “other” and deviant. As members of a “settlement,” they exist in a simpler time (a “mold of yesterday”) that harkens back to outdated traditions, perhaps the same ones of their ancestors who had settled this region. The need for intervention that sought to “lift” the region “out of its backwardness” shows that the Appalachian region in particular—and impoverished people in general—are below the industrial American middle class; the poor are also going backwards, not forwards. These are all intriguing metaphors, especially because, without the emphasis of the quotation marks, they might have slipped by unnoticed when spoken aloud or read silently. Again, this is a danger of language: metaphors tend to reinforce unconscious belief, exactly as Bourdieu predicts, because they are created for that very act of reinforcement.

On the one hand, the culture of poverty theory may seem to have some overlap with Bourdieu’s theories, which would be a fair assessment at first glance. He does say, after all, that people’s (including the poor’s) understanding of reality is based on tacit beliefs and that they reenact their understanding of reality at all times through habit. This understanding of Bourdieu’s theories of *doxa* and *habitus* would certainly support the argument that he saw people crafting cultures that kept them oppressed. On the other hand, Bourdieu’s theories are different in two ways. First, he asked the oppressors, not just the oppressed, to look inward at their own language choices, something the culture of poverty theory does not do. Second, he had hope that the oppressed (as well as their oppressors) could question that oppression by participating in acts of heretical discourse,

which will be discussed further in the next chapter. Indeed, in the culture of poverty theory, there can be no attempt to allow the oppressed the option of questioning where their own oppression comes from because, the theory assumes, they either do not know how to or simply do not want to: “The culture of poverty assumes that culture itself is relatively fixed and unchanging—that once a population exists within the culture of poverty, no amount of intervention in terms of the alleviation of poverty will change the cultural attitudes and behaviors held by members of that population” (Gale). The culture of poverty theory, just like all beliefs, is so dangerous not only because it *seems* true but also because it confirms people’s preconceptions of its truth, just as Bourdieu predicts.

Indeed, as Bourdieu notes, a great concern with language is that, on the surface of things, people actually have very little choice in the words they use, which explains why conceptions, such as the culture of poverty theory, are able to replicate themselves and then continue to *seem* to be true. The phenomenon of language’s self-replication continues, Bourdieu says, until a closer examination of one’s language choices takes place, and the reason heretical discourse is so important is because once people unconsciously accept as true their conceptions of reality, it can be very difficult to break them of their beliefs. The real danger of letting unanalyzed language choices define reality is that these language choices then seep into the mainstream culture and become accepted, even institutionalized. Then they become even more difficult to overcome. Indeed, at times, negative metaphors regarding the poor can become so entrenched in the dominant narrative of society that even the agencies that seek to help the poor are saturated with them, and these antipoverty institutions then risk failing to be of much help at all. Again, the *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* states:

The related notions of a culture of poverty and a culture of dependency have become the foundations for antipoverty legislation, such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, enacted in 1997 and reauthorized in 2005 as a part of welfare reform. This and other programs rely on the assumption that behavior generates poverty, citing the need to end the dependence of the poor on government benefits and promote work and marriage as social norms (Gale).

While work and marriage and less government dependency might indeed be desirable outcomes in one's life, they do not address the assumptions surrounding poverty, namely that until a person has a job, is married, and is no longer on assistance, he or she is somehow socially abnormal.

In its emphasis on finding people jobs and encouraging marriage, the TANF program provides a good example of how the culture of poverty theory may still be a stubbornly mainstream conception of reality in the minds of many Americans. And yet it pales in comparison to earlier initiatives that were also guided by the culture of poverty theory in an effort to understand the poor and why they live the way they do. Long before the welfare reforms of the 1990s, the culture of poverty helped define the conceptions of the poor in the 1960s when the federal government sought to lift millions out of desperate poverty. Indeed, the culture of poverty theory hindered the War on Poverty from the very start. Although the War on Poverty was waged all over the country, from urban ghettos to Native American reservations, Appalachia provides a good case study for how ineffective the culture of poverty was in helping antipoverty workers understand the causes of poverty. Appalachia has long had pockets of chronic poverty and was thus one of the areas the government invested in heavily with new federal programs aimed at alleviating

poverty. Guided by the culture of poverty theory and therefore assuming that their cultural experiences, their social expectations, and their middle class upbringings were somehow more valid (or even healthier) than those of the mountaineers whom they sought to lift out of poverty, the Appalachian Volunteers of the 1960s were a new breed of federally funded cultural warriors who often misunderstood (or even totally ignored) the complex economic, social, and political machinations that had worked for decades to keep the rural poor in their place. In *Reformers to Radicals*, Kiffmeyer explains how detrimental the underdeveloped assumptions of poverty warriors were in helping the rural poor. “First,” says Kiffmeyer, “the reformers’ generalizations about mountain schools and teachers transcended physical conditions and implied that virtually all rural mountaineers, adults as well as children, were insufficiently educated, unimaginative, unable to express themselves, and socially inadequate” (208). The Appalachian Volunteers believed that they needed to convince the mountaineers of their own inadequacies, forcing them to accept the helping hands that sought to change the mountaineers themselves, rather than change the economic, social, and political environment that had kept them in poverty for generations. “This perspective,” Kiffmeyer continues, “prevented the Volunteers themselves from delving beyond surface appearances or discovering their own class biases. In fact, this perspective precluded any sort of class or economic analysis” (208). Kiffmeyer then refutes a popular Appalachian stereotype supported by the insider/outsider dichotomy, which is itself an intriguing metaphor. Kiffmeyer says, “While most histories, either popular or scholarly, of the region portray the mountaineers as the ones to perpetuate the insider/outsider dichotomy, a closer look reveals that, in many cases, including the War on Poverty, it was the

activists who saw the mountaineers as outsiders because they did not represent what the outside world considered normative” (208). This is one example of what Kiffmeyer means when he says that the poverty workers, who came into the mountains already convinced the mountaineers were deficient, had no reason to critically analyze these metaphors.

One of the more interesting facts about the culture of poverty theory is that the author credited with its original description appears to have never meant for an entire generalized population to be defined under such terms. According to Kenneth L. Deavers and Robert A. Hoppe in *Rural Poverty in America*, the culture of poverty model arose out of Oscar Lewis’s attempts to describe a fairly small percentage within the larger population of people living below the federal poverty guidelines. In other words, the culture of poverty, as defined by Lewis, was meant to connote a subculture, “about 20 percent of the poverty population,” and did not, at least initially, signify a full-blown culture (7). Perhaps in retrospect, it should be no surprise that the theory caught on in popularity and came to describe roughly anyone and everyone—men, women, children, and the elderly—who subsists below the poverty line in certain problem areas. As mentioned above, even the famous author and Appalachian activist Caudill, whose firsthand experience of poverty in his own Kentucky homeland would seem to preclude him from being a proponent of the culture of poverty theory, used rhetoric that was closely in line with that of Oscar Lewis and others. These others included the government officials who threw their weight behind the legitimacy of the framework and, according to Ronald D. Eller in *Uneven Ground*, incorporated its principles into the inner workings of the War on Poverty. Eller says,

Later generations of scholars would reject the culture of poverty model as blaming the victim, but the theory played a powerful role in shaping many of the antipoverty programs of the late twentieth century. [...] Lewis, [Michael] Harrington, and other leading advocates of the culture of poverty participated in the Shriver planning meetings to design the War on Poverty, and almost every program administered by the OEO [Office of Economic Opportunity] reflected the theory (101).

This theory was so popular, especially among the government officials and experts who helped implement the War on Poverty, precisely because it promised easy solutions in what now seems an overly idealistic, if not impossible, endeavor: ending poverty in the wealthiest nation in the world. As Eller says, “the culture of poverty model” was just another example of the powerful elites “blaming the victims” (101).

It is not too difficult to see how the culture of poverty paradigm quickly grew in popularity. The theory had powerful and influential backers. It is also not difficult to imagine how the focus of the theory easily transferred from the subjects of Oscar Lewis’s case studies (poor Hispanics) to other impoverished communities in the American landscape, including African-Americans living in the ghetto and Appalachians living in mountain hollers. Even Caudill, the activist discussed above who was very sympathetic to the plight of the mountaineers, describes Appalachians in increasingly hopeless terms in *Night Comes to the Cumberlands*. As mentioned previously, there are times when he speaks of the amorality of the mountaineers (286). And in the quote below, he portrays mountaineers as unable to comprehend the capitalistic culture that has sprung up around them. His rhetoric, however, differs from the culture of poverty theorists’ because he

assigns at least some measure of blame to outside influencers rather than simply labeling the poor themselves as the main problem. Describing Appalachia in the 1920s, Caudill says,

In the inrush of new cultures, ideas, prejudices and ambitions, the mountaineer was bowled over and swept aside. Eventually, as we shall see, he lost his confidence in his own mores and moorings. That he never found new social foundations to which he might securely attach himself we shall also see, and the demoralization and helplessness which flowed from that failure (106).

But here Caudill's language differs from the culture of poverty rhetoric that sought to blame the victim. Caudill acknowledges the victimhood of the poor, calling them demoralized and helpless, but he also points out that what truly led to the oppression of the poor in the mountains was "the inrush of new cultures, ideas, prejudices and ambitions" that left the hardscrabble mountaineer out of the equation of how to end poverty (106). Caudill's observations were therefore at least somewhat more nuanced than those of people who viewed the poor from a strict culture of poverty framework. Still, speaking of "mores and moorings," "amoral females," and "the demoralization" of the poor, Caudill's rhetoric borders on perpetrating the "poor are sinners" metaphor, which is a linguistic move allowed under the culture of poverty framework.

If, as Eller and others have said, the culture of poverty theory was largely discredited as a victim-blaming framework, then future generations ought to mind the lessons of the past. However, many people have speculated about the return of a culture of poverty framework as a convenient way to explain why the poor live the way they do, and perhaps no scholar brings as much weight to the discussion as Thomas Piketty in his

recent tome on Western economics, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*. Piketty talks of the perceived morality of wealth and the immorality of poverty. He acknowledges a belief system in Western societies such as the U.S. that claims that the losers deserve to lose because they do not work as hard as those in society who are successful (433 – 7). He speaks of a meritocratic extremism in wealthy societies and asserts that myths are invoked to justify wage discrepancies (416 – 418, 422). Beneficiaries of welfare payments, he says, “are seen as wanting to live their lives on the dole,” which is reminiscent of the language from the culture of poverty days. Piketty notes, however, that the costs associated with the welfare state are very low compared to other forms of government spending (478 – 479). He delves deeply into popular topics, such as the much-maligned 1%, asking if the wealthiest in America have co-opted the democratic system. He argues that “the risk of the drift toward oligarchy is real” in this country (514).

Whether or not the culture of poverty theory will indeed make a comeback and bring back into national prominence the underdeveloped metaphors that supported it, it nevertheless remains an important concept to study because of how widespread and accepted a theoretical concept it was in its day. It illustrates just how seductive anti-poor metaphors can be, including the idea that a poor person’s culture is like a web that has entangled him in his own poverty. As has been shown, the metaphors at the center of the culture of poverty create a circular logic and then compound themselves: poverty breeds criminality (or immorality and sinfulness), which then creates more poverty; the same is true of the relationship between poverty and dependency, as well as between poverty and

brokenness. The metaphors can be quite vivid and imagistic, though upon closer inspection, they are flawed.

Indeed, a closer inspection eventually helped delegitimize the culture of poverty theory. In a *New York Times* article from October 2010, Patricia Cohen reminds her readers that a high-level bureaucrat in the Johnson Administration named Moynihan was responsible for popularizing the culture of poverty theory in the upper echelons of the federal government. He described “the urban black American family as caught in an inescapable ‘tangle of pathology’ of unmarried mothers and welfare dependency.” Eventually, however, people began to see this way of thinking “as attributing self-perpetuating moral deficiencies to black people, as if blaming them for their own misfortune” (Cohen). As Kiffmeyer states in *Reformers to Radicals*, the same moral deficiencies were seen in poor Appalachians, which shows just how seductive the culture of poverty theory—and anti-poor metaphors in particular—can be. It quickly spread all the way from the cities to the mountains where these anti-poor metaphors took root and grew.

Ultimately, it may be hard to believe that such an underdeveloped conception of reality as the culture of poverty could have had such widespread appeal and acceptance, and yet it did, from the elites to the everyday citizenry. Despite Oscar Lewis’ intentions, the culture of poverty theory came to define all people who lived in chronic poverty. Because the theory was a central component of the War on Poverty, it guided bureaucrats and poverty warriors alike in defining their conceptions of the poor. It rarely asked them to question their own assumptions. This is the truly nefarious power of language in general and metaphors in particular: they can cast the debate in starkly simplistic terms,

convincing large groups of people that the oppressed are responsible for their own oppression. As stated above, this sort of victim blaming allows the oppressors the option of not changing their habits because the habits of the oppressed are so deeply engrained in them. They are, from this underdeveloped conception, permanent belief systems. But, as has also been noted, Bourdieu argues that these belief systems, on both sides, can be changed, and this is why heretical discourse is such an important concept.

Moving Toward Heretical Discourse to Challenge the Culture of Poverty

As the next chapter will argue, heretical discourse can be useful in challenging anti-poor perceptions similar to the ones that were legitimized and institutionalized by the culture of poverty theory. Acts of heretical discourse, when enacted by organizations that specialize in social justice, can help break the repetitive cycle of habits that reinforce these negative beliefs. Despite its problems, the 1960s, ironically a time when the culture of poverty theory was thriving, can offer an example of what effective dissent might look like. In the latter part of that decade, democratic participation was everywhere in America, and it took many different forms, which leads to an important question: If heretical discourse could somehow be institutionalized today, what would it look like? It could take any number of forms. It might be similar to what the Highlander Research and Education Center and other Appalachian community organizers have done for generations: finding problems and giving people in the community the linguistic tools to fix them. Or institutionalized heretical discourse might resemble what the so-called poor people's movements were doing in the 1960s when they demanded more generous and transparent governmental aid. The poor people's movement was one attempt by those on welfare, housing subsidies, and other assistance to gain greater visibility and argue for a

higher living standard. “Although the War on Poverty had been sold as an alternative to welfare,” says Frank Stricker in *Why America Lost the War on Poverty—And How to Win It*, “welfare rights activism was a model of what some planners wanted from community action, namely, poor people’s organization to make local social services more accessible” (119). By speaking up and demanding greater accessibility to and transparency from government leaders and agencies, the poor were proving that they were capable of having intelligent opinions and deserved equal treatment under the law, such as the freedom to dissent without fear of having their assistance cut. According to Stricker, this movement would have flourished at around the same time even without the War on Poverty pumping federal funds into agitation and community organization efforts.

That’s because the collective mood of the nation to help the poor inspired a new and legitimate devotion to help all Americans aspire to greater economic stability, even if it was, in retrospect, less than effective. “In the 1960s,” Stricker says, “new political possibilities opened as the civil rights movement shook people’s minds about equality and democracy. Millions were in motion against racism and poverty, sexism and war. Although the different movements were sometimes at odds with one another, their combined weight supported new initiatives in social policy” (84). As others have pointed out, Stricker argues that the culture of poverty theory was detrimental to the goal of eradicating poverty, but he makes another interesting argument that has important implications for this project. He says victim blaming was rampant in the 1960s not just because of the prevalence of the culture of poverty theory, but also because of the idea that people simply lacked the skills (or human capital) necessary to thrive. He says,

Human capital and culture-of-poverty assumptions meshed with popular attitudes. When the culture of poverty had a racial twist, as in Moynihan's *The Negro Family*, it seemed to confirm whites in the belief that poverty was a result of bad black behavior. The human capital argument meshed with the faith that public education was a road to success. Both theories put much of the responsibility for poverty on the poor, although government would supply education and training. Both approaches emphasized fixing the poor rather than fixing economic structures (91 – 2).

This is the same argument, explored above, that is made by the *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*. The cultures of poverty and dependency are linked together and shape governmental policymakers' perceptions of the poor as they craft the very programs aimed at alleviating poverty (Gale). To "fix" the poor, America simply had to teach them how to stop being poor.

By the time the War on Poverty was faltering, discussions among progressively minded economists and scholars (whom Stricker calls "the Dissenters") seeking to revise public perceptions of the poor might have done some good in restructuring the way the War was waged (92 – 3). But politicians' rhetoric, when combined with the tension linked to demonstrations in some of the major U.S. cities, had already so divided the nation that by the time Richard Nixon came into office, the whole idea of having an antipoverty war seemed pointless, even dangerous due to recent rioting in American cities. The War was scrapped instead of revised and its various departments dissolved or dispersed, though some of these renamed departments still exist today. The heated conversation of what role, if any, government should play in lifting people out of poverty

is also still ongoing, as is the struggle of two extremes, one seeking to define the poor as living in a culture of poverty, the other seeing society at large as the main generator of social oppression. Indeed, rhetoric of the poor as lazy or as deserving of their poverty should be familiar in today's political landscape, and, according to Bourdieu, it is also self-perpetuating. This project has suggested that the culture of poverty theory is coming back into vogue, but then again, perhaps it never left. After all, the anti-poor rhetoric in chapter two of this project is strikingly similar to that seen in the 1960s, during the days when the federal government was attempting an unprecedented expansion of assistance to the needy. As the *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* puts it, "Among scholars, sociologists in the field, and government policy makers, the debate as to whether poverty stems from social, political, and economic conditions or from entrenched behaviors on the part of the poor themselves, continues" (Gale).

As noted above, some good did come out of 1960s America's attempts to wrestle with the huge issue of poverty. Even though the poverty warriors who came to economically depressed areas (such as Appalachia) arrived with ideas about the poor that conformed to the national dialogue, their ideas would be challenged and, in some cases, changed. Surprisingly, these changes of perception did not take much time at all. This observation further points to the power and efficacy of encouraging people from differing socioeconomic backgrounds to interact and to help one another, especially if there is a long-term commitment to such efforts. As Stricker notes, because of the civil rights movement, poor people of all colors were beginning to question their economic status in the United States. "But, as it turned out, federally funded organizations were involved in agitation and information efforts; neighborhood service centers raised people's

consciousness about their rights. Hundreds of Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) workers were organizers for welfare rights groups” (119). Similarly, in *Uneven Ground*, Eller shows that face-to-face interactions with the poor, especially when those interactions are aimed at alleviating poverty, can change the perceptions of the middle class. Here Eller argues that while the Appalachian Volunteers *did* often have shortsighted goals and an underdeveloped understanding of the causes of poverty in the region, those who stayed longer began to better see the flaws of the policies and procedures that were guiding their efforts. Eller says,

Among the first assumptions to dissolve in the wake of field experience for many volunteers was the belief that poverty resulted from inherent deficiencies in mountain culture. Whereas weekend recruits could more easily accept cultural and geographic explanations for economic conditions in the region, volunteers who lived and worked in mountain communities for any period of time had more difficulty attributing poverty to the values, culture, and isolation of a people they came to admire. Occasional volunteers could “pop in, pop off, and pop out,” as local residents put it, but field-workers with their feet in communities understood the complexity of local circumstances and the political consequences of powerlessness. AVs and VISTA volunteers who lived in coal camps and other rural communities quickly rejected the culture of poverty theory and behavior adjustment strategies and searched for other explanations for poor housing, inadequate health care, deficient education, and joblessness among their neighbors. As they listened to local residents express “bitterness about their life experience, about the political structure and their relationship with the coal

companies and other big industries,” the volunteers adjusted their perception of powerlessness. “I felt like I was radicalized or politicized or whatever by the people who lived in the mountains themselves,” remembered one AV.

Increasingly they came to understand the mountain experience in new ways, and they responded to alternative voices that defined the region’s poverty less as the product of Appalachian culture than of economic and political self-interest (135).

When face-to-face interactions such as these challenge the unconscious beliefs of the dominant people in society, there is some hope that even misconceptions that are stubbornly institutionalized can be overturned. The culture of poverty theory, in other words, despite its stubborn resemblance to the truth, is nevertheless not a permanent conception of reality. It does, however, require that people of differing socioeconomic backgrounds interact with one another so that some deeper understanding of life circumstances can be crafted. This is why heretical discourse is so important and why, in the next chapter, organizational methods will be explored to suggest ways of pairing people from differing socioeconomic strata so that anti-poor perceptions can be more effectively challenged.

CHAPTER IV: HERETICAL DISCOURSE AND POVERTY

Harnessing Heretical Discourse to Question Stereotypes in Appalachia

Bourdieu observes that one's assumptions come largely from language and are reinforced by the daily habits that reproduce belief. Looking to Bourdieu and metaphor theory, this project has shown that many of the prominent stereotypes that define the poor are strengthened by certain ungenerous metaphors. If poverty is reinforced in part by language, what hope do those who are on government assistance have for questioning their oppression—and possibly even interrupting the cycle that keeps them oppressed? In the two quotes that closed out the previous chapter, Stricker and Eller confirm Bourdieu's observations, saying that the cultural warriors who were in Appalachia (and other areas) for an extended period of time began to question their assumptions about the poor.

Therefore, by being in close contact with community members who are impoverished, the middle class of today will not only be able to question their language choices regarding the poor, but will be much more likely to do so than if their interactions with the poor were kept to a minimum. In small but significant steps, they may ultimately be able to work toward overcoming these anti-poor metaphors that undergird their assumptions. This is both the importance of heretical discourse and what it predicts. It necessarily fosters discussion among groups of people who see themselves as different from one another. This discussion brings into view the perceived differences between the two groups and allows for a critique of how those perceptions were formed and so might be reconstructed.

Thus, with heretical discourse, Bourdieu offers a strong praxis for breaking from the accepted and dominant logic of a society's perceived reality, which is why this

theory, when put into practice, can push back against the negative stereotypes that are supported by the anti-poor metaphors people unconsciously use to view the world. This is because heretical discourse specifically aims to call into question how the dominators in society have created cultural attitudes and social norms (i.e. habits) that invalidate the experiences of the poor. Heretical breaks can be very useful in “liberating” those people who find themselves dominated by habits of authorized language. “We know,” says Bourdieu in *Language and Symbolic Power*, “that the social order owes some measure of its permanence to the fact that it imposes schemes of classification which, being adjusted to objective classifications, produce a form of recognition of this order, the kind implied by the misrecognition of the arbitrariness of its foundations” (127). In other words, the social order that exists today has mechanisms that trick people into thinking it is permanent and invincible. But with heretical breaks, one can at least begin to shake these permanent structures. The dominant members of society might, for instance, think of the oppressed as unwilling to speak up because they do not know how to and do not wish to. Even if they did speak up, they would not know what to say to challenge their oppression. The act of shaking these perceptions, which are essentially silent power structures, might allow society’s dominant members to see that the oppressed, too, are people. According to Bourdieu, heretical discourse needs to call into question the unconsciously accepted beliefs held by these dominant members of society, and then it must give the oppressed the respect they deserve. He calls this “the legitimacy conferred by public expression and collective recognition” (129). For this reason, if the poor were offered the chance to participate in acts of heretical discourse, their attempts at speaking up could bring them face to face with the more affluent in society and force a reconsideration of society’s

dominant belief systems. As discussed throughout this project, these are the same belief systems that question the legitimacy of the welfare recipient in a democratic republic. As the last chapter showed, sometimes these belief systems can become so tacit that they become institutionalized and, as with the culture of poverty theory that guided the War on Poverty, can lead to the implementation of ineffective antipoverty policies.

One way of spreading heretical discourse would be to encourage the very government offices that administer welfare programs to redefine “work.” These offices could do much to publicize the alternatives available to able-bodied SNAP recipients who have no children, the so-called ABAWD population who must either go to work or lose their assistance. The definition of “work” is a fairly flexible one here. On a question-and-answer webpage dedicated to ABAWD policy, the USDA says that it allows states to make the decision themselves as to whether they will accept volunteerism as a valid form of work: “Q. To qualify as ‘work,’ does the job have to be paying minimum wage or meet certain criteria? Can self-employment count as ‘work’? Can volunteer work count as ‘work’? / A. We will either address this in the regulations or allow State flexibility in this area. In the interim, State agencies may use their best judgment” (USDA). This flexibility has remained in place now that ABAWD is going back into effect, and most states appear to accept volunteerism instead of work, when necessary. The Tennessee Department of Human Services’ *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Policy Manual*, for instance, lists the following forms of work as valid ways for an able-bodied SNAP recipient to fulfill his or her work requirements and continue qualifying for SNAP benefits: “Individual working 80 hours per month (20 hours a week average monthly). / This can be paid, volunteer, or in-kind” (Tennessee Department of Human

Services). If SNAP recipients began volunteering with organizations that specialized in heretical discourse, there is no reason to suspect that they would *not* be satisfying their work requirements.

One may pause here to voice a very real concern, namely that this type of volunteerism might provoke a negative reaction from state legislatures. Elected leaders might eventually ban heretical discourse aimed at overcoming negative perceptions of the poor as a valid form of “work” under the ABAWD rules. Because questioning one’s language choices can lead to public situations where multiple parties (the poor and the middle class, for instance) are encouraged to reconsider their deeply held beliefs, this may, in turn, stoke instances of political dissent. Indeed, if state legislatures decided to defund parts of the SNAP program or strip dissenters of their benefits, there would be precedent for such a move. In recent years, for instance, the Tennessee General Assembly attempted to restrict certain rights of protestors during the Occupy Nashville rallies. Beginning in late 2011, the furor of Occupy Wall Street spread from Manhattan across the country, and in Nashville, protestors set up semi-permanent camps at the War Memorial Plaza next to the State Capitol. In response, state legislators passed a law banning protestors from camping on certain state-owned properties, and authorities then arrested the protestors “who refused to leave” (Barrouquere). Tennessee officials were sued for violating the First Amendment rights of the protestors, but the officials eventually won on appeal (Rau). There is a possibility, therefore, that the General Assembly would react similarly if SNAP recipients began to protest for more rights or for more transparency from their government. This would be an ironic and unfortunate reaction.

However, at the same time, if a state legislature attempted to ban acts of heretical discourse as a valid form of “work” for SNAP recipients, such a move would be further validation of this project’s thesis: that there is a deeply held belief in the minds of many in the middle class (and their representatives) that the poor should not be allowed to move around as freely, to speak as freely, to live as freely as those who do not need government assistance to survive. In other words, these benefits, which are written into law as owed to anyone who meets the income and technical eligibility requirements, become a sort of stamp of dehumanization in a democratic society. If a family is on food stamps, then there is something wrong with them. Additional laws need to be passed to make sure that they are not enjoying as many rights as everyone else is. For instance, if a poor person receiving benefits chooses to speak up against his or her government, hoping to bring a perceived injustice to light, then this person should not be allowed to eat.

Still, the potential threat of anti-poor legislation is not a reason to suspend an experiment that attempts to change people’s perceptions of the poor, and the SNAP program offers a good way of conducting that experiment. Because the ABAWD population of SNAP recipients can currently take part in different volunteer opportunities in order to continue qualifying for assistance, local welfare offices could encourage instances of heretical discourse in an effort to bring the middle class toward a closer understanding and acceptance of the perspectives of the poor. Such acts of heretical discourse could be broadly defined, but would ideally have the recipients of government assistance working closely with and speaking to community organizations whose members have explicitly stated an intention to further social justice causes. Most communities in the United States ought to have such organizations, but again, such

organizations do not necessarily have to pass a litmus test to be considered social justice campaigners. Even a newspaper could be considered a qualifying organization if it were willing to work with poor members of the community who wanted to publish editorials explaining their perspectives on the world. A SNAP recipient might expand on how she is, indeed, an equal member of the community who deserves to be treated with respect and dignity. She might tell an emotive story about the unfair treatment she has experienced in the community simply because she has had to resort to using government assistance. An example identical to this one, written as an editorial by Kathryn James and published by *The Washington Post*, was already given in the second chapter of this project. Indeed, the written—and spoken—word can be a form of heretical discourse.

Satire as Heretical Discourse

Members of different socioeconomic strata who study and discuss the literary arts and popular media might also succeed in enacting heretical discourse. That's because literary works and media, though they might perpetuate perceptions, also have a long and rich history as methods of challenging society's dominant assumptions. Satire in particular does a great job of pushing people to question how they have arrived at their beliefs. Jonathan Swift's *A Modest Proposal*, which encourages the poor to sell off their children as food, is a fantastic example of how a writer's unexpected rhetorical choices can shock readers so deeply that they may suddenly uncover just how inaccurate their deeply held beliefs are (such as blaming the poor for their own poverty). Stephen Colbert's analysis of "The Pooors" on his show *The Colbert Report* has a way of disrupting Middle America's perceptions of the poor as a homogeneous group, which was also what proponents of the culture of poverty theory assumed. Some still make this

assumption today, and, as discussed in chapter two of this project, Thomas Lucente says, “Your typical ‘poor’ person lives in a normal dwelling that is larger than that of the average non-poor European. Nearly 40 percent of the poor own their own homes. Poor children have the same protein and nutrient intakes as upper middle-class children” (Lucente). When Stephen Colbert twists the phrase “The Poor” and turns those who are struggling socioeconomically into “The Pooors,” he disrupts the notion that all poor people are alike. Such an assumption is a problem because, if all the poor are indeed alike, then ensuring that their basic necessities will be met will do them no good. Poverty comes from a lack of personal responsibility, according to some, and a minimum wage will not change the poor if they have come to accept their poverty as permanent. “Minimum is a misnomer,” says Colbert. “\$7.25? I can think of wages a lot lower: \$3.28, \$1.19, a pat on the back and a handful of mints—there are literally dozens of other things you could give them. A barn owl” (Colbert).

As always, Colbert’s hilarious satire is inspired by serious issues from the real world. He provides a blurb from a *Wichita Eagle* article quoting Charles Koch, the billionaire libertarian who “wants to eliminate the minimum wage because it creates a culture of dependency and keeps people with limited capital from starting their own business.” Colbert mocks this argument, sarcastically quipping that paying their employees will, indeed, keep small businesses from pocketing the money that would otherwise remain theirs. “I mean, look at our nation’s forefathers,” says Colbert. “Many of them arrived with nothing more than the blouse on their back, but thanks to no minimum wage, they started a booming cotton industry.” Here a photograph overtakes the screen. It is of African-Americans carrying cotton, ostensibly depicting a scene of

American slavery, a reminder to viewers that certain laws have been passed in an effort to roll back institutionalized injustice. Thus, the comedian-satirist enters into a difficult debate about how much a nation devoted to social justice should raise the minimum wage for the working poor, if at all: “I say the problem isn’t that the minimum wage is too low; it’s that ‘The Pooors’ out there don’t know how to handle their cash” (Colbert).

With this satire, Colbert is attempting to point out how the beliefs of some of his peers in the media so often miss the mark. Bill O’Reilly, for instance, classifies the poor as a homogenous group, much like the culture of poverty theory did in the 1960s. The poor are, according to O’Reilly, likely to act as one unit, as an unthinking force habituated to further their own poverty, and a minimum wage will not help them. “Many of the poor,” says O’Reilly in a clip featured on Colbert’s segment, “will use the money irresponsibly.” O’Reilly then explains that poverty is the result of people’s lack of responsibility, a familiar sentiment. Colbert concludes in sarcastic agreement, using O’Reilly’s own circular logic against him: “If I were poor, I wouldn’t be, because I would turn being poor into an ‘op-poor-tunity.’” Colbert then looks into a public relations snafu that McDonald’s had found itself embroiled in. In 2013, the corporation had attempted to sidestep the issue of income inequality by asking that its employees, many of them considered members of “the working poor,” change themselves so that they could overcome poverty on their own, a familiar move that blames the victims for their oppression. A website for McDonald’s low-wage employees ironically attempted to teach them how to spend their money wisely. One video tells them to keep track of their daily expenses so they can observe the frivolous purchases they have been making: “Try it for one week to see if you notice a difference in your spending. Then try it for at least a

month to see that you really will spend less.” Colbert responds: “Then try a year. Then try a decade. Then fifty years. Then ask yourself, ‘Why am I still working at McDonald’s? I’m eighty-six years old.’” Again, he is disrupting the popular idea that poverty is the fault of the poor person, an assumption that some may not think to challenge without the satire pointing it out for them.

Literature as Heretical Discourse

One contribution that literature offers society is the chance to see the world from others’ perspectives. *Storming Heaven* allows for such a discussion on how the poor in a given community are victims of societal structures that perpetuate their poverty. This novel is about the coal wars during the early twentieth century and the struggle to fight back and unionize in response to large, faceless corporations where absentee landowners seek to strip the environment of its resources and antagonistic businesspeople care only about the bottom line. The book is based in part on history, and so it could raise interesting questions regarding poverty as an ongoing narrative. Though it is a book set between 1920 and 1921, there are parallels with anti-poverty battles occurring in later decades. One such battle blends fiction with history, combining the imaginary world with the real one, as good literature does so well. The battle was waged inside the hotel room of a fictional coal unionizer named Rondal Lloyd, and it was also waged in the hotel room of Myles Horton, a social justice campaigner who fought for income equality and civil rights in real life.

There is a scene in *Storming Heaven* in which Rondal Lloyd tells mercenary gun thugs who have come to kill him that he is such a great organizer, he bets he can organize even *them*. They scoff at him and tell him they *are* already organized; they have

organized to kill him. What happens next is taken, almost word for word, from Horton's autobiography, leading one to conclude that Rondal Lloyd is, in fact, based in part on Horton himself. As four company men prepare to barge into Horton's hotel room to kill him, the self-proclaimed radical and democratic socialist never loses his humor:

“Well, I'd like to talk to you a minute,” I said. “You know I like to organize.” / “Yeah, but your organizing days are over.” / “Well, the last thing I'd like to do is to try to help somebody get organized.” They laughed, and I said, “You know you guys need to get organized.” / “Why do we need to get organized?” one of them asked. / “Well, somebody's going to come in this door,” I said. “You're going to get the key down at the desk.” The hotel was owned by the company. “You're going to come up here and one guy's going to open that door and come in. And,” I said, “I'm going to kill the first person that comes in. Next, another person is going to come in and I'll probably kill that person. When the third person comes in, it'll be a toss-up whether I kill him or he kills me. And the last person, he'll be able to kill me. There's no question about that. You've got to decide which ones of you I'll kill. I don't have a problem—I'm going to be killed—but you've got to decide which ones of you are going to be killed” (Horton 124).

Instead of “getting organized,” the gun thugs decide to leave. This slick wit and quick thinking on Horton's part no doubt saved his life, as it does Rondal's in *Storming Heaven*. Again, Rondal's story is almost identical to Horton's, with a notable and humorous exception that Rondal's tormenters are not gun thugs but monsters, or “booger men” (238 – 40). This story was originally the intellectual property of Horton. It was an adventure that actually happened to him in 1937, but he evidently let Giardina use it in

her 1987 book about the coal battles of the early 1920s. Horton then published the story in his autobiography in 1997, which is essentially a reflection of his life advocating for equal rights, from coalfields to civil rights campaigns. And so literature can be adapted and shared as a method of telling stories to explore difficult intergenerational themes, such as poverty, violence, corruption, corporatization, and unionization.

This chapter in *The Long Haul* is entitled “Charisma,” and Horton discusses the danger of charisma while examining the importance of leadership. He begins the chapter with the following anecdote:

Back during the heyday of the civil rights movement in Mississippi, I met an older black woman who told me, “We’ve got a Citizenship School down here.” I asked her what that was and she told me, “Well, you know, I go out and teach people to read so they can vote. I can read a little myself. . . .” And I said, “That’s great, where did you get the idea?” She told me, “I figured it out, and then I taught three other women to do it.” She had no idea that anybody else was doing the same thing. She’d probably been to a conference where somebody was talking about Citizenship Schools and the idea was so simple, she could pick it up and make it her own (113 - 4).

It is appropriate that he begins the chapter with this little story because it shows how important sharing good ideas can be, as well as allowing people to take those ideas and make them their own to spread as they wish. It is what Horton allowed Giardina to do in her book. Sharing ideas to further discourse may indeed be the heart of democratic engagement, even if the capitalistic impulse is for each individual to claim his or her share of the intellectual property in question.

An additional and important point to note is that, despite being structurally identical, Horton's story has language that is markedly different from Giardina's retelling. Much of this has to do with the relatively respectable language—including correct grammar—that Horton uses. One might call the dialect of Giardina's characters more realistic. Horton says, "Then I told them, 'That's why you need to get organized. You've got to vote on who's going to die'" (125). Giardina's character Rondal says, "'So you got to git together. You got to git organized. You got to decide which booger men will be the first ones through that door, because them will be dead booger men'" (239). These short excerpts are about as close as the language matches up in the otherwise identical stories. And so, when Giardina puts this story in the mouth of Rondal Lloyd, it is adapted as a more "folksy" telling. Thus, heretical discourse in the form of literature can show people who do not speak a dominant (or an "authorized") dialect that they, too, can assume leadership roles. They can also make intelligent statements and rhetorical choices that question acts of corruption or even violence in their community. The poor in a given region may be reduced to certain stereotypes, but with their forceful words and their demands for recognition, even people whose ways of speaking may be considered "folksy" or "urban" can say something of value. Thus, both satire and fiction can be effective in enacting heretical discourse. Such works can disrupt stubborn stereotypes by showing how undeveloped they are and also by demonstrating that the poor are indeed capable of speaking up.

Organizations That Might Enact Heretical Discourse

Then there are also traditional organizations that specialize in enacting heretical discourse that the recipients of government assistance could tap in order to continue

qualifying. Just as in the previous chapter, Appalachia can be a good case study in this regard, and Horton's own Appalachian organization (Highlander) provides a good example of what some organizations might do in seeking to treat all people equally, no matter their language backgrounds. Indeed, because the region has long struggled with a multiplicity of problems (not just poverty, but also unfair labor practices, racism, sexism, religious intolerance, etc.), it has also had reactionary actors rise up at unexpected and much-needed times to provide inspiration and leadership to downtrodden populations. In this way, various pockets of Appalachia, for having had such a long history of socioeconomic oppression, could be microcosms of what communities hoping to enact heretical discourse could look like. For that reason, this chapter will focus on one specific group that has changed—and is continuing to change—the political and socioeconomic landscape of the region. To be sure, there are many more examples that could be given. The purpose of this relatively short analysis is twofold. First, it will show that such organizations can indeed effect change even in a region where oppression has become institutionalized. Second, it will expand on Bourdieu's theory of heretical discourse and provide realistic ways that such dissent, which can be so important in the case of the poor in general and the SNAP recipient in particular, could be possible in one actual region of the United States.

The Highlander Research and Education Center

There are many groups in the United States that specialize in enacting dissent. Groups such as the Highlander Research and Education Center, a stalwart organization that has fought for social justice causes for decades in Appalachia, can have an immense impact on helping the poor rise out of poverty, especially if these groups can successfully

teach the poor how to speak up—and to speak up forcefully without fear of reprisal—which, if they do so while working with middle earners, will show the more affluent how aligned their goals, aspirations, and necessities are. To summarize, working together to dissent politically can teach new skills; ideally, however, and even more importantly, it can build bridges and new understandings between communities and economic echelons. It can, in other words, challenge the metaphors that have come to characterize the poor.

Connecting people for democratic change is one of Highlander’s goals, and as Eller points out, connecting people can have an immense impact on how they perceive one another. Highlander still specializes in this sort of socioeconomic and political transcendence, guided by its devotion to equality. A job announcement from 2012 describes the organization’s central role in seeking change in oppressed areas:

Fundamentally, Highlander is *an intersectional resource* for the U.S. South, a place where *leaders, networks, and movement strands come together to interact, build relationships, craft joint strategy and develop tools and mechanisms to advance a multi-racial, intergenerational movement for justice in our region.*

Cornerstones of the work: building the skills of grassroots people and capacity of organizations for long haul work, and *connecting people and issues for holistic analysis and broad-based movement building* (“Highlander Research and Education Center: Position Available,” emphasis added).

If society undertakes the massive task of helping the poor lift themselves out of poverty by offering them the chance to keep their government assistance in exchange for working with organizations that will then teach them how to democratically engage their society, their government, etc., there are, as in the days of the War on Poverty, plenty of

organizational templates to use in such an effort. Highlander offers one such template. Allowing the poor to remain on governmental subsistence assistance after their allotted time has elapsed will hopefully give the poor an incentive to learn the art of dissent, if guided by the right organizations.

Above all, by working with specific organizations, the poor will not only be doing good in their communities, but will also be interacting face to face with the middle class, who, in their discussions with the poor, will continue to see them in more and more humane terms. Heretical discourse is not necessarily the act of explicitly saying, “I am not that thing which you assume I am.” It can be much subtler than that. It might be a poor person, encouraged by the community, to stand up for something that he or she believes in. The act of taking a stand or of talking back with a firm voice would call into question the larger community’s underdeveloped views of the poor as hopeless and helpless. These acts of dissent, as Eller might note, can have real and lasting impacts on the community because they will encourage the middle class to see the poor as equal members of society. Also, it will force the realization that no change can be made, no matter how forcefully people stand up and talk back, unless a majority of voters vote to alter the socioeconomic structures of their communities.

A History of Highlander

This project features Highlander for a couple of reasons. Mainly, the purpose is to give an example of just one type of organization (which at least partially focuses on the importance of language choices in furthering social justice) that the aid recipient might select in order to keep qualifying for his or her benefits. Secondly, Highlander has a rich and vibrant history and a proven track record in enacting change in the Southeast, and it

has existed since the early 1930s. Jeff Biggers discusses that history, as well as the various forms of engagement the organization has undertaken, in his book, *The United States of Appalachia: How Southern Mountaineers Brought Independence, Culture, and Enlightenment to America*. Highlander was the brainchild of two progressive activists, Myles Horton and Don West, and the idea for Highlander came to them from what were called “the Danish folk schools,” which were local level experiments in democratic participation.

According to Biggers, these schools were quite popular and successful in Denmark. “Recognizing that a majority of the rural peasant population had lost touch with their own cultural traditions, language, and, ultimately, their role in the civic duties of society, the residential folk schools emerged as a place for adults to improve their literacy skills and learn about modern agricultural contributions and possibilities in Danish society” (174). Sometimes, the biggest contributions schools such as these can make to society may actually seem small at first, but they can in fact be revolutionary in the long term. For instance, in the days of U.S. segregation, when reading and citizenship tests were required before African-Americans could register to vote, a value could not be placed on teaching literacy. Such a small goal—teaching people their ABCs—can have huge ramifications when realized at the right place and the right time. The goal of these community schools was to give power back to the people, and, as Biggers points out,

In an attempt to bring the displaced peasants into the inner workings of the liberated country, the curriculum stressed the wisdom of common people and land-based agricultural societies and cooperatives, education through life experiences, and learning through informed and lively discussions. Within a

generation, Denmark had witnessed a remarkable revival, thanks in many respects to the schools (174).

Horton and West hoped to replicate the successes of these schools in places like Appalachia and elsewhere in the South where huge problems like racism were stubbornly systemic.

But why was Highlander different from other organizations that sought to help lift the rural mountaineer out of poverty? First of all, it was more realistic than utopian. “Both men [Horton and West] interpreted the ‘folk’ definition in its strictest sense of representing the aspirations of common people in dealing with their daily challenges, not in maintaining a quaint and apolitical, folkloric tapestry in the mountains” (175). Yes, the leaders of this Appalachian folk school did initially have trouble translating their ideas into practical change for the same reason that most revolutionary ideas do not always have smooth transitions from theory to praxis: “Untold utopian educational experiments in Appalachia, the South, and the rest of the nation, of course, had gone the route of burning enthusiasm into the dismal ashes of a disillusioning reality in a short time. In fact, Highlander did flounder in its first years before gaining a foothold in the region” (176). But eventually, the idea caught on. Much of the enthusiasm surrounding Highlander, not to mention the successes it had, had to do with the way it treated the rural poor as equals—and this is in direct contrast to how many of the government’s so-called poverty warriors saw the rural poor in the early days of the War on Poverty, which began a few decades later in the mid-1960s. Still, parallels can be drawn between the failed initiatives of the War on Poverty and some of the folk schools in the region other than Highlander. “Contrary to the outside missionary viewpoint of ‘saving’ the mountain

communities, as if they were deficient, Highlander stood out as a unique institution that recognized the ability of mountaineers to determine their own fate in volatile times,” says Biggers (177). Everybody, no matter what race, sex, or income status, was welcomed at Highlander, which was itself a revolutionary idea in America at the time. “Highlander’s fame circulated throughout the South as the singular mountaintop school where both whites and blacks could meet, in defiance of a 1901 Tennessee law forbidding interracial gatherings in the state. A black professor even taught occasionally at Highlander in the 1930s” (178 – 9). Highlander was indeed central in the fight for civil rights, including school desegregation efforts. If today’s poor people on government assistance were offered the opportunity to pursue heretical discourse in exchange for an ABAWD waiver, the practices of an organization such as Highlander could offer good templates for what that heretical discourse might look like. Highlander has stood the test of time because its methods for teaching critical thinking have been effective. It has trained students, many of them poor, to recognize their own value in society, and (just as importantly) it has forced mainstream America to recognize that value as well.

One of the most famous “students” to attend Highlander was Rosa Parks. “Highlander’s interracial residential experience astounded Parks. [...] Horton’s role in the workshop was crucial. Parks found the Highlander director to be the ‘first white man’ she could trust” (182 – 3). They became close friends, and she always remembered him fondly. “Speaking at a gathering thirty-five years after their meeting, she recalled Horton’s ability to ‘strip the white segregationists of their hardcore attitudes and how he could confuse them, and I found myself laughing when I hadn’t been able to laugh in a long time” (183). Horton was both a famously down-to-earth figure and a realistic teacher

in his goals. He sought ways of bringing practical changes to communities, which can be a realistic way of challenging the *habitus*. By making incremental changes, giving the oppressed person a little more access in society than he previously had, the social justice organization can slowly help bring about a change in the attitudes of the wider society that question the oppressed person's worth. A down-to-earth leader may appear to be folksy or even ineffective, but in fact, by modeling what leadership looks like, he can help teach people how to be leaders themselves. Another important step that a social justice leader must take is encouraging oppressed people to put the lessons they have learned into practice, which again means that he is stepping away from the role of leadership and asking *them* to fulfill that role. Biggers says,

Horton, who would always downplay any influence or role he held in the civil rights movement, concluded the workshop as he had done at all workshops with a session called "Finding Your Way Back Home." He urged all the participants to picture how they might utilize the workshop discussions in their own communities. "You have brought these problems here," he told them. "We have been a sort of catalyst in a process that makes a little bulge in your education. Now, are you going to keep on learning? Highlander will continue to relate to you in terms of this process when you get back. So you are not going back alone. We will work with you if you get in trouble" (183).

Horton was a born speaker, and as an integrationist in a time when local, state, and federal powers conspired to keep the status quo (or, as Rosa Parks called it, "the status Crow") the way it was, he knew the power of educating the common people. Even after losing court battles that resulted in the shuttering of his school, he was not dismayed.

“After nearly three decades of social crusades in the South and Appalachia, an amused but weary Horton dismissed the trial and school closing as a circus. ‘A school is an idea,’ he declared. ‘And you can’t padlock an idea’” (183, 193 – 4). As Biggers points out, the school still exists today (194). Indeed, it might be one of the schools that the poor in Appalachia come to, if they are given the chance to keep their government aid by volunteering their time to learn the art of dissent. There are plenty of other examples, but Highlander is an organization with a respectable history in East Tennessee and beyond. The school, located on tranquil farmland with beautiful views of the Great Smoky Mountains, still pursues social justice initiatives on a range of issues, including striving for gay rights, easing racial tensions, lobbying for inmates, and working with immigrants.

How Is Highlander Forging Language Justice Today?

Indeed, Highlander remains at the forefront of some of today’s greatest social justice campaigns. Perhaps most relevantly to this project, it continues to see the importance that language plays in the dehumanization process of oppressed people throughout the United States, especially regarding immigrants who are not fluent in English. Due to issues of racism and xenophobia, immigrants are already at a disadvantage when coming to this country, and these disadvantages are compounded if they are unable to speak the dominant language of the land. According to the Pew Research Center, the poverty of recently arrived immigrants to the U.S. grew from 18% in 1970 to 28% in 2013. The trend has not been nearly as stark for U.S.-born Americans; in 1970, poverty among this population was at 14%, and in 2013, it had risen to 15% (“Poverty of Recently Arrived Immigrants Has Grown”). Thus, Highlander’s focus on

making sure immigrants have the tools to communicate with their communities is warranted.

In an online article in *EverydayFeminism.com*, writer Alex-Quan Pham explores the difficulty that many immigrants encounter when they come to this country and are unable to speak English. Pham says,

A life without language, without the ability to name things, to address people, to describe how you're feeling, to ask for what you need, is a horror that I can barely imagine. [...] When immigrants come to "America," they are routinely stripped of their language. They are expected to learn English immediately and flawlessly, because the kind of people that Americans consider respectable talk and look like middle-class white people. / We are told that there is one correct form of English, and deviating from grammar and pronunciation rules associates us with the working class. Not only is this classist, but it fortifies the idea that English has a "proper" form — even though every variation of English has been constructed. Here Pham is echoing Bourdieu's observations that the linguistic habits of some people conform more closely to the authorized form of a given language. Those who do not speak "properly," in other words, are often considered outside of society's mainstream. And if a person cannot speak the language at all, then his or her hopes for advancement are practically nonexistent.

Highlander promotes the movement known as "language justice," which can be defined as providing reasonable accommodations to people who are not fluent in English but still wish to change their communities for the better. According to Highlander's website,

Language is at the core of people and their cultures and is the vehicle for t [sic] people to share their ideas, strengths and dreams for a better world. In order to build broader movements for justice, it is important to create multilingual spaces where language is used democratically and as a tool of empowerment, so that people can communicate, learn and strategize together (“Language Justice”).

By assuring them that their words will be understood, workshops devoted to language justice allow immigrants to participate in Highlander’s social justice campaigns. These workshops could also be a great way for multiple segments of an impoverished community—for instance, *both* those who were born in the U.S. and can speak English *and* those who were born outside the country and are not fluent in the language—to connect with the larger community, including those in the middle class who are fluent English speakers. Pham, who took one of Highlander’s “Interpreting for Social Justice” workshops, agrees that language justice is essential to social justice campaigns, saying, “Some of us shamed our parents for not speaking English as well as we did, for not assimilating as well as we did. The internalized oppression that comes from language injustice leads us to harm one another. / And that’s why healing is a crucial part of language justice.” When Pham speaks of healing, this is in reference to the ways one can overcome America’s devastation of numerous nations, including Vietnam. Healing can also occur within communities divided by socioeconomic strata, and that concept of “healing” is essentially what this project promotes when it asks for middle income Americans to interact with the poor so that they might challenge the anti-poor stereotypes that they have come to accept as true.

If SNAP recipients work with immigrants to further their social justice campaigns and are thus allowed to continue qualifying for these benefits, this would add another level of complexity to the way language shapes perceptions of antipoverty assistance. A poor person born in the U.S. would continue to receive his or her assistance, while many of the immigrants would not be able to qualify at all because they would likely not be citizens. Nevertheless, these two populations, by working together, might overcome some of the preconceived notions that each has of the other. Meanwhile, the middle class would get to work with both populations and would, ideally, also have their perceptions challenged.

According to its website, Highlander offers multiple workshops for language justice, but one of them is entitled “What Did They Say? Interpreting for Social Justice: An Introductory Curriculum.” In a 2009 manual that explains the curriculum of “What Did They Say?” Roberto Tijerina asks, “What do oppressed people have in common with each other?” There are multiple answers to this question, but four of them are: “We lack social and economic equality / We are all stereotyped, demonized, and dehumanized [...] / We blame ourselves... / ...And society blames us.” Toward the end of this manual, one of its central goals is listed, and it is also the central goal of this project: “to struggle together through our own stereotypes (whatever they might be!) and our own domination” (Tijerina).

With an emphasis on how language molds people’s perceptions, the questions that this research has aimed to answer are simple enough: What hope do people living in Appalachia and the surrounding areas (or in any community in America) have for a better life when they have lived in extreme poverty for generations? To whom can they turn

when the wider society's language structures militate against them? And what methods do these groups to whom they turn hope to use to encourage the growth of social justice? With the advocacy of enough groups such as the Highlander Research and Education Center, one might yet see a bright future for these communities. Sometimes, a volunteer opportunity that seeks to overturn stereotypes can be just as encouraging as the promise of a good-paying job, especially if the volunteerism is a grassroots effort that passionately seeks to challenge people's perceptions. While jobs and economic development are of course very important to the people living in Appalachia, residents who receive SNAP benefits may also grow to understand the importance of leadership development and higher education.

Future research into East Tennessee and the surrounding region would find many more groups that mobilize people for real and lasting social change. One of them is the Coal Creek Watershed Foundation, an organization focusing on local history, environmentalism, and education in the largely rural Anderson County, Tennessee (Coal Creek; Matheny; Moore). Another interesting group is the South Knoxville Alliance, which hosts Knoxville SOUP, a program combining small-scale democracy with charity to award micro-grants to worthy individuals and groups hoping to better the community ("Knoxville SOUP"). For those looking to build a larger list of social justice organizations, a book edited by Stephen L. Fisher entitled *Fighting Back in Appalachia: Traditions of Resistance and Change* is a good place to start. This is a compilation of sixteen essays by various Appalachian contributors (including the conclusion written by Fisher himself, plus his introduction). The book is an eclectic collection that paints a picture of regional domination and insubordination, focusing on groups such as Save Our

Cumberland Mountains (SOCM) and Kentuckians For The Commonwealth (KFTC). These groups—whether focusing on environmentalism, education, equality, etc.—have an important role to play in the future of the region, and hopefully they will continue to cultivate leaders ready for democratic engagement. As always, the region needs strong leaders willing to take on the faceless machines of corporations and government. They need leadership to represent the will of the people. Perhaps most important of all, a group dedicated to social justice needs to teach the poor the confidence and skills necessary to interact with the more affluent, so that the middle class can continue casting a more realistic picture of who the poor are as people—as living, breathing human beings.

CONCLUSION

The goal of this project has been to spotlight the negative rhetorical choices that people make when describing the poor and to point out how language can therefore be a systemic cause of the poverty that afflicts the very people those rhetorical choices critique. One major reason some metaphors are so dangerous, including those that compare the poor to animals, parasites, and sinful criminals, is because they allow the people who believe them to critique oppressed individuals without applying that same critical analysis to their own habits. They allow people to blame the oppressed, in other words, without much consideration going toward how that oppression is socially constructed. Metaphor is a slippery creature, often concealing more than revealing, and by dissecting our language choices, we may become more conscious of the ungenerous stereotypes that we use to understand the poor. That is the first step. A second step may be for the more affluent in society to join with the poor to enact heretical discourse together, not necessarily so that the poor can change the ill circumstances in which they live (though that is of course a possible outcome), but because the middle class might then grasp the fact that the poor are, indeed, people.

There are plenty of organizations out there that will give the poor and the more affluent the opportunity to work together toward this goal of re-humanization, and at the same time as they interact with one another, they might also work toward achieving various social changes, with an eye toward that ultimate goal: changing the socioeconomic landscape for those who are poor in the richest nation in the world. Some of these organizations that offer templates for heretical discourse are well established; others are new and still struggling to gain footholds in the communities they hope to

serve. Attempting to find a comprehensive list of all the organizations in the United States that could help communities fight for social justice could be as overwhelming as entering into the world's largest Google search, and so this project has attempted to narrow the answer down a little, looking specifically at TV satire, literary fiction, and an Appalachian organization. This way, a few specific methods that might succeed in challenging people's perceptions of the poor have been highlighted, though a comprehensive list of all possible methods could never be constructed in this short space. That is one reason why the same offices that administer government aid such as SNAP could join in the effort in locating various community organizations devoted to social justice. Trained social services workers could vet these social justice-minded groups and provide their clients with longer lists of area agencies that need volunteer help. At the same time, social services workers might also be encouraging their clients to seek opportunities in their communities that will allow for different definitions of "work," including opportunities that emphasize education (such as discussing literary satire in reading groups or writing opinion pieces for publication in local newspapers) and leadership (such as working with immigrant populations to help them achieve English fluency or to protest their perceived oppression).

Some may argue that it is not possible to effect fundamental socioeconomic change in a society as large and diverse as the U.S. This goal, some may say, is especially not likely if one of the central methods is simply to encourage the more affluent to interact with impoverished members of the communities in the hope that such interactions will spur changes in perceptions. But to refute such an argument, one need only look back fifty years to an era embroiled in civil rights and a poverty war. Those

days were not perfect. They did not lead to total societal change, largely because people's perceptions were supported by many of the same stereotypes they should have been working to overcome. And yet, looking back to those days, skeptics will find people who would, in some ways, look forward to our current society. By looking back to the days when the poor were supposedly to blame for their own poverty, skeptics will see parallels with today's American society. They may also find people whose perceptions were changed because they did the hard work of critically analyzing some of the inconsistent metaphors at the heart of undeveloped stereotypes.

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