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**Statecraft:
The Politics of Welfare Reform in Wisconsin**

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Abstract

Wisconsin's reform of family welfare is the most radical and, arguably, the most successful in the nation. This is not due to anything special about the welfare problem or public opinion in the state but rather to special features of the state's politics and government. Reform is radical, but at the same time it has been largely bipartisan, with most Democrats joining with Governor Tommy Thompson and other Republicans in seeking to transform the system. Bipartisanship, in turn, reflects the unusual moderation of Republicans in approaching reform and the unusual willingness of Democrats to criticize the old system. Outside groups—such as black leaders, welfare advocates, and academics, who elsewhere block reform—have been moderate or ineffective in their protests, while business has been unusually supportive. Two background conditions have helped shape this political environment—Wisconsin's cohesive society and its masterful government, the product of its Progressive past. In Wisconsin, in contrast to other urban states, both the will to reform welfare and the capacity to do so are strong.

**Statecraft:
The Politics of Welfare Reform in Wisconsin**

In the last decade, Wisconsin has instituted the most radical welfare reform in the nation. “Welfare” here means Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), the principal federal-state program for needy families. Congress created TANF in 1996, when the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) abolished the earlier family welfare program, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), that had been the object of controversy for over 30 years. Under TANF, states have enhanced control over welfare policy, but they must also institute demanding new work requirements for adult recipients. Families can draw aid for only 5 years. Even before PRWORA, however, Wisconsin had enforced work in welfare with special stringency. It also enacted a new, all-work-based aid system, and it is still the only state to do so.

My question is how Wisconsin managed to do this. In my understanding, public policy as a field within political science should use policy success or failure to reveal fresh insights about government.¹ Welfare reform poses a tough problem for government. It was evident as early as the 1960s that the failure of most welfare adults to work was a major reason for dependency. Yet neither Washington nor state governments have found it easy to require work in welfare. Assistance usually remained an entitlement. That is, it was given to people on grounds of need, with little self-reliance expected of them in return. In earlier writings, I attributed that failure to American government’s reluctance to obligate individuals or to admit their incapacities, among other problems.²

But Wisconsin has enforced work in welfare, so the question shifts: What features of this government allowed it to succeed where others have failed? My answer is that Wisconsin possesses an exemplary political process and a talented bureaucracy. In this paper I summarize the political side of that argument.³ The question is: Why were Wisconsin’s politicians able to agree on such a radical reform?

ASSUMPTIONS

In approaching this problem, I make these assumptions, which I cannot justify fully here:

The Wisconsin reform is real. Not every initiative announced by a governor, or even enacted by a legislature, represents an actual change in policy. The history of welfare is rife with state-level “reforms” that never got beyond press releases; or if they were enacted, they did not receive waivers from Washington (before PRWORA, experiments usually required federal permission) or were not implemented by the bureaucracy.⁴ Wisconsin’s reform, however, appears to have been fully implemented over a period of more than 10 years. According to fieldwork and analyses of program data, local welfare operations had already changed by the mid-1990s to require work of many more welfare adults than usual in the U.S.⁵ The new Wisconsin welfare system, called Wisconsin Works, or W-2, requires all parents of aided families to work at some level. Although many states talk about welfare reform, Wisconsin has produced. The state is not distinctive in what politicians say about welfare, but rather in its capacity to deliver change “on the ground.”

The reform is a success. There are several reasons to regard the Wisconsin reform as successful. First, it embodies what has been learned from past efforts at reform—the best approach to reform is to promote work among the adult recipients. Raising work levels addresses the immediate cause of most poverty among the working-aged—a lack of sustained employment. The most successful work programs have two critical features. First, they are mandatory, not voluntary, and enforce participation stringently. Second, they require that most participants actually work or look for work in available jobs, in preference to obtaining education or training for better positions.⁶ The reformed Wisconsin system institutionalizes both policies.

A second reason to regard the Wisconsin reform as successful is that the consequences of reform to date *appear* to have been favorable. Participation and work levels among recipients have increased sharply while the caseload has fallen dramatically. Only 13,342 families received cash aid in Wisconsin

in March 1998, a decline of 86 percent since January 1987.⁷ The full consequences for families are still unclear; surveys and other research to track the effects of reform in this and other states are still incomplete. However, remarkably little evidence points to hardship, such as increases in homelessness or children forced to go into foster care because families were destitute. Observers report an encouraging increase in work levels and income in some poor sections of Milwaukee.⁸

Success is unusual. The Wisconsin story would not draw attention if it were common, but it is not. No state has matched Wisconsin's dramatic fall in dependency. Between 1987 and 1995, AFDC fell 27 percent in Wisconsin, or 9 points more than in the next-best state (Mississippi).⁹ In the last several years, several rural states with small caseloads have outpaced the Wisconsin decline in percentage terms, but no urban state has done so. Most large states are still reversing the sharp run-up in dependency that occurred between 1989 and 1994, when the national caseload jumped 30 percent. Wisconsin, which avoided that increase, has taken welfare down to levels not seen since before AFDC became a national issue in the 1960s.

Currently, to be sure, welfare caseloads are falling dramatically across the country, and this has allowed many states to claim credit for reforming welfare. But expert observers think the declines are driven mostly by a good economy and by a political dynamic triggered by PRWORA. Jobs are available, and needy people are hearing so much talk of work requirements that many are leaving the rolls spontaneously or not going on them even though they might be eligible.¹⁰ It is doubtful how much the current decline reflects actual, implemented changes in welfare policy.

Also, no state has transformed welfare as radically as Wisconsin. Not only is W-2 totally work-based, but it has other features not found in other states. It pays the same grant to all families regardless of size, pays all child support directly to welfare families rather than reimbursing welfare, and subsidizes health and child care for all working poor, on or off welfare.¹¹ According to a federal report, "Wisconsin provides the most dramatic example of how the traditional service and benefit delivery structure can be

changed to transform welfare into a work-based system.”¹² In addition, Wisconsin’s welfare bureaucracy has been reinvented through wide use of private contractors to deliver services, including the total privatization of welfare administration in Milwaukee, site of most of the state’s remaining welfare cases.

Wisconsin’s welfare record is unique. Thus, the reasons for the success become interesting and important.

DETERMINING THE REASONS

Why should we trace this success to government at all? In the past, academic observers have attributed Wisconsin’s welfare decline, like that of the nation currently, to unusually good economic conditions and reductions in welfare benefit levels, which render fewer families eligible for aid. It is true that Wisconsin has enjoyed below-average unemployment in recent years, and that benefits, after a cut in 1987, were not raised in nominal terms for 10 years, allowing them to fall further with inflation.¹³ However, many other states had equally good economies and allowed benefits to fall, without recording the same reductions in dependency. Statistical analysis of the Wisconsin fall suggests that it is due partly to economic conditions but also to the enforcement of work by the state’s new welfare policies.¹⁴

Another argument is that it is easy to reform welfare in Wisconsin because it is a small state with few blacks and Hispanics, the groups most seriously dependent on welfare. Actually, Wisconsin’s population of 5 million is about average for the states, and in 1993, 31 percent of its welfare recipients were black, not far below the 36 percent figure for the nation in 1994. Although Wisconsin has few Hispanics on welfare, it has more Asians and Native Americans than the norm. The white proportion among recipients was 47 percent, compared to 37 percent for the nation.¹⁵ Since 1994, the continuing fall in the rolls, which is greatest among whites, has made the remaining recipients even more heavily nonwhite. Nor does Wisconsin escape the problems of urban America. Milwaukee, where most of the remaining cases are concentrated, is heavily black and Hispanic. According to a recent study, it is one of

the most segregated and depressed cities in America.¹⁶ Yet welfare decline has been dramatic even in Milwaukee.

In short, favorable social and economic conditions alone cannot explain Wisconsin's welfare success. The state's secret must lie somewhere within politics or government. One might suspect that the Wisconsin public is especially insistent about reforming welfare. It is true that polls in the state reveal a strong fear that high benefits are attracting poor people from other states, and a still more intense desire to change welfare lifestyle. Majorities of 80 percent or more favor tougher child support enforcement and requiring recipients to work and keep their children in school, on pain of reductions in their grants.¹⁷ But in this Wisconsinites are no different from voters in other states, most of whom want the same kind of reforms.¹⁸ What stands out about Wisconsin is not the shape of opinion but the fact that government here, more than anywhere else, has actually changed welfare in the way the public wants.

In explaining that, the performance of government itself is critical. Reforming welfare by changing lifestyle is difficult. It is not enough to give or deny aid as such. Rather, one must *combine* aid with functioning requirements so that the recipients work and fulfill other social expectations (such as getting through school and obeying the law) *in return* for support. The system must be both generous and demanding toward the recipients. In this sense, it must become paternalist.¹⁹ To accomplish this, legislators have to enact the required policies, and then administrators have to execute them, a complex undertaking. If most states have not done that, it is chiefly because government has been unequal to these tasks, for two main reasons.

First, politicians are usually more polarized about welfare than is the public. Typically, liberals want to be generous toward the poor, conservatives demanding, but not both at once. One side will not countenance serious work obligations for the dependent; the other will not pay for the bureaucracy and child care needed to enforce work. Until PRWORA, that impasse prevented decisive change at the national level.²⁰ Traditionally, some important states, notably New York and California, have passed

merely cosmetic reforms, or they have delegated the tough decisions about change to their counties, a habit that continues under PRWORA.

The second big problem is administrative. The welfare bureaucracy in many states is simply unequal to grafting a serious work mission onto the aid operation. To do that requires continuing to aid families while at the same time inducting them into job search and other activities meant to promote independence. In most big cities, work activities remain largely peripheral to income maintenance, a fact masked by the current caseload decline.

I hypothesize that Wisconsin has succeeded with reform mainly because government is more capable there than in most states. That is, the politicians could agree on reform and the bureaucracy could execute it. I deal in this paper with the political side of that story. The question is why Wisconsin's parties were able to agree not only on change but on a radical reform that exceeded what either of them had previously contemplated. The reasons, I argue, are partly that the parties are more collaborative than they seem to be in other urban states and partly that they draw upon a special political culture that stresses both social obligations and problem-solving. My sources include other studies of the Wisconsin reform, interviews with legislators and administrators who played a key role in reform, and reviews of news stories about the politics of reform.²¹

Is good government also the key to welfare reform in other states? It is difficult to generalize from a single case study. Methodologists advise researchers that they cannot draw much inference about causes unless they examine a wide range of variation in both their dependent and explanatory terms.²² I cannot offer such a range here. Wisconsin is clearly an outlier among the states in terms of both welfare reform and governmental quality. I will deal with this problem to a limited extent by drawing on the secondary literature on state-level welfare reform. Existing studies of other states, though less thorough than this one, are enough to sustain the general association between government quality and successful reform. That is, I do not know of another substantial, implemented reform produced in another state

without conspicuously good government, and I also do not know of a conspicuously well-governed state that has seriously tried to change welfare and failed. However, most of those other states, for instance Iowa, Utah, and Oregon, are smaller and less urban than Wisconsin, and their reforms are less thoroughgoing.

I am less concerned about establishing causality beyond doubt than about dramatizing the manner of the Wisconsin reform. In this state we witness state-building in operation—a democratic government facing its challenges and elaborating its structures to solve a major public problem. This is how the public in every state wants government to address social problems.

In the sections that follow, I briefly summarize the Wisconsin reform and then argue that conventional political explanations are insufficient. It is not enough to say that a welfare crisis arose and that Tommy Thompson, the state's reforming governor, capitalized on it, defeating his opponents. One also has to explain why the parties could agree on change, and indeed on radical change. I show that the Republicans have been surprisingly progovernment and Democrats surprisingly willing to criticize the old welfare system, to the point where reform was substantially bipartisan. Also, outside groups have not blocked reform. Further, I link these features to Wisconsin's social makeup and its Progressive past, forces that have given it a conservative social ethos but an ambitious and masterful government. I close with a few comments on the timing of the reform.

WISCONSIN'S WELFARE REFORM

In the 1970s and early 1980s, Wisconsin built up one of the most generous welfare systems in the United States AFDC grant levels were increased regularly, and by 1987, when Tommy Thompson became governor, they were the fifth highest in the nation.²³ Reforms to stem dependency began early but had little effect. The Work Incentive (WIN) program was the first national program intended to put

AFDC recipients to work, and Wisconsin ran it unusually well. In the early 1980s, the state was also a pioneer in improving the collection of child support.

But dependency kept growing. The AFDC rolls crested at over 300,000 persons in 1985–86. The burden of general assistance, a locally funded aid program largely for single adults, also grew. The state suddenly awoke to its problem. After Tommy Thompson became governor in 1987, he initially trimmed welfare benefit levels. He instituted Learnfare, a requirement that teenage welfare recipients stay in school on pain of grant reductions, and Children First, an experimental child support enforcement program. In subsequent years, he added several more experiments intended to cut dependency, such as enhanced work incentives, so that recipients lost less welfare if they worked; Two-Tier, which paid incoming welfare recipients less than Wisconsin citizens at first if they came from a state paying less; and Parental and Family Responsibility (“Bridefare”), a set of incentives to deter parental breakup among the poor. Most of these programs required waivers of normal federal rules from Washington. All the while, the state built up welfare work requirements in AFDC. Work programs reached more and more of the caseload, and by the early 1990s they emphasized work in immediate jobs, rather than education and training.

A more radical phase of reform began in 1993, when the state enacted Work Not Welfare (WNW). This was an experiment in which families were limited to 2 years of cash aid, and they had to work for it by discharging specified activities. In 1994 came Work First, an attempt to divert applicants for aid from welfare by arranging some other means of support, often a job or help from families. Other than Learnfare, the experiments were instituted initially only in selected counties, usually outside Milwaukee. But in March 1996, the demands to look for work in advance of aid and to earn one’s grant with activities were extended to the entire state through Self-Sufficiency First (SSF) and Pay for Performance (PFP). Finally, in September 1997, the state instituted W-2, in which all adult recipients

must work at some level. Spells of aid under W-2 are generally limited to 2 years, and no family can get assistance for a total of more than 5 years.

Except for a brief uptick in 1991, during the national recession, the AFDC caseload fell continuously throughout the reform period. It seems to have been driven down mostly by good economic conditions in the late 1980s, then by toughening welfare work policies in the early 1990s, finally by diversion after 1994.²⁴ Many expected that the decline would abate after the most employable clients were placed and only the harder-to-serve remained. But SSF and PFP led to wholesale departures from the rolls and a sharp fall in new applications for aid, trends that continued with the implementation of W-2. Today, cash welfare is a shadow of its former self, although in-kind caseloads (for food stamps and Medicaid) have fallen less dramatically. Due to the expense of administration and support services such as child care, the state is spending more per case than before reform. Yet because of the caseload collapse, welfare spending is still dramatically lower than before Tommy Thompson took office.²⁵

A CONVENTIONAL POLITICAL ANALYSIS

One might explain the Wisconsin reform simply by saying that the state followed the political drift of most of the nation to the right since the 1960s. Traditionally, Wisconsin was a liberal state. In the postwar era, the two parties traded control of the governorship and federal offices regularly, but Democrats controlled the state legislature continuously from the mid-1970s until 1993.²⁶ Democrats were chiefly responsible for the state's generous prereform welfare system. Following Tommy Thompson's election as governor in 1986, however, Republicans rebuilt their strength in the legislature, and this unnerved their opponents. With Ronald Reagan in the White House, national welfare policy had already turned conservative, and liberal policymakers in Madison were worried.

Reform first became an active issue in the mid-1980s, due to "welfare migration." Local officials noticed that many new applicants signing up for welfare seemed to be recent migrants from nearby states

that paid lower benefits—in particular from Chicago. Joseph Andrea, a Democratic state senator from Kenosha, the county closest to Chicago, blamed the problem on the state’s overgenerous benefits and lack of serious work requirements. The cry was taken up by other blue-collar Democrats from Milwaukee and Racine. Later, in 1992, David Prosser, the Republican leader in the Assembly, produced evidence that some Chicagoans were coming to Milwaukee just to collect welfare checks by posing as residents—and then taking the money back to Chicago.²⁷

These stories of fraud and abuse fatally undercut Wisconsin’s liberal welfare consensus. The migration issue painted Wisconsinites as suckers who were being exploited by their less-civic neighbors. Governor Tony Earl, a liberal Democrat elected in 1982, had raised welfare benefits in alliance with the liberal legislature, as the government had been doing for years. The migration furor blindsided him. He commissioned a study by the state university, which showed that few poor migrants came to Wisconsin specifically for higher welfare. A string of later studies showed the same or equivocal results.²⁸ But the controversy refused to die, and Earl never recovered. There was no way he could satisfy his liberal political base—poor voters and advocate groups committed to welfare—while at the same time responding to an enraged public.²⁹

Tommy Thompson capitalized on the welfare issue, among others, to unseat Earl in the 1986 election. He then used welfare to keep the initiative. He and his advisers launched one reform “experiment” after another. Democrats perpetually had to react to his agenda rather than advancing their own. Key members of Thompson’s team were James Klauser, a longtime aide whom Thompson made Secretary of Administration, and Gerald Whitburn, who was Secretary of the Department of Health and Social Services (HSS) from 1991 to 1995. According to Whitburn, the earlier reforms, successful or not, “set the table” for W-2, because they drove Democrats into a corner where they had no choice but to accept radical reform. Although Thompson pursued other changes in state government, welfare was the

subject where he had his rivals on the run. His relentless focus on it accounts for much of his success.³⁰ Press accounts of the Wisconsin reform consistently laud his leadership.³¹

Democrats found Thompson hard to answer. They compromised with the governor in self-protective ways, and this prevented them from opposing him effectively. When first elected in 1987, Thompson persuaded Tim Cullen, the influential Democratic majority leader of the Senate, to become his Secretary of HSS, the department in charge of welfare reform. That removed Cullen as a potential gubernatorial rival. It also made Tom Loftus, Speaker of the Assembly, the presumptive challenger to Thompson and forced him to trim his liberal sails to appeal to a statewide electorate. In 1990, Loftus did run against Thompson and was defeated soundly.

By this point, many Democrats found it easier to support Thompson's schemes than to oppose them. Representative Margaret Krusick, a Democrat from Milwaukee, remarked in 1991 that "If lawmakers are responsive to their constituents, they will vote for welfare reform." Indeed, for Democrats not "to be in the forefront of welfare reform" would be to "risk . . . losing their seats in the Legislature."³² Democrats could not assemble a coalition against Thompson. The defense of welfare drew its strongest support from liberal legislators from the Madison area and from liberal advocate groups in Madison and Milwaukee. Neither element could deliver many votes. As for the recipients and minority groups reliant on welfare, their voting turnout was too low to give them leverage. It might seem inevitable that the Republicans eventually gained a majority in the legislature in 1993–94 and went on to enact the radical W-2, undoing the liberal welfare system.

WAS REFORM PARTISAN?

This conventional interpretation of the process leading to Wisconsin's welfare reform is not wrong, but it is incomplete. It presumes that welfare was a partisan matter. That is, reform was conservative, and if it was to prevail, Republicans had to outmaneuver Democrats. On this view, the

outcome should have been a messy compromise that satisfied neither party, or it could have been an outright Republican victory. At the federal level, the Family Support Act of 1988 was an example of messy compromise, since it expanded welfare benefits while also toughening work requirements. PRWORA was an example of conservative victory, since it was an unabashedly conservative measure that President Clinton signed only reluctantly.

In Wisconsin, welfare in the past had been partisan. When Republicans in the Assembly first forced through cuts in welfare benefits in 1969, they did so to save money, and their rhetoric questioned the very legitimacy of aid. Democrats fought the cuts, and radical priests led welfare recipients from Milwaukee in marches on Madison. The episode galvanized the liberal constituency behind welfare as never before. Churches, advocates, Democratic politicians, even unions united to defend a generous welfare policy against unreasoning reaction. This helps explain why the indulgent, undemanding character of that system went unquestioned for so long.³³ At this point, both parties were entrenched in positions where they favored or opposed big government as such—the very polarization that long prevented fundamental change in Washington.

That sort of estrangement lingered into the Thompson era. There were moments, especially early on in Thompson's quest, when Democratic leaders such as Tom Loftus announced that they had "irreconcilable differences" with him over welfare.³⁴ Thompson himself averred that his leading opponents were committed liberals who opposed him root and branch. In the early years, they allowed him only "limited experiments."³⁵ Indeed, they defeated or delayed many of his early proposals, and he was able to force through his benefit cut and Learnfare in 1987 only through aggressive use of his partial veto. He wielded this power, in effect, to rewrite the state budget, which contained many of his programs, by expanding the benefit cut and toughening Learnfare far beyond what the legislature had authorized. Democrats were outraged. They fought in vain to overturn the vetoes, first in the legislature and then in the courts.

If we accept a partisan interpretation, the parties do not collaborate, and election outcomes become critical because they determine which party can coerce the other. Thompson's defeat of Earl in 1986 was fundamental to change, because Earl defended entitlement, or aid without work tests, while Thompson rejected it. Also, it was critical that Republicans regained their legislative majority in 1993–94, after years in the wilderness, because this allowed them to enact the more radical phase of reform. With Democrats in charge, W-2 would certainly have been more moderate, providing more aid to the employable and allowing more education and training in place of work. Indeed, when Democrats recovered control of the Senate in 1996, they tried to liberalize Thompson's system by abolishing Learnfare and paying wages rather than welfare grants to W-2 clients in community service jobs. Thompson had to beat back some of these attempts with further vetoes.³⁶

The trouble with this account, however, is that it cannot explain how much Thompson achieved. Most of the time since 1987, he has had to work with a legislature where his opponents controlled at least one house, and usually both of them. Despite all the static, Democrats collaborated with Thompson on reform more than they fought him. The very Democratic leaders who the governor said opposed him agreed to join a bipartisan Welfare Reform Commission set up by Thompson in early 1987. Chaired by HSS Secretary Tim Cullen and including all four legislative party leaders, this body approved most of the initial planks in Thompson's program, although not the benefit cut.³⁷

Many, even most, Democratic legislators ended up voting for Thompson's proposals. A number of Democrats even signed up as cosponsors of the radical Work Not Welfare, and the great majority of representatives and senators from both parties voted for it.³⁸ The final vote in the Assembly was 73–25 in favor of W-2, with 22 of 47 Democrats in the majority; in the Senate, the vote was 27–6, with 10 of 16 Democrats in favor.³⁹ Even the few Democratic liberals who voted against W-2 admitted that much of Thompson's support came from their own party.⁴⁰

Nor did collaboration imply that Democrats were simply intimidated. The outcome was not a messy compromise, nor was it a clear-cut victory for the conservatives. W-2 did end entitlement and impose the most severe work requirements in the nation. But it also promised huge expansions of child care and government jobs for people needing aid, and it extended unprecedented child and health care subsidies to the entire low-wage working population. This was a radical reform that went far beyond what either Republicans or Democrats had previously advocated. The spirit of W-2 is socially conservative in that good behavior is enforced on the dependent, but also liberal in that the enforcing is done by a generous government using new benefits. The outcome was neither conservative nor liberal in the traditional sense, but paternalist.

REPUBLICAN MODERATION

The consensual yet radical nature of the Wisconsin outcome is what requires a deeper exploration. One explanation for it is that the positions conservatives took on welfare in the 1980s were notably more moderate than in the past, making agreement with liberals easier.

The traditional conservative stance toward welfare had been either to oppose aid to the working-aged on principle or to reject the extra spending it took to reform welfare. But in the 1980s, conservatives in both parties tended to attack the abuses in welfare rather than the institution or its cost. Joseph Andrea tore the skin off the issue by protesting migration, but he claimed that his intent was to rebuild, not destroy. He wanted to “provide child care, provide a job, to get these people jump-started”; he never questioned the need for a welfare system.⁴¹ To liberal defenders of aid such as Tony Earl, that sort of concern, despite the passion it aroused, sounded less “ideological” and more “practical” than the attacks on AFDC that they had previously battled.⁴²

Republicans, for their part, were sobered by their earlier defeats over welfare. In reforming the system, they wanted to appear “less punitive,” lest they ignite another advocate/liberal crusade.⁴³ Tommy

Thompson had been an unquestioning conservative during his service in the Assembly, where he rose to become minority leader. He steadfastly opposed Democratic spending programs, earning the sobriquet “Dr. No.” But once he entered the governor’s mansion, he took a more moderate line. He did not seek to cut back public commitment to welfare in any basic way, the goal that Republicans in Congress achieved with PRWORA. He did not reform welfare mainly to save money, although he did want to cut taxes and improve the business climate. Nor did he accept radical ideas for privatizing welfare advanced by conservative intellectuals within Wisconsin, although the administration of W-2 would be partially privatized.⁴⁴

Thompson’s most significant initial proposal was his demand to cut AFDC benefits. That sounds like a traditional conservative device to reduce spending and taxes, but Thompson justified it as a way of funding bigger work programs. The point was not to cut back welfare as such but to shift the form of aid from income maintenance toward employment. The byword was “Cut, but invest.” Democrats could easily justify that to their consciences and constituents.⁴⁵ Thompson also made no further cuts in AFDC benefits for 10 years, as a sign of “commitment,” Whitburn said, to the humanitarian purposes of reform.⁴⁶ And in 1997 he raised stipends paid to recipients placed in W-2 government jobs by 21 percent, a step upsetting to some conservatives.⁴⁷

Furthermore, Thompson was willing to spend lavishly on the child care, health care, and other services that Democrats demanded to ease the pain of reform. If the state in fact saved money due to the caseload decline, that was a windfall. Very seldom during the reform process did Republicans voice public concern about excessive spending.⁴⁸ Instead, it was Democrats who used claims of waste to criticize the Thompson initiatives, especially Learnfare.⁴⁹ Even after W-2 drove the caseload down far below expectations, Thompson did not pocket the savings. He spoke of using them on other programs outside welfare, such as housing and environmental cleanup.⁵⁰

He also compromised with Democrats on operational matters. He postponed the implementation of Learnfare from 1987 to 1988 when it became clear that the program faced difficulties monitoring school attendance, especially in Milwaukee.⁵¹ Most of his welfare experiments were piloted outside Milwaukee, seat of the state's largest and most entrenched caseload. Only in 1996, with the inauguration of SSF and PFP, did Milwaukee recipients face unambiguous demands to participate in work programs and to look for jobs.

All told, the Thompson program might appear conservative. But perceptive Democrats noted how distant it was from what Republicans had traditionally favored. Tony Earl, whom Thompson defeated over welfare, remarked ironically that "The kind of proposal, W-2, that Thompson has now would have been rejected out of hand as too liberal and too expensive by the Republican legislative leaders of the late 1960s. He's gone through a real transformation."⁵²

DEMOCRATIC CRITICISM OF WELFARE

On the other side, most Democrats were not unwilling reformers. They had their own reasons to criticize welfare, and they began doing so well before the Republicans forced them to.

In most urban states, Democratic politicians are not uncritical of welfare, but they defend entitlement, the essence of the unreformed system. Usually, they would like to see more work by the adult dependent, but they prefer to promote it on a voluntary basis by providing the recipients with more education, training, child care, or government jobs. They fear to *enforce* work, that is to demand it as a condition of aid, because to do so might threaten vulnerable families. Especially, they will not allow reform at the hands of their Republican opponents, whom they see as uncommitted to the poor, interested only in cutting back spending and taxes.

In Wisconsin, however, serious criticism of welfare arose in the 1980s on the left as well as on the right. Initially, the welfare debate erupted within the Democratic party. Conservative Democrats like

Joe Andrea were the first to attack welfare excesses, in opposition to liberal defenders of welfare. The conservatives came chiefly from the urban southeastern corner of the state—Kenosha, Racine, and Milwaukee—the area most exposed to migration from Illinois. The liberals came mostly from Dane County, around Madison, the state capital, an area hospitable to advocates of feminism, environmentalism, and other causes of the left. Lee Dreyfuss, the Republican governor prior to Tony Earl, once referred to Madison as “a city in Wisconsin surrounded by reality.”⁵³ Andrea “made a career” of fighting the “Dane County liberals,” he said, leading to “slam-bang debates” in the Democratic legislative caucus. Indeed, Andrea claimed proudly, “Thompson ran for governor on the Joe Andrea platform.”⁵⁴ The battles softened Democrats up on the welfare issue.

Nor was Democratic criticism confined to the few conservatives in the party. Even Democrats with a liberal image attacked welfare in terms seldom heard in other urban states. Tom Loftus was Speaker of the Assembly during Thompson’s early years as governor. He defended generous welfare and opposed Thompson’s efforts to cut benefits. But at the same time, he called AFDC “a hopeless program” that was “too broke to be fixed.”⁵⁵ He did not flinch from asking blunt questions about how proposed liberal reforms would solve the personal and family problems of the poor.⁵⁶

John Norquist was another liberal who, as an assistant majority leader in the Senate, reacted favorably to Thompson’s initial proposals. Later, as a highly visible mayor of Milwaukee, he ridiculed traditional welfare as “a failure” that “ought to be abolished.”⁵⁷ His main objection to Work Not Welfare and W-2 was not that they were too tough on recipients but that they offered them any cash at all (W-2 did permit some limited grants to recipients unable to work in the short run, although these people still faced required activities). He would have preferred a system in which *only* jobs were offered.⁵⁸ In this, he reflected the thinking of his adviser, David Riemer, one of several liberal theorists who think replacing aid with government employment would serve progressive purposes.⁵⁹

Many other Democratic politicians and officials spoke out against welfare on their own initiative, not simply to blunt Republican sallies. During Thompson's early reform years, Milwaukee struggled constantly with general assistance, a locally funded program for single adults and others who did not qualify for federally funded aid such as AFDC. Repeatedly, county executives, welfare administrators, and city council members from Milwaukee—most of them Democrats—complained of the expense and abuses of the program. They demanded that Madison take over more of the costs and allow more stringent work and residency requirements. Such complaints dissociated the Democratic voice from any simple defense of welfare.

Although Governor Tony Earl tended to defend traditional welfare, this did not stop officials of his administration from attacking it. Linda Reivitz, his HSS Secretary, declared that "The dysfunctions in the system, the barriers to employment, are insane." Peter Tropman, head of welfare planning under Reivitz, wrote influential papers attacking the old system as permissive. AFDC, he later said, was simply "out of sync with the experiences of most Americans. What adult people do is work."⁶⁰

As these comments suggest, Democrats regarded welfare as a failure because it looked like a bad deal compared to employment. They were more client-oriented than the Republicans, but they assumed that the recipients would be better off if they worked, and anything welfare did to block that was questionable. Why not work, they asked? In this they differed noticeably from liberals in other states and at the national level, who often view work as a threat to poor families. Yes, work is good in principle, these liberals say, but only if the effort is voluntary and cushioned with elaborate child care and other support services. The Wisconsin left simply had higher expectations of the capability they could expect from their own poor.⁶¹

Such sentiments drove Democrats to begin their own efforts to reform welfare well before Tommy Thompson became governor, when they still controlled the entire state government. In this, Loftus was a pioneer. He immersed himself in welfare as soon as he entered the Assembly in 1977. He

agreed with Irwin Garfinkel, an economist at the Institute for Research on Poverty at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, that the best way to reform welfare was to improve child support enforcement so that more single mothers could support themselves without aid. Working with Garfinkel and Democratic governors, Loftus fought to raise the level of child support awards and improve their collection, reforms that became models for similar steps at the national level. Loftus also endorsed Garfinkel’s proposal that women who were owed child support should have some minimum payment guaranteed by the state, whether the father paid or not.⁶² A plan to test a “child support assurance system” in Wisconsin was blocked by Thompson in 1987. When Loftus ran against Thompson in 1990, he proposed that this system replace traditional welfare.⁶³

In 1985, when the welfare migration issue first blew up, the legislature trimmed the usual benefit increase for AFDC from 3 to 2 percent a year and set up two special committees to study the welfare problem.⁶⁴ Already, both Earl and Loftus had the idea that a freeze or even a reduction in benefits could be justified in order to expand the work program.⁶⁵ Out of the ferment emerged the Work Experience and Job Training (WEJT) program, the most ambitious attempt to promote work in welfare yet seen. WEJT aimed to serve the employable AFDC population much more fully than earlier, federally mandated work programs, such as WIN. Enacted in 1986 and implemented in 1987 in five counties, WEJT was expanded to much of the state under Thompson. It provided enhanced funding for both training and government jobs, much as the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills (JOBS) program was to do at the national level under the Family Support Act of 1988. WEJT gave Wisconsin a crucial head start in implementing JOBS and, thus, in moving toward the more ambitious work requirements of the 1990s.⁶⁶

Due to these precedents, when Thompson advanced his reform proposals, he encountered a Democratic leadership that did not reject all change. Not only was Loftus an established innovator, but his counterpart as floor leader in the Senate, Tim Cullen, agreed to leave elective office to become Thompson’s chief welfare administrator. Cullen was indispensable in selling the Thompson program to

his Democratic colleagues.⁶⁷ His successor as Senate majority leader, Joe Strohl, invented the idea behind Two-Tier—paying incoming recipients only the benefit they would have received in their previous state if it was lower than Wisconsin’s.⁶⁸ These were not leaders afraid to grasp the political nettles of welfare reform.

Nor did Democratic innovation cease with Thompson’s election, even if it was overshadowed by him. In 1991, in response to Thompson and recent increases in the rolls, Walter Kunicki, the Speaker of the Assembly, set up a Select Committee on Welfare Review to suggest further changes. It advised a crackdown on welfare fraud in Milwaukee and recommended milder versions of Two-Tier and restrictions on general assistance than proposed by Thompson.⁶⁹ On several occasions in 1992–93, Mayor Norquist and Democratic legislators from Milwaukee proposed to replace AFDC with government jobs, a plan known variously as Wisconsin Works or the Wisconsin Jobs Connection. The proposal became a competitor to Thompson’s Work Not Welfare, differing from it mainly in having no time limit on aid.⁷⁰ And after the state decided in 1993 to sunset AFDC and replace it, Democrats set up yet another legislative panel to decide how to do that.⁷¹ In 1994, the idea of replacing cash with jobs was again pressed by Chuck Chvala, the Democratic challenger to Thompson’s reelection.⁷²

On occasion, Democrats even claimed that they were more radical reformers than Thompson. In a floor speech in 1989, Loftus asserted that “AFDC is a Republican program. It is a program that doesn’t work. It’s an administrative mess. It’s sexist, it’s anti-family, and it is Republican.” He then led Democrats in the chant, “AFDC is a Republican program.”⁷³ Since AFDC was created by Franklin Roosevelt and expanded mostly by liberal Democrats in the 1960s and 1970s, that claim would be ludicrous in most states. In Wisconsin it merely stretched the facts.

The most surprising episode occurred in 1993, when Rep. Antonio Riley, a black Democrat from Milwaukee, proposed the total abolition of AFDC. Other Democrats went along. Thompson’s bill to establish Work Not Welfare was amended to require that AFDC be replaced by some new program,

vaguely specified, by 1999. Riley did this partly to seize the initiative from the Republicans and partly because he really believed that welfare had to be totally revamped to emphasize work. His idea was abetted by Norquist and Riemer.⁷⁴ Convinced that abolition was an impractical charade, most of Thompson's advisers urged him to veto the provision. For a moment, Democrats really were out in front of their rivals. But Thompson signed the bill, gambling that he and not Democrats would control the reworking of welfare. Because he was reelected and Republicans won control of both legislative houses in the 1994 elections, it was a gamble he won.

But by this point, Democratic thinking on welfare was hardly less radical than that of Republicans. As noted above, most Democratic legislators ended up voting for W-2. Indeed, some said that it did not go far enough. Like AFDC, it covered needy families with children. Perhaps, these critics said, it ought to cover single people and childless couples as well.⁷⁵ Democrats had journeyed far from the world of entitlement.

OUTSIDE GROUPS

Another factor helping to explain the emergence of radical reform was that political forces outside elective politics did not stop it. Liberal groups lacked a veto over change, and business was unusually supportive.

In most urban states, minority leaders, advocate groups, and intellectuals are hostile to conservative welfare reform, and they often have enough influence to derail it. They may not be able to deliver many votes, but they have enough moral and intellectual authority to intimidate politicians who might want to question entitlement. It is difficult to contemplate making recipients work or stay in school in the face of community leaders or commentators who present this as immoral or ignorant, and who have the ear of the media. In a conservative national climate, these elements have lost the power they had 30

years ago to drive social policy to the left. But in most large states, they can still prevent it from moving decisively to the right. Whether even PRWORA has changed this is unclear.

Blacks

Black leaders are often presumed to be natural opponents of reform, because so many blacks rely on aid. In the Wisconsin legislature, some blacks did challenge Thompson. The most prominent were Senators Gwendolynne Moore and Gary George, Democrats representing poor areas of Milwaukee. They played the “race card” as black politicians often do elsewhere in America. Moore characterized Thompson as a “successful demagogue” who “beat up on people of color” and whose reform amounted to a “new form of slavery.”⁷⁶ George attacked Learnfare as “no different from South Africa.” To him, Two-Tier implied that “If you’re black, you don’t get fair treatment in America.”⁷⁷ As individuals, Moore and George were widely admired, according to my interviews.

Yet few other blacks or Democrats followed them. A more moderate black figure was Antonio Riley, the representative who in 1993 spearheaded the abolition of AFDC. Riley sat for the same heavily welfare-dependent Milwaukee district that Moore occupied before moving up to the Senate. But instead of defending the system, Riley declared that “Welfare is the jailer of our people.” It caused blacks to be “written off” by the rest of society. Like many white liberals, Riley assumed that work was better than welfare, even for needy one-parent families. This reflected his own life experience. He had been on welfare himself but had also worked from a young age and begun his career in private business. Like Riemer, he wanted to redesign welfare around work and to “make work pay,” if necessary using government jobs. He became impatient with Republican “tinkering” and advocated a clean break with the past. W-2, as it emerged from Thompson’s planners, was too severe for him, and he voted against the final legislation. But he still thought that “Parts of W-2 are light-years better than the old system,” and he persisted in believing that it could be improved, for example by permitting more education and training.

This stance made him, like some other Democrats, more of an ally than an opponent of Thompson.⁷⁸ More blacks supported his line than that of Moore or George.⁷⁹

Due to the weakness of black opposition, advocates defending entitlement on racial grounds did not become the voice of Milwaukee in the welfare debate, as they have in other big cities. Instead, the city was spoken for mainly by its elected leaders, most of whom, as mentioned earlier, were Democrats aggrieved by the old aid system. In short, blacks did not set themselves apart from other interests affected by reform, despite their unusual dependency on aid. They did not force the rest of the polity to treat welfare as a racial issue. That was why, other than delaying reforms in Milwaukee until late in the process, the state made no serious concessions to the minority character of welfare in urban areas.

Community Groups

Equally surprising, community organizations opposed to conservative reform had little clout. By all accounts, they had been very influential during the liberal era of welfare in the 1960s and 1970s. But they failed to stop Thompson's train. The main reason, as with blacks, was that their heart was not in it.

Opinion opposed to reform was not silent. Everyone I spoke to in Wisconsin mentioned the Welfare Warriors, a traditional welfare rights group that demanded that poor single mothers receive support as a matter of right.⁸⁰ Another such group, called Acorn, held demonstrations at welfare centers. Advocate groups spoke at hearings in the legislature to oppose reform. They held news conferences and demonstrations at the capitol. But compared to the 1960s, they drew little attention. Politicians heard them but did not obey. They were more swayed by their own, more moderate opinions and by the public's forceful voice favoring change.

Perhaps the weightiest opposition came from the Catholic Church. "Catholic social teaching holds that the poor, especially children, have a moral claim on the resources of the community," stated the Wisconsin Catholic Conference, and conditioning aid on work affronted that. Milwaukee Archbishop Rembert Weakland attacked W-2 as "a tragedy for the poor and a moral blemish on the earth's most

affluent society.” But these words from the hierarchy carried less weight than the actions of radical priests had done in 1969. Thompson, although a Catholic himself, dismissed the attack, saying Weakland should “come back to Wisconsin and read his Bible instead of playing piano in New York” (Weakland was on sabbatical finishing a doctorate in music at Columbia University).⁸¹

What undercut the opposition was that few advocates were prepared to defend entitlement. They questioned the traditional welfare rights position that poor families deserved support even if mothers did nothing to support themselves. The idea that adult recipients should have to work seemed acceptable to most of them in principle, although they wanted the terms of work—pay, support services, chances for better jobs, etc.—to be more generous than the Republicans did. Pat DeLessio, a prominent poverty lawyer, admitted that “I generally support a principle that requires people to work if it offers them a way to get training and get out of poverty.”⁸² Church groups found the issue of entitlement too sensitive to take a clear position on it. The upshot was that when the Welfare Warriors demanded that welfare mothers be guaranteed aid until their children turned 18, other community groups refused to support them; “shouting erupted,” and the Warriors were left isolated.⁸³

The groups chose to accommodate reform rather than to oppose it root and branch. They criticized details while tacitly accepting the end of entitlement. They asked, for instance, that recipients of government jobs provided under W-2 receive regular wages and the earned income tax credit, rather than just welfare; that more education and training be permitted, rather than immediate work; that time limits be less rigid if recipients made a good-faith effort to work; that child care meet higher standards; and that copayments for health and child care be limited. They also criticized the troubled implementation of SSF, PFP, and W-2 in Milwaukee, which led to the improper sanctioning of many clients.⁸⁴ The Thompson administration reached out to such groups sufficiently to give them a sense that they had been heard. Thus, like Antonio Riley and most Democrats, they became collaborators in the reform process more than adversaries.

One inducement for community groups to cooperate was that W-2 perpetuated the “welfare industry” often criticized by conservatives. Because the program demanded work rather than simply denying aid, it required that many services—child care, job placement, government jobs, etc.—be delivered to a still-large caseload. Money was to be made doing this, and some of the community groups that might have obstructed reform instead became its contractors. This included the private organizations that ended up administering W-2 in Milwaukee. In this sense, the potential opposition was coopted. Said Pat DeLessio, “You’ve got African-American agencies that bought into this program,” such as Opportunities Industrialization Center and Goodwill Industries. Said Gwendolynne Moore, “This is a plantation,” and “would-be activists are being paid to be the overseers.”⁸⁵

Academics

A final source of outside opposition was liberal intellectuals, of which the most important are poverty experts in the universities. Far more than other elites who grapple with poverty, academics tend to believe that welfare recipients are helpless victims of the larger society. Much can be done to help them, they assert, but nothing can be demanded from them, such as work, without risking harm to families and children. Virtually all academics involved in poverty research have opposed the conservative brand of welfare reform now dominant.⁸⁶

These views should have carried special weight in Wisconsin. Not only was it traditionally a liberal state, but state policymakers deferred to something called the Wisconsin Idea. This was the conception, going back to the Progressive era, that experts at the state university should collaborate with elected leaders to craft enlightened social policies. That tradition partly explains why a number of important social programs were first developed by economists in Wisconsin, and why several, including workmen’s compensation and unemployment insurance, were first enacted there.

From 1966 onwards, the nation’s principal center of academic inquiry into poverty was the Institute for Research on Poverty (IRP) at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. There a talented group

of liberal economists, among them Robert Haveman and Sheldon Danziger, developed approaches, centered on income transfers and work incentives, to overcoming need. Another IRP economist, Irwin Garfinkel, developed the ideas for child support that Tom Loftus partially instituted. The period of this child support collaboration, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, was one of the summits of the Wisconsin Idea.⁸⁷

To this genteel world of earnest expertise, Tommy Thompson's election was a rude shock. Thompson took just the approach to welfare—centering on moral issues and lifestyle—that the academics, with their antiseptic focus on economics and incentives, disparaged. Ever since then, they have belittled his achievements. They do not deny the dramatic caseload fall in the state, but, as noted above, they attributed it to Wisconsin's good economy and the decline in benefit levels rather than to Thompson's welfare experiments. They also produced analyses of the welfare problem that suggested that few recipients could work and thus that the potential for work-oriented reform was slim.⁸⁸ They would prefer an approach to reform that centered much more on assured child support and “making work pay”—wage subsidies and guaranteed child and health care.

Yet they were unable to embarrass Thompson. One explanation is that the national debate about poverty and welfare had already turned rightward. Conservative analysts such as Charles Murray and Lawrence Mead focused on the lifestyle, not the economics, of poverty. They argued that welfare was promoting nonwork and family dissolution among the poor, either by the disincentives it set up, or due to its lack of serious work requirements.⁸⁹ The Thompson reformers countered the local intelligentsia by calling on some of these outside voices. On several occasions in early 1987, Mead, who was visiting at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, made presentations favoring work requirements to legislative and welfare department audiences, often alongside Garfinkel, the IRP expert who was the most receptive to enforcement approaches.⁹⁰ This argument for coupling work requirements with welfare had some impact.

It cut more ice in liberal Wisconsin than the more radical demand by Murray simply to abolish assistance for the working-aged.⁹¹

Thompson also accepted the offer of the Hudson Institute, a moderate think tank from Indianapolis, to help him plan the redesign of welfare. The president of Hudson, Leslie Lenkowsky, was himself a recognized welfare expert and a critic of economic approaches to reform.⁹² Hudson assembled a team of experts from Washington and Wisconsin—none of them academics—and this group was chiefly responsible for the design of W-2. This outside input helps to explain why W-2 represents a fresh conception and a sharper break with AFDC than the reforms seen in other states. In a way, the Wisconsin Idea continued, but the expertise politicians relied on no longer came from the University of Wisconsin.

IRP was eclipsed for political reasons, but also because its analysis of poverty was out of date. The idea that poverty and dependency were rooted in economics or social barriers was a lot more plausible in the 1960s, when most poor adults worked, than in later decades, when poverty work levels were much lower, welfare rose, and destitution was more closely linked to behavioral problems, particularly nonwork and out-of-wedlock pregnancy. Solutions now required the use of social authority to change lifestyle, so social policy became more administrative. Work requirements in welfare were the leading instance.⁹³ That was a change that most of the IRP group could not understand or accept.

Business

Like other conservative forces, business groups oppose large-scale dependency, which they see as raising the cost of government and undercutting the quality of the labor force. But they often would prefer simply to cut back benefits and eligibility for aid. They fear that a more complicated, work-oriented reform would end up costing even more than welfare now does. This view helps explain the relatively hard-line, aid-cutting approach to reform taken, for example, by Republicans in New York State. Unfortunately, it is unacceptable to big-city liberals. Much of the paralysis of reform in the larger states results from this.

In Wisconsin, by contrast, business has been a constructive force for change. Businessmen in need of more low-skilled labor have pushed for work-oriented reform in certain key counties, including Dane and Fond du Lac.⁹⁴ At the state level, business groups did not oppose the Thompson reforms on grounds of cost, even early on before it was clear that the caseload fall would more than finance all the needed new services.

More unusually, business used its own money to finance experiments in reform, not waiting for government. The most important of these was New Hope, a job-guarantee program in Milwaukee that ran from 1992 to 1998 at a cost of over \$15 million. Funding came from several governmental and private sources. These included the Greater Milwaukee Committee, a business group in Milwaukee, and several prominent executives sat on the New Hope board. The program was liberal in that it tried to overcome both poverty and dependency by guaranteeing jobs, adequate wages, and child and health care to a sample of poor and near-poor adults. In this it reflected the thinking of David Riemer and his circle who favored guaranteed jobs. At the same time, the program was conservative in that participants could claim the new benefits only if they worked at least 30 hours a week. The program was successfully implemented and, at this writing, is still being evaluated.⁹⁵ Another business coalition took over the management of a decrepit public housing project in Dane County (Madison), providing intensified casework and job placement services.

At the very least, this progressive business stance liberated Republican lawmakers to focus on the welfare problem and on gaining agreement with the left, without fear that big-government measures would endanger their political base.

A DUTIFUL SOCIETY

The immediate causes of the Wisconsin reform appear to be the moderation of the Republicans, Democratic willingness to criticize welfare, and the disinclination of outside groups to block change.

If we seek a still deeper explanation, one factor must be the cohesive and conservative tenor of Wisconsin society. The values of Americans and their preferred lifestyle do not vary much around the country. The vast majority of people everywhere want a respectable life that observes middle-class norms of work, a sober family life, and obedience to the law. But in most urban states, it is also accepted that cities are less respectable. Efforts during the Progressive era to stamp out urban drunkenness and prostitution failed. This led to an acceptance in most states that the special disorders of the city—crime, family problems, and so forth—must be tolerated, if not endorsed.⁹⁶

In Wisconsin, however, the tolerance for urban disorder appears weaker than in other big-city states. This may be true of the entire Midwest, a region often seen as socially more conservative than the East or West coasts. The reason may be that the immigrants who first settled Wisconsin—heavily German, Polish, and Scandinavian—are particularly attached to bourgeois values. People I have interviewed throughout the state simply refuse to accept the extent of social problems they see associated with welfare. That attitude penetrates even the liberal advocate groups, which then hesitate to defend entitlement. Even in Milwaukee, social politics is conservative. As Gary George remarked, “Its German-Polish roots are still dominant. It’s not like New York.”⁹⁷

Importantly, the revulsion against welfare is shared by Wisconsin’s blacks. Because social problems are disproportionately linked with blacks nationwide, academics tend to assume that blacks are more tolerant of those disorders than other racial groups are. That is a reason why whites hesitate to reform welfare at black expense. But at least in Wisconsin, blacks are not behindhand in criticizing the old system. Antonio Riley emphasized to me that he decided to take on welfare only after black constituents of every social position told him of their strong distaste for what AFDC was doing to their community. They said this because of, and not despite, the fact that the district depended heavily on welfare. Similarly, Joe Strohl, the Democratic senator who originated Two-Tier, said that he was converted to reform after older blacks joined whites at meetings in his Racine district in complaining

about younger blacks moving in from Chicago and going on welfare. “It’s okay for me now to talk about welfare,” Strohl concluded, “because my black constituents say the same thing as others”⁹⁸ This hostility to traditional aid extends even to blacks who work in the social service system, who might be expected to defend it.⁹⁹

A PROGRESSIVE HERITAGE

A second background force behind the welfare settlement is the Progressive history of Wisconsin politics. Progressivism was a movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that aspired to cleanse politics of corruption and base policymaking on reason. The movement was supported by middle-class and professional people who disliked urban machine politics, often based on immigrant voters, and wanted to take public administration “out of politics.” Progressivism was a national force, inspiring early federal efforts to regulate industrialism and, at the state level, electoral primaries and other reforms that weakened party control over nominations and elections.

Progressivism had a particularly strong influence on Wisconsin. Up through the 1880s, the state’s politics was dominated by a Republican party suspicious of government and moralistic groups of reformers, known as mugwumps, who wanted to clean up cities and politics, but on an elitist basis that did not draw wide support. Politics was factionalized among various business, labor, and ethnic groups. But in the course of the 1893–97 depression and its aftermath, broader-based demands for public action against entrenched economic interests arose. The new attitude was that Wisconsinites should work together to solve common problems through politics, setting aside their suspicions of each other and government itself. Government was to directly serve “the people,” whom it appealed to over the heads of all intervening interests. This was the sentiment that Robert M. La Follette molded into a electoral crusade on the state and then the national scene.¹⁰⁰

Several legacies resulted, all of them favorable for the state's recent ability to transform welfare. First, the state developed a government of unusual capabilities. Progressivism led not only to clean-politics laws like primaries and the secret ballot but an early development of a civil service and a progressive income tax. Public service became revered, drawing capable people into administrative careers. The regime came to embody "a level of expectation in terms of honesty, competence, humane motivation, and service that is a cut or two above the average among the states."¹⁰¹ And this competence was especially displayed in tackling social and economic problems. The state became a laboratory for new social programs aimed at the insecurities of employment, as mentioned earlier. Later, in the postwar era, black migration led to racial problems such as school segregation. Policymakers tackled these also with confidence, because "the people of Wisconsin had come to believe in the power of legislation and in the idea that good laws enforced by honest and vigorous public servants could resolve virtually any problem involving discrimination and the exploitation of one group by another."¹⁰² Later, that same confidence, equally oblivious to race, would be applied to welfare reform.

A second consequence was that the party system in Wisconsin became oriented to policy issues rather than conventional partisanship. After World War II, Progressivism as a party splintered in Wisconsin, and its remnants joined both of the regular parties. A conventional two-party system of Democrats opposing Republicans reemerged.¹⁰³ But both parties were permanently stamped by the progovernment yet antipartisan spirit of the Progressives. Tom Loftus claimed proudly to be the scion of "die-hard supporters of . . . La Follette and the Progressive movement." That made him an "outspoken liberal," but at the same time, as Speaker, he was careful to include conservatives as part of his policymaking team.¹⁰⁴

Tommy Thompson, the former "Dr. No," also claimed to be a Progressive. He did criticize the original Progressives for being too hostile to business and for overemphasizing "government responsibility" at the expense of "individual responsibility." His own populism was directed more against

the federal government, which in his view unduly constrained what the states could do with money from Washington.¹⁰⁵ But he kept the Progressive commitment to solving common problems through government. Unlike many federal Republicans, he did not attack government as such. “I am not an ‘anti-government’ conservative” or an “ideologue,” he declared. Rather, he governed by “common sense,” seeking solutions that work and can be explained to people. His “belief in proactive state government” came of “growing up in a state where . . . Progressive values are unspoken.”¹⁰⁶

That meant, especially, that Thompson kept Wisconsin’s signature commitment to an ambitious social policy. He did not question that government should do many things for the poor. Merely, there was a need for “redirecting our compassion.” “We were requiring more of welfare recipients, but we were also being more generous,” he reasoned. “I am a conservative,” he declared, but not in the antigovernment manner of Edmund Burke, Friedrich Hayek, or the Heritage Foundation. He was willing to “confront the labels” that said that Republicans could not have social concerns.¹⁰⁷ Hence his calm acceptance of the big-government dimensions of W-2.

Compared to parties in most other states, Wisconsin’s political parties are not oriented to organization. They make little attempt to control who enters them; nominations for office are abandoned to the primary system. The parties are coalitions of able self-starters who get into office on their own, chiefly because they are interested in policy problems. Issues are taken seriously in their own right, not only as means of garnering influence.¹⁰⁸

Parties still matter in Wisconsin. The parties are careerist, highly competitive, and often vote in the legislature on party lines. The close division of power in the legislature encourages this. Indeed, the parties are among the most closely matched in the country, a fact that also promotes a liberal social policy. At the same time, they are not deeply divided in their beliefs or in the coalitions who support them.¹⁰⁹ Thus, the parties compete sharply for power, but they also can work together once the elections are over. The attitude is “live and let live,” Tony Earl said, not “kill or be killed.” Another leader

remarked, “We do everything in Wisconsin by bipartisan committee.” The most dramatic expression of this trust was the willingness of Democrats to sunset AFDC in 1993 even though they knew that Thompson would likely design the replacement. Collaboration between business and government is also “part of our Progressive tradition,” Thompson wrote; “we share a commitment to an idea that state government can and should work.”¹¹⁰

The parties focus as much on problem-solving as on partisan maneuver. The welfare battle generated rivalry, but the larger impulse was to find a true solution to the welfare dilemma. In tackling that problem, Tom Loftus, whom one associate called a “policy wonk,” announced that he was “after the next generation, not the next election.”¹¹¹ Both parties engaged in serious inquiry, and did not impose preformed solutions. Most notably, Democratic policymakers did not armor themselves against the hostile feedback they received about welfare, even though it was anathema to their liberal convictions. They took it on board. They threw up their hands and admitted that the conservative reformers had a case. So they accepted the need for change. That willingness to face reality was critical to Wisconsin’s bipartisan yet radical reform.¹¹²

The absence of deeply entrenched partisan positions on policy was essential to tackling welfare, because the problem crosscuts the normal partisan divide. Democrats tend to argue for more government, Republicans for less, but successful welfare reform instead requires changing the character of government. It must change from a mere benefit system to one in which support is coupled with functioning requirements. That requires Republicans to accept a larger government, and Democrats a more demanding one, than they do normally. Only a close focus on the problem, rather than on partisanship, could have led Wisconsin policymakers to their paternalist outcome.

A third legacy was a political culture committed, as the Progressives wished, to collective action in the general interest. In a famous analysis, Daniel Elazar identified three strands in American political culture, one or another dominant in each state. The “individualistic” culture, characteristic of the mid-

Atlantic region, conceives politics mainly in market terms as a way of distributing material advantages to individuals and interests. This approach tolerates a politics oriented to economic subsidy and payoffs to politicians and their supporters. The “traditionalistic” culture, dominant in the South, allows government only a limited role in a social order oriented to the maintenance of racial and class hierarchy. Wisconsin, rather, represents the “moralistic” culture of New England, the upper Midwest, and parts of the West, where government is seen as “a positive instrument” for the pursuit of the “general welfare.” In that tradition, benefits for narrow interests are suspect. Policy is supposed to be based on a general rationale that leaders sell to an intelligent and undifferentiated public.¹¹³

The combination of this moralistic political culture with conservative social values powerfully equipped Wisconsin for welfare reform. Most states with an ambitious governmental tradition, for example New York, are too divided socially and too tolerant of big-city social evils to be leaders of reform.¹¹⁴ Conversely, most states with a cohesive culture, as in the South, confine their governments to a limited role. They may implement social programs offered by Washington, but they do not originate them. In Wisconsin, however, society is conservative, yet government is ambitious. *Both* the society and government are strong. Such a state will *want* to enforce values in welfare, such as work, *and* it will have the governmental enterprise to do this.

That strange combination helps explain why, to an outsider, the state can seem like a chameleon, liberal and conservative at the same time. Wisconsin is above average among the states in the liberalism of both public opinion and state policy.¹¹⁵ It is also a state with a strong union tradition that once elected a Socialist to Congress. Yet it also sent Joe McCarthy to the U.S. Senate and voted for George Wallace in presidential primaries. Such a state could switch in a decade from one of the most indulgent welfare systems in America to the most demanding.

THE TIMING OF REFORM

A final question concerns the timing of reform.¹¹⁶ Most of the factors that predisposed Wisconsin to change welfare were long-term. Why did that urge erupt in the mid-1980s, rather than some other time? The trigger was probably not events outside the state. Serious questioning of welfare did arise in national politics before it did in Wisconsin, in the 1970s and early 1980s. But federal reforms through the late 1980s were still very tentative. A serious effort to end entitlement and enforce work did not appear until the Family Support Act of 1988 and above all PRWORA in 1996. This was well after the onset of serious change in Wisconsin.

One trigger internal to the state probably was cost. By the 1980s, the rapid growth in welfare produced fiscal strain. Along with health costs, welfare dominated the state budget, while HSS had become the largest public agency in the state. Wisconsin was losing jobs. To Tommy Thompson's eye, the problem was that welfare recipients were coming to Wisconsin while workers were leaving. Thus, one of his promises when he first ran for governor in 1986 was to cut taxes and spending.¹¹⁷ On the other hand, as noted already, Thompson's reform did not center on cuts but on shifting spending from income maintenance to work programs. He often said reform would cost more money rather than less, although the caseload fall did in fact save money. Thompson did economize on government, but mainly by squeezing and reorganizing other agencies, not welfare.¹¹⁸

A better argument is that the failures of welfare itself triggered reform. Not only the migration issue but the inability of good economic conditions to reduce dependency signaled to politicians and voters alike that something was wrong. Welfare was failing in its mission to help people while returning them to self-sufficiency. To use John Kingdon's theory of the agenda, this agreed sense of a problem then joined with a political opportunity, in the form of Thompson's election, and with a plausible policy alternative, in the form of work programs, to create a "policy window." That juncture explains why, in the formative period of 1985 to 1987, policy shifted so sharply away from benefit increases and toward

work enforcement. Alternatively, one can, following Baumgartner and Jones, speak of the slow decay of the welfare policy subsystem. The generous system that liberals and advocates had built up in the 1960s and 1970s came under increasing challenge, until finally critics and politicians of all stripes turned on it. Then a monolith that had seemed unassailable crumbled in only a few years.¹¹⁹

In the end, the old welfare was simply unacceptable to a society and a government deeply committed to functioning well. It was an insult to Wisconsin's cohesive social order, and even more to its masterful regime. Both parties felt this. They reacted not by retreat, but by crafting and launching a still more ambitious welfare system.

Endnotes

¹Lawrence M. Mead, “Public Policy: Vision, Potential, Limits,” *Policy Currents* (newsletter of the Public Policy Section of the APSA), February 1997: 1–4; Lawrence M. Mead, “Policy Studies and Political Science,” *Policy Studies Review* 5, no. 2 (November 1985): 319–335.

²Lawrence M. Mead, *Beyond Entitlement: The Social Obligations of Citizenship* (New York: Free Press, 1986); Lawrence M. Mead, *The New Politics of Poverty: The Nonworking Poor in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1992).

³The paper is part of a book-length study of the Wisconsin reform that also includes extensive analysis of the implementation of work policies.

⁴See, for example, Donald F. Norris and Lyke Thompson, eds., *The Politics of Welfare Reform* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1995); Marcia K. Meyers, Bonnie Glaser, and Karin MacDonald, “On the Front Lines of Welfare Delivery: Are Workers Implementing Policy Reforms?” *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 17, no. 1 (Winter 1998): 1–22.

⁵Lawrence M. Mead, “Optimizing JOBS: Evaluation versus Administration,” *Public Administration Review* 57, no. 2 (March/April 1997): 113–123; Lawrence M. Mead, “The Decline of Welfare in Wisconsin” (Milwaukee: Wisconsin Policy Research Institute, March 1996).

⁶For a fuller defense of this position, see Lawrence M. Mead, “Welfare Employment,” in *The New Paternalism: Supervisory Approaches to Poverty*, edited by Lawrence M. Mead (Washington, DC: Brookings, 1997), chapter 2.

⁷Figures are from the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development. This is much the same department that, during most of the reform period, was called Health and Social Services.

⁸U.S. General Accounting Office, *Welfare Reform: States Are Restructuring Programs to Reduce Welfare Dependence* (Washington, DC: U.S. General Accounting Office, June 1998), chapter 4; Michele Derus, “Making the Bus Means Making a Living on W-2,” *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, June 28, 1998.

⁹Calculated from state welfare caseload data in U.S. Congress, House Committee on Ways and Means, *Green Book—Background Material and Data on Programs within the Jurisdiction of the Committee on Ways and Means*, various years.

¹⁰Jason DeParle, “Success and Frustration, as Welfare Rules Change,” *New York Times*, December 30, 1997, pp. A1, A16.

¹¹L. Jerome Gallagher et al., *One Year after Federal Welfare Reform: A Description of State Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Decisions as of October 1997* (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, June 1998).

¹²Pamela A. Holcomb et al., *Building an Employment Focused Welfare System: Work First and Other Work-Oriented Strategies in Five States* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, June 1998), p. 77.

¹³Thomas J. Corbett, “Welfare Reform in Wisconsin: The Rhetoric and the Reality,” in *The Politics of Welfare Reform*, edited by Donald F. Norris and Lyke Thompson (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage,

1995), p. 47; Michael Wiseman, “State Strategies for Welfare Reform: The Wisconsin Story,” *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 15, no. 4 (Fall 1996): 523–524; John Pawasarat and Lois M. Quinn, “Wisconsin Welfare Employment Experiments: An Evaluation of the WEJT and CWEP Programs” (Milwaukee: University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, Employment and Training Institute, September 1993).

¹⁴Mead, “Decline of Welfare,” pp. 14–22. Later versions of this paper have sustained this finding.

¹⁵Wisconsin Department of Health and Social Services, *JOBS Annual Report* (Madison: Department of Health and Social Services, December 1994), p. 46; U.S. Congress, House Committee on Ways and Means, *1998 Green Book—Background Material and Data on Programs within the Jurisdiction of the Committee on Ways and Means* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, May 19, 1998), p. 441. The Green Book does not report data for 1993.

¹⁶Paul A. Jargowsky, *Poverty and Place: Ghettos, Barrios, and the American City* (New York: Russell Sage, 1996). pp. 49–57.

¹⁷Polls by the Wisconsin Policy Research Institute, summarized in the *Milwaukee Journal*, January 19, 1988; *Milwaukee Sentinel*, January 28, 1992; and *Milwaukee Sentinel*, August 30, 1994.

¹⁸Steve Farkas and Jean Johnson, with Will Friedman and Ali Bers, *The Values We Live By: What Americans Want from Welfare Reform* (New York: Public Agenda Foundation, 1996). For summaries of earlier polls and studies, see Mead, *Beyond Entitlement*, pp. 233–240, and Mead, *New Politics of Poverty*, pp. 57–63.

¹⁹Mead, *New Paternalism*, chapters 1–2.

²⁰Mead, *Beyond Entitlement*, chapters 8–9; Steven M. Teles, *Whose Welfare? AFDC and Elite Politics* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1996).

²¹Despite its prominence, the Wisconsin reform has generated only a small secondary literature. I have relied on Corbett, “Welfare Reform in Wisconsin”; Wiseman, “State Strategies”; John Pawasarat and Lois M. Quinn, “Wisconsin Welfare Employment Experiments”; and Paul E. Peterson and Mark C. Rom, *Welfare Magnets: A New Case for a National Standard* (Washington, DC: Brookings, 1990), chapter 2.

An important source, especially for bureaucratic policymaking, is Cyril Ignatius Kendrick, “The Roots of Welfare Reform: The Social Forces Underlying the Wisconsin Learnfare Program,” Ph.D. dissertation (Blacksburg, VA: Virginia Polytechnic Institute, Department of Sociology, March 1993). I have also drawn upon the memoirs of two of the main players: Tommy G. Thompson, *Power to the People: An American State at Work* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), and Tom Loftus, *The Art of Legislative Politics* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly, 1994).

I also had a research assistant review the state’s major newspapers and summarize stories about welfare reform from 1985 through 1997, and I reviewed reports written for the legislature by the state Legislative Fiscal Bureau about budget issues related to welfare over this same period.

²²Gary King, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).

²³U.S. Congress, House Committee on Ways and Means, *Background Material and Data on Programs within the Jurisdiction of the Committee on Ways and Means: 1988 Edition* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, March 24, 1988), pp. 406–407.

²⁴Mead, “Decline of Welfare,” pp. 14–23.

²⁵I estimate that the state saved over \$68 million on welfare reform between 1987–88 and 1993–94, and this was before the dramatic recent caseload fall triggered by diversion. See Mead, “Decline of Welfare,” pp. 27–29.

²⁶Democrats controlled the state Senate from 1975 to 1993 and the state Assembly from 1971 to 1995. See Wisconsin Legislative Reference Bureau, *State of Wisconsin: 1997–1998 Blue Book* (Madison: Wisconsin Legislature, Joint Committee on Legislative Organization, 1997), p. 256.

²⁷Dave Daley, “Prosser Says He Saw Fraud Cases Firsthand,” *Milwaukee Journal*, January 6, 1992, part B, p. 7.

²⁸Welfare Migration Study Committee, *The Migration Impact of Wisconsin’s AFDC Benefit Levels: A Report to the Wisconsin Expenditure Commission by the Welfare Migration Study Committee* (Madison: Wisconsin Expenditure Commission, December 1986). For a review of studies through 1992, see David E. Umhoefer and Celeste Williams, “Data, Emotions Cloud ‘Welfare Magnet’ Issue,” *Milwaukee Journal*, January 5, 1992, part A, p. 1.

²⁹Interview with Linda Reivitz, Madison, WI, June 13, 1997. Reivitz was Secretary of the Department of Health and Social Services, in charge of welfare, under Governor Tony Earl.

³⁰Interview with Gerald Whitburn, Tomahawk, WI, March 15, 1998; interview with Rep. John Gard, Madison, WI, March 17, 1998. Gard chaired the committee on welfare reform that pushed W-2 through the Assembly.

³¹For example, Dave Daley, “State Cuts Bold Path on Welfare,” *Milwaukee Journal*, July 17, 1994, pp. A1, A17; Norman Atkins, “Tommy Thompson: Governor Get-A-Job,” *New York Times Magazine*, January 15, 1995, pp. 22–25.

³²Amy Rinard, “Some Democrats May Embrace Thompson Welfare Reform Plans,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, December 23, 1991, part 1, p. 12.

³³Interviews with Tony Earl and Peter Tropman, both in Madison, WI, June 12, 1997. Tropman was Administrator of the Division of Policy and Budget at the Department of Health and Social Services under Earl.

³⁴“Speaker, Governor Split on Welfare Reform,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, January 8, 1988, part 1, p. 11.

³⁵Thompson, *Power to the People*, pp. 54, 75.

³⁶Joel Dresang, “Workforce Chief, Agencies Protest Late W-2 Changes,” *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, July 8, 1997, part B, p. 5; Steven Walters, “Governor’s Vetoes Remold State Budget,” *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, October 12, 1997, part A, p. 1.

³⁷Kendrick, “Roots of Welfare Reform,” pp. 194–198; “Governor’s Commission Backs Welfare Changes,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, April 2, 1987, part 1, p. 11.

³⁸Amy Rinard, “Welfare Reform Backed by Majority,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, September 10, 1993, part 1, p. 9; Stephen Walters and Amy Rinard, “Assembly OKs Plan to End Welfare in ’99,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, October 27, 1993, part 1, p. 1; Amy Rinard and Stephen Walters, “Work Not Welfare Goes to Governor,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, October 29, 1993, part 1, p. 1.

³⁹Amy Rinard, “W-2 Rolls through Assembly,” *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, March 8, 1996, part A, p. 1; Amy Rinard, “Senate Passes W-2 Plan,” *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, March 14, 1996, part A, p. 1.

⁴⁰Interview with Rep. Barbara Notestein, Madison, WI, March 17, 1998.

⁴¹Interview with former Sen. Joseph Andrea, Kenosha, WI, June 11, 1997. Andrea sat for Kenosha in the Assembly and Senate from 1977 to 1997.

⁴²Earl interview.

⁴³Tropman interview.

⁴⁴In a series of well-argued papers, the Wisconsin Policy Research Institute, an arm of the conservative Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation, recommended a reform based on voluntarism and nongovernmental organizations. See, for instance, David Dodenhoff, “Privatizing Welfare in Wisconsin: Ending Administrative Entitlements—W-2’s Untold Story” (Thiensville, WI: Wisconsin Policy Research Institute, January 1998). Bradley is a large public policy foundation that is conservatively inclined and headquartered in Milwaukee.

⁴⁵Thompson, *Power to the People*, pp. 43–44, 49.

⁴⁶Whitburn interview.

⁴⁷Joel Dresang, “Budget Plan Boosts W-2 Subsidies,” *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, February 13, 1997, part A, p. 15; Richard P. Jones, “Budget Breezes through Senate,” *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, September 26, 1997, part A, p. 1.

⁴⁸One occasion arose in 1993, when John Gard and other GOP legislators expressed fear that the proposed replacement of AFDC with a work program would only expand the cost of aid. But later, Gard accepted the higher cost of W-2. See Dave Daley, “‘Ending’ Welfare Will Cost More, GOP Legislators Say,” *Milwaukee Journal*, December 2, 1993, part B, p. 1; Daniel Bice, “W-2 Costs to Exceed Current Program,” *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, November 28, 1995, part B, p. 1.

⁴⁹Dave Daley, “Learnfare Costs \$10.2 Million, Moore Says,” *Milwaukee Journal*, June 2, 1994, part B, p. 5; Meg Jones, “Democrats to Ask Governor to Shut Down Learnfare,” *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, June 3, 1996, part B, p. 1.

⁵⁰Statement at meeting of the Subcommittee on Business, Welfare Reform, and the Low-Wage Labor Market, Committee for Economic Development, Milwaukee, WI, March 23, 1998.

⁵¹Kendrick, “Roots of Welfare Reform,” pp. 230–234. Thompson later admitted that it had been a mistake to implement Learnfare immediately statewide; see *Power to the People*, pp. 49–50.

⁵²Earl interview.

⁵³Interview with former Rep. Dismas Becker, Madison, WI, June 13, 1997. Becker was a disillusioned liberal who became leader of the Assembly in 1985–86. Long before that, in 1969, he had been one of the radical priests who led demonstrations against the Republican benefit cuts.

⁵⁴Andrea interview.

⁵⁵Craig Gilbert, “Workfare Isn’t the Final Word,” *Milwaukee Journal*, May 18, 1987, pp. 1A, 11A; “Program Called Mean-Spirited,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, April 18, 1990, part 2, p. 6.

⁵⁶I heard Loftus do this at a meeting of the Thompson Welfare Reform Commission on April 1, 1987, when I was visiting at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. He repeatedly pressed liberal economists from the Institute for Research on Poverty to tell him how anything they proposed would overcome the problem of out-of-wedlock pregnancy among the poor.

⁵⁷Eldon Knoche, “Thompson Would Create Jobs for Welfare Recipients,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, December 8, 1986, part 1, p. 1; Gretchen Schuldt, “Welfare Overhaul, Health Plans Linked,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, July 28, 1993, part 1, p. 9.

⁵⁸Mary Beth Murphy, “Norquist Says Thompson’s Welfare Plan Falls Short,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, September 16, 1993, part 1, p. 7; “Mayor, 9 to 5 Urge Clinton to Block W-2,” *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, May 22, 1996, part A, p. 12.

⁵⁹David R. Riemer, *The Prisoners of Welfare: Liberating America’s Poor from Unemployment and Low Wages* (New York: Praeger, 1988); Philip Harvey, *Securing the Right to Employment: Social Welfare Policy and the Unemployed in the United States* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989); Mickey Kaus, *The End of Equality* (New York: Basic Books, 1992).

⁶⁰Richard Bradee, “Reivitz Calls Some Welfare Rules ‘Insane’,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, June 4, 1986, part 1, p. 1; Tropman interview.

⁶¹The competence to be assumed of the poor is a key dimension of antipoverty politics and policymaking. The higher the competence assumed, the more demanding policies tend to be. See Mead, *New Politics of Poverty*.

⁶²For Garfinkel’s thinking, see Irwin Garfinkel, *Assuring Child Support: An Extension of Social Security* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1992).

⁶³Loftus, *Art of Legislative Politics*, chapter 8; Craig Gilbert, “Loftus: The Man and His Stance on Key Issues,” *Milwaukee Journal*, July 15, 1990, part A, p. 14.

⁶⁴These were a Select Committee on Work Incentives in the Assembly and a Legislative Council Study Committee, the latter a joint body drawing members from both legislative houses and the public.

⁶⁵Charles E. Friederich, “Earl May Try to Freeze Welfare,” *Milwaukee Journal*, September 28, 1986, part A, p. 1.

⁶⁶Wiseman, "State Strategies for Welfare Reform," pp. 518–519, 529–531.

⁶⁷Kendrick, "Roots of Welfare Reform," pp. 186–187, 198–199, 216.

⁶⁸"Strohl Pushes AFDC Limit for Families Moving to State," *Milwaukee Journal*, July 31, 1986, part A, p. 14; Charles E. Friederich, "Welfare Plan Aims to Curb Migration," *Milwaukee Journal*, January 5, 1989, part A, p. 1.

⁶⁹Dave Daley, "Committee to Study Welfare Alternatives," *Milwaukee Journal*, November 1, 1991, part A, p. 10; Amy Rinard, "Panel Backs Welfare Reform to Aid in Arrests," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, March 6, 1992, part 1, p. 4; "Welfare Compromise Gets Support from Bipartisan Legislative Panel," *Milwaukee Journal*, March 12, 1992, part A, p. 15.

⁷⁰Amy Rinard, "Legislator Cites Welfare Migration," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, February 27, 1992, part 1, p. 13; Amy Rinard, "Democrats Dust off Welfare Plan," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, May 29, 1993, part 1, p. 10; Dave Daley, "Democrats Tout Own Welfare Plan over Governor's," *Milwaukee Journal*, October 17, 1993, part B, p. 5.

⁷¹Dave Daley, "Democrats Ask for Welfare Reform That Avoids Bashing of Recipients," *Milwaukee Journal*, June 22, 1994, part A, p. 12.

⁷²Steve Schultze, "Chvala Offers a Wider Plan to Scrap Welfare," *Milwaukee Journal*, August 22, 1994, part A, p. 1.

⁷³Steve Schultze, "Loftus Turns up Heat on Thompson," *Milwaukee Journal*, October 22, 1989, part A, p. 22.

⁷⁴Interview with Rep. Antonio Riley, Milwaukee, WI, March 16, 1998; Jason DeParle, "Getting Opal Caples to Work," *New York Times Magazine*, August 24, 1997, p. 35.

⁷⁵Amy Rinard, "Welfare Plan Puts All to Work," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, August 4, 1995, part A, p. 1.

⁷⁶Norman Atkins, "Tommy Thompson," p. 24; Steven Walters, "Senate OKs Aid Cutoff Experiment," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, October 22, 1993, part 1, p. 1; Amy Rinard, "'W-2' Welfare Reform Proposal Called 'Return to Slavery'," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, August 13, 1995, part B, p. 5.

⁷⁷Steven Walters, "Panel Rejects Learnfare Expansion," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, May 22, 1991, part 1, p. 1; Dave Daley, "Assembly Approves 2-Tier Welfare Checks," *Milwaukee Journal*, March 24, 1992, part A, p. 1.

⁷⁸Marc Cooper, "Overthrowing the Welfare State," *Village Voice*, May 31, 1994, p. 33; Antonio Riley, "From a Central City Legislator: Why I Said No," *Milwaukee Journal*, February 27, 1994, part J, p. 1; Riley interview.

⁷⁹According to my interview with Riley, five of six black representatives in the Assembly voted for his proposal to abolish AFDC, while both black senators (George and Moore) opposed it.

⁸⁰I interviewed the Warriors myself in Milwaukee on March 16, 1998. Pat Gowens, the leader of the group, wore a T-shirt proclaiming that "Every Mother Is a Working Mother." She announced that she

had agreed to speak to me despite the fact that, as a proponent of work-oriented reform, I was guilty of “violence” against poor mothers.

⁸¹Steven Walters, “Catholic Group Wants W-2 Changes,” *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, May 15, 1996, part B, p. 5; Frank Aukofer, “Weakland Opposes W-2 Program,” *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, July 5, 1996, part A, p. 1; Richard P. Jones, “Governor Demands Apology from Weakland,” *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, July 9, 1996, part A, p. 1.

⁸²Interview with Pat DeLessio, a staff attorney for Legal Action of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, WI, March 16, 1998.

⁸³Interview with Marcus White, Associate Director, Interfaith Conference of Greater Milwaukee, Milwaukee, WI, March 16, 1998. The Interfaith Conference represents various churches and synagogues in Milwaukee. According to another account I heard, at one meeting called to consider the Warriors’ demand, the view that welfare mothers should be paid to stay home was treated as “ridiculous” by other liberal groups and voted down, 14–1.

⁸⁴DeLessio and White interviews; Amy Rinard, “Welfare Reform Changes Sought,” *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, December 21, 1995, part B, p. 5; Fran Bauer, “Legislature Told to Go Slow on W-2,” *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, December 29, 1995, part B, p. 1.

⁸⁵Bruce Murphy, “The Myth of Welfare Reform,” *Milwaukee Magazine*, May 1994, p. 118; interviews with DeLessio and Moore; interview with Sen. Gary George, Madison, WI, March 19, 1998. Another, more conspiratorial theory suggested by George, Moore, and Pat Gowens of the Welfare Warriors was that opposition had been suppressed due to pressure from the mainstream media, big business, and the Bradley Foundation.

⁸⁶Lawrence M. Mead, “Conflicting Worlds of Welfare Reform,” *First Things*, no. 75 (August/September 1997): 15–17.

⁸⁷Garfinkel, *Assuring Child Support*, pp. vii–xii; Loftus, *Art of Legislative Politics*, chapter 8.

⁸⁸One example is Maria Cancian and Daniel R. Meyer, “IRP Special Report: A Profile of the AFDC Caseload in Wisconsin: Implications for a Work-Based Welfare Reform Strategy” (University of Wisconsin–Madison, Institute for Research on Poverty, September 1995). Funded by liberal foundations through the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families, this study argues that the more the caseload falls, the more it is “composed of individuals who face barriers to full-time work.”

⁸⁹Charles Murray, *Losing Ground: American Social Policy, 1950–1980* (New York: Basic Books, 1984); Mead, *Beyond Entitlement*.

⁹⁰The Garfinkel vision for child support involved tougher payment demands on absent parents, but only incentives (not requirements) to work for the single mothers receiving the payments.

⁹¹Corbett, “Welfare Reform in Wisconsin,” p. 34; Kendrick, “Roots of Welfare Reform,” pp. 157–158, 160–161, 190–191, 204–205. I was only dimly aware of this influence at the time.

⁹²Leslie Lenkowsky, *Politics, Economics, and Welfare Reform: The Failure of the Negative Income Tax in Britain and the United States* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1986).

⁹³Lawrence M. Mead, "Welfare Policy: The Administrative Frontier," *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 15, no. 4 (Fall 1996): 587–600.

⁹⁴In the book (see footnote 3), I plan to have a chapter on local-level reform, stressing the pioneering efforts of Kenosha, the inventor of Work First.

⁹⁵Thomas Brock, Fred Doolittle, Veronica Fellerath, and Michael Wiseman, *Creating New Hope: Implementation of a Program to Reduce Poverty and Reform Welfare* (New York: Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, October 1997).

⁹⁶Paul Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820–1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978).

⁹⁷George interview.

⁹⁸Riley interview; interview with former Sen. Joseph Strohl, Madison, WI, June 12, 1997.

⁹⁹When I interviewed welfare and JOBS employees in Wisconsin in 1994, several who happened to be black made unsolicited speeches to me about how the dysfunction they observed in the ghetto was morally unacceptable, and something had to be done about it. Similar staff I have interviewed in New York and other states have not done this.

¹⁰⁰David P. Thelan, *The New Citizenship: Origins of Progressivism in Wisconsin, 1885–1900* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1972); Robert C. Nesbit, *Wisconsin: A History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1973), chapters 22–27.

¹⁰¹Nesbit, *Wisconsin*, p. 532.

¹⁰²William F. Thompson, *The History of Wisconsin: Continuity and Change, 1940–1965* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1988), p. 336.

¹⁰³Leon D. Epstein, *Politics in Wisconsin* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1958), chapters 3–4, 7–8.

¹⁰⁴Loftus, *Art of Legislative Politics*, pp. 4, 55, 59–60.

¹⁰⁵Thompson, *Power to the People*, pp. 27–28, 155–156.

¹⁰⁶Thompson, *Power to the People*, pp. 6–8, 200.

¹⁰⁷Thompson, *Power to the People*, pp. 42, 62–63, 203.

¹⁰⁸Epstein, *Politics in Wisconsin*, chapters 2, 5; David R. Mayhew, *Placing Parties in American Politics: Organization, Electoral Setting, and Governmental Activity in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986); Peterson and Rom, *Welfare Magnets*, pp. 44–46. When I spoke to the Republican caucus of the Wisconsin Assembly in 1987 and in 1998, I was struck at how issue-oriented the discussion was, compared to discussions in comparable bodies I have observed in other states.

¹⁰⁹One reason for the overlap of party appeals is that, in selecting candidates, the state uses open primaries. Voters of either party may vote in the primary of the other, and this tends to promote moderate candidates. See John F. Bibby and Thomas M. Holbrook, "Parties and Elections," in *Politics in the American States: A Comparative Analysis*, 6th ed., edited by Virginia Gray and Herbert Jacob (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1996), pp. 99–109.

¹¹⁰Strohl interview; Thompson, *Power to the People*, p. 122.

¹¹¹Strohl interview; "Unimpassioned Look at Aiding Poor Vowed," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, September 19, 1986, part 2, p. 10.

¹¹²This rueful willingness to face the facts was particularly notable in the interviews with Becker, Notestein, and Reivitz.

¹¹³Daniel J. Elazar, "The States and the Political Setting," in *Policy Analysis in Political Science*, edited by Ira Sharkansky (Chicago: Markham, 1970), pp. 171–185. According to Virginia Gray, "The Socioeconomic and Political Context of States," in *Politics in the American States*, edited by Gray and Jacob, pp. 25–28, other scholars have confirmed the Elazar analysis.

¹¹⁴New York has gotten serious about reform only in the last 3 years. Not by accident, the current reform team at the New York City welfare department was imported from Wisconsin.

¹¹⁵Gray, "Socioeconomic and Political Context," pp. 28–29.

¹¹⁶For much of the following, I am indebted to my research assistant, David Dodenhoff.

¹¹⁷Wilder Crane and A. Clark Hagensick, *Wisconsin Government and Politics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin–Extension, Institute for Governmental Affairs, 1976), chapter 11; Peterson and Rom, *Welfare Magnets*, pp. 32–38, 47–49; Thompson, *Power to the People*, pp. 38–39.

¹¹⁸Thompson, *Power to the People*, chapter 9.

¹¹⁹John W. Kingdon, *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policy* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1984); Frank R. Baumgartner and Bryan D. Jones, *Agendas and Instability in American Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).