

Social Experimentation in the Face of Formidable Fables

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The ways to prevent poverty are well known to us all. Allow every baby a chance to be born wanted, raised in good health, educated to full capacity, accepted upon individual merit, welcomed to a range of job choices according to capacity and interest, paid a good wage, insured at adequate levels against the economic hazards of the industrial economy, and assured a comfortable house in a supportive neighborhood, and opportunities for cultural enrichment, participation in the decisions affecting his own life, and survival into a respected and secure old age. In this age, these are not utopian goals. — Senator Fred Harris, 1970

Once upon a time there was a Little Red Hen who scratched about and uncovered some grains of wheat. She called her barnyard neighbors and said, "If we work together and plant this wheat, we will have some fine bread to eat. Who will help me plant the wheat?" "Not I," said the Cow. "Not I," said the Duck. "Guaranteed annual bread," said the Goose. "Then I will," said the Little Red Hen—and she did . . . She baked five loaves of fine bread and held them up for her neighbors to see. "I want some," said the Cow. "I want some," said the Duck. "I want some," said the Pig. "I demand my share," said the Goose. When the Farmer came to investigate the commotion he said, "You must not be greedy, Little Red Hen. Look at the oppressed Cow. Look at the underprivileged Pig. Look at the less fortunate Goose. You are guilty of making second class citizens of them . . . In other barnyards you would have to give all five loaves to the Farmer. Here you give four loaves to your suffering neighbors." And they lived happily ever after, including the Little Red Hen, who smiled and smiled and clucked "I am grateful, I am grateful." But her neighbors wondered why she never baked any more bread. — Merle Lofgren, 1970, *Corson County* (So. Dakota) *News*

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From the sober perspective of the 1980s, when grandiose spending schemes are few and budget deficits many, the pervasive confidence of the 1960s in the government's ability to cure social ills seems distant. But when the nation was enjoying an unprecedented level of affluence in the 1960s, no social goal was unattainable, at least in the minds of the social welfare specialists who made the pilgrimage to Washington during the Kennedy years. Professional expertise could be wedded to the bountiful American economy to erase the anomaly of the richest society in the world—the persistence of poverty. Nevertheless, the main manifestation of efforts to diminish poverty, the Family Assistance Plan, failed to win passage in Congress, and the New Jersey Graduated Work Incentive Experiment, designed to test the labor supply response, was part of that losing effort. The Family Assistance Plan was ultimately rejected, however, not because something was wrong with the research experiments that claimed to support it but because it failed to achieve the integration of political perspectives that would have made these claims acceptable.¹

Setting the Stage: Policies in Search of Constituencies

"There was no 'demand' (in the interest group sense) for a war on poverty," writes Lawrence Friedman.² Rather, the "demand" came from the supply side, from the scholars who studied poverty and the bureaucrats who would conduct the battles. Self-interest was merged with social interest, in what Moynihan calls the "professionalization of reform."³ The time appeared ripe for the rapid enactment of the Great Society poverty agenda. Even in a heady era of government expansion, however, the idea of a guaranteed income⁴ was too extreme for a liberal President to embrace: "It will hurt its chances of ever being passed if it's connected with me," President Johnson warned.⁵

Proposals for a negative income tax appeared in the academic literature⁶ and within the U. S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare bureaucracy, gaining support from policy elites but generating little enthusiasm among politicians or the public. According to Robert Levine, the negative income tax "was not regarded as a serious proposal that could be enacted in less than a decade."⁷ But interest in direct payments to the poor increased as disappointment with the training and service programs of the Great Society grew. For many liberals, the direct income transfer was just another strategy for bringing the fruits of affluence to the poor. Job training, housing, money—each program was a step toward liberating the individual from the shackles of impoverish-

ment. "A psychology of scarcity produces anxiety, envy, egotism, (but) a psychology of abundance," which the guaranteed income would help achieve, according to Erich Fromm, "produces initiative, faith in life, solidarity."⁸ For others, particularly economists, it was the market individualism of the income strategy that made it attractive.

The strongest and most consistent support for the negative income tax has come from economists. In May 1968, 1200 economists signed a petition in support of a negative income tax.⁹ "It gives help in the form most useful to the individual, namely, cash," wrote Milton Friedman, and "It makes explicit the costs borne by society."¹⁰ Liberal and conservative economists could agree that the negative income tax, which would provide universal, nationally uniform cash payments, would increase efficiency by reducing administrative costs and allowing individuals to pursue their own preferences. "The curse of the poor is literally their poverty. Give them more money," urged Paul Samuelson, "and not only they but their progeny can break through the vicious circle."¹¹ Guaranteed income was seen as a technically superior mechanism; a simple, efficient, visible transfer would replace a myriad of complex programs with their hidden costs. The devotion of economists to cost minimization through less bureaucratic procedures appears to have overridden the political implications of making it so easy to distribute welfare payments.

The negative income tax is an ideological hybrid, ill-fitted to common conceptions of liberalism or conservatism. Should conservatives oppose guaranteed income plans because they reward those who are irresponsible and indolent, or favor them because they allow poor individuals to pursue their own preferences free from government direction? Should liberals support income guarantees because they ease the misery of the unfortunate, or oppose them because they perpetuate inequality? The struggle over the guaranteed income can be described as a clash between three political cultures: hierarchy, libertarianism, and egalitarianism. These cultures are composed of people who share values justifying the social relations they deem desirable.

Hierarchs believe they have a social obligation to provide for the poor and that the poor cannot be trusted to look after their own interests. They will support paternalistic social policies, such as providing food, clothing and moral guidance to the needy. Egalitarians find paternalism offensive because it implies that some are wiser and should have more power than others. They will support poverty policies that seek to redistribute income and resources. Libertarian individualists believe it is the responsibility of each person to escape poverty and that the government should not tell anyone how to do it.

The Nixon Plan and the Welfare Establishment

Richard Nixon came to office seeking to show that a Republican could put together a domestic reform package that would meet the nation's social goals without overburdening the economy. He created an Urban Affairs Council, bringing in specialists in welfare policy who included several Democrats with experience in previous administrations, most prominently Daniel Patrick Moynihan. For policy proposals and data, the most available sources were bureaucrats within the Office of Economic Opportunity and the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. The hibernation of the negative income tax plans during the Johnson years was coming to an end. "The welfare reform plan that had been brusquely dismissed by President Johnson was hauled out and dusted off," according to Martin Anderson. "The plan was rewritten, numbers were updated, and a few new ideas were added."¹²

Persuaded by Moynihan, Nixon reached into the welfare policy network and pulled out the Family Assistance Plan, which he presented to the public in a televised address on August 8, 1969. The Plan would have provided a minimum guaranteed annual income (subject to work requirements of debatable enforceability) of \$1600 to every family in America; it also reduced benefits by 50 percent of earned income until the break-even point of \$4000. Over the next 40 months, the Plan rose and died and rose again, as a series of bills won support in the House but wasted away in the Senate.

The Family Assistance Plan essentially was an attempt to provide enough enticement to each of the three political cultures to win their support, or at least to weaken their opposition. The Plan would extend benefits to millions of new recipients and establish a guaranteed income, which was supposed to please egalitarians. Limiting the plan to families would weaken egalitarian support but would be necessary to gain hierarchical backing by making it possible to argue that the Plan would strengthen a traditional institution—the family. Hierarchs would object to letting the poor control their own expenditures through direct payments, but this was necessary to entice individualists, who could support a program that would reduce government interference with the autonomy of poor people.

One might expect the Plan to have been supported by welfare workers and recipients. But this was not so. The criticisms from the welfare profession and welfare rights groups were that the guaranteed income was too low, was not universal, and was tied to work requirements. *Social Work*, the journal of the National Association of Social Workers, was filled with condemnations of welfare, and particularly the Family Assistance Plan, as a tool for the repression of poor people: "The welfare system . . . has . . . been used by society as an instrument to

deny dignity to the soul. [Its features] contribute to totalitarian domination of the poor by those in power."¹³

Critics focused on the requirements that welfare recipients be available for suitable work or job training, or risk a reduction in their families' benefits, saying that the Plan would mean "compulsory work or starvation for mothers of school-age children."¹⁴ Exceptions were to be made for mothers of young children, and child care and job training were to be provided. But the attempts to prepare recipients to be self-supporting were condemned as hoaxes: giving training to blacks on welfare would raise their aspirations, yet racial discrimination would prevent them from finding jobs. Ultimately, according to William Taylor, approval of Nixon's plan would be "social dynamite," causing a new wave of riots in the cities: the Plan "will . . . produce a new group of individuals who feel relatively deprived, frustrated, and angry enough to be susceptible to civil disorder and strife."¹⁵

Social welfare thinkers called for recognition of a national right to at least poverty-level subsistence for all individuals; they resented any suggestion that those who chose not to work were somehow inferior or should have their benefits reduced. "A person who does not work," complained Miriam Dinerman, "is virtually a nonperson."¹⁶ "An individual should be able to claim maintenance as a legal right," George Hoshino argued, "unconditioned by the judgments of another person about his behavior."¹⁷ The Nixon income plan, while aiding millions of new recipients, was seen as perpetuating too many of the evils of the welfare system to deserve support from the welfare establishment.

The years of the major congressional battles over guaranteed income plans, 1969-72, coincided with the zenith of the National Welfare Rights Organization (NWRO). The group was founded in 1966 under the direction of George Wiley, a former university chemist who resigned his faculty position to work directly for what he considered the rights of poor people. He was influenced by Richard Cloward and Frances Fox Piven, who then (they have since changed their views somewhat) conceived of welfare as a form of state oppression: the poor got a pittance in return for legitimizing the very institutional arrangements that kept them poor. Advocating a militant strategy of poor people demanding all the payments they were entitled to under aid to families with dependent children (AFDC), they argued this would overload the system and cause its collapse and replacement by a universal guaranteed income. A grassroots network was set up aimed at recruiting recipients of AFDC, the largest welfare program. In order to strengthen the organization, the National Welfare Rights Organization provided assistance not to the poor in general, but only to dues-paying members:

Only members were provided with forms and assistance to obtain the special grants from the welfare department. As long as this information and assistance remained an exclusive payoff for members only—a “private good”—the NWRO membership and number of affiliate WRO groups multiplied. When these monetary incentives disappeared, or became widely available, the membership dropped almost as fast as it had risen.¹⁸

The special provisions embodied in welfare law were essential to the National Welfare Rights Organization because these made it worthwhile for clients to make special demands. Income maintenance would abolish or narrow special provisions.

The Family Assistance Plan would directly benefit the poor in states, mostly in the South, that provided payments below the minimum national level (originally \$1600, later raised to \$2400), but most National Welfare Rights Organization members lived in northern states that already had higher benefit levels. It would extend benefits to the working poor, who were also not represented in Organization membership. The Family Assistance Plan was in the best interests of the majority of the poor, according to Moynihan, but, “like the early trade unionists, the NWRO represented the aristocracy of welfare recipients.”¹⁹

The Public View: A Different Definition of Poverty

In a Gallup poll conducted shortly after Nixon’s August 1969 speech, 65 percent of respondents said they had a favorable opinion of the Family Assistance Plan, while only 20 percent said their opinion was unfavorable (table 1). The White House received over 2700 responses to the speech, characterizing 81 percent as favorable and only 9 percent as opposed. Media reaction was also positive; a Health, Education, and Welfare Department survey of newspaper editorials concluded 95 percent were favorable, and called newspapers in the 25 largest metropolitan areas “enthusiastic” about the plan.

A very different understanding of public attitudes, one that would predict opposition to any guaranteed income plan, emerges when respondents are asked to evaluate specific approaches to reducing poverty. Opposition to a guaranteed income, even for families, was strong and consistent (table 1). A Gallup poll in September 1965 found 67 percent opposed, 19 percent in favor. In May 1968, 58 percent were opposed, 36 percent in favor. The guaranteed income was opposed by every income group except those with incomes under \$3000, who favored it by 3 percentage points, an insignificant margin. A December 1968 Gallup poll reported 32 percent favoring a guaranteed income and 62 percent opposed. Every income group was opposed.

Table 1
Public Opinion on Guaranteed Income Plans

In general, would you say you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of Nixon's new welfare proposals? (Gallup: August 1969)

Favorable	65%
Unfavorable	20
No opinion	15

It has been proposed that instead of relief and welfare payments, the government should guarantee every family a minimum annual income. Do you favor or oppose this idea? (Gallup: September 1965)

Favor	19%
Oppose	67
No opinion	14

As you may know, there is talk about giving every family an income of at least \$3200 a year, which would be the amount for a family of four. If the family earns less than this, the government would make up the difference. Would you favor or oppose such a plan? (Gallup: May 1968)

Total:		Income over \$10,000:		Income under \$3000:	
Favor	36%	Favor	26%	Favor	48%
Oppose	58	Oppose	68	Oppose	45
No opinion	6	No opinion	6	No opinion	7

Identical question (Gallup: December 1968)

Total:		Income over \$10,000:		Income under \$3000:	
Favor	32%	Favor	24%	Favor	43%
Oppose	62	Oppose	72	Oppose	44
No opinion	6	No opinion	4	No opinion	13

Opinions about welfare proposals shifted dramatically when the subject was guaranteeing or requiring jobs (which seem to have a similar meaning in the public's mind), not income (table 2). In 1964, 84 percent of the public agreed that men on relief who are physically able should be required to take any job offered that paid the going wage; support was identical among the lowest income group. According to a May 1968 Gallup poll, 78 percent of the public favored guaranteeing jobs to a wage earner in each family; support was very consistent, ranging from 75 percent among middle income recipients to 86 percent among blacks. A December 1968 poll yielded virtually identical results. In each case, a guaranteed income plan providing \$3200 to a family of four was strongly opposed, yet a guaranteed jobs program providing the same income received wide support.

Table 2
Public Opinion on Work for the Poor

Here are some plans that have been suggested about the handling of relief. Will you tell me what you think about each one for this area? All men on relief who are physically able to work must take any job offered which pays the going wage. Would you favor or oppose this plan for this area? (Gallup: November 1964)

Total:		Lowest Income Group	
Favor	84%	Favor	85%
Oppose	11	Oppose	7
No opinion	5	No opinion	8

If men on relief, who are physically able to work, cannot find jobs, then they must work for the city on streets, parks, and the like. Would you favor or oppose this plan for this area? (Gallup: November 1964)

Total:		Lowest Income Group	
Favor	82%	Favor	79%
Oppose	12	Oppose	11
No opinion	6	No opinion	10

Another proposal (other than the guaranteed income) is to guarantee enough work so that each family that has an employable wage earner would be guaranteed enough work each week to give him a wage of about \$60 a week or \$3200 a year. Would you favor or oppose such a plan? (Gallup: May 1968)

Total:		Income over \$10,000:		Income under \$3000:	
Favor	78%	Favor	77%	Favor	83%
Oppose	18	Oppose	20	Oppose	16
No opinion	4	No opinion	3	No opinion	1

Identical question (Gallup: December 1968)

Total:		Income over \$10,000:		Income under \$3000:	
Favor	79%	Favor	76%	Favor	77%
Oppose	16	Oppose	22	Oppose	11
No opinion	5	No opinion	2	No opinion	12

The provision of goods and services in lieu of money was also supported by the public (table 3). In November 1964, 73 percent of respondents to a Gallup poll favored reducing the money given to persons on relief and giving them food and clothing instead; support was high even among the lowest income group. A 1969 poll found 68 percent of the public in favor of giving food stamps to families with earnings below \$20 per week; agreement was strong within all income groups and regions.

Table 3
Public Opinion on Food and Clothing for the Poor

Some communities provide food and clothing to persons on relief, reducing the amount of money given to them. How do you feel about this? Do you think that it is a good idea or a poor idea? (Gallup: November 1964)

Total:		Lowest Income Group:	
Good idea	73%	Good idea	65%
Poor idea	19	Poor idea	25
No opinion	8	No opinion	10

A United States senator has proposed that the Government give free food stamps to all families whose earnings are under twenty dollars a week. Do you favor or oppose such a proposal? (Gallup: April 1969)

Total:		Income over \$10,000:		Income under \$3000:	
Favor	68%	Favor	67%	Favor	76%
Oppose	25	Oppose	27	Oppose	17
No opinion	7	No opinion	6	No opinion	7

Would you favor or oppose giving food stamps at a greatly reduced rate to those whose earnings are twenty to sixty dollars a week? (Gallup: April 1969)

Favor	60%
Oppose	31
No opinion	9

The public shared with policy elites a concern for the poor and a belief that the government should do something to alleviate poverty. Important aspects of the negative income tax received public support: that a minimum for poor families should be guaranteed by government, and that the working poor should receive benefits. But the mass public opposed a guaranteed income, preferring instead to guarantee, and require, work. "Not many Americans outside the antipoverty community," writes Hugh Heclo, "seemed to accept the concept of a right to income as such but only to the necessities income might buy."²⁰ Representative Landrum voiced this sentiment when he complained, "The priorities of this bill [the Family Assistance Plan] are wrong. They are: cash, first; food, second; and work, third. I believe there should be a reversal in priorities: work, first; food, second; and cash, last."²¹ This partly explains why there was to be a food stamp program but not an income maintenance program.

Members of the public prefer a different solution—jobs, not money—because they have a different definition of the problem. If

poverty is the lack of money, then the provision of money should end poverty. But if poverty is the lack of a job, and the discipline and self-respect that go with it, then transferring money may only gloss over the poverty problem. Martin Anderson puts it bluntly when he writes:

The provision of an adequate income may eliminate poverty in the official sense, but it does not guarantee that those who receive welfare will spend that income in a manner that also eliminates the characteristics that many people associate with poverty . . . If they personally value nice cars, good liquor, and gambling, they may not have much money left for housing, clothing and food.²²

Poverty, for the public, is not only a lack of resources but also a problem of behavior.

The public's attitude toward poverty is that giving money to those who cannot handle it is futile. Better to follow a paternalistic policy of giving the poor what is good for them—such as food and clothing—and requiring and guaranteeing work, which will give them the moral character to be self-reliant. Then (and only then) should they receive the reward—the freedom to spend their earnings as they please. Rewards should flow from taking advantage of opportunities, not from getting rewards in order to seek opportunities.

The public, then, had an ambivalent attitude toward the reforms embodied in the Family Assistance Plan. They supported the President's determination to "clean up the welfare mess," but distrusted transfer payment programs for the poor. The Family Assistance Plan that failed was no more antithetical to the general public than was tax reform at a time when majorities thought dealing with the deficit was more important. In each case it was political elites, not the public, who took the lead; it is to their activities that we now turn.

The Battle in Congress: Clash of the Fables

Guaranteed income plans, such as the Family Assistance Plan, were caught between two opposing cultural myths: One, that the ways to end poverty, in the words of Senator Harris, "are well known to us all," and thus any plan that does not provide for the immediate lifting of every individual out of poverty is inadequate. In this egalitarian view, the costs of an aggressive program to the social values or economic resources of the society are inconsequential, or cannot ethically be considered. The opposing myth, as captured in the tale of the Little Red Hen, is that any assistance to the poor that is not strongly tied to individual work effort will destroy the moral fabric and bankrupt the society.

When Cavala and Wildavsky asked members of Congress about the

guaranteed income prior to Nixon's proposals, they found widespread, automatic support among "safe-seat" liberals. "They knew only that guaranteed income was a liberal issue and that they were liberals; ergo, their support was automatic . . . There was little concern with the moral or even the knotty technical issues involved in guaranteed income."²³ Liberal support was sufficiently strong in the House to aid passage of Nixon's guaranteed income plan, but in the Senate the coalition came unraveled.

The guaranteed income plans died in part because liberals, encouraged by the Administration's portrayal, began believing their exaggerated rhetoric about the inadequacy of the Nixon proposal. In each house, liberals proposed more egalitarian alternatives to the Family Assistance Plan that would broaden coverage to include all individuals and greatly raise the minimum floor. "Minimal financial security should be a right of citizenship," asserted Senator George McGovern, who promoted a Human Security Plan that would guarantee jobs and income to all. Representative William Ryan introduced the Income Maintenance Act, a more generous plan based on an Office of Economic Opportunity draft, and also cosponsored the National Living Income Program, an outline of which had been drafted by the economist James Tobin. But the Nixon strategy of downplaying the egalitarian nature of the welfare reform proposals carried over into some of the congressional alternatives. The sponsors of the National Living Income Program discovered that "the President's plan appears to be limited to families with children."²⁴ There was "no justification for such discrimination," according to Representative Goodell.²⁵ Their own plan, which emphasized that payments would go only to families (a buzzword pleasing to hierarchists), decreed in the fine print that a family shall consist of "at least one claimant." If only aid to families was politically feasible, then family would have to be redefined so that none would be excluded.

Family stood for something more than a legal definition of people living together or related to one another. Family symbolized social order. Its children stood for the deserving poor, the dependent people who could not be expected to work until society helped them to help themselves. The sacrificial ethic of the hierarchical collective, in which the better off help the worst off, just as officers go first in battle, made welfare into a matter of mutual obligation, the one to give in good grace, the other to receive in gratitude, saying metaphorically that it is a good system that takes care of its own. Eliminate family and you wipe out Moynihan's carefully crafted effort to blunt the usual attacks on welfare (the good us versus the feckless them) through an integrative solution. For if Americans were all part of the same family, they were just helping themselves.

Statements by Moynihan, Patricelli and others that the welfare

reform plans were major steps toward a universal guaranteed income may have failed to impress egalitarians, but they did not go unnoticed by individualists. The Family Assistance Plan was condemned by Representative John Rarick, who quoted a column in the *Economic Council Letter* calling the guaranteed income a "scheme for legal plunder on a scale without precedent in all history."²⁶ For those who claimed the guaranteed income would extend the legacy of the New Deal, *The Wall Street Journal* quoted the wisdom of Franklin Roosevelt, who proclaimed in his 1935 State of the Union address that "To dole out relief is to administer a narcotic, a subtle destroyer of the human spirit."²⁷

The two camps also made different empirical assertions. Neither side seemed terribly concerned about marshaling evidence to support its arguments. Liberals took it as a matter of faith that the guaranteed income would not do significant harm to the economy; to question that would be to criticize the character of the poor. Conservatives believed that only work, not money, could end poverty. "If you cut your own wood," the philosophy of the conservative legislators went, "it warms you twice."²⁸

The integrative solution embodied in the Family Assistance Plan—family support for conservatives,²⁹ extension of benefits for libertarians, and reduced bureaucracy and greater autonomy for liberals—failed because adherents of these ideologies were not persuaded there was enough in the Plan for them.

The Income Maintenance Experiments: Policy Analysis as Political Ammunition

Social scientists often cringe when they see how their research is distorted, if it is noticed at all, in the political arena. Once empirical studies are disseminated, political expediency may overwhelm the search for truth, or so the common wisdom goes. "Policymakers, while not totally subjective and nonrational, will use whatever data are at hand to support their case," writes Ernest Stromsdorfer. "Canons of evidence are not ignored but are selectively applied."³⁰ In assessing the use of analyses of Great Society programs, Henry Aaron concludes that "Evaluation was a political instrument to be trotted out when it supported one's objectives or undercut one's opponents, and to be suppressed, if possible, when it opposed one's objectives or strengthened one's opponents."³¹

What started as an experiment intended by the Office of Economic Opportunity to strengthen the case for a guaranteed income several years in the future soon became of immediate political relevance when

Nixon proposed welfare reform along the lines of the New Jersey experiment. Positive findings would have to appear early if they were to aid passage of the bill. "Well before [the experiment] was completed," recalls Moynihan, "a President had embraced its principles and hoped-for conclusions . . . Inevitably, there arose a conflict between the methodological demands of social science and the political needs of Congress and the Administration, and perhaps just as inevitably, the latter won out."³² Officials "broke into" the data and produced their "preliminary" findings in February 1970.

"There is no evidence that work effort declined among those receiving income support payments," the Office of Economic Opportunity report concluded. "On the contrary, there is an indication that the work effort of participants receiving payments increased relative to the work effort of those not receiving payments."³³ These findings ran counter to the predictions of economic theory that income supplements would encourage people to work less, but were welcome news to those supporting the bill.

Officials later backpedaled a bit, but the initial findings were cited repeatedly by politicians and economists who supported the negative income tax. A 1971 report on the New Jersey experiment again concluded that work effort is "undiminished by negative tax transfers."³⁴ Andrew Brimmer, an economist and member of the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, told an audience in June 1971 that "There is well-founded evidence [e.g., the results of the New Jersey Graduated Work Incentive Experiment] showing that poor people prefer to work—even when they receive an income supplement."³⁵ Moderates and liberals in Congress used the findings to support guaranteed income plans. A universal income floor would yield "great economic benefits [and] create incentives [to work. The New Jersey experiment] shows this very clearly," Senator Harris claimed.³⁶ When asked on the House floor whether the Family Assistance Plan would create incentives to work, Ways and Means Committee Chairman Wilbur Mills replied that, as regards New Jersey, "their final report will indicate the success of that experiment."³⁷ References to the experimental results in the congressional hearings and floor debates are few; by and large, the negative income tax experiment was ignored, but, when it was cited, the misleading preliminary findings received the most attention.

After the Government Accounting Office criticized its preliminary findings, the Office of Economic Opportunity backed away from the shaky claim that the income guarantee actually increased work effort.³⁸ Now officials asserted that the most reasonable conclusion from New Jersey was that work effort did decrease but not by much. "We have not picked up any precipitous decline in work effort. That is the major crux of our findings," John Wilson, assistant director of the Office of

Economic Opportunity, reported to the Senate Finance Committee. He emphasized the positive by claiming that "low-income people are strongly work motivated," basing that assertion not on behavioral evidence, but on an opinion survey of recipients.³⁹ The New Jersey results, William Morrill of Health, Education, and Welfare concluded:

. . . clearly indicate that a negative tax type plan . . . will not trigger *large* scale reductions in work effort . . . only *minor* cost implications should be expected . . . Offsetting these would be the potential for substantially reducing income poverty, increasing the command of the poor over material goods and services, and enhancing their freedom to choose among economic options (emphasis added).⁴⁰

The New Jersey team apparently followed the advice that if you cannot win, declare victory. They had found evidence that income guarantees could decrease, not increase, work effort; hence they concluded that "the burden of proof would now appear to be on those who assert that income maintenance programs for intact families will have very large effects on labor supply."⁴¹ According to those sharing this view, the battle for the negative income tax was nearly won: "Public opposition to coverage of all intact families by an income-related cash-transfer program . . . should decrease," claimed Michael Barth, Larry Orr and John Palmer. "The case for a work test . . . is weakened."⁴²

Ultimately, the New Jersey experiment had little to do with the political fortunes of the Family Assistance Plan. But the Office of Economic Opportunity cannot be faulted for lack of trying. In its hands, through creative interpretation of results, the negative income tax experiment was partially molded into arguments for the proponents. But it was still a policy experiment, with ambiguous and undramatic results, hardly equal to the task of overcoming fundamental cultural disputes, the gulf between the egalitarian nirvana of Senator Harris and the libertarian lesson of the Red Hen fable.

The Modest Role of Experimentation

Policy research has been criticized as being an impediment to reform. Henry Aaron says that analysis is "profoundly conservative," strengthening opposition to change by pointing out the imperfections in any reform proposal. David Greenberg and Philip Robins claim that "The probability of enactment [of proposals such as the guaranteed income] was reduced as a direct consequence of experimentally testing them."⁴³ This conclusion is easy to reach if one believes the policies advocated are innately good and would be supported by the public if they properly understood them. When enlightened policies backed by

the President and key members of Congress fail, a sinister force must be at work, and the misuse of policy analysis by the opponents of change becomes a convenient scapegoat.

If the only choices are to maintain the status quo or completely transform the society, then perhaps experimentation would have a conservative role. But this is hardly the usual picture; more often policy research has a moderating influence, showing us that a change in policy would neither be as beneficial as some might hope nor as harmful as others might fear. This, indeed, is the legacy of the income maintenance experiments. They showed that there would be work reductions, but of modest proportions; they also demonstrated that it was practical to administer the program. The consequences of the experiments were conservative only in light of inflated promises: that the income maintenance plans were not guaranteed incomes, would increase work effort, and would reduce the burden on taxpayers. No amount of research could credibly support these claims.

The guaranteed income proposals failed not because policy research had a conservative effect, but because they were orphaned by the welfare establishment and its egalitarian supporters. Caught between conflicting demands, the Family Assistance Plan was seen as not giving enough to each to secure passage. This insufficiency was a consequence of the legislation itself and the expectations of the times; failure cannot be blamed on the experiments. "Research, no matter how relevant and competent," Michael Barth and his coauthors remind us, "cannot tell us what national policy ought to be."⁴⁴

Far from preceding policy, data are inextricably intertwined with the theories on which public policies are based. In formulating policy, therefore, there is no unalterable need to get the numbers straight before doing anything else. On the contrary, it is the policy one has in mind that determines which data, accurate to what degree, are relevant.⁴⁵

Scientists acknowledge the "objectivity" of results by certifying among themselves the integrity of the process, not by direct apprehension of the facts. Appeal to the facts to resolve disputes is possible only when there is prior consensus, both as to the implicit conceptual framework (the language of discourse) and the rules of resolution. And this consensus was lacking at the time of the New Jersey negative income tax experiment.

Why did this integrative approach, blessed with an integrative name—family assistance—and an integrative argument—use market methods to secure equity and social order—fail in garnering sufficient support? The Family Assistance Plan died not because the demise of welfare reform was inevitable but because in those days the elites who spoke for egalitarianism would not go along. In their eyes, reform was certainly too little, perhaps too late. Everyone had to be made better off.

No means test was permissible. Nothing could be left for tomorrow. The existing system was so rotten that only the most radical change was tolerable. They demanded far greater expenditure so that all welfare recipients would immediately receive substantially more, while denigrating the considerable change that could be accomplished, thus casting a pall over income maintenance before it was defeated.

Yet facets of the negative income tax have been incorporated into poverty policy. Although the proposal of a guaranteed income for families died, a guaranteed income for the needy aged, blind and disabled was enacted (Supplemental Security Income). A universal income was rejected, yet a far-reaching food stamp program was adopted. These alternatives succeeded because they were perceived as more integrative solutions: SSI provided aid to a group that even libertarians might concede merited special assistance; food stamps pleased hierarchists by supporting an important institution—the farm—while providing for a basic need—food for the unfortunate.

What could have happened, we ask, in the spirit of counterfactual history, if the Family Assistance Plan, like the 1986 tax reform legislation, had been accepted by egalitarians as a basis for negotiation rather than rejected as inherently flawed? The morale of the sponsors would have received a tremendous boost. The prospects of gaining credit for an historical change, rather than taking the blame for the failures of welfare, might have engendered a broader appeal. As long as the presumed beneficiaries thought it good for them, the prospects for social peace, dear to the hearts of hierarchs, and for self-reliance, as individualists desired, might have appeared brighter.

Had the Family Assistance Plan passed, the New Jersey negative income tax experiment might have been hailed as a visionary social experiment, policy research at its best, providing it was practical to implement a novel social solution. But its success would have been due far more to facilitating political circumstances that allowed for ideological compromise than to any consequences of experimentation.

The role of the income maintenance experiments in the political battles over the Family Assistance Plan paled in comparison with the vigorous ideological clashes. "Rarely, if ever," Burke and Burke tell us in their authoritative book, "has a proposal met with such misinformed but energetic attack."⁴⁶ Income maintenance challenged fundamental beliefs about the good life—how to live it, who is obligated to whom for what—and it was on this ground that the battle was fought. Experimentation may point the way toward specific policy solutions once there is sufficient consensus to make broad support possible, but research cannot replace the dialogue among supporters of different ways of life. Were research a substitute for mutual persuasion, there would be no democracy, no pluralism, and, in the end, no decent research.

¹See also Dennis J. Coyle and Aaron Wildavsky, "Requisites of Radical Reform: Income Maintenance Versus Tax Preferences," *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, May 1987.

²Lawrence M. Friedman, "The Social and Political Context of the War on Poverty: An Overview," in Robert H. Haveman, ed., *A Decade of Federal Antipoverty Programs*, New York: Academic Press, 1977, p. 35.

³Daniel Patrick Moynihan, "The Professionalization of Reform," *The Public Interest*, Summer 1965, p. 6.

⁴We will use the terms guaranteed income and negative income tax interchangeably as forms of income maintenance, to describe programs that would provide a minimum income for eligible recipients.

⁵Robert Harris, Review of Henry J. Aaron, *Politics and the Professors: The Great Society in Perspective in Knowledge*, 2 (1981), p. 455.

⁶Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*, Univ. of Chicago Press, 1962; Robert Theobald, ed., *The Guaranteed Income: Next Step in Economic Evolution?*, Garden City, N.J.: Doubleday, 1965; James Tobin, "Improving the Economic Status of the Negro," *Daedalus*, Fall 1965, p. 878; James Tobin, "The Case for an Income Guarantee," *The Public Interest*, Summer 1966, p. 37; C. Green and R. J. Lampman, "Schemes for Transferring Income to the Poor," *Industrial Relations*, 6 (February 1967), p. 121; and Joseph Pechman, James Tobin, and Peter Mieszkowski, "Is a Negative Income Tax Practical?" *Yale Law Journal*, 77 (1967), p. 1.

⁷Robert A. Levine, "How and Why the Experiment Came About," in Joseph A. Pechman and P. Michael Timpone, eds., *Work Incentives and Income Guarantees: The New Jersey Negative Income Tax Experiment*, Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1975.

⁸Erich Fromm, "The Psychological Aspects of the Guaranteed Income," in Theobald, *The Guaranteed Income*, p. 176.

⁹*Congressional Record*, August 4, 1969, p. 22187.

¹⁰Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*, p. 192.

¹¹*Congressional Record*, August 4, 1969, p. 22188. (This in the days before the spectacle of suddenly oil-rich countries raised doubt whether the difference between rich and poor was mostly money.)

¹²Martin Anderson, *Welfare: The Political Economy of Welfare Reform in the United States*, Stanford, Calif.: Hoover Institution Press, 1978, p. 8.

¹³Betty Mandell, "Welfare and Totalitarianism," *Social Welfare*, 16 (January 1971), p. 17.

¹⁴Alfred J. Kahn, "Guaranteed Protestant Ethic," *Social Work*, 15 (January 1970), p. 3.

¹⁵William H. Taylor, "Unintended Consequences of the Nixon Welfare Plan," *Social Work*, 15 (October 1970), p. 15.

¹⁶Miriam Dinerman, "Mr. Harris and the Elephant Game," *Social Work*, 15 (January 1970), p. 114.

¹⁷George Hoshino, "A Conceptual Analysis of the Nixon Welfare Proposal," *Social Casework*, 51 (March 1970) p. 157.

¹⁸Guida West, *The National Welfare Rights Movement: The Social Protest of Poor Women*, New York: Praeger, 1981, p. 312.

¹⁹Daniel P. Moynihan, *The Politics of a Guaranteed Income: The Nixon Administration and the Family Assistance Plan*, New York: Random House, 1973, p. 334.

²⁰Hugh Hecló, "The Political Foundations of Antipoverty Policy," in Sheldon Danziger and Daniel Weinberg, eds., *Fighting Poverty: What Works?* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1986, p. 326.

²¹*Congressional Record*, March 24, 1970, p. 9107.

²²Anderson, *Welfare*, p. 34.

²³Bill Cavala and Aaron Wildavsky, "The Political Feasibility of Income by Right," *Public Policy*, 18 (Spring 1970), p. 321.

²⁴*Congressional Record*, September 12, 1969, p. 23396.

²⁵*Congressional Record*, March 31, 1970, p. 9841.

²⁶*Congressional Record*, April 27, 1970, p. 13328.

²⁷*Congressional Record*, January 30, 1969, p. 2288.

²⁸Cavala and Wildavsky, "Political Feasibility of Income by Right."

²⁹This argument would be weakened several years later by evidence from income maintenance experiments in Seattle and Denver that transfer payments increased family breakup, but by then the Family Assistance Plan was long gone.

³⁰Ernest W. Stromsdorfer, "Social Science Analysis and the Formulation of Public Policy," in Jerry A. Hausman and David A. Wise, eds., *Social Experimentation*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985, p. 258.

³¹Henry J. Aaron, *Politics and the Professors: Studies in Social Economics*, Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1978, p. 32.

³²Moynihan, *Politics of a Guaranteed Income*, p. 191.

³³*Congressional Record*, December 31, 1970, p. 44505.

³⁴David Elesh, Jack Ladinsky, Myron J. Lefcovitz and Seymour Spilerman, "The New Jersey-Pennsylvania Experiment: A Field Study in Negative Taxation," in Larry L. Orr, Robinson G. Hollister and Myron J. Lefcovitz, eds., *Income Maintenance: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Research*, Chicago: Markham, 1971, p. 29.

³⁵Moynihan, *Politics of a Guaranteed Income*, p. 344.

³⁶*Congressional Record*, February 10, 1970, p. 3112.

³⁷*Congressional Record*, April 15, 1970, p. 11885.

³⁸The methodology on which that claim was based has been the subject of considerable criticism, and the findings were contradicted by those of the more carefully designed Seattle-Denver income maintenance experiments. See Philip K. Robins and Richard W. West, "Labor-Supply Response Over Time," *Journal of Human Resources*, 15 (1980), p. 541.

³⁹Finance Committee, Senate, Hearings on H.R. 16311, 1970, p. 914.

⁴⁰William A. Morrill, "Introduction," Symposium on Graduated Work Incentives, *Journal of Human Resources*, 9 (1974), p. 156.

⁴¹Albert Rees and Harold W. Watts, "An Overview of the Labor Supply Results," in Joseph A. Pechman and P. Michael Timpane, eds., *Work Incentives and Income Guarantees*, p. 87.

⁴²Michael C. Barth, Larry L. Orr, and John L. Palmer, "Policy Implications: A Positive View," in *Ibid.*, p. 207.

⁴³David H. Greenberg and Philip K. Robins, "The Changing Role of Social Experiments in Policy Analysis," *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 5 (1986), p. 345.

⁴⁴Barth et al., "Policy Implications," p. 207.

⁴⁵See Ellen Tenenbaum and Aaron Wildavsky, *The Politics of Mistrust*, Sage Publications, 1981.

⁴⁶Vincent J. Burke and Vee Burke, *Nixon's Good Deed: Welfare Reform*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1974, p. 132.

Discussion

*Hugh Hecló**

The Coyle/Wildavsky paper asks why an effort to radically reform the welfare system should have failed. Their answer is derived from a tripartite view of American political culture. Essentially, the egalitarians were unwilling to accept half a loaf.

First point. It is not clear why it is so necessary to rev up cultural theory and overheat the word processor to explain the fate of welfare reform in 1969-70. We can expect that it will be difficult to persuade Americans (elite or mass) about the merits of a plan for transferring some of their money to an easily despised fraction of the population.

Second point. Taking the premises of the analysis, the conclusion of the paper is not only self-evident but preordained. Given that America is composed of three cultures; given that radical change is defined as a major alteration in relative power; it follows that radical reform will require the consent of the three cultural blocs. Q.E.D. Of course this country has shown it is possible to obtain radical change by playing two against one. But that is not called reform. It is called civil war. Working with the Coyle/Wildavsky formulation, we can only wonder why historians have spent so much time debating the causes of the Civil War and missed the fact that it was the egalitarians (Abolitionists) and individualists (Northern capitalists) ganging up on the hierarchs (guess who).

Third point. While I sincerely believe there are substantial insights to be derived from the recent movement to apply cultural concepts to American politics, I must say that this paper tells us little about the

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historical and political context of the negative income tax experiments as such, the focus of this conference. We are told that at times the results of the experiments were used as political ammunition and that those backing the experiments may have been a bit naive about the relationship of social science findings to policymaking. No news here. Working within the confines of the paper, the relevant—and unaddressed—question is this: What is the relation between this idea of three cultures on the one hand and the creation and operation of the income maintenance experiments on the other? If this were older history and none of the participants in question were alive to argue back, it might be an easier question to answer. Would all of the egalitarians pushing negative income tax experiments in the 1960s please stand up? Since this whole effort at performing deliberate social experiments on Americans was a pretty radical departure for the federal government, did not the individualists and hierarchs in the audience have to sign on too? When it comes down to it, who among us thinks that his or her views can be jammed into one of these three pigeonholes?

I believe there are important issues lurking in the larger context of these experiments. Unfortunately they are not revealed in this paper. The phenomenon of social experimentation was itself a sociopolitical experiment. What was happening here—was something worth intellectual attention going on beyond the particular experimental findings? Forget the substantive results for a moment. What did this phenomenon *mean*?

Thankfully, I have not been given the job of trying to write such a paper. In the remaining space allotted to me, and drawing as best I can on several other papers, let me offer one possible sketch.

The negative income tax experiments represented the triumph of what Richard Elmore in his paper terms an analytic subgovernment. No politician in the White House, no congressman, no interest group as conventionally defined and no lobby of rank and file citizens was pressing for a multi-million dollar system of negative income tax experiments. Their creation was the work of a more or less autonomous economics profession and a particular school within economics at that. One part of the story is how their intellectual constructs came to prevail in this postwar period. A more obscure but no less important part of the story is how their closest disciplinary competitors for thinking about the poverty issue—social work/sociology—collapsed from within. It is a story hinted at in the Coyle/Wildavsky paper's mention of social workers' reaction to the proposed Family Assistance Plan. A discipline filled with such loathing for its own tradition was simply no match for the economists.

That the income maintenance experiments could happen in this way tells us, I think, something even more important. It tells us how far we have come from our original vision in this country about the role of

social science. One hundred years ago, the founders of America's modern system of social investigation (Spencer Baird, Otis Mason, Ainsworth Rand Spofford, John Eaton, Francis Amasa Walker, John Wesley Powell, Lester Ward and Carroll Wright, to name a few) saw social inquiry as a new kind of instrument for linking state and civil society. Social science was seen to have a civic purpose. By contrast, the massive machine of negative income tax experimentation can be seen as an indicator of just how far apart have been drifting the separate realms of politics, social science, and the understandings of ordinary citizens.

Existing in this kind of splendid isolation, the negative income tax experiments represented a centralizing, reductionist impulse—a search for the one right answer—that comes naturally to a single disciplinary view of the world. Only from this mindset could it make sense to spend millions of dollars on four experiments to see if people worked less in response to income guarantees and next to nothing to find out what they did with any lessened time on the job. So much for economists' supposed preoccupation with scarce resources.

As we all know, the negative income tax mentality (the wit of NIT?) has gone into remission and no talk of income guarantees for the poor is to be heard in the land (the non-poor are another matter). What has been left in its wake? These social experiments themselves became part of the new historical and political context. On the one hand the whole episode probably contributed to the no less monofocal view of those reacting against income guarantees, against "incentives" for proper behavior rather than punishments for bad, against the dependency-creating effects of poverty programs, and so on. As for the negative income tax experimenters, at least it can be said that they were trying to find answers to questions about which they were not sure. Their conservative successors in the monofocal sweepstakes of American politics are more interested in bringing an indictment based on the way in which they *know* the world works.

On the other hand, and of longer lasting importance, the negative income tax experiments broke ground for a succeeding generation of social experimentation. It is a generation not only of more refined techniques but also, as Barbara Blum's paper reminds us, of more sensible connections to existing political and administrative structures. The era of the single, dramatic, Washington-centered experiment is gone, gone as quickly as it arrived. In its place is the more familiar pluralism of social inquiry involving state and local governments, foundations, more disciplines. I suppose we could take the author of the concluding paper, Dick Nathan, as a representative character in this evolution. His migration from the old New Federalism of revenue-sharing to the central income guarantees of the Family Assistance Plan, and hence to the fine-grained Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation experiments

with services and multi-program approaches, tracks rather well with the central tendencies of our time.

If we are willing to pause for a moment and look past the experimental findings, the controversies about workfare, the budgetary pressures on new research funds . . . if we are willing to be so untopical as to even look past the hot ideas for any next round of welfare reform, what we will see in the last 20 years is a society more busily engaged than ever in seriously trying to know itself.

Discussion

*Lawrence M. Mead**

Authors Dennis J. Coyle and Aaron Wildavsky argue that welfare reform did not pass because it failed to satisfy the conflicting cultures in American politics. Major reform in the United States, they contend, must usually appeal to all three of these cultures. Their ideals are respectively hierarchy (a concern for social order and due place), egalitarianism (equality of condition), and individualism (equal opportunity).

These categories have the appeal that they exhaust the major ideals to be found in political theory. Behind them lie the great names of Burke, Rousseau, and Locke. But I would question whether they are equally rooted in American politics. Where are the American hierarchs? I thought that aristocratic visions of society went out of American politics no later than 1800, when Jefferson defeated the Federalists. Since then, even the right wing in American politics has had to appeal to the people.¹

It is true that American government involves a degree of hierarchy and authority. The New Deal still sets the frame of American politics, and New Deal politics was highly organized. Large-scale political structures, both parties and interest groups, mediated the demands of the people to government, and New Deal policy used public bureaucracy on a new scale to serve the people.² The social vision, however, was a Lockian one, and not a Tory one as the term hierarchy might imply. Government was still the servant, not the master, of the people. Its aim was not to enforce social inequality but to ameliorate it, albeit by steps well short of socialism.

And as the authors suggest, even governmental hierarchy has since come into question. After 1960, an egalitarian politics of protest and

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single-interest groups undercut the traditional parties. Community Action and other innovative grant programs inaugurated a new, anti-bureaucratic style of federal public administration.³ These trends were answered in turn, not by a reaffirmation of hierarchy, but by a recrudescence of free-market conservatism. Today, it would seem, the egalitarian and individualist persuasions—those that denigrate authority—dominate the political culture.

Coyle and Wildavsky suggest that welfare reform failed because the three cultures refused to compromise. The egalitarians demanded a degree of income guarantee unacceptable to the individualists, while the hierarchs wanted to enforce values, especially a work requirement, that were unacceptable to either of the others. In part, I agree. This analysis is certainly an improvement over the view, emphasized in other accounts,⁴ that reform failed largely because of conventional “New Deal” disagreements between left and right over the scale of government.

But this view fails to explain the most startling thing about welfare politics—the fact that the public is nowhere near as divided as the elites. The public lines up unequivocally with what Coyle and Wildavsky call the hierarchical position. It wants to guarantee the poor jobs rather than income, and this preference extends even to minorities and the poor themselves. The polls that the authors cite positively radiate the desire to *enforce* at least minimal norms through public authority, the animus that is so lacking in the other two cultures.

Some Congressmen spoke for this position in the Family Assistance Plan debates. I call them the moderates or civic conservatives. Their leaders were Martha Griffiths and Russell Long. It could even be said that they defined the consensus toward which the debate progressed. Over time, the welfare plans in Congress relied more on requirements, less on incentives, as the mechanism for promoting work by the employable. But the moderates were outnumbered, and eventually disagreements among all the groups killed reform. The same disputes, along with a greater fear of costs, killed Jimmy Carter’s welfare plan, the Program for Better Jobs and Income.⁵

There seems to be a division between what I would call social opinion and political opinion. Unpolitical Americans are the ones who speak for hierarchical values, who want to use government, not just to help people, but to enforce the civilities essential to American life, one of which is work for the able-bodied. Most active politicians, however, want government to serve the values of freedom and opportunity rather than order. Liberals locate the main barriers to freedom in private society, while conservatives find them in government itself. Liberals therefore want a larger government, to protect people from the economy, while conservatives want a smaller one, to give the economy full sway.

The public seems to be little interested in these disputes. A study by Verba and Orren shows sharp polarization between liberal and conservative groups over whether "the system" or the poor themselves are responsible for poverty.⁶ But these are the views of elites, bound up in the New Deal struggle over the scale of government. According to other studies, unpolitical Americans reject this polarity. They hold *both* government and the individual responsible for social problems. They are much less interested in changing how much is done for the poor than in enforcing decent behavior on those who are helped.⁷

Why were the politicians not as unified as the public about welfare? In the authors' terms, why is the hierarchical persuasion much the strongest among ordinary citizens, while individualist and egalitarian visions that deny the need for public authority flourish among elites? Concretely, *why do politicians not do in welfare what the public wants*, which is to guarantee the needy a sustenance but make the employable work for it?

That is the great mystery in welfare politics. Merely to label the persuasions as different cultures does not account for it. My own view is that it must go back to the founding of the country. The framers of the Constitution, alone of founding elites, construed their task as the limitation rather than the enhancement of national public authority. They presided over a healthy society in which reform at the hands of government never would be as necessary as in the modernizing societies of Europe (or now of the Third World). They construed government as the product of society, rather than society as the creation of an enlightened government. Ever since, the main political dispute has been how, not whether, to subject public authority to the people. That has made it tougher to *use* government for the tasks of social reconstruction that exist even in America, of which the most daunting today is integrating the welfare class.

In welfare, reform failed partly for pluralist reasons. The authors mention that specific groups—for example, social workers, Southern politicians, the National Welfare Rights Organization—would have lost from it and thus opposed it. Welfare is certainly a subject on which consensus is notoriously elusive. The fundamental reason for defeat, however, was that the reforming elites were out of step with public opinion. They would not or could not reform welfare in the way ordinary Americans wanted. They would not enforce social obligations like work in return for benefits.

Social order as a concern entered prominently into welfare politics. Welfare is a fundamental disorder in American life. Long-term dependency is offensive to the American social vision of a nation of equivalent citizens. It is also a cause of other disorders such as crime, drug addiction, and the decline of the schools. Thus, the public has

strong views about it and demands that any reform reduce disorder.

In welfare, the central issue is not who should be subsidized or who should win or lose, but how to elevate the seriously dependent so that they can even play the political game like other people. Welfare politics is abnormal. The question is how to create the community that is assumed in ordinary politics. It is how to make the poor self-reliant enough so that the stakes of politics are no longer critical.

Abnormal politics is much more distressing to the public than ordinary politics. It raises basic issues of personal and social identity that ordinarily never come up. Pressures for change arise, not from economic claims, but from social dysfunction. Claims arise, not from competent economic interests, but, so to speak, from the disassembly of the personality. The long-term dependent do not have their lives "together" enough to be the kind of individuals imagined in either the individualist or the egalitarian vision of society. Whoever is to blame, they threaten social order at a much more fundamental level than anything about the tax system, for example.

Questions of social order expose the limitations of federal governance. Whether we speak of a New Deal division or competing individualist and egalitarian visions, all the dominant tendencies in Washington seek to assume what in social policy must be created—a nation of competent citizens. Would that they listened more to the civic attitudes articulated by public opinion. The problem in social policy is to make government as civic-minded as society.

There is an additional problem too. The serious claims in modern politics are about dependency, and yet elites have not learned to talk about them rigorously. We have a language for discussing claims to political freedoms. It is the language of democracy and civil liberties, the language of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, of what one might call middle-class politics. But—except in South Africa—these issues are passé. We also have a language for discussing claims to economic protection. It is the language of socialism and collectivism, the language of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, of what one may call working-class politics. But, despite the ambitions of the Reagan administration, the welfare state is established and its boundaries are unlikely to change much anywhere in the West.

We do not have a language to discuss the claims that arise from the appearance of an underclass in Western societies. What does one do about the social dysfunction that remains even *after* a society has carried out the reforms specified in middle-class and working-class politics? Who is to blame for serious dependency, and what is to be done about it? Disputes revolve around claims to determinism, not claims to freedom in the earlier sense. Those who speak for the poor assert that they are dominated by their environment and not responsible for

dysfunction, while their opponents deny it. The earlier theories all assumed that even the downtrodden were accountable for decent personal behavior, while in dependency politics, that assumption is itself the main issue.

Perhaps the final reason that welfare reform did not succeed is that welfare raised embarrassing issues of personal adequacy that politicians *hate* to talk about. The moral of past welfare reform is that we have to talk about them. We need serious arguments, based on research, that go beyond rhetoric on the serious behavioral questions in welfare. Who is and who is not responsible for personal functioning, and for what specific competences? What is the potential for human nature to achieve civility?—the very question that conventional political and economic theory never asks.⁸

Such languages do not eliminate disagreement, but they clarify views and, over time, narrow the differences. Consensus can then be embodied in policy. Recent discussions of the welfare problem have been newly open about discussing the behavioral problems, and that is a step on the way. The goal is a political theory and a constitutional doctrine about permissible degrees of dependency, such as we already have for civil liberties and economic regulation. Only on this basis could government set a standard for behavior on welfare and enforce it, as the public wants.

¹Louis Hartz, "The Whig Tradition in America and Europe," *American Political Science Review*, 46 (December 1952), pp. 989-1002.

²Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York: Knopf, 1955), ch. 7; Samuel H. Beer, "Liberalism and the National Idea," *The Public Interest*, 5 (Fall 1966), pp. 70-82.

³Samuel H. Beer, "In Search of a New Public Philosophy," in Anthony King, ed., *The New American Political System* (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 1978), ch. 1.

⁴For example, see Daniel P. Moynihan, *The Politics of a Guaranteed Income: The Nixon Administration and the Family Assistance Plan* (New York: Random House, 1973).

⁵Lawrence M. Mead, *Beyond Entitlement: The Social Obligations of Citizenship* (New York: Free Press, 1986), ch. 5.

⁶Sidney Verba and Gary R. Orren, *Equality in America: The View From the Top* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), p. 74.

⁷For a summary, see Mead, *Beyond Entitlement*, pp. 233-40.

⁸A pioneering inquiry along these lines is James Q. Wilson and Richard J. Herrnstein, *Crime and Human Nature* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1985).