

Cultural Categories and the American Welfare State: The Case of Guaranteed Income Policy¹

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There is considerable evidence that cultural categories of worth are central to the ideological foundation of the American welfare state. However, existing perspectives on U.S. welfare policy development grant little explanatory power to the role of culture. For this reason, they cannot adequately explain the dynamics of an important, but frequently overlooked, episode in American welfare state history: the rise and fall of guaranteed annual income proposals in the 1960s and 1970s. The author outlines three mechanisms—schematic, discursive, and institutional—through which culture can influence policy outcomes. He then argues that cultural categories of worthiness affected welfare policy development through their constitutive contribution to cultural schemas, their deployment by actors as resources in expert deliberation and public discourse, and their institutionalization in social programs that reinforced the symbolic and programmatic boundaries between categories of the poor. The author discusses how these cultural mechanisms can be integrated with existing class- and institution-based accounts of welfare policy development.

Why does the United States not guarantee basic income security for all its citizens? There are, of course, numerous answers to this question. Yet if the major historiographical accounts of American welfare policy agree on a central theme, it is that 20th-century policy development was shaped

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by deeply embedded cultural categories of worth (Katz 1986, 1989; Patterson 1994). Put most simply, some people were considered to be more worthy of government assistance than others. The “deserving” poor were those people not expected to work because of their age, gender, family status, or physical limitations, and they were therefore deemed as meriting government support. The “undeserving” poor, on the other hand, were expected to work and consequently warranted only limited, haphazard government assistance. This pattern of cultural classification has been documented in interviews (Halle 1984; Hochschild 1981; Lamont 2000; Rieder 1985), public opinion research (Cook and Barrett 1992; Kluegel and Smith 1986; McCloskey and Zaller 1984), and the analysis of organizational practices (Goldberg 2001; Mohr 1994).

Given this thorough documentation, it is striking that mainstream perspectives on U.S. welfare policy development do not consider this cultural distinction to be theoretically important. The narrative sections of some studies make passing reference to cultural categories of worth. But the theoretical frameworks used to *explain* policy development emphasize the significance of other factors, most prominently the power of business, social movement pressure, the role of government bureaucrats, and the institutional structure of the polity. As recent review articles illustrate (Amenta, Bonastia, and Carren 2001; Manza 2000), the literature is largely bereft of culturally attentive studies of welfare policy development despite at least a decade of calls for closer integration between cultural analysis and policy studies (Burstein 1991; Campbell 2002).

This article has two complementary aims. First, it outlines a framework for examining cultural influences on welfare policy development. In doing so it draws together research on the role of ideas in other policy-making domains and extends this work using recent work in the sociology of culture. More specifically, welfare state scholars argue that cultural accounts, in order to be taken seriously, need to be able to explicate the *timing*, *content*, and *political fate* of social policy (Skocpol 1992; Weir, Orloff, and Skocpol 1988). I outline three mechanisms through which cultural categories of worth have affected these aspects of American social provision, mechanisms that operate through (a) their constitutive contribution to collective schemas, (b) their deployment by actors as cultural resources in expert deliberation and public discourse, and (c) their institutionalization in social programs that reinforce the symbolic and programmatic boundaries between categories of poor people. I discuss how these cultural mechanisms can be used both to amend and to extend existing class- and institution-based approaches to welfare policy development. This type of integration draws together analytic traditions that have typically inhabited “separate intellectual space” in the social provision literature (Orloff 2005, p. 201).

The second aim of the article is to apply the framework to an often overlooked policy episode that cannot be easily explained by existing theoretical perspectives (Quadagno 1990): the rise and fall of guaranteed annual income proposals during the 1960s and 1970s. Guaranteed annual income (GAI) proposals sought to establish a base income beneath which no American could fall, thereby providing minimum income security for all American families. They represented the boldest attempt to transform the basis of U.S. welfare policy in the 20th century (Katz 2001) and, though largely forgotten today, the strongest contender among them nearly became law during the Nixon presidency. Understanding the reasons behind this failed attempt at welfare restructuring can add analytical leverage to accounts of U.S. policy development that have focused mainly on positive outcomes (Amenta, Bonastia, and Carren 2001; Hecllo 1994).

Case studies provide the best basis for theoretical elaboration in well-developed areas of research (Feagin, Orum, and Sjoberg 1991; Ragin and Becker 1992) and the case of GAI policy in particular suits the analytic purposes of this article. GAI proposals directly challenged long-standing cultural categories of worth in American society by basing the provision of government benefits upon *economic need*. In contrast, almost all prior and subsequent welfare policies have been based upon *work status*. It is precisely the taken-for-granted nature of the boundaries defined by work status that makes their impact on policy so difficult to examine. Their influence leads to “nonevents”; the status quo is not challenged.² By transgressing existing cultural categories based on work status, GAI policies called into question many assumptions about the structure of social provision and forced defenders of the existing regime to reinforce these boundaries rhetorically and programmatically, thereby throwing the influence of categories of worth on policy development into sharper relief. As a closer examination of this case suggests, this threat to existing cultural categories was coextensive with a brief but bold challenge to the legitimacy of the labor market as the ultimate arbiter of economic security in America.

Methodologically, the article examines the development of GAI proposals during three presidential administrations. For further analytical leverage, it compares the failure of GAI proposals during the Nixon administration to the subsequent creation of two closely related social policies that achieved some of the same aims: Supplemental Security Income and the Earned Income Tax Credit. The passage of these proposals was, in essence, a crucial experiment that provides comparative evidence that cultural categories of worthiness were instrumental in the failure of GAI plans. The analysis is based upon archival and media data sources. I

² See Gaventa (1980) on the benefits of studying nonevents in the analysis of power.

examined over 3,000 pages of documents from the Nixon presidential archives in College Park, Maryland, and the Carter presidential archives in Atlanta, Georgia. These documents reveal the efforts to transgress, redefine or reinforce existing cultural categories of worthiness within the executive branch, U.S. Congress, and national interest groups; they further reveal how these struggles help to account for the timing, content, and failure of the proposals. A limited examination of media coverage illustrates the ways in which elites framed the policies in public discourse. This combination of data on both elite deliberation and public framing helps surmount problems typical to most studies of policy in which elites' "private" worldviews and "public" framing strategies are difficult to disentangle (Campbell 2002).

GUARANTEED ANNUAL INCOME POLICY AND EXISTING PERSPECTIVES

The idea of guaranteeing Americans a minimum annual income has existed since at least the 1930s, but GAI proposals did not successfully reach the governmental agenda until the sixties. By 1968, there was a strikingly broad range of support across ideological and partisan lines for replacing existing public assistance programs, such as Aid to Families with Dependent Children, with a GAI plan. Republican president Richard Nixon announced his Family Assistance Plan in 1969 and it passed the House of Representatives by large majorities in both 1970 and 1971. Many commentators at the time also expected Nixon's plan to pass in the more liberal Senate, but the legislation stalled in committees on both occasions and never reached a full vote. A few years later, the Carter administration placed a GAI proposal at the center of its welfare reform agenda. This plan fared less well than Nixon's and never reached the floor of Congress.

Existing approaches to welfare policy development can only partially illuminate this episode of reform and leave many questions unanswered. First, the 1960s were clearly marked by social disruption. A social movement perspective argues that economically disenfranchised groups create pressure for social policy expansion by creating social disturbances. In response, political elites seek to restore stability by offering concessions that extend social provision along lines that are prefigured by existing programs (Piven and Cloward 1977). This approach highlights the role that multiple sources of social pressure—stemming mainly from civil rights activism in the early 1960s, urban rioting in the mid-1960s, and welfare rights activism later in the decade—played in creating an impetus for policy change. Yet such pressures cannot account for the specific content of reform, since GAI policies were not prefigured by existing social

policy, nor did Nixon and his White House advisors assume office in 1969 with plans to propose a GAI plan.³ This perspective also fails to anticipate the continuing consideration of GAI proposals through the 1970s, which was a period of social quiescence among economically disadvantaged groups.

A second perspective argues that state bureaucrats have the potential to advance policy proposals according to their own agendas rather than solely reflecting the interests of groups outside government, such as social movements or economic elites. The premise of this perspective is that government bureaucrats will promote the expansion of social provision if they have the autonomy and administrative capacity that enables them to do so, and the conditions for such action include the availability of fiscal resources, organizational infrastructure, and a professional class of civil bureaucrats insulated from ties to economic actors located outside the state (Orloff and Skocpol 1984; Skocpol 1985*a*). This emphasis on state experts provides considerable explanatory leverage for the development of GAI proposals. GAI proposals had been considered by the Kennedy administration and subsequently dismissed as politically implausible. The institutional capacity of welfare experts increased at the outset of President Johnson's War on Poverty initiatives and, as Rueschmeyer and Skocpol (1996) suggest, this increased capacity allowed for the uptake of new policy ideas. For the next 15 years, GAI proposals were advanced first and foremost by welfare experts within the government bureaucracy. Yet as critics have noted, the state-centered approach offers little guidance about the actual direction of expert reform, nor can it be assumed that experts will necessarily advance "liberal" policy goals (Huber et al. 1993; Korpi 1989). Therefore this perspective cannot account for why government experts initially favored GAI proposals over numerous competing welfare reform alternatives or why experts continued to favor the proposals, against mounting opposition, in the years to follow.

A third perspective focuses on the role of business elites. One prominent line of argument is that capitalists oppose the expansion of national social policy because they have interests in limited government, low corporate taxes, and maintaining a compliant labor force (Berkowitz and McQuaid 1980; Domhoff 1990; Quadagno 1984).⁴ This perspective is challenged in

³ The main policy outcome that Piven and Cloward ([1971] 1993, 1977) discuss is expansion of the existing AFDC rolls, which subsequent research confirmed was in fact positively associated with social unrest (Hicks and Swank 1983).

⁴ Deriving any general statement from the literature on the role of business is challenging because claims concerning capitalists' interests, policy preferences, degree of influence, and mode of influence are each highly contested (see Amenta, Bonastia, and Carren 2001; Hacker and Pierson 2002; Manza 2000). However, the conventional assumption within the literature (an assumption built in to what Swenson [2002] calls

the case of GAI policy. Business groups were indeed influential, yet much of the business class—including many small business owners, corporate CEOs, and big business coalitions—supported GAI proposals. Business opposition came almost exclusively from the national office of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. When such intracapitalist divisions occur, divergent policy preferences are typically explained in reference to varying economic interests based in different organizational environments (e.g., Quadagno 1984). However, debates over the impact of GAI proposals on business spending and labor market processes were marked by a high degree of uncertainty, making the identification of straightforward economic interests difficult to calculate. Moreover, groups with the most ostensibly similar interests, such as the Chamber of Commerce and the National Federation of Independent Business, held different preferences. Archival evidence and the passage of alternative antipoverty legislation reveal that cultural perceptions, which are ignored in existing accounts, shaped the formation and divergence of business interests.⁵

Finally, a fourth perspective argues that institutional configurations—such as sectionalism, federalism, and existing policy design—shape social policy development (e.g., Skocpol and Ikenberry 1983; Weir, Orloff, and Skocpol 1988). Differences between the South and the rest of the country have created competing objectives for welfare reform within these regions. The impact of these regional differences has been further amplified by federal power-sharing arrangements that grant local authorities considerable control over public assistance programs and by the structure of the congressional committee system, which has, since the 1930s, concentrated power over social policy in the hands of southern conservatives. These factors, according to institutional arguments, have created barriers to generous, federal-level public assistance programs. Yet while sectionalism and federalism have undoubtedly been important influences in shaping U.S. policy development (especially in contrast with European welfare states), commentators have noted that they constitute a static framework in which other factors are required to explain temporal dynamics and causal processes (Amenta, Bonastia, and Carren 2001; Hacker and Pierson 2002). More specifically, institutional explanations often smuggle the interaction between institutional arrangements and cultural patterns—such as conservative ideology in the American South (e.g., Steinmo and Watts

the “equivalency premise”) is that capitalists, in contrast to working-class movements, oppose most expansionary social policy, especially policies that threaten to decommodify labor and raise taxes.

⁵ One prominent exception to the omission of cultural factors is Weir (1992). She argues that economic interests are heavily mediated by ideas and that analysts should thus seek not to identify economic interests, *per se*, but to discern why “some definitions of interests win out over others” (Weir 1992, p. 17).

1995)—into their empirical accounts, while this interaction itself is seldom explicitly theorized. Such an interaction played a significant role during the debates over GAI policy in the early 1970s. Yet without reference to these cultural elements, institutional factors alone provide a sensitizing framework with little leverage on causal process and mechanisms.

Institutionalists further argue that existing policy design constrains policy development through “policy feedback” processes that allocate resources, shape incentives, and generate interpretive frameworks (Pierson 1993). Substantively, this approach could be challenged to explain why GAI proposals, which had no existing precedent, developed and then came so close to legislative passage in the early 1970s. Theoretically, a more significant shortcoming is that existing policy feedback arguments have focused on the *resource/incentive* dimension of policy feedback processes, while underplaying the importance of *interpretive* feedback mechanisms.⁶ For instance, Myles and Pierson (1997) make a policy feedback argument in a comparative study of the failure of GAI proposals in the United States and their success in Canada during the same period. The authors emphasize the importance of existing universal social policies in Canada that served as a “natural bridge” to new GAI policies through incremental change and program substitution. They argue that GAI proposals failed in the United States in part because they lacked a similar programmatic bridge. What an examination of the actual debates over GAI policies shows is that supporters of GAI plans lacked a critical *symbolic* bridge that existing universal programs in the United States could have provided. Such policies could have been used analogically as a symbolic resource to make sense of a new social program that not only dissolved the distinction between the deserving and undeserving poor, but that extended income benefits to a new category of recipient—fully employed workers—for the first time. This absence, as will be shown, also helps to explain a key difference between the U.S. and Canadian cases that the authors argue is important but do not explain; namely, that GAI policy was so contentious in the United States because of its association with “welfare reform.”

As Amenta (1998) aptly characterizes it, mainstream perspectives on U.S. welfare policy development have drawn from two traditions within classical sociological theory. Scholars who focus on business influence and social movements are informed by Marx’s work on political economy, while studies focusing on state actors and institutional configurations draw from Weber’s and Tocqueville’s writing on bureaucracy and political institutions. Neither of these orientations grants an important role to the influence of culture. Therefore existing perspectives exhibit a variety of

⁶ For an exception, see Pedriana and Stryker (1997)

blind spots that diminish their ability to incorporate the influence of cultural categories of worth on policy development. For this reason, even a combination of these perspectives cannot explain the politics of GAI policy without a theoretical reorientation that is more attentive to culture.

One partial exception is Skocpol's (1992) book, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers*. As even the title suggests, the book highlights the ways in which U.S. social policy has been guided historically by moral categories of worthiness.⁷ Skocpol in fact argues that "institutional and cultural oppositions between morally 'deserving' and the less deserving run like fault lines through the entire history of American social provision" (Skocpol 1992, p. 149). However, this comment remains in the *narrative* middle of the book, with no discussion of the importance of these cultural categories in her *theoretical* framework.⁸ The absence of a cultural dimension in her theoretical approach stems, at least in part, from the weaknesses of existing cultural explanations for welfare state development, which were formulated a generation ago. She argues that these "national values" approaches fail to specify the mechanisms through which culture affects policy development. She asks, "*Whose* ideas and whose values? And ideas and values *about what* more precisely?" (Skocpol 1992, p. 22; emphasis in original). She further urges closer consideration of the groups who carry particular ideas, the resources that they bring to bear in policy processes, and how institutional configurations may advantage some ideas over others.

Bringing ideas into the analysis of welfare policy development along the lines that Skocpol suggests would mark an advance in the field, but it is only a first step. Skocpol's view of the role of ideas in society is largely instrumental. Ideas are influential only when they are consciously articulated and strategically deployed.⁹ Yet elements of culture can also be constitutive of the social order, rather than solely instrumental in nature, and taking this constitutive role seriously requires rethinking some of the assumptions made by existing approaches.¹⁰

⁷ See Mohr (1994) for a further discussion of this point and an analysis of the cultural structures embedded in Progressive-era social provision.

⁸ This pattern parallels the sociological literature on the state as a whole, where the role of culture is recognized empirically but disappears theoretically (Friedland and Alford 1991).

⁹ For the clearest exposition of Skocpol's perspective on ideas, see her rejoinder to Sewell (1985) in their exchange over the role of ideology in the French Revolution (Skocpol 1985*b*).

¹⁰ For a similar argument regarding the literature on state formation, see Steinmetz (1999).

CULTURAL CATEGORIES AND WELFARE POLICY

If current approaches to welfare policy development have drawn from Marx's writing on political economy and Weber's work on bureaucracy, another strand of theorizing has been largely omitted from consideration: Weber's discussion of the role of ideas in the constitution of interests and more recent, related work on schemas, discourse, and political culture. Integrating insights derived from these perspectives with those from existing frameworks can expand the explanatory scope of welfare state theories. Most importantly, such a synthesis can provide analytical points of entrée through which to bring *cultural meanings* and their *mechanisms of influence* back into considerations of welfare policy development without reducing such influence to vaguely specified "national values" (Skocpol 1992).

In his influential essay on the social psychology of world religions, Weber formulated an approach to social action that combined the pursuit of material interests with the constitutive nature of ideas. He wrote that ideas, or the "world images" created by ideas, "have, like switchmen, determined the tracks along which action has been pushed by the dynamic of interest" (Weber 1946, p. 280). In other words, people do not simply have straight-forward interests; instead, they have ideas about their interests. In the last decade, a growing number of scholars have sought to apply this basic insight to policy making by showing how it is structured by ideas (e.g., Berman 1998; Dobbin 1994; Hall 1993). A few scholars have further developed typologies of ideas that can be influential in the policy-making process. Of these, Campbell's (1998) is the most parsimonious.¹¹ He classifies ideas across two dimensions, cognitive/normative and background/foreground, which yields a four-fold typology. According to Campbell, programs (cognitive-foreground) are explicit policy prescriptions that specify how to solve particular problems. Paradigms (cognitive-background) are background assumptions that constrain action by limiting the range of policy alternatives that are deemed useful or worth considering. Frames (normative-foreground) are normative claims that elites employ to legitimate policy alternatives to the public. Public sentiments (normative-background) are background assumptions held by elites regarding what the public will accept as legitimate.

Cultural categories of worth structure each of these types of ideas and applying this fourfold distinction to the debate over GAI proposals, as will be demonstrated, yields two general observations. First, the challenge to the existing policy regime posed by GAI proposals pushed the background assumptions about categories of worth to the foreground of policy

¹¹ Two others appear in Campbell (2002) and Goldstein and Keohane (1993).

deliberation. Second, while proponents of GAI plans criticized the normative aspects of categories of worth (i.e., viewing one category of the poor as more worthy than another), they still cognitively partitioned the poor according to the old categories. A few shortcomings, however, limit the applicability of this framework (or others) to the case under consideration. First, current approaches focus mainly on the role of ideas at the level of elite decision making. When the impact of public sentiments is discussed, it is reduced to somewhat vague normative inputs. Second, while frames in this typology are viewed as largely normative in nature, the dominant strand of work on policy framing emphasizes its cognitive effects (Gamson and Modigliani 1989). Third, *types* of ideas are distinct from the *mechanisms* through which they may influence policy (Campbell 2002). As a consequence, there is little empirical work on mechanisms of influence and the interaction between them. Fourth, because cultural categories are a particular type of ideational form—as distinct from other types of ideas, such as policy programs—more specific work on categories and boundaries can shed further light on how cultural categories of worth influence policy making.

Schematic Influence

Schemas are cognitive constructs that structure “everyday cognition” by providing the templates that define objects and the relationships between them. In recent years, sociologists have increasingly turned to studies of schematic cognition in order to gain insights into how culture works (Cerulo 2002; DiMaggio 1997). DiMaggio, for instance, contends that “for some purposes, it may be useful to treat the schema as the basic unit of analysis for the study of culture . . . in schematic cognition we find the mechanisms by which culture shapes and biases thought” (1997, p. 269). Accordingly, cultural categories of worth exert schematic influence in welfare policy development by shaping the range of cognitive perceptions and normative evaluations that actors find comprehensible or plausible.

Because schemas affect cognition by providing templates for categorization, they are particularly applicable to the study of social policy, since a central aspect of policy making entails creating official social categories. Skrentny’s (2002) study of the evolution of minority rights policy in the 1960s and 1970s illustrates this process. Policy makers within the federal bureaucracy sought to construct “official minority” categories in order to determine which Americans would benefit from new laws and policies aimed at assisting minorities. Yet the definition of “minority,” much less the basis for deservingness, was far from clear. Skrentny argues that policy makers, on the basis of schematic cognition, came to define these categories

largely through comparisons between black Americans, their paradigmatic minority population, and other potential target groups.

The structure of social policy must also resonate with the schematic boundaries found in the mass public if it is to be enduring and legitimate. For instance, Lamont's (2000) analysis of working-class culture finds that working-class men draw sharp moral (as opposed to economic) boundaries between themselves and the unemployed poor. The men in her study set themselves apart from those "below" them, often pejoratively associating the poor with reliance on public assistance, even if the economic differences between the two groups were relatively small. Lamont contends that understanding these men's mental schemas is important for understanding social justice and the structure of the welfare state because "social policies are more likely to be adopted if they resonate with conceptions of the boundaries of the community that citizens hold" (Lamont 2000, p. 9).

When systems of classification change, cognitive inertia and symbolic pollution often result. Classification systems create "impersonal cognitive commitments" from which it is difficult to recover "preconceptual innocence" (Starr 1992, p. 272). For instance, examinations of both race- and gender-based classification show that individuals often experience difficulty reorienting their perceptions when classification schemes and their associated meanings change (Roy 2001; Starr 1992; Zerubavel 1991). When classification schemes map on to status hierarchies, challenges to these boundaries are reinforced by pollution beliefs: ideas about the "impure" status of one group contaminating the "pure" status of another (Douglas 1966). One mechanism through which symbolic pollution occurs is the allocation of stigma and the avoidance of "spoiled identities" (Goffman 1963), and one example of these processes from racial classification in the United States is the "one-drop rule" (Davis 1991). Stated more broadly, when the schemas implicated in social hierarchies are transgressed, pollution beliefs proliferate.

Discursive Influence

Cultural categories of worth exert discursive influence in welfare debates by structuring framing strategies that amplify existing cognitive schemas.¹² Stated differently, these categories are elements of what Ferree (2003) calls the "discursive opportunity structure" of policy debates. Ferree distinguishes between two types of frames. *Resonant* frames align with the dominant discursive structure, provide the most expedient way to influ-

¹² For seminal discussions of framing, see Snow et al. (1986) and Gamson and Modigliani (1989).

ence policy, and generally reinforce the status quo. *Radical* frames, on the other hand, challenge the dominant discourse and imply more fundamental change. In her cross-national study of debates over abortion policy, Ferree finds that differences in the discursive opportunity structure in the United States and Germany, which are grounded in each country's respective legal frameworks, account for different framing strategies. Feminists in the United States argue for abortion rights on the basis of claims to privacy while their counterparts in Germany base their claims on the state protection of women. Ferree is careful to note, however, that the influence of the dominant discursive structure in each country is probabilistic, not deterministic. Some feminists use radical framing strategies, even if their claims are disadvantaged in the structure of the dominant discourse, when their political goals imply social transformation. The overall pattern that Ferree finds demonstrates that, while there are many potential framing strategies in any policy debate, the prevailing discursive structures places limits on those that will resonate in the political culture.

The enabling and constraining capacity of discursive structures applies equally to deliberation among elites and framing in public discourse. At the popular level, for instance, Anglo-American Protestantism provides a number of powerful narratives about weakness, self-discipline, and redemption that resonate in American culture. Block (1996) highlights how Ronald Reagan effectively tapped into these narratives in order to bolster his attacks on the welfare state in the 1980s. The effects of discursive frameworks are not only limited to the mass public. They also shape expert deliberation among elites (Majone 1989). Skrentny (1996) argues that early debates over affirmative action were structured by the Enlightenment ideals of justice and progress, and that deliberation along these lines is integral to explaining the development of affirmative action programs in the absence of public pressure. Yet discursive structures also limit the possibilities of what can be plausibly claimed. In her study of civic engagement, Eliasoph (1998) observes how social activists who were motivated by altruism often find themselves publicly articulating their sentiments in the language of self-interest. This disconnect between private motivations and public pronouncements exists, Eliasoph argues, because the language of self-interest is part of the dominant American discourse, while the language of altruism is viewed skeptically. Thus it provides less effective warrants for claims making. The activists' use of the dominant discourse, however, reinforces the very cultural framework that they often endeavor to combat.

Institutional Influence

Cultural categories of worth exert institutional influence when they interlock with patterned practices in ways that channel routinized action and allocate symbolic meanings. To say that an element of culture has become “institutionalized” is to say that it has become embedded in formal organizations, regimes, and cultural practices that reproduce social patterns in self-activating ways (Jepperson 1991). For welfare policy development, this means that categories of worth provide a template for program design, which then further reinforces the symbolic and programmatic distinctions between categories of poor people.

The cultural dimension of institutional arrangements is often neglected in “institutional” approaches to policy development. However, Jepperson and Swidler (1994) posit a hierarchy of cultural elements in which institutional patterns and tacit meanings anchor the social order, while more reflexive and discursive elements of culture are subject to ongoing debate. Much as Marx viewed capital as “dead labor,” they view “the infrastructure of institutions as something like ‘dead culture’” (Jepperson and Swidler 1994, p. 362). According to this logic, the cultural basis of institutional arrangements is most apparent during the transitional moments in which discursive culture provides the template for institutional formation.

Drawing from a series of case studies on foreign policy, Goldstein and Keohane (1993) point to this mechanism as a primary causal pathway through which ideas influence policy. When ideas are integrated into policy design, they provide the basis of powerful structures of incentives that reproduce the social order. Notably, the authors do not theorize the accompanying *symbolic* dimension of this resultant social order. Yet as Friedland and Alford (1991) argue, symbolic relations are central to the organization of social life and are instantiated in institutional arrangements as varied as private property, the marriage contract, and voting. From this perspective, institutions should be viewed as reproducing both social structure and symbolic relations and hierarchies.

These processes of social reproduction highlight the fact that it is the ongoing interaction between these schematic, discursive, and institutional mechanisms that produces such a durable cultural classification scheme. This perspective stands in contrast with more static, neo-Durkheimian views that posit that well-elaborated cultural categories are intrinsic to collective culture and simply get invoked during periods of contestation.¹³ Rather, more in line with proponents of “new” political culture approaches (Olick and Levy 1997), cultural categories are part of an ongoing repro-

¹³ On this Durkheimian perspective and its critics, see Alexander and Smith (1993) and Battani, Hall, and Powers (1997).

ductive process based upon the imbrication of shared schemas, claims making, and institutional arrangements. This type of cultural imbrication creates conditions for what Bourdieu (1977) describes as the *doxa*: the state in which the fundamental assumptions and categories that shape knowledge in a particular intellectual field go largely unquestioned.¹⁴

Previewing the Case and Argument

Processes of symbolic and moral differentiation, along with claims about pollution and stigma, are at the cultural foundation of U.S. welfare policy. What transpired in the 1960s was a breach in which prevailing cultural assumptions—particularly concerning views of poverty and the economy—were called in to question. State experts, activists, academics, and business leaders challenged the normative and programmatic legitimacy of the existing classification scheme upon which contemporary welfare policy was based. Most important, the new welfare reform strategy, GAI policy, erased the symbolic and programmatic boundaries between the deserving and undeserving poor by placing them in the same social program. This resulted in what Douglas (1966) termed *symbolic pollution*. Both elites and the general public had difficulty seeing the deserving and undeserving poor as equivalent, and in the absence of programmatic boundaries separating them, the morally tainted status of recipients receiving “welfare” benefits (from Aid to Families with Dependent Children, or AFDC) polluted the status of other, more “deserving” categories of recipients—the “working poor” and the unemployed poor not expected to work.

This symbolic pollution was based upon the collective inability to define government social provision outside the boundaries of cultural categories of worth, and it affected the content and political fate of GAI programs in three ways. First, at the schematic level, GAI proposals were widely perceived as “welfare” proposals, even though they could have been defined otherwise because the majority of benefits went to “deserving” populations. This perception shaped debates over “welfare” spending, increasing “welfare” caseloads, and other hot-button political issues. It also illuminates why influential conservative business leaders opposed the proposals, despite the fact that GAI plans socialized the costs of low-wage labor through government wage subsidies. As a comparison between views of Nixon’s plan and the Earned Income Tax Credit reveals, business leaders and their conservative political allies feared stigmatizing the working poor with “welfare” benefits and the associated repercussions this

¹⁴ Along similar lines, Sewell (1992) refers to this type of interlock as a function of the depth and power of dually constitutive symbolic schemas and material resources.

stigma might have on labor market processes and the national economy. Payments understood as “income supplements” in a separate program did not connote this threat. Just as significantly, the working poor themselves did not lobby on behalf of GAI proposals, despite the fact that the plans were in their material interest. These members of the working class did not consider themselves to be “welfare” recipients.

Second, at the discursive level, both supporters and opponents used language that buttressed cultural categories of worthiness. Opponents of Nixon’s plan effectively mobilized language that aligned with the prevailing discursive structure. This oppositional discourse often *presumed* pollution between categories of the poor rather than making such claims directly. These claims resonated with existing pollution beliefs. Perhaps more surprisingly, Nixon himself consistently used rhetoric that reinforced the symbolic boundaries between categories of poor people that his own plan actually blurred. This framing further bolstered the dominant collective schema. Significantly, “radical” framing strategies existed. They were put forward privately by GAI proponents ranging from liberal business groups to sympathetic government bureaucrats. But these alternative policy frames were almost never used publicly, and thus the dominant discursive structure was seldom directly challenged. The few exceptions—cases in which Nixon and presidential challenger George McGovern each publicly transgressed cultural categories and were subsequently chastened by advisors or the public—prove the rule.

Third, at the institutional level, the pattern of existing, categorical social provision symbolically structured the debate over GAI policy as it emerged during the 1960s, and new social programs created in the 1970s further instantiated cultural categories of worth. Early on in the debates over GAI proposals, the absence of existing programs that provided the working poor with income benefits made this group particularly susceptible to the polluting effects of being included in the same program with undeserving populations. There was no existing status through which to understand the working poor as a category of government beneficiary, therefore GAI supporters lacked an important symbolic resource for defining income benefits for workers without the stigma of “welfare.” Cultural categories also provided the template for further policy development. In the wake of the failure of Nixon’s GAI proposal, two new federal programs programmatically reinforced the boundaries between categories of poor people that GAI proposals had challenged. These new institutional arrangements further heightened the cultural and political barriers to subsequent GAI proposals during the Carter era.

THE TRANSGRESSIVE POLITICS OF GUARANTEED INCOME PROPOSALS

Categorical Breaching during the Kennedy/Johnson Years

While perhaps surprising from today's vantage point, conservatives, moderates, and leftists alike helped to put guaranteed annual income proposals on the public agenda in the early 1960s. Though the details and rationales of the respective proposals differed, their common consequence was to dissolve the normative and programmatic distinctions between categories of poor people by placing them in the same social program and providing them with the same benefits. GAI programs had been considered earlier in U.S. history, such as during the New Deal era, but they did not successfully reach the governmental agenda. However, by the 1960s, new information about unemployment, growing attention to poverty rates, increasing societal affluence, and concerns about industrial automation all challenged the normative boundaries that had previously prevented GAI proposals from being seriously considered. These weakening cultural boundaries account for the *initial emergence* of GAI proposals—as opposed to other possible antipoverty measures—among experts during the Kennedy years.

Milton Friedman, a conservative economist and future Nobel laureate, gave GAI plans broad public exposure when he advanced one in his influential book, *Capitalism and Freedom* (Friedman 1962). The specific GAI proposal was a negative income tax (NIT), which was based on a relatively simple set of principles. It extended the tax scale below a specified break-even point and filing units at income levels below this point would receive payments from the government rather than paying taxes. If a filing unit received no income, it would receive a minimum income guarantee. As income levels increased up the scale from zero to a predetermined cut-off level, government transfer payments would be reduced by some proportion of the earned income. This was the “negative tax rate.” A tax rate of less than 100 percent preserved work incentives by some margin.

In a discussion about alleviating poverty, Friedman spelled out why the NIT was the best means toward this goal: it was a direct attack on poverty; it operated outside the market; it improved work incentives; and it was relatively simple to administer. In contrast, Friedman viewed the existing public assistance system, AFDC, as uncoordinated, inefficient, and ineffective. Particularly troubling to Friedman was the 100 percent effective tax rate on earnings in the AFDC program. Because the NIT was based upon economic need and applied equally to unemployed, part-time, and full-time workers—which, in Friedman's view, was the most

efficient and rational program structure—it dissolved the long-standing categories of social provision based on work status.

President Kennedy’s economic advisors took up consideration of GAI plans during a time when academic and government experts were revising mainstream views of unemployment. The postwar years of affluence had stalled during the end of the Eisenhower presidency and high unemployment and long-term jobless rates preoccupied many of Kennedy’s advisors. It appeared that, despite the reigning economic orthodoxy, economic growth alone did not provide financial security for all the country’s citizens (Bernstein 1991; O’Connor 2001). These economists worried about a new type of unemployment: *structural* unemployment. This was persistent unemployment among populations who were structurally disadvantaged within the economy for reasons such as age, race, educational attainment, geographic location, or family structure. Kennedy’s economic advisors considered pursuing an NIT plan that would provide income maintenance for these groups because these populations seemed beyond the reach of a growth-based antipoverty strategy that focused on job training and residual social services. This consideration heralded the beginning of a significant shift within the government from attacking poverty with an employment approach to one based on income maintenance, a shift that challenged the existing categorical system.¹⁵ Kennedy’s advisors ultimately rejected the idea of pressing ahead with the NIT because they deemed it politically implausible (Patterson 1994). However, the idea was ensconced within the government bureaucracy by the beginning of President Johnson’s War on Poverty initiatives (Steiner 1971).

During the same period, leftists with more radical intentions advanced GAI proposals. Economist Robert Theobald led a social democratic movement that favored completely breaking the link between income and work by providing a GAI payment through a flat grant to all adults and children (Theobald 1961, 1963, 1965). The country had entered into an era of abundance, Theobald contended, but jobs were disappearing because of trends in automation and computerization. The policy challenge was to produce new institutions that could ameliorate the negative effects of these changes for citizens. He proposed a plan that would provide a basic income regardless of work status and argued that this “due income” was a constitutional right (Theobald 1963).

The GAI plans advanced by these conservatives, moderate, and leftist proponents were each premised on a structural view of poverty that challenged the normative and programmatic grounds for categorizing the poor based upon their perceived worthiness. For conservative economists, the

¹⁵ Similarly, Block and Manza (1997) call this a shift from the employment paradigm to the transfer paradigm.

NIT was an efficient and rational system that would eliminate many of the problems with the existing New Deal-era social service programs. For moderates, it was a realistic and direct way to deal with changes in the post-war economy. For both these groups, removing the boundary between deserving and undeserving was incidental to other goals—namely, alleviating poverty, rationalizing social provision, strengthening work incentives, and moving more people into the paid labor force. Significantly, though concerns about work were paramount, the poor were not considered morally deficient. Their poverty was viewed in circumstantial, not behavioral, terms, and therefore they did not deserve social stigma and programmatic separation from the broader population. For leftists, a GAI policy based on flat grants for all citizens marked a bolder philosophical shift—the decommodification of labor—and achieving this goal explicitly entailed overriding the existing boundaries between categories of poor people.

It was President Johnson's War on Poverty initiatives in 1964 that created institutional conditions in which a new and innovative policy such as GAI could flourish.¹⁶ The creation of the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) gave the welfare experts who worked there the policy mandate, organizational capacity, and political autonomy to develop initiatives that broke sharply with the status quo and had been deemed implausible only a few years earlier. The OEO was a new federal agency with a mandate to end poverty. Because it was new, the agency was unencumbered by existing levels of bureaucracy or commitments to existing programs or paradigms. It recruited young policy experts who brought new ideas to existing problems. Johnson gave it a large initial operating budget, so experts within the OEO believed they had the capacity to put their ideas into practice. And the OEO's experts were intentionally insulated from the pragmatic concerns of legislative politics. Under newly adopted operating procedures, which were borrowed from the Department of Defense, the experts developed their ideas blind to costs and shielded from political pressures.

OEO experts favored GAI policies for the reasons articulated by Friedman and by Kennedy's economic advisors—they considered existing categorical plans technically ineffective and normatively problematic.¹⁷ If the aim of antipoverty policy was reducing poverty, then the experts believed

¹⁶ This discussion of the Johnson administration draws from accounts in Kershaw (1970), Levine (1970), Rivlin (1971), and Steiner (1971).

¹⁷ For instance, in his critique of categorical plans, Joseph Kershaw, a former director of research at the OEO, wrote that the "moral degradation that had become so much a part of the existing system" was one of the most important factors leading to the indictment of existing AFDC programs (Kershaw 1970, p. 103).

that benefits should be based upon economic need alone. The agency's first annual report, issued in 1965, contained a GAI proposal as one element of a three-part strategy to combat poverty. In the subsequent years, support for GAI proposals relative to other antipoverty strategies only increased within the OEO. Much to the chagrin of many poverty experts, however, GAI plans were antithetical to Johnson's stated goals in the War on Poverty, which focused on increasing opportunities and expanding social services for the poor. So while GAI proposals enjoyed increasing favor among policy experts, they gained little traction in the Johnson White House.

During this period, social activists began to demand the right to welfare, but these demands did not initially refer to GAI policies. The call for "welfare rights" in the early 1960s primarily came from poverty lawyers who were concerned with procedural rights for people who were *already* either receiving or eligible for some form of welfare payments (Davis 1993; Melnick 1994). Only with the founding of the National Welfare Rights Organization (NWRO) in 1967 did a national movement begin to lobby for a guaranteed adequate income for *all* Americans.¹⁸ The NWRO's demands for welfare rights mixed calls for procedural rights and eligibility rights for the existing welfare population with calls for universal welfare rights through a GAI program. The multivocal nature of these demands mirrored the discussion of welfare rights found in the organization's founding blueprint, an article published in the *Nation* in 1966 by Richard Cloward and Frances Fox Piven, which combined calls for increasing AFDC eligibility and payments with calls for universal coverage of the poor. During this same period, the Civil Rights movement turned its attention from civil rights to economic rights, as reflected in the Poor People's Campaign in 1968. While these movements did not originate the GAI idea, their activism and its repercussions concentrated national attention on the plight of the poor and the inadequacies of the existing system, thus moving the issue of welfare reform to the top of the nation's domestic agenda.

During the final years of the Johnson administration, GAI proposals attracted the attention of both the business community and academic economists. In 1966, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, a bastion of free-enterprise ideology, held a national symposium that even-handedly dis-

¹⁸ On the NWRO, see Piven and Cloward (1977) and Kotz and Kotz (1977). The NWRO's founder, George Wiley, became acquainted with the GAI idea in 1965 through Robert Theobald and members of civil rights organizations.

cussed the pros and cons of the proposals.¹⁹ In the following two years, the idea steadily gained favor within the business community and among economists. A number of business groups—including the Committee for Economic Development, the National Association of Manufacturers, and a conference of prominent business executives convened by Nelson Rockefeller—came out in support of the idea (Moynihan 1973; Steiner 1971). In 1968, over 1,200 economists endorsed a statement calling for a “national system of income guarantees and supplements” along the lines of an NIT plan, and coverage of the statement included a front-page article in the *New York Times*.²⁰ In response to this mounting interest, President Johnson created the President’s Commission on Income Maintenance Programs to explore the viability of GAI and other antipoverty plans.

This commission would not publish its conclusions until the following year, but its final report, which recommended a GAI plan, contained a clear challenge to the cultural categories of worth that served as the ideological basis for existing programs:

Our economic and social structure virtually guarantees poverty for millions of Americans. . . . The simple fact is that most of the poor remain poor because access to income through work is currently beyond their reach. . . . There are not two distinct categories of poor—those who can work and those who cannot. Nor can the poor be divided into those who will work and those who will not. For many, the desire to work is strong, but the opportunities are not readily available. (PCIMP 1969, pp. 23–24)

The commission was mainly composed of national business leaders and academic economists, and it was their acceptance of structural unemployment and low wages as permanent features of the modern economy that most recommended providing public assistance based on economic need alone, without reference to distinctions between the deserving and undeserving. In light of events to come, this historical juncture marked the point at which existing cultural categories of worth exerted the least amount of influence on policy development.

The Nixon Paradox: Transgressing and Reinforcing Cultural Categories

When Nixon took office in January 1969, a number of factors, including increasing AFDC caseloads, concerns about urban unrest, and mounting

¹⁹ The Chamber of Commerce of the United States, “Proceedings of the National Symposium on Guaranteed Income,” December 9, 1966, Washington, D.C.: Chamber of Commerce of the United States. Of the symposium’s five panelists, three favored some version of GAI policy and two opposed it.

²⁰ “Economists Urge Assured Income,” *New York Times*, May 28, 1968, p. 1.

fiscal pressures in many big cities, generated pressure from across the political spectrum to address what was increasingly termed the “welfare mess.” Yet Nixon had no intention of proposing a GAI policy. Neither these social pressures nor welfare activism inevitably generated GAI proposals. At the height of civil disturbances in 1968, Nixon had, in fact, explicitly stated his opposition to such proposals on the presidential campaign trail (Hoff 1994). Before taking office, his domestic advisors pushed strongly for incremental reforms to existing antipoverty programs as opposed to more comprehensive measures.²¹ During the first few months of sustained deliberation over welfare reform, when civil disturbances had largely waned, it was a cadre of poverty experts leftover from the Johnson administration who succeeded in placing an NIT program on the list of policy options (Burke and Burke 1974).

The introduction of this GAI proposal set the stage for a debate that would last until Nixon announced his welfare plan in August. At the center of the debate were issues raised by the prospect of dissolving existing categorical distinctions, providing benefits solely based upon need, and extending income transfer payments to the working poor for the first time. Such prospects raised concerns about the definition of “welfare,” backlash against “welfare” spending, the impact of benefits on the work ethic of the poor, the nation’s economic productivity, and even “the American way of life.” These concerns, along with their political implications, shaped the *content* and *symbolism* of Nixon’s GAI legislation.

Within the administration, proponents of three different policy paradigms converged to support GAI proposals. These paradigms could be distinguished by where they located the ultimate source of the problem of poverty (Steensland, in press). One paradigm advanced by governmental experts at the OEO and the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) located the source of the problem in the labor market. It was based on Kennedy-era views of structural unemployment and recognized that labor market participation alone could not assure income security for all Americans. A second paradigm located the problem in the social system, specifically identifying family breakdown as the proximate cause of poverty and unemployment as the antecedent source of family breakdown. One of Nixon’s main domestic policy advisors, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, became the major proponent of this view. A third paradigm

²¹ Even Daniel Patrick Moynihan, the Nixon advisor who ultimately played the most central role in lobbying for GAI proposals, did not initially favor GAI plans as a strategy to reform the welfare system. On the early recommendations to Nixon, see Report, “Programs to Assist the Poor: Report to President-Elect Richard M. Nixon,” Task Force on Public Welfare, December 1968, folder Public Welfare, 1969–70, Box 3, White House Central Files (hereafter WHCF): EX FG 221-11, Nixon Project Materials (hereafter NPM).

located the source of the problem in the welfare system itself, specifically the irrational structure of its incentives. Nixon's Secretary of Labor, George Shultz, was a proponent of this perspective, which was heavily influenced by the laissez-faire philosophy of his former colleague, Milton Friedman.

Because proponents of these paradigms did not view the individual behavior of the poor as the source of the poverty, they did not view the normative basis of existing categories of worthiness as morally valid, much less socially or programmatically desirable. Much as GAI proponents had before them, they argued that erasing the existing categories would create a more simple and administratively efficient delivery system; alleviate race- and class-based tensions; remove the stigma of receiving government benefits; expand the political constituency for income maintenance programs; strengthen the work incentives in a currently dysfunctional program; and, centrally, reduce poverty. Contemporaneous accounts indicate that these arguments swayed Nixon; he grew convinced that GAI plans promised the best existing way to address the "welfare mess" (Burke and Burke 1974; Moynihan 1973). In April he announced to his advisors that he would pursue a GAI strategy, which became known during this formulation period as the Family Security System. Notably, as Nixon's support suggests, the plan's supporters presented the program as a technical fix to a pressing problem, not as an ideological coup.

This soon changed as the program became irrevocably politicized. The most prominent lines of attack against the Family Security System (FSS) illustrated how the schematic influence of cultural categories of worth shaped views of symbolic pollution and social stigma and constituted the basis of oppositional claims making. Arthur Burns, one of Nixon's closest domestic advisors, widely circulated a 41-page memo, entitled "Investing in Human Dignity," that expressed two prominent concerns.²² First, Burns complained about the addition of what he estimated would be 20 to 25 million people to the welfare rolls. This not only overestimated the actual number by up to 100%, but, more important, it implied that *all* the new recipients would be "welfare" recipients, even though the majority of benefits would go to members of the deserving and working poor populations. Based on his definition of Nixon's program as a "welfare" program, Burns further argued that the cost increases were untenable because the public would not tolerate such a welfare expansion. Second, Burns protested the inclusion of the working poor in Nixon's plan because he argued that dignity was derived from work. The FSS would undermine self-sufficiency and the work ethic by providing "welfare" to workers,

²² Memo, Burns to Nixon, April 21, 1969, folder Welfare Proposals (2 of 2), Box 40, White House Staff Files (hereafter WHSF): Ehrlichman, NPM.

thereby enslaving recipients to their dependency on government. According to Burns's worldview, government benefits and work were mutually exclusive categories to be kept fully separate. It was only through removing people from the rolls, his overarching goal, that policy could maximize their human dignity. In accordance with these concerns, Burns proposed his own incremental welfare reform strategy that tightly limited eligibility and excluded the working poor, thereby reinforcing categories of worth.

Another Nixon advisor, Martin Anderson, viewed the FSS in a similar way, but drew a more direct connection to the plan's ostensible effect on the nation's economic productivity and moral fiber. Anderson's rhetorical strategy was based on comparing Nixon's FSS to England's Speenhamland Law of 1795, which was the origin of the English poor laws that established the framework for Anglo-American poor relief. Making exclusive use of six pages of highly selective quotes from Karl Polanyi's book, *The Great Transformation*, Anderson's memo to Nixon recounted the criticisms of the Speenhamland Law that opponents claimed damaged productivity, drove down wages, demoralized workers, and threatened the capitalist order. A few excerpts illustrate Anderson's strategy:

It introduced no less a social and economic innovation than "the right to live," and until abolished in 1834, it effectively prevented the establishment of a competitive labor market. . . . To later generations nothing could have been more patent than the mutual incompatibility of institutions like the wage system and "the right to live," or, in other words, than the impossibility of a functioning capitalist order as long as wages were subsidized from public funds. . . . A grave deterioration of the productive capacities of the masses resulted. . . . The outcome was merely the pauperization of the masses, who almost lost their human shape in the process.²³

Anderson's discursive strategy was adept. The sharp contrast drawn between work (the "wage system") and welfare (the "right to live") clearly reinforced dominant cultural categories of worth. Moreover, the reference to wage subsidies threatening the capitalist order showed how radical the notion of income supplements to the working poor appeared to opponents of the FSS at the time, since income-based benefits for workers heretofore did not exist. The memo's epigraph was Santayana's well-known quote, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." The implication was that Nixon's plan would present the same economic and

²³ Martin Anderson, "A Short History of a 'Family Security System'," April 14, 1969, folder Welfare Proposals (2 of 2), Box 40, WHSF: Ehrlichman, NPM.

moral threat to America's free market system as had the Speenhamland Law to England's.²⁴

During the early spring, the debates over welfare reform were largely confined to competing expert paradigms and the main difference between the FSS and Burns's incremental reform plan was the inclusion of the working poor.²⁵ But in May concerns within the administration about the *public* response to Nixon's proposed plan began to intensify as it became more clear that the FSS was a serious contender. Burns sent Nixon and his advisors a memo that summarized a recent *New York* magazine article called "The Revolt of the White Lower Middle Class." Burns quoted the article extensively, including quotes that reflected the attitudes of the white ethnic population toward the poor. The quotes contained racial epithets, reproduced a typical stereotype of the lazy poor spending their money on liquor, and reflected a pronounced anger and belligerence directed at welfare recipients. The author concluded:

The working class is actually in a revolt against taxes, joyless work, the double standards and short memories of professional politicians, hypocrisy, and what he considers the debasement of the American dream. . . Any politician who leaves the white man out of the political equation does so at his own risk.²⁶

Burns argued that these sentiments supported his own welfare reform strategy, which contained strict work requirements, lower levels of provision, and only applied to the existing AFDC population. Soon concerns about working-class backlash took center stage in the welfare debate and Nixon himself circulated a memo called "The Working Poor" to his advisors highlighting the centrality of the working poor to his overall political strategy.²⁷ It looked to conservatives like calling attention to the possible reaction of the working class had been an effective strategy for challenging Nixon's proposal. However it did not lead to the triumph of Burns's plan. Instead it ultimately led to a programmatic and rhetorical repackaging of Nixon's own FSS.

²⁴ For a revisionist account of the Speenhamland episode and its effects, see Block and Somers (2003).

²⁵ See Memo, Burns to Nixon, June 6, 1969, folder WE 10-5, FSS Begin-7/17/69, Box 60, WHCF: WE, NPM; Memo, Moynihan to Nixon, June 6, 1969, p. 3, folder WE 10-5, FSS Begin-7/17/69, Box 60, WHCF: WE, NPM.

²⁶ Quoted in Memo, Burns to Nixon, May 26, 1969, folder Welfare Book, Attitudes toward Welfare, Box 39, WHSF: Ehrlichman, NPM. Also see Rieder (1985) on the working-class backlash against AFDC beneficiaries in the early 1970s.

²⁷ Memo, Stephen Bull to Agnew et al., June 11, 1969, p. 3, folder 5/1/69-7/31/69, Box 1, WHCF: WE, NPM. See Frymer and Skrentny (1998) on how Nixon's focus on the working poor aligned with his larger political objectives, such as his "southern strategy."

Guaranteed Income Policy

These concerns were rich in paradox, and they shed further light on how schematic perceptions affected views of GAI plans among both elites and the mass public. Burns saw the FSS as a welfare plan and he was convinced that the working class would view it similarly. They would, he asserted, react harshly to the proposed expansion of welfare by many millions of recipients. This was despite the fact that most of these additional recipients of government assistance would be *members of the working class themselves*. In other words, it was in the material self-interest of the working class to support the FSS. But Burns expressed a further concern that helped clarify his own position and the reaction he anticipated from the working class. In a memo to Nixon, he wrote:

The agitation for income guarantees and the like is coming from intellectuals who have not considered sufficiently what may happen to the moral fiber of America when many millions of people, a good portion of whom do not even consider themselves poor, are suddenly thrust by law onto the welfare rolls. If I am right in thinking that the basic aim of welfare reform should be to rehabilitate people, then the gains to be achieved through work and rehabilitation—on which I have been insisting—may be nullified by placing millions of self-reliant working people in a state of dependency.²⁸

The key to Burns's logic was concern about dependency and social stigma. In Burns's view the working poor would be rendered "dependent" once they began receiving government benefits. The logic of this analysis depended upon perceptions of moral contamination—defining the FSS as a welfare program and then extrapolating the negative effects that the receipt of "welfare" payments would have on those already in the workforce. He was further convinced that the working poor themselves would see these payments as "welfare" payments and they would reject any program that connoted this stigma.

Meanwhile supporters of the FSS devised counterframes that directly responded to the claims of Burns and his allies. Supporters of the FSS vigorously contested the view that the FSS was a welfare proposal and they provided Nixon with a new discursive framework for his plan and a strategy to reach out to the working poor. In short, they elaborated a new schema through which to understand social provision, a framework that Nixon could then articulate to the public:

It is entirely improper to consider the working poor, who will get wage supplements under the [FSS] plan, as being added to the welfare rolls. These are not welfare recipients—they are not dependent persons who are living on the dole. It would be equally illogical to add to the welfare rolls all those

²⁸ Memo, Burns to Nixon, July 14, 1969, p. 11, folder Welfare Book, FSS 1969 (1 of 2), Box 38, WHSF: Ehrlichman, NPM.

persons who are receiving wage supplements under social security, veterans' benefits, food stamps, or unemployment insurance. This is a *new* category—it is a *new* Federal program of *wage supplementation* to the working poor—and the whole point is that these people are not thought of as welfare recipients.²⁹

The memo concluded by saying that the FSS was “by far the best strategy to deal with the ‘forgotten man,’” and that the program would have a “tremendous beneficial political impact” for the administration. These advisors provided Nixon with an alternative discursive framework—based upon economic need and without categorical distinctions—for appealing to the working-class, white ethnics that concerned Burns.

But the existing cognitive schema was difficult to dislodge. In the days preceding Nixon's public announcement in August, Burns made a final attempt to change Nixon's mind by contending that the president's plan really contained two separate programs, “FSS-Welfare” and “FSS-Working Poor,” and that the 13 million members of the working poor who were covered by the plan would lose their incentive to work.³⁰ The striking thing about Burns's characterization of the plan, as debates during the summer had made clear, was that administration officials who both supported and opposed the FSS viewed it as covering these two separate populations: they could not help but see the plan through the dominant collective schema that distinguished between these two social categories.³¹ Even Nixon's speech writer, William Safire, complained that coming up with a final name for a program that contained both aid to families with no income and income supplements for the working poor was a challenging task for this reason.³² The debate within the administration concerned not the experts' *cognitive* definition of the situation, which was shared, but the *normative* implications of what to do about it: blur the boundaries between categories of the poor or reinforce them.

The final strategy that Nixon undertook tried to have it both ways by

²⁹ Report, “Comments on Dr. Burns' Memorandum of July 12,” p. 3, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, July 14, 1969, folder Welfare Book, FSS 1969 (1 of 2), Box 38, WHSF: Ehrlichman, NPM (emphasis in original).

³⁰ Memo, Burns to Nixon, August 4, 1969, p. 2, folder Welfare Book, FSS 1969 (2 of 2), Box 38, WHSF: Ehrlichman, NPM. Burns's concerns contradicted an analysis conducted by the administration that showed that people covered by the plan would always receive more money by working than by solely receiving benefits.

³¹ For instance, Moynihan and Secretary Finch, among others, drew sharp distinctions between these populations. See “Report of the Committee on Welfare of the Council for Urban Affairs,” April 4, 1969, folder CF WE 10-5, Box 69, WHSF: [CF]: WE, NPM; Memo, Finch to Nixon, April 30, 1969, folder Welfare Proposals (2 of 2), Box 40, WHSF: Ehrlichman, NPM.

³² Memo, Safire to Ehrlichman, July 15, 1969, folder Welfare Book, Name of Program, Box 39, WHSF: Ehrlichman, NPM.

rhetorically masking what his policy did in actual detail. This strategy was explicit. Nixon's domestic policy advisor reminded him what he needed to do in the announcement. The speech needed to target tax payers and the working poor, not current AFDC recipients, blacks, or the unemployed.³³ This aligned with Nixon's desire to draw both southern Democrats and northeastern "white ethnics" away from the Democratic party. Nixon heeded this advice. His announcement introduced a revolutionary program that dismantled the long-standing categorical divisions between deserving and undeserving poor, but one would have never known it by his rhetoric.

Nixon's announcement framed the program in ways that strongly influenced public perceptions and established the terms of the coming political debate. The speech, in which he introduced his revised and renamed Family Assistance Plan, emphasized work above all else. One liberal critic wrote that Nixon "offered the poor the Protestant Ethic warmed over" and Nixon repeatedly equated welfare with the "choice" not to work.³⁴ Moreover, the announcement contained three central ironies that were rooted in the tension between the substance of Nixon's plan and the symbolism that he was trying to project. First, he repeatedly bemoaned the country's recent decline into "welfarism," despite the fact that his program proposed to add 13 million government beneficiaries to the rolls. Second, Nixon's advisors estimated that 90% of the benefits in the program would be directed toward the working poor, but Nixon denigrated the character of people receiving government benefits. Third, he said he wanted to move people from the "welfare rolls" to "payrolls," even though his new program placed many beneficiaries on both, since the "payrolls" by themselves did not provide economic security for many Americans. Each of these ironies was rooted in the boundary transgression that his proposal advanced but that he offered the public no new way to understand. Instead, each of these rhetorical devices clearly and publicly reinforced the categorical distinctions between poor people that his program in practice would obviate. This set the stage for the politics of GAI during his administration.

The Politics of Nixon's Family Assistance Plan

Apparently due to Nixon's rhetorical strategy, his newly renamed Family Assistance Plan (FAP) enjoyed early public favor. Polling in 1968 had

³³ Handwritten Notes, John Ehrlichman, n.d., folder Welfare Book, Domestic Speech, Box 39, WHSF: Ehrlichman, NPM.

³⁴ "Transcript of Nixon's Address to Nation Outlining Proposals for Welfare Reform," *New York Times*, August 9, 1969, p. 10; critic cited in Moynihan (1973, p. 270).

shown that the public opposed GAI plans.³⁵ Yet after Nixon's announcement the administration's internal analysis showed that over 90% of newspaper editorials and columns favored the plan, and a Gallup poll showed that public support was as high as 65%.³⁶ This support was not based on a changing public philosophy that supported a right to basic income. Rather Nixon persistently reiterated that his proposal strengthened the work ethic, curtailed dependency, and, most ironically, moved people off the welfare rolls. In doing so, he continued to reinforce existing categories of worth. Over the course of the welfare debate, the administration conspicuously hewed to this line of argument.³⁷

Some conservatives who opposed the FAP grudgingly recognized the success of Nixon's framing strategy, while maintaining serious concerns about the FAP's substantive policy implications. As the editors at the *National Review*, a leading conservative political magazine, observed, "The conservatives are getting the rhetoric while the liberals are getting the action."³⁸ Nixon's framing indeed seemed to be working among conservatives. A poll showed that members of the National Federation of Independent Business favored the FAP by almost a 2-to-1 margin.³⁹ Some of these respondents included additional handwritten notes in their survey responses, and a further examination of the reasons for their support sheds some light on these business owners' rationales. Two examples are illustrative:

A Minnesota realtor says, "Welfare is something I think is very important. However, I am fed up with the present system that allows able-bodied

³⁵ Data on public attitudes toward GAI proposals were sparse prior to 1969. A Gallup poll from 1968 showed that only 36% of respondents favored a GAI proposal while 78% supported a plan that provided guaranteed jobs at the same level of income (Moynihan 1973, p. 245). Another study described the public as "hugely opposed," based on a June 1968 Gallup poll that showed that even low-income respondents favored GAI proposals at levels under 50% (Cavala and Wildavsky 1970, p. 349).

³⁶ "Editorial/Column Analysis, President's Welfare Proposals," August 20, 1969, attachment in Memo, Cole to Burns et al., September 22, 1969, folder Welfare Book, Reports and Speeches, Box 38, WHSF: Ehrlichman, NPM; Memo, Art Klebanoff to Moynihan, September 5, 1969, folder WE 10-5, 7/18/69-9/30/69, Box 61, WHCF: WE, NPM; Moynihan (1973, p. 268).

³⁷ E.g., Memo, Harlow to Staff Secretary, January 26, 1970, folder WE 10-5, 10/1/69-2/11/70, Box 61, WHSF: WE, NPM.

³⁸ "Deeper and Deeper Still," *National Review*, March 24, 1970, p. 293. This article was also circulated within the White House by the Nixon staff; see Memo and attachments, Webster to Morgan, March 26, 1970, folders WE 10-5, 3/1/70-3/31/70, Box 61, WHCF: WE, NPM.

³⁹ Press Release, National Federation of Independent Business, Inc., March 17, 1970, p. 1, folder 3/1/1970-3/31/1970, Box 61, WHCF: WE, NPM.

Guaranteed Income Policy

people to sit on their hind ends. Let's get a program to train these people to support themselves."

A Tennessee garage owner, says, "Welfare is one of the most abused programs we have. We have tried to get some of the big strong fellows to work too many times. They have refused because their families were getting welfare and food stamps."⁴⁰

Nixon had succeeded in convincing these respondents that his program reinforced the boundaries between the deserving and undeserving poor by emphasizing rehabilitation, and thus his framing resonated with a set of dominant schematic distinctions held by the general public.

Letters to the White House consistently showed similar patterns.⁴¹ A supportive petition from auto workers at a Pontiac plant in Michigan aptly captured these widespread sentiments:

We strongly support your efforts to bring about Welfare Reform. We believe the welfare programs should be for those who really need it, and not for those *men* and *women* who are able to work at something. They too should help share the tax burdens of this nation. This is a *non-partisan* petition.⁴²

Notably, nothing in the correspondence indicated that these employees viewed the working class themselves as prospective beneficiaries of Nixon's plan if they faced difficult financial times. The accompanying letter informed Nixon that the most hotly discussed subject during the lunch breaks at the factory was the "deadwood" condition of the nation's welfare system, and that the workers approved "emphatically of your plan for able-bodied men and women to work or starve. We know that we will always have the poor with us, but feel that the majority of them could be self-supporting if they wanted."⁴³

Nixon's framing strategy also helps to explain why many of the FAP's potential supporters, such as welfare rights and civil rights organizations, viewed his plan skeptically. They responded less to the radical structure

⁴⁰ Report, National Federation of Independent Business, Inc., n.d., pp. 2–3, attached in Memo, Webster to Morgan, April 13, 1969, folder 4/1/70-6/30/1970, Box 61, WHCF: WE, NPM. The Federation mailed the report to each member of Congress.

⁴¹ Letters to the White House are not, of course, a nationally representative sample. But they do reveal the grounds on which letter writers base their policy preferences. In the absence of widespread public opinion data during this time period, such letters, along with news articles and editorials, were the main way that presidential administrations gauged public opinion (see Lee 2002). The letter quoted here captures the essence of many letters of support for the FAP that Nixon received.

⁴² Letter and attachment, Mrs. Warren A. Kline to Nixon, April 22, 1971, p. 1 of attachment (emphasis in original), folder WE 5/16/71-5/31/71, Box 8, WHCF: WE, NPM.

⁴³ Ibid.

of the plan and more to Nixon's critique of dependency, his rhetorical emphasis on work requirements (which almost all conservatives doubted could be enforced), and benefit levels they considered to be inadequate. Their skepticism turned to hostility as the debates over the program progressed and their demands for higher benefit levels escalated. For political reasons, Nixon placed little importance on selling his plan to these groups, and they responded in kind.

In contrast, the administration was quite concerned with the opinion of the business community, especially how leaders at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce viewed the plan's effects on the labor market. Here the news was not so good due to the same sort of symbolic pollution that had concerned Burns. In the spring of 1970, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce formally announced its opposition to the FAP and made defeating the bill its highest legislative priority.⁴⁴ The main reason the Chamber opposed the bill was its inclusion of the working poor. A "Special Report on Welfare," circulated to 30,000 members, argued that the FAP was "best understood as three separate programs rather than as one," encompassing aid to the aged, blind, and disabled; benefits for existing recipients of AFDC; and income supplements for families headed by a fully employed father with a low income. The Chamber stated that if the FAP had solely contained the existing AFDC population and the aged, blind, and disabled, the organization would have far fewer objections. However, the Chamber argued that including the working poor "packs the greatest economic wallop . . . a system under which everyone is guaranteed a minimum income would do incalculable damage to an economic system that is built on an incentive system."⁴⁵

A month later, the Chamber's executive vice president wrote to Nixon to reiterate the organization's opposition to the FAP. The great majority of the three-page letter was devoted to objections to providing income supplements to the working poor:

We do not believe that adding them to the welfare rolls is a solution to the basic welfare problem. . . . We believe that work incentives and personal initiatives would be weakened by such a program. . . . We believe that in

⁴⁴ The trajectory of the Chamber's political activity during these months is drawn from the discussion in Moynihan (1973, chap. 4) and from the following documents: On the Chamber's early disinterest in the FAP relative to other issues, see Memo, Ehrlichman to Nixon, November 25, 1969, folder 11/1/69-12/9/69, Box 3, WHCF: EX FG 6-12, NPM. For the Chamber's stated opposition by the following February, see Memo, Webster to Lamar Alexander, February 19, 1970, folder Family Assistance Plan, Box 63, WHSF: Colson, NPM; and Memo, Webster to Morgan, February 20, 1970, folder WE 10-5, 2/12/70-2/28/70, Box 61, WHCF: WE, NPM.

⁴⁵ Letter and attachment, Charles Harbaugh to Webster, March 13, 1970, p. 3 of attachment, folder Family Assistance Plan, Box 63, WHSF: Colson, NPM.

Guaranteed Income Policy

its total effect, this part of the program—paying welfare to fully employed father families—would impair the nation’s productivity.⁴⁶

A few points stand out in the opposition to the FAP articulated by the Chamber. First, the Chamber viewed the FAP as providing benefits to fundamentally different categories of poor people. Second, the organization’s primary concern about payments to the working poor once again showed how radical this type of income supplementation program appeared to opponents of Nixon’s plan. Third, both the special report and the personal correspondence to Nixon repeatedly referred to such payments as “welfare” payments. Following lines of reasoning that had been expressed by Burns and Anderson, these opponents feared that such “welfare” payments would harm the work ethic of low-wage workers. Fourth, the special report and the correspondence also both noted how little was actually known about the possible effects of a GAI program on the behavior of the poor, either in terms of affecting family stability or its impact on work effort.⁴⁷ Therefore the impact of income supplements on the working poor—and thus the impact of the FAP on the economic interests of business—remained solely a matter of speculation based on existing preconceptions. The need for more research on these issues had in fact prompted the OEO to launch a series of experiments to assess the impact of GAI plans on work effort and family structure in the late sixties, but little data was yet available at the outset of debate over Nixon’s plan. The earliest and most tentative findings from the OEO experiments, announced during the same month as the Chamber launched its legislative offensive, had however found “no evidence that work effort declined among those receiving income support payments.”⁴⁸

In stark contrast to the Chamber, many other business groups supported Nixon’s plan, yet their “business-friendly” rationales were virtually absent from the policy frames used in public discourse. The National Association of Manufacturers, the Committee for Economic Development, and many corporate executives had been in communication with one of Nixon’s domestic advisors, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, over the previous years, and

⁴⁶ Letter, Arch N. Booth to Nixon, April 3, 1970, pp. 1–3, folder WE 10-5, 4/1/70-6/30/70, Box 61, WHCF: WE, NPM.

⁴⁷ This recognition of uncertainty was widely noted. Another business group, the Committee for Economic Development made a similar point in its research report *supporting* GAI proposals during the same month. See “Improving the Public Welfare System,” April 1970, Research for Policy Committee for the Committee for Economic Development, folder 4/1/70-4/21/70, Box 2, WHCF: EX WE, NPM. Moreover, the research community had long realized how little was understood about the impact of income support on the behavior of the poor (Levine 1970; Moynihan 1973; Rivlin 1971).

⁴⁸ Press Release, Office of the White House Press Secretary, February 18, 1970, p. 2, folder Family Assistance Plan, Box 63, WHSF: Colson, NPM.

this communication, along with participation in numerous working groups, had influenced their perceptions of poverty and social policy.⁴⁹ These business leaders favored Nixon's plan for a number of reasons: it provided income subsidies to lift worker's wages rather than seeking increases in the minimum wage, thereby socializing the costs of low-wage work; it provided minimal interference in the labor market; it increased the spending power of low-wage consumers; and it increased work incentives through its graduated benefits scale.⁵⁰ Yet strikingly few officials, including Nixon himself, gave public voice to these reasons for supporting the FAP. Doing so would highlight the noncategorical nature of the plan and almost inevitably invoke the "radical" recognition that the U.S. economy could not support all American workers at a decent standard of living without government intervention.

On one occasion, early on in the welfare debate, Nixon publicly violated the dominant discursive structure of welfare reform by frankly discussing the design of his plan and he was quickly "corrected" by his advisors. In a speech following a congressional hearing, Nixon described the benefit of the FAP as residing in its noncategorical nature. He stated that the plan would, for the first time, "put cash into the hands of families because they are poor, rather than because they fit certain categories."⁵¹ Upon hearing about the speech, Burns immediately sent a memo to Nixon's domestic counsel asking for a clarification, saying that Nixon's statement looked like the "classic definition of a guaranteed income." Burns stated that he had received queries wanting to know if the president had changed his earlier position toward these types of programs, or whether he was "simply using strong rhetoric to make his point."⁵² Nixon's domestic counsel apparently understood the political significance of these distinctions and informed Burns that the president had not meant his statement to be taken literally.⁵³

Through deft maneuvering by Nixon and the Speaker of the House, the FAP passed its first legislative hurdle, the House of Representatives,

⁴⁹ See Moynihan (1973) and Steiner (1971). On the role that participation in such policy networks can play in the formation of business groups' policy preferences, see Martin (1995).

⁵⁰ "Report from the Steering Committee of the Arden House Conference on Public Welfare," Albany, New York, n.d. [circa 1968]; and Report, "Incentives and the Welfare Programs," National Association of Manufacturers, n.d. [circa 1969], folder Family Assistance Plan, Box 63, WHSF: Colson, NPM.

⁵¹ Nixon quoted in Memo, Burns to Ehrlichman, December 4, 1969, folder Welfare Book, Reports and Speeches, Box 38, WHSF: Ehrlichman, NPM.

⁵² Memo, Burns to Ehrlichman, December 4, 1969.

⁵³ Memo, Ehrlichman to Burns, December 5, 1969, folder Welfare Book, Reports and Speeches, Box 38, WHSF: Ehrlichman, NPM.

by a large margin in April 1970. But when the legislation reached the Senate, conservatives raised four concerns that exemplified the schematic influence of symbolic pollution: the inclusion of the working poor, the program's costs, the expansion of the welfare rolls by 13 million recipients, and the fact that many claimed that the FAP ensured a "right to welfare."⁵⁴ The first three of these concerns were rooted in viewing the FAP as a "welfare" program, rather than as a new, more inclusive category of social provision, as Nixon's advisors had suggested it be framed. However, the Nixon administration could not change rhetorical course because much of the support for the program was based on the view that the program reinforced existing cultural categories and therefore emphasized rehabilitation through work. These concerns continued to hang up the members of the Senate committee until the close of the year, and the legislation was tabled until the new congressional session in the following year.

In his State of the Union address in January 1971, Nixon called welfare reform, as he had in the previous year's address, his highest domestic priority and said that he would introduce revised welfare legislation to Congress.⁵⁵ The second version of his plan contained changes that were clearly concessions to the concerns in the Senate about work and the moral contagion between categories of the poor. The new version distinguished between three types of recipients—the aged, blind, and disabled; families with no employable members; and families with employable members—and the benefits for each subpopulation were administered through a separate agency. However, these groups were still included in the same legislative program and received the same type of benefits. The White House continued to try to emphasize that the bill was "workfare" legislation, at one point explicitly directing all members of the administration to refer to it as such.⁵⁶

The revised version of Nixon's plan passed the full House of Representatives by a large majority but it once again bogged down through the end of the year in the Senate. The work-related aspects of the bill were still the dominant concern among powerful congressional conservatives who viewed the threat in the noncategorical features of the plan itself. The chair of the Senate Finance Committee, Russell Long, proposed his own set of sharply categorical programs as an alternative. His "welfare"

⁵⁴ Memo, Webster to Moynihan, July 15, 1970, and Memo, Morgan to Ehrlichman, July 16, 1970, both located in folder WE 10-5, 7/1/70-12/70, Box 61, WHCF: WE, NPM.

⁵⁵ "Transcript of President's State of the Union Message to Joint Session of Congress," *New York Times*, January 23, 1971, p. 12.

⁵⁶ Memo, Haldeman to Ehrlichman, May 18, 1971, folder WE 5/16/71-5/31/71, Box 8, WHCF: WE, NPM; Memo, Hullin to Staff Secretary, July 14, 1971, folder WE 10-5, Family Security Plans, 1/1/71-12/72, Box 62, WHCF: WE, NPM.

proposal aimed at reducing the existing AFDC population by up to 40%. Long also liked the idea of helping the working poor, but he wanted to do it in a completely separate program through income subsidies paid through a worker's employer. Thus he proposed two complementary pieces of legislation that would erect an explicit programmatic boundary between the deserving and undeserving poor. Because of an elaborate training, job placement, and surveillance apparatus, officials estimated that Long's workfare plan would cost between \$3 and \$9 billion more than the Nixon's proposal, one of a number of indications that cost was never the main obstacle for Nixon's proposal.⁵⁷

In the 1972 presidential campaign, even Nixon's liberal Democratic opponent, George McGovern, was constrained by the political imperative to draw distinctions between poor people, despite the fact that he was beholden to completely different constituencies. McGovern initially proposed a "demogrant" plan that would provide a \$1000 flat-rate income guarantee to every person in America, regardless of their income level or work status. McGovern adopted this proposal, in part, in order to replace the existing "caste system approach" to public assistance. Yet his plan was so widely criticized by Democrats and Republicans alike—on the basis of its "welfare" costs, its ideological radicalism, and its consequences—that he retracted the plan and instead proposed a clearly categorical alternative program that was in some ways even more conservative than Nixon's.⁵⁸ The plan consisted of three components—public jobs for the employable poor, an expansion of Social Security for the blind, aged, and disabled, and increased benefits for existing AFDC recipients. The new plan did not require poor single mothers with young children to work, but neither did it expand eligibility beyond the existing welfare population. Most notably, in contrast with Nixon's FAP, McGovern's plan did not contain income supplements for the working poor, an issue that he claimed must await future resolution. This omission provides further indication of the increasingly contentious nature of providing government benefits to fully employed workers within a "welfare" proposal.

During the presidential campaign, Nixon's public framing amplified the existing categorical discourse of the U.S. welfare state. Despite the

⁵⁷ Majorie Hunter, "Senate Unit Puts 'Must Work' Plan into Relief Bill," *New York Times*, April 29, 1972, p. 1.

⁵⁸ On the evolution of McGovern's welfare reform proposals and the criticisms levied against them, see Edwin L. Dale, Jr., "McGovern Income Plan Ridiculed by a Nixon Aide," *New York Times*, June 18, 1972, p. 1; Jack Rosenthal, "Growth of an Issue: McGovern Dilemma," *New York Times*, July 8, 1972, p. 10; James T. Wooten, "G.O.P. Study Sees a Big Deficit in McGovern's Fiscal Proposals," *New York Times*, August 17, 1972, p. 24; "Excerpts from Senator McGovern's Address Explaining His Economic Program," *New York Times*, August 30, 1972, p. 22.

fact that Nixon's plan blurred existing categories of social provision while McGovern's reinforced them, Nixon claimed that the country faced a choice "between the 'work ethic' that built the nation's character and the new 'welfare ethic' that could cause the American character to weaken." Journalists covering Nixon described such rhetoric as "calculated to appeal to millions of largely white and increasingly prosperous blue-collar workers who seem divided on Mr. McGovern's candidacy and whose divisions the President obviously hopes to exploit for his own political profit." Journalists themselves adopted Nixon's rhetorical distinction between the "work ethic" and the "welfare ethic" in their general coverage of the debates over welfare reform.⁵⁹ Unnoted in the press was the irony that it was Nixon's proposal that would expand the "welfare ethic" by extending benefits to 13 million additional people, while McGovern's new plan would maintain the existing number of people on the rolls. Nixon's rhetoric once again appeared to win the day because it skillfully exploited the dominant discursive structure based upon categories of worth.

In October 1972, one month before the presidential election, the prospects of a GAI plan died for the remainder of the Nixon administration. Earlier in the summer, the Finance Committee had deleted Nixon's plan from its broader legislative package. On October 15, a House-Senate conference committee followed the Senate's lead in keeping the FAP out of the broader legislation, and two days later Congress passed it without a guaranteed income program, but with elements of Senator Long's work-oriented provisions.⁶⁰

Institutionalizing Cultural Boundaries

Subsequent to the failure of Nixon's FAP, two closely related pieces of social policy legislation passed into law. These policies—Supplemental Security Income and the Earned Income Tax Credit—partially attained some of the original goals of Nixon's plan. Their passage illustrates the process through which cultural categories of worth became further institutionalized in the programmatic structure of the welfare state. Their passage also provides a crucial experiment that highlights how schematic perceptions shaped the interests of conservative business leaders and their political allies, particularly the perception that the working poor would

⁵⁹ Quotes appear in Robert Semple, Jr., "President Scores 'Welfare Ethic'," *New York Times*, September 4, 1972, p. 1. For an example of the continuing use of the work ethic-welfare ethic distinction, see Steven V. Roberts, "Welfare: Explosive Issue for '72," *New York Times*, September 10, 1972, sec. 4, p. 6.

⁶⁰ Marjorie Hunter, "Senate Rejects a Welfare Plan," *New York Times*, October 4, 1972, p. 24.

be rendered in a state of dependency by receiving “welfare” benefits in a GAI plan.

The Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program provided assistance for the aged, blind, and disabled—a group clearly defined as the deserving poor. It was a generous program that did not require payroll contributions as did the Social Security program. Moreover, SSI payments could be a supplement both to regular Social Security checks and to earned wages. Amid the ideologically strident controversies over the FAP, which would have included SSI recipients, the passage of this legislation in 1972 went virtually unrecognized, despite the fact that it was the first federally recognized minimum income guarantee for any category of recipients.⁶¹

The SSI legislation programmatically separated the groups included under its provisions from the other categories of poor people not defined as deserving. This separation was explicitly intended to remove the stigma of welfare from payments going to the elderly, blind, and disabled. In the closing months of debate over the FAP, members of the Senate Finance Committee had in fact intentionally changed the name of Title II of the legislation from “Assistance for the Aged, Blind, and Disabled” to “Supplemental Security Income” in order to ensure that the program would not be called “welfare” (Burke and Burke 1974). By implication, the non-aged, unemployed poor still deserved the stigma of “welfare.” Nixon inadvertently made this clear on the campaign trail in 1972, when he stated in a speech: “And while we’re talking about welfare, let us quit treating our senior citizens in this country like welfare recipients.”⁶² Symbolic and programmatic differentiation between categories of the poor was at the heart of the SSI legislation and its easy passage into law.

A parallel process of institutional differentiation occurred in regard to another category of deserving recipients: the working poor. The most controversial aspect of Nixon’s proposal had been the provision of governmental benefits to this group. Sentiments against including the working poor were widely shared. Opponents had claimed that payments to the working poor would carry tragic consequences: the working poor would be placed in a state of dependency; their dignity would be tarnished; national productivity would decline; and the American way of life itself would be threatened. Nowhere were these concerns articulated more forcefully than by the leaders of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the members of the Senate Finance Committee. Yet three years later, in 1975, Congress passed legislation for the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)—legislation that originated in the Finance Committee and gave income

⁶¹ On the development of the SSI legislation, see Burke and Burke (1974, chap. 9).

⁶² “Transcript of Nixon’s Acceptance Address and Excerpts from Agnew’s Speech,” *New York Times*, August 24, 1972, p. 47.

supplements to the working poor by reducing their tax burden and often providing a tax refund. This was a negative income tax for the working class, precisely what conservatives had opposed three years earlier. What had changed?

Senator Long proposed the EITC, which grew out of the work-oriented legislation he developed as an alternative to Nixon's welfare reforms in 1972. Yet the plan owed its structure and delivery mechanism to Nixon's FAP, since it was a negative income tax that provided benefits only for those people in the work force (Howard 1999). Crucially, however, this separation distinguished the working poor from the "welfare" poor. Indeed, the only substantial opposition the EITC received before its passage in 1975 was from conservative members of the House who misunderstood it as a full-fledged negative income tax plan (Howard 1999, p. 69). The legislation passed easily in a bipartisan vote.⁶³

This ease of passage belied the main claim previously made by conservative opponents of Nixon's GAI proposal. During the debate over the FAP, the Chamber of Commerce, conservative members of the Senate Finance Committee, and administration officials such as Arthur Burns had all claimed that income supplements to the working poor would decrease work incentives, harm the free market economy, and stigmatize this "deserving" population. Yet income supplements of this type were precisely what the EITC program provided. Its uncontentious passage revealed that the problem with Nixon's plan had not been income supplements for the working poor per se. The problem had been that the working poor under Nixon's unified plan would receive benefits that connoted the status of "welfare." This, conservatives believed, would render the working poor "dependent" and negatively affect work effort and national productivity. Therefore it was this moral threat posed by dissolving the programmatic boundary between the working and "welfare" poor to which conservatives had responded so vehemently.⁶⁴ The contrast

⁶³ While President Ford opposed the EITC on the grounds that it was poorly targeted, business groups apparently did not take a position. Howard writes: "As a wage subsidy, the EITC might have appealed particularly to business interests seeking to reduce demands for higher wages. There is no evidence, however, that representatives of business or labor played any part in proposing or passing the EITC" (Howard 1999, p. 73). In the 1980s, the Chamber of Commerce explicitly supported expansion of the EITC as an alternative to the minimum wage (Howard 1999, p. 152).

⁶⁴ Along these same lines, in the year following the collapse of Nixon's plan, but before the development of the EITC, a sympathetic administration official emphasized the importance of this symbolic threat by recommending that future legislation refer to benefits for the working poor as "income supplements" as opposed to "welfare." Richard Nathan, "What Went Wrong with FAP: Should We Give Up?" Paper Presented to the National Conference on Social Welfare, May 28, 1973, Atlantic City, N.J., in folder WE 10-5, Family Security Plans, 1/1/73-[7/74], Box 62, WHCF: WE, NPM.

between the opposition to the FAP and acceptance of the EITC reveals that ideas about moral contamination shaped the policy preferences of conservative business leaders and politicians.

Thus by the mid-1970s, the cultural boundaries between categories of poor people had been explicitly reinforced through the creation of two social new programs. This promised to make any subsequent attempt to propose a unified, cash-based relief system considerably more challenging because future reform would have to deconstruct these programs and combat concerns raised by their new and influential constituencies. The existence of these new programs also stripped away the strongest rationale for a unified income strategy while simultaneously leaving virtually untouched the programs for the most vulnerable of the poor. The boundary transgression posed by Nixon's FAP, a program that dissolved the cultural categories of worth, had led to the institutional reinforcement of the very boundaries it would have dismantled.

The Fall of Guaranteed Income: The Carter Administration

On the presidential campaign trail in 1976, Jimmy Carter found that welfare reform was a popular issue. When he took office the following year, he had no intention of making a GAI policy part of his reform proposal. Yet his administration, much as the Nixon administration before it, ended up favoring a GAI plan in its early months because welfare experts within the government bureaucracy succeeded in placing a negative income tax proposal at the top of the list of welfare reform plans. GAI policies fit the administration's goals of initiating comprehensive, rather than incremental, reform; streamlining the welfare system in the hope of reducing fraud; and providing more equitable treatment for the poor (Califano 1981; Lynn and Whitman 1981; Patterson 1998). Yet three factors directly related to cultural categories of worth posed such significant challenges to GAI proposals that Carter ultimately proposed a three-tiered categorical welfare reform plan in lieu of a noncategorical GAI plan. The first was the fear among policy experts of stigmatizing the deserving poor with "welfare" benefits. The second was the long-standing equation of GAI plans with "welfare," which made them susceptible to the growing welfare backlash in the country based upon antipathy toward "welfare" spending. The third was the new EITC program, which served as both a more palatable alternative for addressing the needs of the working poor and as an obstacle to consolidating disparate government programs into a unified system of social provision.

The most trenchant, and ultimately influential, criticism of GAI plans came from Tom Joe, an external consultant on welfare policy who par-

ticipated in the administration's policy formulation process.⁶⁵ Joe was sympathetic to GAI plans and had in fact been instrumental in getting GAI policy on the agenda in the Nixon administration. However, by 1977 he had backed away from supporting GAI programs and instead developed a three-tiered "triple-track" approach as an alternative. The "welfare" track would be for those truly not expected by society to work; the "manpower" track would combine job training, job placement, and public jobs for those whom society expected to work; and the "working poor" track would expand and liberalize the EITC, which would assure that people were always better off working than on welfare.⁶⁶ This approach maintained clear boundaries between categories of poor people.

Joe favored this triple-track approach over a unified GAI plan for both programmatic and political reasons. At the programmatic level, he argued that "although a single [negative income tax] system does respond to objectives of simplicity and equity, the work incentives provision has in the past created serious technical and philosophical hang-ups which are best solved by a multi-system approach."⁶⁷ The technical hang-ups were largely due to the complex array of interrelated antipoverty policies, including SSI and the EITC, that a unified plan would have to dismantle. This was the legacy of the institutional build-up in the wake of the FAP's failure that had reinforced the programmatic boundaries between categories of the poor.

But the "philosophical hang-ups" to a unified plan were the root of the political rationale for the triple-track approach, and, according to Joe, these hinged on the symbolic dimensions of GAI plans and the potential public reaction to them: "While some strategically argue that if welfare becomes more inclusive (i.e., subsumed employable but unemployed adults and the working poor) it will become more acceptable to the public, I do not believe this to be the case. In my opinion, welfare will remain unpopular as long as we try to subsume other problems (i.e., unemployment) under the welfare umbrella and successful welfare reform must result in smaller caseloads of people who cannot be expected to work."⁶⁸

⁶⁵ For further discussion of Joe's influence on policy development as well as on Carter's personal views, see Lynn and Whitman (1981). Many experts at the Department of Labor also opposed GAI proposals because they favored public jobs legislation instead, but this interagency competition played a less central role in determining the shape of *welfare* reform.

⁶⁶ Tom Joe, "Designing a Three-Tiered Approach to Welfare Reform," January 12, 1977, folder 1/21/77, Box 4, Staff Secretary, Jimmy Carter Library (hereafter JCL); Tom Joe, "Double Social Utility: The Needy Serving Others in Need Through a Job Creation Strategy," April 1977, folder 4/77, Box 317, DPS: Eizenstat, JCL.

⁶⁷ Joe, "Designing a Three-Tiered Approach to Welfare Reform," p. 2.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

The contrast drawn by Joe between his categorical approach and the consolidated approach sought by NIT supporters recapitulated the debate during the Nixon era over the meaning of “welfare” and the threat of social stigma. The essence of the question was this: If formerly separate categories of recipients were treated equally within the same program, which population would confer its social status upon the others? Advocates of the consolidated NIT believed that if all the poor were treated according to the same criteria, including the aged, the disabled, and the working poor, then the stigma of welfare would diminish. By this rationale, the dominant status of the program would be determined by the presence of the deserving poor. Opponents of the consolidated approach, such as conservative senators in Congress, believed that the influence would run the other way—the working poor would be stigmatized because they received “welfare” benefits. Joe tried to split the difference, seeking many of the objectives sought by negative income tax proponents, but through differentiating recipients in a similar way as Long did, thereby insulating the deserving populations politically and symbolically. Joe felt that if “welfare” programs were targeted solely at those whom society deemed not expected to work, such as single mothers with young children, then “welfare” would lose its stigma. Other sub-populations of the poor—those who worked and those who were expected to—would be placed in categorically different manpower or income supplement programs, not “welfare” programs. In Joe’s scheme it was the unemployed but employable poor that constituted the morally contaminating group, and his plan isolated them in the manpower track.

As the debates over welfare reform proceeded over the course of the spring, Joe’s views gained influence as other administration officials recognized how the public would likely view a GAI proposal, namely through the lens of symbolic pollution. Former supporters of Carter’s unified GAI proposal now expressed reservations: “You should be aware that folding into the ‘welfare system’ the earned income tax credit, extended unemployment benefits, ‘Section 8 housing,’ and attaching [public] jobs will appear to be an expansion of the welfare system and will label as ‘welfare recipients’ people who are not now so perceived.”⁶⁹ Another staffer made a similar point, saying that the “stigma” issue had not been directly addressed by the NIT supporters: “The application of the term welfare to a benefit also can be seen as stigmatizing the recipients. . . . To the extent that a consolidated assistance program brings additional people within a

⁶⁹ Memo, Parham to Watson, April 15, 1977, p. 1, folder 4/22/77 [1], Box 20, Staff Secretary, JCL.

‘welfare program,’ stigma may be increased.”⁷⁰ Because of the immediate precedent of Nixon’s failed proposal, to which experts repeatedly referred, policy makers were much more sensitive to public perceptions than Nixon’s had been.

When Carter announced the first outlines of his program to the general public on May 2, 1977, his welfare advisors at HEW expected the principles of welfare reform he discussed to reflect the philosophy and programmatic details of the NIT they were working on. Instead, Carter’s principles almost exactly followed those from Joe’s triple-track plan, including references to the separate manpower and working poor programs. Over the course of the summer, the debates and compromises continued. Administration and congressional officials in both parties continued to stress the importance of keeping the working poor separate from other beneficiaries. An alternative to doing this under the rubric of “welfare reform,” some suggested, was the expansion of the new EITC program, because labels and stigma were important to consider:

Although the earned income tax credit is retained [in the current proposal], that plan makes no suggestion for using it in an expanded way. One hope was that such a mechanism would enable many of the working poor to be assisted *without labeling them as welfare recipients*, or requiring that they undergo a means test.”⁷¹

Another staff member made the point in a different way, based on experience with other social programs:

On a theoretical level there may be no reason to distinguish transfer payments paid by the IRS [through the EITC] from those paid by HEW. On a practical level there are important reasons for doing so. Low income persons resist the inconvenience and stigma imposed upon them by participation in direct means-tested programs. . . This is particularly true of the working poor, relatively few of whom have elected to participate in such programs as food stamps.⁷²

These experts recognized the schematic effects of existing cultural categories of worth and the dilemma they posed for a noncategorical welfare proposal. Both the general public and recipients of social provision themselves drew distinctions between types of recipients. The experts further

⁷⁰ Memo, Raines to Eizenstat, April 15, 1977, folder 4/77, Box 317, DPS: Eizenstat, JCL.

⁷¹ Memo, Watson and Parham to Carter, May 23, 1977, p. 1, folder 5/77 [2], Box 318, DPS: Eizenstat, JCL (emphasis in original).

⁷² Memo, Packer to White House Staff, July 15, 1997, p. 2, folder 7/77, Box 318, DPS: Eizenstat, JCL.

discovered that the EITC was a new resource that could be used to maintain the symbolic boundaries between categories of the poor and thereby prevent moral contamination between groups.

The final plan that Carter publicly announced on August 6 reflected these concerns. It codified the moral boundaries that GAI proposals could not overcome or reconfigure. Carter's plan was a two-track program that proposed replacing the existing system with a jobs program for those expected to work and an income maintenance program for the needy who were unable to work because of disabilities, age, or family circumstance. The proposal for an expanded EITC for the working poor was included under separate legislation, but was equivalent to the third track of Joe's triple-track plan. Even a Democratic administration had recognized the difficulty of overriding cultural categories of worth with a noncategorical GAI proposal, and the recent creation of SSI and the EITC further reinforced these boundaries programmatically. Carter's bill, the Program for Better Jobs and Income, later encountered insurmountable difficulties on account of skyrocketing inflation, high rates of unemployment, and the "tax revolt" of 1978, among other things. But his August 1977 announcement of a sharply categorical welfare reform plan marked the beginning of the end of GAI programs as they had been intended by their proponents in the 1960s.

DISCUSSION

A variety of studies provide ample evidence that cultural categories of worth constitute part of the ideological foundation of the American welfare state. However, existing approaches to welfare policy development place causal priority on collective actors or institutional structures while cultural factors are bracketed off from explanatory frameworks for metatheoretical or methodological reasons. Absent any orientation toward cultural analysis, these perspectives exhibit little recognition that systems of social provision are embedded in moral and symbolic orders that shape their development. In contrast, this analysis has invoked a cultural point of reference. The evidence suggests that cultural categories of worth affected policy development in concrete, empirically tractable ways through three interrelated mechanisms: their constitutive contribution to collective schemas, their deployment by actors as cultural resources in private deliberation and public discourse, and their institutionalization in social programs that reinforced the symbolic and programmatic boundaries between categories of poor people.

This analytic framework responds to Campbell's (2002) call to improve the specification of cultural causal mechanisms in policy studies and it

contributes to a broader scholarly movement that seeks to demonstrate the importance of cultural elements such as categories, framing, and narrative in shaping policy development (e.g., Bleich 2003; Skrentny 2002; Somers and Block 2005). The goal of much of this work is not to replace existing perspectives, but to bring greater “theoretical hybridization” to analyses of social policy, particularly in light of the cultural turn taken by many historical sociologists (Orloff 2005). Integrating the cultural approach illustrated here into the current synthesis of class- and institution-based accounts of welfare policy development (e.g., Amenta 1998) entails four points of reorientation that can broaden the explanatory power of existing approaches.

Culture and cognition.—First, and most broadly, cultural categories of worth constrain strategies of policy development by shaping cognitive perceptions and normative presuppositions. This schematic influence is independent of group resources and the programmatic constraints of institutional arrangements, though it often interacts with these factors. This type of schematic influence was most apparent when categories of worth were under threat of being dissolved, such as in Burns’s argument that Nixon’s initial proposal (the FSS), which transgressed these categories, was actually two proposals—“FSS-Welfare” and “FSS-Working Poor.” Both supporters and opponents of Nixon’s plan within the administration viewed the proposal in this light; in other words, they all sorted its beneficiaries into a binary scheme based upon shared constructs in American culture. The disagreement between factions was not based upon their *cognitive* perception of this distinction, which was shared, but upon the *normative* implications of Burns’s observation: whether it was desirable to blur this distinction or to reinforce it. Had administration officials (and later the general public) instead viewed the poor as situated along a continuum between welfare and work, as the structure of negative income tax plans implied, rather than as falling in to one of two mutually exclusive categories, the content and political fate of GAI proposals would almost certainly have been much different.

The schematic template created by categories of worth made GAI proposals, which dissolved these categories, susceptible to symbolic pollution. Discourse that presumed pollution between categories further amplified these concerns. At the schematic level, the fact that Nixon’s proposal was considered a “welfare” proposal, even though the majority of benefits went to the working poor, provides the strongest *prima facie* evidence of pollution effects. The stigma associated with AFDC benefits contaminated the social status of the other “deserving” beneficiaries contained in the same program. This ultimately opened up GAI plans to concerns about increasing welfare costs and caseloads and fears of a mounting welfare backlash. Notably, however, while GAI plans were perceived as “welfare”

plans from the outset of discussions within the Nixon administration, it took active claims making on the part of GAI opponents to connect symbolic pollution to other high-stakes political consequences. Skilled political actors such as Burns and Anderson mobilized language that presumed moral contagion between categories by arguing that the stigma of welfare would render the working poor in a state of dependency and thus threaten the economy. These claims were effective because they capitalized upon the uncertainty associated with erasing long-standing categorical boundaries.

Culture and interests.—Second, following Weber’s “switchman” analogy, cultural schemas shaped the definition of interests and the direction of influence among important groups of actors. Recognizing this interaction between culture and action helps explain puzzles that remain unanswered by existing approaches, such as why state experts favored GAI plans in particular and why business groups defined their interests as they did. For instance, new conceptions of poverty and unemployment emerged in the early 1960s that challenged existing categories of worthiness and the policies based upon them. It was the weakening of these categories that made noncategorical GAI policies, amidst competing ideas, attractive to their supporters within and outside government. Johnson’s War on Poverty initiatives then greatly expanded the capacity of state welfare experts, which enabled them to act upon their innovative policy ideas. The activism of the nascent welfare rights movement, along with the uncoordinated urban unrest that swept the country from 1965 to 1968, moved welfare reform up the nation’s agenda by the end of the decade. Yet social activism alone did not inevitably lead to GAI proposals. Only through *combining* the influence of weakening cultural categories with increased state capacity and social disruption does the rise of GAI proposals, as compared to competing policy options, become more clear.

In a similar way, the interaction between cultural perceptions and business influence helps to explain both the split between various business coalitions on GAI proposals and the reasons why business conservatives opposed benefits to the working poor within a GAI program but favored them in the context of the EITC. Many business groups and leaders favored GAI plans, and this support was central to Nixon’s decision to proceed with such a nontraditional proposal. As policy papers and reports demonstrated, these groups were convinced that the categorical distinctions in existing policy were socially and programmatically harmful, and that a GAI plan could actually advance their interests by strengthening work incentives and socializing the costs of low-wage labor.⁷³ The leaders

⁷³ The first NIT proposal ever was in fact presented by a conservative economist as an alternative to minimum wage legislation (see Stigler 1946).

of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, on the other hand, vociferously opposed Nixon's plan. The Chamber's main ground for opposition rested upon the argument that the FAP's payments would threaten the work ethic of the working poor and therefore jeopardize the nation's economic productivity. These claims resonated with many conservative lawmakers and served as the basis for opposition to the FAP within the Senate Finance Committee. Yet the easy passage of the EITC a few years later revealed that the Chamber's influential opposition to the FAP had not been based on the *economic* threat of income subsidies to the working poor but upon the *cultural* threat of stigmatizing the working poor with "welfare" benefits in Nixon's plan. Both supporters and opponents of the FAP within the business community pursued their interests, but their interests were mediated by the meaning they attributed to the dissolution of cultural categories of worth and its consequences.⁷⁴

Culture and institutions.—Third, the multifaceted relationship between institutional arrangements and cultural schemas requires disentangling. Institutional arrangements amplify some schemas and discourses over others. Skocpol (1992) notes as much in her critique of "national values" approaches to welfare state development. But since neither she nor most other institutionalist welfare state scholars develop this point theoretically, institutional effects and cultural effects are frequently conflated. For instance, sectionalism and the structure of congressional committees are often cited as institutional barriers to federal policy expansion in the United States (e.g., Amenta 1998; Weir et al. 1988). Indeed, in the case of GAI politics, Senator Long, a southern Democrat, opposed the FAP from his influential position as chair of the Senate Finance Committee and supported (and designed) the EITC for similar reasons to those of conservative business leaders—to distinguish between categories of poor people. However, existing approaches often confuse *structural* effects, such as the congressional committee structure, with the *cultural* dispositions of incumbents in *structurally powerful* (and historically contingent) positions. In other words, while American institutions may empower some actors or coalitions over others, the precise mechanisms at work in limiting policy expansion are often based upon the cultural worldviews of those in power.

The longitudinal relationship between institutional configurations and cultural patterns also requires disentangling in regard to both mechanisms and direction of causation. Policy feedback approaches argue that existing

⁷⁴ In his contemporaneous account of the divergent policy preferences of business leaders on the FAP, Moynihan made a consonant point. He observed that "cultural divergences" between the leadership of the various business coalitions "routinely override similar economic interests" (Moynihan 1973, p. 289).

policy design shapes future development by distributing material resources, creating incentives, and shaping interpretive meanings (Pierson 1993). Yet the interpretive dimension of this feedback process—namely the ways that existing policies shape the interpretive resources available to actors—has been underemphasized in empirical work. The debates over GAI policy indicate that the absence of existing income maintenance programs for the working poor constrained supporters' ability to frame GAI plans analogically. There were few *symbolic* precedents from which supporters could draw to make the case for extending benefits to low-income workers without raising concerns about dependency and stigma. Thus benefits for this group, especially when included in a "welfare" reform package, sounded "radical" as opposed to "resonant." Furthermore, the logic of policy feedback arguments takes existing program design as a given and then examines its effects on interpretive meanings. However, the causal relationship between cultural and institutional patterns should be treated explicitly as one of reciprocal influence in which cultural understandings also shape new institutional arrangements. The creation of the SSI and EITC legislation in the early 1970s illustrates this process. These programs institutionalized existing cultural definitions of worthiness that were under threat. This policy expansion then created new obstacles for GAI plans during the Carter administration.

Public discourse and public opinion.—Fourth, existing studies underplay two additional factors that proved to be consequential in the debates over GAI policy: public discourse and popular sentiments. The debates over GAI policy show that presidential administrations hold considerable power to shape the public understanding of social policy through public pronouncements and that this presidential discourse has considerable political consequences. Nixon was especially effective in rhetorically reinforcing the symbolic boundaries between the poor that his program effectively blurred. While his advisors presented him with other, more radical framing strategies that more accurately reflected the original impetus behind GAI plans, Nixon's more resonant policy framing played to his electoral advantage while leaving the dominant understandings of poverty and the aims of welfare reform intact. One consequence was that the working class never exhibited wide recognition that the FAP was in their material interest. Sustained attention to this type of public discourse has been virtually absent from the welfare state literature, despite the fact that some scholars have noted its essential role in creating collective justifications for new policy reforms (e.g., Amenta 1998, pp. 270–71; Skocpol 1988). The analysis also reveals that public sentiments shaped the content of GAI proposals during their development in both the Nixon and Carter administrations. Nixon's policy advisors perceived that the public distinguished between the "welfare" poor and the working poor, and they

molded the design and symbolism of the FAP accordingly. Through a process of social learning (Hall 1993), Carter administration officials recognized the significance of these public views and, despite their sympathies toward a unified GAI proposal, ultimately designed a categorical plan that fit the dominant collective schema held by the public. Greater attention to the impact of popular sentiments on program design and fate provides one way to “bring the public back in” to analyses of social policy development that have largely neglected the potential influence of mass opinion (Burstein 1998).

Another strand of the welfare policy literature deals more closely with the influence of these types of shared cultural schemas. In light of welfare policy development since the 1960s, there has been an understandable inclination to see cultural categories of worthiness as coextensive with distinctions based upon race and gender. A growing body of research suggests that racial stereotypes and normative gender roles have not only strongly influenced social provision in recent years but have become deeply entangled with issues of deservingness (e.g., Gilens 1999; O’Connor et al. 1999; Quadagno 1994). This entanglement with ascriptive characteristics has certainly reinforced the cultural power of these categories. Yet these characteristics are not the root source of the categories. Comparative and historical work on poverty demonstrates that race and gender are simply the most recent social dimensions that align with long-standing cultural boundaries. The poor have long been differentiated along moral lines. Somers and Block (2005) locate the roots of categories of worthiness in the Malthusian view of poverty that became the basis of English poor laws in the early 1800s. In the United States, moral distinctions based on the work ethic have deep roots in industrial capitalism and have been embedded in American poor relief since the colonial era (Katz 1986; Rodgers 1974). Moreover, Skocpol (1992) found that black Civil War veterans received war pensions in what she argues was among America’s earliest forms of social provision. Racial distinctions, in this case, were not the salient marker of worthiness; instead it was a man’s status as a veteran. And numerous studies show that the populations accorded deserving and undeserving status in America’s social insurance and public assistance programs shifted considerably between the 1930s and 1960s. The constant social process in all these examples is social partitioning based on a binary moral classification scheme, not the specific cultural markers (i.e., race or gender) used to sort recipients into one category or another at a particular moment.

CONCLUSION

How might greater attention to cultural categories advance our understanding of the trajectory of American social policy? Research could benefit by further exploring the constitutive nature of cultural categories rather than their particular contents, or following Abbott, the “things of boundaries” as opposed to the “boundaries of things” (Abbott 2001). This means linking categories of worthiness with what Tilly (1998) calls patterns of “durable inequality,” which are rooted in durable categorical distinctions, routinized through cultural scripts, and embedded in organizational practices. The basis of these categories and the entities they constitute will vary across cases and over time, but the cultural mechanisms—schematic, discursive, and institutional—that define and reinforce them should be broadly generalizable.

As this should suggest, the potential influence of cultural categories of worth on policy development is germane to other policy domains and warrants further consideration. Skrentny’s (2002) analysis of minority rights policy is one of the few studies that has adopted a theoretical approach along these lines. While not explicitly focusing on cultural categories, Quadagno’s (2005) account of debates over national health insurance in the United States suggests some fruitful lines of inquiry in the area of health policy. She notes in passing that during one of the few significant expansions of government health provision in the 20th century—the creation of Medicare in the 1960s—collective actors were able to alter the basis of categories of worthiness through claims that the elderly were a population deserving of government coverage. Further research could examine the extent to which schematic, discursive, and institutional mechanisms of cultural influence apply to this consequential instance of policy change or illuminate the more numerous cases of failed attempts to expand health provision in the United States. Quadagno’s assessment of prospects for future reforms points to various paths that either challenge or accommodate existing categories in health provision. In direct challenge to the status quo, Quadagno argues that Americans must come to “view health insurance as a social right, not a consumer product” (2005, p. 6). This type of transformation would entail altering the basis of deservingness from ability to pay to assessment of medical need and would have to surmount similar challenges to those confronted by GAI plans. However, some of the concrete reform proposals she outlines accommodate existing categorical template to varying degrees. Vouchers for low-income families continue to define the basis of deservingness as the ability to pay but alter the upstream source of payment, thereby working within existing categories. Proposals to expand the current categories of Medicaid eligibility would capitalize on existing institutional design by using it as a

resource for change, much like the EITC expansion during the Carter years did. These types of incremental strategies may encounter less opposition because they resonate more closely with the existing categorical template of health provision. Yet as the case of the EITC demonstrates, strategies that accommodate existing categories further institutionalize the status quo, both programmatically and symbolically, making comprehensive reforms in the future all the more challenging.

Finally, since cultural categorization is not static, research would benefit from further attention to dynamism and change, including specifying factors that explain variation in levels of cultural influence, examining cases of successful categorical reconfiguration, and analyzing conflict between competing logics of categorization—each with an eye toward explicating policy outcomes. For instance, Nixon's GAI proposal almost passed, not only by surmounting some of the obstacles posed by prevailing cultural categories but because Nixon effectively framed his proposal as *working within* the existing categorical framework. Had his plan passed, its enactment would have almost inevitably set up a conflict between two competing sets of policy principles—a noncategorical basis of deservingness based on degree of economic need versus a categorical principle based upon work status and ability—that would have reverberated in policy development for years to come. This scenario would be similar to the enduring tensions within racial policy that the country has actually witnessed between the color-blind approaches to employment practice prescribed in the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the race conscious affirmative action policies established thereafter (Lieberman 2002; Skrentny 1996). Examining competing categorical principles such as these, as refracted through contention over policy design, is a fruitful line of potential inquiry. Regarding welfare policy, however, because GAI proposals failed and quickly faded from collective memory, there are few alternative cultural resources for making resonant claims in favor of noncategorical systems of social provision, a circumstance that helps explain why similar challenges to American antipoverty policy are more or less unthinkable today.

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