

Framing the Poor: Media Attention and Generosity of United States Poverty Policy

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# 1

## Introduction

The president needed help from the great civil rights leader. A six-day riot had left 32 people dead and more than one thousand injured in Watts. As tension built, the Los Angeles Police Chief went on television to suggest that the white residents had the right to own guns to defend themselves against black rioters. After talking with local leaders, Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. worried, a “full-scale race war could develop here.”

“What’s your recommendation?” asked President Lyndon B. Johnson, in a telephone conversation<sup>1</sup>. In the middle of a military build up in Vietnam, Johnson did not want the country further divided. The just passed civil rights bills would come to naught if war broke out in the Watts.

Poverty programs, King replied.

And Johnson agreed: “A man's got no more right to destroy property with a Molotov cocktail in Los Angeles than the Ku Klux Klan has to go out and destroy a life. And what we've got to do is all obey the law, but there's no use giving lectures on the law as long as you've got rats eating on peoples' children and unemployed and no roof over their head and no job to go to and maybe with a dope needle in one side and the cancer in the other,” he said, as King concurred. Johnson continued: “Because they don’t have very good judgment. People don’t that got that kind of condition. And we’re not doing enough

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<sup>1</sup> Recordings of Johnson’s telephone conversations available through the Presidential Recordings Program at the Miller Center at the University of Virginia: <http://whitehousetapes.net/transcript/johnson/wh6508-07-8578> This conversation took place on August 20, 1965.

to relieve it, and we're not doing it quickly enough." He talked about addressing the issues that might prevent racial tension, such as education, health and social security.

In the conversation, Johnson resolved to increase the number of poor youth receiving jobs to one million. With the help of civil rights advocates and a cooperative Congress, Johnson had just passed several bills that would change the government's role in poverty. The Economic Opportunity Act created a series of new institutions, including Head Start, intended to provide pre-kindergarten education to low-income children, and Community Action, which funded non-profits and government organization that implemented programs with "maximum feasible participation" from the poor. Medicaid provided a large expansion in health coverage for the poor. Yet Johnson shared his concern with King that Congress would cut funding devoted to his new programs.

This thesis focuses on how the interaction between public perception of the poor and political attention drives policy change. Two large shifts in poverty policy occurred in the last 50 years. First, between 1960 and 1976, a surge of attention surrounded the passage of many programs targeted at decreasing the amount of poverty. In the three years following the Watts riots, the *New York Times* printed about three articles per day on United States poverty. Johnson and King discussed the slum conditions, rats eating poor people, and the protests as a result of those causes. That reflected the dominant conversation, in the newspapers and across the United States. For Johnson and King, and the United States public, an increased government role could both ease tensions and decrease the number of people living in slums. To measure this government role, I describe a Government Generosity Index, which shows the action of policy makers while controlling for the amount of need and size of overall government. Between 1960 and

1976, the intense attention, initially focused on the government as a solution to poverty, led to a remarkable increase in the role of policy. Government generosity grew by three times, this study finds.

The tone of public conversation began to shift late in Johnson's presidency. The focus turned from poverty as a problem that requires government solutions, to welfare programs and the poor as responsible for poverty. Policy changes followed by ten years the altering composition of the political conversation, with close correlation. As Jimmy Carter ended his time as president, an inflation crisis struck and the government support did not keep up with the increasing poverty. By the time Ronald Reagan finished his first two years as president, the generosity of poverty programs had decreased by more than 40 percent, as measured by the Index. For the last 30 years, as the amount of attention to United States poverty issues has decreased, the tone of the conversation has continued to become more negative.

Large increases in government action have occurred following massive attention to the poor, focused on issues to which government can provide a response. However, I find that the cuts in generosity of the early 1980s resulted without an increase in public attention and raise the possibility that government, when wielding a "budget ax," can make large policy changes without the public's attention. The construction of the poor as lazy or dysfunctional has a powerful and continuous role in causing an increasingly stingy government. The framing is more powerful than other social and economic indicators, such as the amount of poverty or unemployment.

This work uses the approaches of framing and agenda-setting.<sup>2</sup> Changes in political attention and policy occur in a disjointed manner (Baumgartner and Jones [1993] 2009). Long periods of equilibrium dominate, with occasional punctuations, or abrupt changes, in attention, when media, policy makers, and the public all converge around the importance of a public issue. Attention spikes result in windows of opportunity, when the politicians see the issue and attempt to identify the correct solutions.

Those solutions depend on the tone of the public conversation. Featured in a recent *New York Times* article, Fermin Roman works in construction every day and then goes back to the New Mexico house he built himself. Pajarito Mesa, where Roman lives, is one of the few remaining communities without running water or electricity. To bathe and flush the toilets, he buys and hauls water for elevated tanks. To power the refrigerator and television, he uses four solar panels (Eckholm 2010). Peyi Bravo, in a different article a month earlier, is also poor. An immigrant to New York City from Peru, Bravo is looking for a job through a government financial services program. Asked about a red flag in her credit score, Bravo lies. Only when the city worker presses does she admit that she forgot to pay a bill. “‘Maybe. I mean, I did, yes,’ she conceded.” (Santos 2010). Most public policy issues are complex, with both positive and negative aspects, but the limited attention of both the media and individual brain requires that the public focus on one facet of a multifaceted issue (Baumgartner and Jones [1993] 2009). With poverty in particular, that means the attention can focus on any number of angles, such as broken families or economic barriers. Social construction, influenced by the media, policy makers, religion and history, means that certain groups share characteristics in the public

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<sup>2</sup> Theoretical discussion of agenda-setting and framing draws from the ideas set out by Baumgartner and Jones ([1993] 2009) and Kingdon (1984)

eye (Schneider and Ingram 1993). If the public believes that the poor share negative characteristics, then it becomes less likely to support government intervention. A negative conversation results in a less generous welfare state. As that construction changes, focusing more on the poor as being like Bravo or Roman, the potential solutions change. Winning a policy debate, then, requires control of the conversation. However, changes in focus result from a complex combination of events, actors and social conditions. Would King and Johnson still be talking about slum conditions, without riots in Watts? At the same time, riots in the Watts likely would not have occurred without poverty and racial segregation. No one actor controls the focus of the political agenda.

This thesis examines poverty from a system level, with the task of identifying the causes of changes in policy between 1960 and 2007. The Government Generosity Index identifies shifts in policy while controlling for the amount of poverty and the growing size of the government. The Index, which required regression analysis to expand the available data on the depth of poverty, matches the common understanding of changes in the welfare state. I compare this dependent variable to the independent variable, changes in the public conversation. A previous study has analyzed framing on a system level using scholars manually coding the different frames (Baumgartner et. al. 2008). With a high level of accuracy, more than 90 percent positive hits, I do the same type of analysis digitally, using keyword searches in the ProQuest database. I identify 23,065 articles in the *New York Times* that focus on United States poverty. The study classifies the articles by five unique frames: social disorder, underclass, economic and physical barriers, laziness and dysfunction, and cheating. The first three frames advocate an increased role for government, while the last two suggest a more stingy government as the solution. I

use keywords to identify the stories that focus on each frame. The final results compare the changes in framing to the changes in government policy.

The next chapter presents the dependent variable, changes in policy. First, the chapter divides the last 50 years of United States policy changes into five distinct periods, distinguished by the amount and direction of action on poverty. I outline previous measures of changes in government action and then detail each part of my measure, the Government Generosity Index.

Chapter Three qualitatively shows the varied attention and tone of poverty conversation. Using presidential tapes, existing literature and newspaper articles, I find that each of the five frames exists throughout the period of this study, and even dates back hundreds of years. However, the 1960s marked the emergence of the underclass and social disorder frames, with the release of prominent scholarship and riots throughout the northeast. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, prominent politicians began to run on platforms that portrayed the poor as the problem. Those frames have continued to gain prominence since.

Chapter Four describes changes to poverty attention in the United States, using the large dataset of *New York Times* articles. After showing the increase in attention of the 1960s and the time surrounding Welfare Reform of 1996, I chronicle changes in the presence of each frame. Together, the framing shows a conversation that has moved almost constantly from the original dominance of generosity to a more negative view of government intervention in poverty.

Chapter Five uses a variety of methods to identify the ten-year lag between quantitative measures of conversation and policy. To conclude, I discuss the implications



of the findings. Although the policy and conversation currently point in the direction of less attention and a decreasing generosity, the study demonstrates the potential for government responsiveness to a change in public dialogue.

## **Creating an Index of Government Generosity to the Poor**

The policy towards the poor has shifted significantly during the last 50 years. First, as President John F. Kennedy took office, he initiated a string of programs, which began to grow the federal government and did not stop until the inflation crisis of Jimmy Carter's presidency. The beginning of President Ronald Reagan's administration brought a sharp cut in the generosity of government. Since Reagan, the government has become increasingly stingy, with only a slight reversal preceding the welfare reform of the mid-1990s.

One faces many challenges when attempting to quantify the changes in the government's efforts against poverty. Changes in poverty spending can result from many different sources, not just policy shifts. Total government spending has grown across the board, and a certain amount of means-tested growth can come by those incremental additions. In addition, many programs, known as mandatory spending, automatically grow when the amount of poverty increases. When people lose their jobs, more people require Food Stamps. The provision of Food Stamps to those extra people does not show a change in policy. Other programs, known as discretionary spending, receive an amount of funding determined each year by Congress. Here, I control for outside factors in the changes of poverty spending, isolating those changes that result from the decisions of lawmakers to put more focus or take focus away from issues of poverty. When have lawmakers contracted or grown the government's role in fighting poverty?

This chapter divides the last fifty years of American social policy changes into five periods of generosity, supported by both qualitative and quantitative analysis:

- 1) The Formation of the Modern System (1960–1978)
- 2) The Cuts (1979–1982)
- 3) The Handcuffed Conservatives (1983–1992)
- 4) Signs of Spending (1993–1995)
- 5) Ending Cash Assistance as We Know It (1996–2008)

First, I qualitatively describe changes in policy, using the existing literature on social policy history as well as articles from the *New York Times*. Then, I introduce the quantitative measure, the Government Generosity Index, which closely matches the five eras of policy history and controls for both the amount of the problem and the changing size of government. The Generosity Index starts with a calculation of the expansiveness of American social policy, dividing spending on poverty programs by total government spending. The index then divides by the extent of the problem, in order to separate the changes in aid that result from policy decisions from the changes in aid that stem from fluctuations in the amount of need. As an indicator of the extent of the problem, the study uses the poverty gap. Data for the years 1960–1974 did not previously exist for the gap, so I use regression analysis to develop a dataset that will span all of the time of the study. The resulting Government Generosity Index shows separate trends in medical and non-medical generosity. The medical generosity continues to grow, as non-medical assistance shrinks. For this thesis, I primarily address the major shifts in non-medical generosity, which I will later compare to the changing public conversation.

## **A Qualitative History of Poverty Policy (1960–2008)**

The American system of poverty policies dates to before the Constitution. Following the example of English Poor Laws, the colonies began to give taxpayers responsibility for caring for the poor as early as the mid-17<sup>th</sup> Century (Trattner [1974] 1999, 15–27). In the interest of brevity, the analysis of poverty laws will focus on the last 50 years, with a brief mention of the New Deal to provide context.

This qualitative section draws from the work of scholars who have written general histories of the American welfare state. Trattner ([1974] 1999), in the sixth edition of *From Poor Law to the Welfare State*, chronicles the development of poverty programs in the United States from biblical origins through the welfare reforms of President Bill Clinton. Katz ([1986] 1996), writing *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse*, takes a critical view of the development of the United State welfare state, faulting its focus on reforming the poor. I also draw from the vast number of scholars who have focused particularly on the development of the Great Society (Unger 1996) or on the declines in the American Welfare State (Weaver 2000). Archives of the *New York Times* provide additional anecdotes and a better idea of the political context surrounding major legislation.

The New Deal provides context on the development of the major modern American poverty programs. In 1935, with the beginning of the second New Deal, Roosevelt began in earnest to set up long-term welfare institutions (Katz [1986] 1996, 234–238). In 1934, Francis Townsend first proposed a \$200 per month pension for those over the age of 60 who stopped working and would spend the entire amount in the month. The Social Security Act, which Roosevelt signed on August 14, 1935, included old-age insurance and compensation for the jobless. The Act also included, without much

attention, Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) in order to help widows with young families (Katz [1986] 1996, 234–238). The next decades included several other additions to welfare services. “Caretaker” grants, signed in 1950 under President Harry Truman’s Fair Deal, gave money to the mothers of dependent children and caused the renaming of ADC to Aid to Families of Dependent Children (AFDC). Other new programs included:

- National School Lunch Program (1946)
- Full Employment Act (1946)
- Housing Act (1949)
- Disability Insurance (1950)

In his eight years in office, Dwight Eisenhower did little to add to the New Deal and Harry Truman’s Fair Deal. Many of Roosevelt’s original goals were still unfulfilled as John F. Kennedy reached the presidency. The last 50 years have meant tremendous changes in the generosity towards low-income communities.

### ***The Formation of the Modern System (1961–1978)***

In his first inaugural address, President John F. Kennedy suggested “man holds in his mortal hands the power to abolish all forms of human poverty.” Kennedy, born into wealth, began to set the stage for a large increase in the role of government in helping low-income communities. The first policy stage of the last fifty years begins as Kennedy reaches the presidency. At the beginning of this era, the most reliable statistics showed that about one in five Americans lived in poverty, in a time of general economic prosperity. This period is defined by bipartisan increases in generosity, the creation of new national programs and a large decrease in the amount of poverty.

With his New Frontier, Kennedy began to add more protection to the welfare state. He gave priority to poverty in distressed areas such as Appalachia and began efforts to retrain the workforce to decrease structural unemployment (Unger 1996, 27–31). In May 1961, Kennedy signed the Area Redevelopment Act, which gave incentives for industries to relocate to poor areas while providing money for the building of roads and bridges in those locations. In 1962, the Manpower Development and Training Act provided \$262 million for work retraining (30). The 87th Congress also increased social security payments and the minimum wage, from \$1 to \$1.25. By October 1963, Kennedy gave his Chief Economic Advisor Walter Heller permission to start putting together proposals for new programs on poverty (69). Kennedy increased spending on the poor, but did not put in place the long-term programs before his assassination. Lyndon B. Johnson would use many of Kennedy and Heller’s ideas in his rapid expansion of government generosity (69).

Johnson became president in a time of general economic prosperity but a high amount of poverty. Johnson, in a speech at the University of Michigan, outlined his vision for a Great Society, in which a “creative federalism” would help spread the prosperity and create a unified community (Unger 1996, 15–19). This meant both improvements in race relations and a large increase in government generosity towards the poor. When he won election in 1964, with large majorities in both houses of Congress, Johnson believed he had a mandate to expand the safety net. In 1964, with his first major welfare legislation, Johnson signed the Economic Opportunity Act, which emphasized education through job training and early childhood education. It created the Office of Economic Opportunity to manage a number of new poverty programs, including Head

Start, which provides pre-kindergarten education to low-income students, and the Job Corps, which offers job training to young adults. The War on Poverty also included the Food Stamp Act in 1964, and Medicaid and Medicare in 1965. Johnson envisioned an even greater growth in government generosity, but the Vietnam War prevented many programs from receiving significant amounts of funding. The Economic Opportunity Act never received more than \$2 billion for its long-term goals. By contrast, Mayor John Lindsay said New York City alone needed \$10 billion annually (Trattner [1974] 1999, 323). Even so, Johnson greatly expanded the reach of poverty programs, and his successors would increase their generosity.

Although Richard Nixon talked harshly about the welfare system, his administration expanded programs and increased funding at a rate unlike any of its predecessors (Katz 1989, 269–270). Leading up to his presidency, advocates for the poor worried that Nixon would attempt to dismantle the new batch of programs. In 1968, Nixon said, “It is gross irresponsibility to promise billions of new federal dollars for the cities, or even for the poor.” (New York Times 1968) Yet, Nixon would continue to add programs to the welfare state and preside over unprecedented increases in funding for the existing programs. Nixon’s approach to expanding the government role in poverty differed from his two predecessors. Whereas Johnson and Kennedy utilized federal bureaucrats and social workers, Nixon preferred private enterprise and public officials (Trattner [1974] 1999, 351). His “New Federalism” intended on giving more decision-making ability to the states. He also dismantled the Office of Economic Opportunity, transferring its responsibilities to other government agencies and eliminating funding for

some of the most controversial programs. Nixon ended all federal aid to community action organizations, which developed services in local areas (Rosenthal 1973).

However, despite the different approach, he advocated a radically expanded welfare state, succeeding in some aspects. Nixon proposed, unsuccessfully, the Family Assistance Plan (FAP), which would have set a guaranteed income to the poor, originally a minimum \$1600 for an unemployed family of four. In the initial plan, families would be able to keep a portion of that money until their total income reached \$4000 (Trattner [1974] 1999, 339). At the time, Nixon faced opposition from both sides: advocates for the poor, who criticized the minimum income as too low, and conservatives, who criticized the plan because it would make so that increased earnings would at certain thresholds lead to decreased benefits, effectively making the poor worse off (Weaver 2000, 59). Although the guaranteed income passed the House of Representatives in 1971, the administration could not persuade the Southern Democrats who controlled Senate committees (59). The bill that eventually passed lacked any income floor, but still increased generosity in a more sweeping manner than any piece of legislation in US history. For a price of \$5 billion, it made 144 changes to welfare benefits, including a new program to provide federal supplemental security income to the aged, blind and elderly (Lyons 1972). Nixon also pushed through Congress the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act, which subsidized public service jobs for the unemployed, and the Social Security Amendments, which provided \$2.5 billion annually to the states for welfare programs (350). Although he had installed anti-welfare advocates in key positions, including Donald Rumsfeld as his first director of the Office for Economic Opportunity, Nixon played a crucial role in expanding the current social safety net.



Looking at total spending, Nixon expanded poverty aid more than the two preceding presidents.

Although President Gerald Ford vetoed new programs that would have meant an even more generous government, he could do little to prevent the expansion of recently enacted legislation. In his short time in office, Ford vetoed a public works bill, education aid, health care expansion and a school lunch program (352). However, many of Nixon's funding increases went into effect during the Ford presidency. In addition, Ford signed the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), compromising with a Democratic Congressman in order to pass the Tax Deduction Act of 1975 (Shanahan 1975). First proposed in 1972, the EITC differed significantly from a guaranteed income, which would have given the most money to families who had no income. Instead, EITC gave bonuses to families, increasing with the amount of money that they earned (Weaver 2000, 79). It marked a significant turning point in the welfare state. For the first time in United States history, the federal government used the tax system to provide assistance for the needy (Trattner [1974] 1999, 345–349). Ford reluctantly presided over continually increasing government generosity towards the poor.

During the first three years of his presidency, Jimmy Carter increased government generosity but failed in efforts to enact large reforms. Upon his election in 1976, Carter faced a national mood scared of inflation, forcing him to begin some cuts in welfare programs (Trattner [1974] 1999, 354–359). Carter did not lend active support to Congressional proposals of new programs to create public jobs or provide childcare, among other bills (355). However, he did expand Medicaid and promote a youth employment bill (355). In 1977, Carter proposed the Better Jobs and Income Program,

which would have replaced the current welfare with a two tiered–system: jobs for those who could work and income for the unable (355–356). This plan, slightly more ambitious than Nixon’s because it covered all of the poor rather than just families with children, made little progress (356). By the end of the Carter Administration, Congress had enacted only incremental changes, including a change that led to large growth in food stamp spending (Weaver 2000, 66). Without enacting new programs, the Carter administration increased spending. During a 20–year period, the United States had put in place expansions in government generosity that no president would be able to fully dismantle, while decreasing the poverty rate from 22 to 12%.

### ***The Cuts (1979–1982)***

In this era, the government made cuts in welfare spending even as high inflation led to rising poverty. The next stage of government generosity combines the last two years of the Carter presidency, with an ineffective president in the middle of high unemployment, and the first two years of Ronald Reagan, who intentionally attempted to trim welfare spending. The era contains the largest increase in poverty of any comparable period of this study, accompanied by very little increased aid.

As Carter sought reelection in 1980, he faced an inflation crisis. Many Americans blamed his administration for the crisis and actions by the Federal Reserve that led to a recession (Trattner [1974] 1999, 358–359). Lacking any political capital, Carter could do little to increase the amount of poverty aid during the recession. In his last year in office, Carter presided over the largest increase in the poverty rate of the last 50 years, as 3.2 million more people fell below the line. While Carter did not attempt to cut spending, the government efforts did not keep up with increasing need.

In 1978, California voters, with support from Governor Ronald Reagan, approved Proposition 13, cutting state property taxes and limiting future growth. The California change came as many states took people off government programs and slashed overall spending (Katz [1986] 1996, 292–295). That nationwide series of legislation previewed a Reagan presidential administration that would attempt to make government stingier, succeeding in cutting only limited areas. Reagan entered the presidency with the goal of reducing federal control, which he believed put too much restriction on states and municipalities. “What once was a federal helping hand is quickly turning into a mailed fist,” he said in a speech to a group of mayors (Raines 1981). This transfer to state control would come with a cut of federal spending of about one–fourth, according to the original plan (Raines 1981).

In his first budget, Reagan proposed cutting welfare benefits for about one–fifth of recipients in the United States, while reducing the federal reimbursement for Medicaid and AFDC (Weinraub 1981). That final budget eventually included some of the cuts but failed to make any major reforms. As the recession contributed to increasing poverty, those cuts meant that agencies spread the remaining money more thinly. Eventually, Reagan met stiff political resistance. With the major entitlement programs, such as Medicaid and Food Stamps, he made small cuts that did not go much further than Carter (Mead 1992, 42–45). Without political opposition, Reagan’s presidency might have proved much worse for advocates of increased spending on the poor. Reagan’s most significant long–term change slashed job training for the poor (42–45). In 1982, his major reform, a federal takeover of Medicaid in exchange for state control of AFDC and Food Stamps, never made it before Congress (Weaver 2000, 54). Reagan’s cuts in the middle

of the recession helped contribute to a poverty rate increase from 11.7 to 15.0% between 1980 and 1982. The government poverty policy contracted during the end of Carter's administration and the beginning of Reagan's, making the safety net increasingly vulnerable to economic downturns.

***The Handcuffed Conservatives (1983–1992)***

After Reagan's first year in office, Congressional opposition stopped his most politically difficult ideas, including large cuts in Social Security. George H.W. Bush did little to increase aid to the poor despite a severe recession. In the next stage, the two Republican presidents had little success in forcing an uncooperative Congress to change the system.

At the beginning of 1983, Reagan presided over nearly 10% unemployment and heard pressure from key advisors to increase benefits for those without work (Trattner [1974] 1999, 368–369). He responded by approving almost \$10 billion to create hundreds of thousands of public service jobs and extend unemployment compensation (370). By 1985, Reagan had cut spending on social policy less than 10% below projections (Mead 1992, 42–45).

In 1988, the last year of his presidency, Reagan signed the Family Support Act. The original proposal required all women with children over the age of three to work or go to training if they wished to receive assistance (Weaver 2000, 75–78). The final legislation, passed through a Democratic Congress, was a modest compromise. While it slightly increased the amount of money available for job training (\$3.305 billion during five years), the work requirements fell short of the original proposals (76–77). The Family Support Act set modest requirements for AFDC recipients, who would have to enroll in work programs (77). By the end of Reagan's presidency, with the help of years

of prosperity, the poverty rate had fallen to 13% from its high of 15.2% in the middle of the recession of the early 1980s.

Reagan failed to move welfare responsibilities to the states. And George H. W. Bush, who campaigned on goals similar to his predecessor, did little to change the status quo. Bush approved an increase in the minimum wage, from \$3.35 to \$4.25 per hour. However, as the economy weakened in 1992, he called for private charity to step in where the government would not (Trattner [1974] 1999, 383–384). The number of applications for welfare programs soared, and without greater support from the federal government, the states looked for ways to cut their share of welfare spending (383–384). Tommy Thompson, the Republican governor of Wisconsin, pushed through a state program that cut AFDC benefits for families whose children missed a certain number of school days, while Michigan reduced the monthly check for AFDC (DeParle 1991). The safety net, including Medicaid and Food Stamps, had developed a political support not easily broken, but the states found ways to prevent spending increases even as poverty rose. This era had no major cuts in government generosity and a poverty rate that hovered between about 13 and 15%. Bush lost reelection, in part because of his failure to enact important domestic measures as unemployment increased (Trattner [1974] 1999).

### ***Signs of Spending (1993–1995)***

Bill Clinton came into office on a moderate platform that included minimum wage increases and welfare reforms to limit the amount of time people stayed on AFDC. He promised to unify the United States with common purpose. “This is America. There is no ‘them.’ There is only us,” he said. His first two years in office coupled small increases in generosity towards the poor with a rapidly improving economy.

Immediately upon taking office, Clinton signed a measure, vetoed multiple times by Bush, which guaranteed many employees unpaid leave of up to 12 weeks. Clinton then pushed enactment of the biggest EITC expansion in history. In A budget in which Vice President Al Gore cast the tie-breaking vote, Congress passed a \$20.8 billion increase in EITC spending (Weaver 2000, 81). EITC fairly consistently results in decreases in poverty numbers (Gao et. al. 2009, 110). In this case, the expansion had a significant influence on both reducing welfare roles and decreasing poverty (Brown and Venner 1999, 175–196). However, this would be Clinton’s main addition to aid to the poor, as his efforts to increase the minimum wage failed. His health care reform would have meant insurance for many of the people who could not afford coverage. His additions to government generosity ended shortly after the 1994 elections brought in a Republican Congress.

### ***Ending Cash Assistance as We Know it (1996–2008)***

The final stage, which brings the reader up to the beginning of this most recent recession, combines a healthy economy with only limited policy efforts to decrease poverty. Bill Clinton changed the system of cash assistance to the poor, and George W. Bush continued with reforming welfare. Congress replaced AFDC with TANF. Despite the enormous publicity, the cut represented only a small decrease in government generosity. Instead, this stage is more remarkable for the only limited amount of poverty reduction in the middle of economic growth.

After losing his Congressional majority, Clinton had to find common ground with the Republican leadership. AFDC never made up a substantial portion of the federal budget, or even the spending directed specifically at the poor. At its peak, in 1992, the

program required \$34.8 billion 2005 constant dollars (Hansan and Morris 1999, 9). The number of AFDC recipients had begun to decline in early 1994, before welfare reform (Blank 2000, 4). Yet, Clinton settled on Welfare Reform as an area of political promise. After vetoing two earlier versions, in August 1996, Clinton signed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, which abolished AFDC and replaced it with the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program (TANF). TANF has three primary characteristics:

- 1) Limiting federal assistance to families and children to five years, while permitting states to give special allowances of an additional two years.
- 2) Giving states relative free reign to spend their share of a \$16.38 billion annual block grant.
- 3) Requiring that 80% of families who receive cash assistance participate in employment activities (Hansan and Morris 1999, 2).

This continued to fulfill an important aspect of AFDC's purpose, by providing a time of transition for parents of young children to stay at home and then move into the workforce (Hansan and Morris 1999, 2). However, it eliminated the previous benefit of maintaining an economic safety net for poor children regardless of the roots of their poverty (2). Between 1994 and 1999, as the economy grew, both the number of AFDC/TANF and food stamps recipients cut in half (Blank 2000, 4).

George W. Bush came into office with a desire to build upon the previous reforms. His Republican-controlled Congress passed 11 short-term extensions between 2002 and 2006, before approving a reauthorization in 2006 that strengthened work requirement while keeping funding constant (Daguerre 2008). Bush did not depart

significantly from his predecessor, although he did emphasize increased funding for faith-based initiatives.

“Ten years ago, neither side got exactly what it had hoped for. While we compromised to reach an agreement, we never betrayed our principles and we passed a bill that worked and stood the test of time,” wrote Bill Clinton, in a *New York Times* article marking the tenth anniversary of the passage of welfare reform. He had done much to decrease the number of people on welfare roles. The literature generally concludes that the bill both decreased caseloads and increased employment, controlling for other aspects (Blank 2009, 27). Yet, while Clinton might have changed cash assistance, the effect of his welfare reform on poverty remains murky. The strong economies in the 1990s caused increases in earnings among low-skilled, single mothers (Bollinger et. al. 2009, 100–101). However, loss of income from post-tax measures like the EITC and food stamps more than offset those earnings, which would indicate a decreased quality of living for the children in those families (101). As the nation recovers from a deep recession, many studies will track how the social safety net, with less cash assistance, responded to increases in unemployment. As for what we know, while the Clinton reform decreased the number of families receiving cash assistance, it had little effect on both the government generosity and the amount of poverty. This era had slightly decreasing amounts of non-medical poverty spending, a somewhat constant poverty rate, and a booming economy.

### **The Quantitative History of United States Poverty Policy (1960–2008)**

How have lawmakers altered the last 50 years of poverty policy in the United States? At two times, policymakers made large poverty policy changes, as Kennedy and his



successors built the modern system and Reagan attempted to tear that down. However, the individual legislation does not clearly show the extent of the changes, the monumental nature of both shifts and the continued trend towards a decreasing government generosity. Quantifying this trend requires isolating the intentional policy decisions from those that result from increases in poverty or a growing economy.

Having laid out the major generosity changes of the last 50 years, I will now introduce a quantitative measure, which correlates closely with the five stages of policy history. The measure requires a combination of an indicator of changes in expansiveness of the American welfare state and an indicator of poverty. Most of the existing literature that attempts to quantify poverty policy comes from the fields of economics and public policy. That literature has used several different methods for calculating changes in the size of poverty programs. Some of the literature uses the amount of spending on welfare programs (Sanders 1990; Smeeding 2005; Rector et. al. 2010), but that gives no context to whether the spending is responding to decreases in economic growth or a bad economy. The most common measure of the expansiveness of poverty policy uses the percentage of Gross Domestic Product that goes to social welfare programs (Huber and Stephens 2001; Kenworthy 1999; Moller et al. 2003, 35). Most of that literature addresses how poverty responds to the size of welfare systems (Brady 2005; Kenworthy 1999; Moller et al. 2003), with poverty programs as the independent variable and poverty as the dependent variable. The Government Generosity Index expands on the existing measures by adding a measure of poverty to control for the extent of the problem. After controlling for medical assistance, the Index shows a three-fold increase in generosity during the

1960s and 1970s, followed by a 40% decrease in a span of about four years. Between 1983 and 2008, the generosity continued to decrease slowly.

***What are poverty programs?***

The United States government confronts poverty through a combination of different programs, not all exclusively for the poor. This paper uses only means-tested aid, any programs that aid exclusively low-income people. This does not include other forms of social insurance, which benefit people of all income levels, such as Social Security and Medicare. Some would argue that an attempt to show changes in government generosity should include these entitlements because the poor receive a substantial amount of money. This thesis uses only means-tested aid for two reasons: 1) Because of the budgeting process, it is difficult to calculate the portion of Social Security and other non means-tested entitlements that goes to the poor. 2) More importantly, the study focuses on policy response to framing of the poor, so the total amount of money that each poor person receives from the government takes a secondary importance to an accurate measure of government's policy focus on poverty. The means-tested aid isolates how the government changes programs specifically designed for the poor and therefore will be the best available barometer for changes in generosity.

There are more than 80 means-tested programs in the United States budget, with varied levels of income eligibility and focus. The main types of means-tested programs are (Levitan et. al. 2003, 32–35):

- 1) Cash support, such as AFDC
- 2) Provision or subsidization of necessities, such as health care or food
- 3) Educational programs for youth, such as Head Start

4) Employment related programs, such as job training, economic development, or direct public employment.

Program eligibility can be determined by a number of factors, including the poverty line, state and local lawmakers, area median income, or enrollment in other programs (Spar 2006, 16–22). Most means–tested programs provide assistance to people with a range of incomes, as high as several times the poverty threshold. Table 2.1 shows several examples of poverty programs, and indicates both the type of program and the factors that determine eligibility.

Table 2.1: Examples of Means–Tested Poverty Programs

	Type	Description	Who is Eligible?
<b>Medicaid</b>	Subsidization of Necessities	Sends payments to health care providers, often requiring co–payment from the recipient.	People below the poverty line not receiving cash aid, namely pregnant woman, children, the blind, disabled and elderly; those eligible for AFDC pre–1996, but not TANF; others determined locally and by the states.
<b>National School Lunch Program</b>	Provision of Necessities	Provides low–cost or free lunches to students in public or non–profit schools.	Free lunch for below 130% of the federal poverty guideline, reduced–price for students below 185%; food stamp eligibility.
<b>Head Start</b>	Educational Program for Youth	Provides grants to local public and private non–profits to provide childhood development services, particularly pre–kindergarten.	Children with family incomes below the poverty line, or families who receive TANF or Supplemental Security Income; Foster children; programs can enroll up to 10% with students who do not meet the requirements.
<b>Section 8 low–income housing aid</b>	Subsidization of Necessities	Provides vouchers, administered locally, which recipients use for rent in housing that meets requirements.	Family’s income may not exceed 50% of median for county or city of residence. At least 75% must go to families with less than 30% of the area’s median income.
<b>Supplemental Security Income</b>	Cash Aid	Provides cash to finance necessities for the blind, aged, and disabled.	Elderly, disabled or blind, and w/ limited income (including government services and free food) and limited resources (property, vehicles, etc.)
<b>Senior Community Service Employment Program</b>	Jobs/ Training	Provides training for people 55 years or older who are unemployed and with little prospects	At least 55, unemployed, with income less than 125% of the national poverty level.

Source: CRS Report (Spar 2006, 17–22) and program Web sites

The national, state and local government have collective responsibility for poverty policy, so this study combines those three levels. The federal government provides much of the vision, so shifts generally show a more expansive or contractive direction from the U.S. Congress. However, the national and state authorities share the responsibility for funding. In the 2008 fiscal year, the federal government provided 73% of means-tested aid and the state government accounted for 27% (Rector et. al. 2009, 5). More than three-fourths of the state aid goes to a single program, Medicaid (5). While many of the programs require local control, the municipalities and counties have little funding responsibility. Having defined poverty policy and established a need to use different levels of government, the next section examines existing calculations of means-tested aid.

### **Two Calculations of Poverty Aid**

The literature shows several existing calculations of government aid to the poor. Some scholars have summed key programs, such as AFDC and Food Stamps (for example, Blank 1988, 88; Sanders 1990; Scholz et. al. 2009). Generally, those datasets result in artificially low estimates. For one, they usually only include aid from the federal government. Second, more than 80 different programs provide means-tested aid, so a complete dataset requires information from many different sources. The Congressional Research Service (CRS) and the Heritage Foundation have produced the two most thorough datasets of government aid to the poor. The CRS, the professional staff that produces research for Congress, writes a regular report on poverty policy, *Cash and Noncash Benefits for Persons with Limited Income: Eligibility Rules, Recipient and Expenditure Data* (Spar 2006). The report sums the budget totals for 84 government

programs to produce an annual estimate from 1975 to 2004. The U.S. House Committee on Ways and Means uses the historical table from this report to produce its quadrennial Green Book, cited widely in policy literature (Levitan et. al. 2003, 32–37).

The other set of data comes from the Heritage Foundation, a right wing think tank, as part of calculations for *Obama to Spend \$10.3 Trillion on Welfare: Uncovering the Full Cost of Means–Tested Welfare or Aid* (Rector et. al. 2009). The authors only slightly alter the list of programs in the CRS report, eliminating educational programs that also provide aid to higher income levels and adding community grants. The Heritage report calculates poverty expenditures from 1950 until 2008, with predictions through 2018. Presented in a Congressional hearing and available widely on the Internet, the report attempts to cast doubt on the spending choices of the Obama Administration. While they approach the issue with different motivations, CRS and Heritage produce similar calculations. Figure 2.1, the total government means–tested spending, shows that the CRS and Heritage datasets line up closely for the years in which they overlap. Only the Heritage calculations cover the full time range of this study. Therefore, the Government Generosity Index uses the Heritage Foundation’s calculations as a starting point to calculate policy changes (Heritage data courtesy of Rachel Sheffield, see Appendix, Table A.1, for data).

Figure 2.1: Heritage and CRS Estimates for Total Government Aid to the Poor

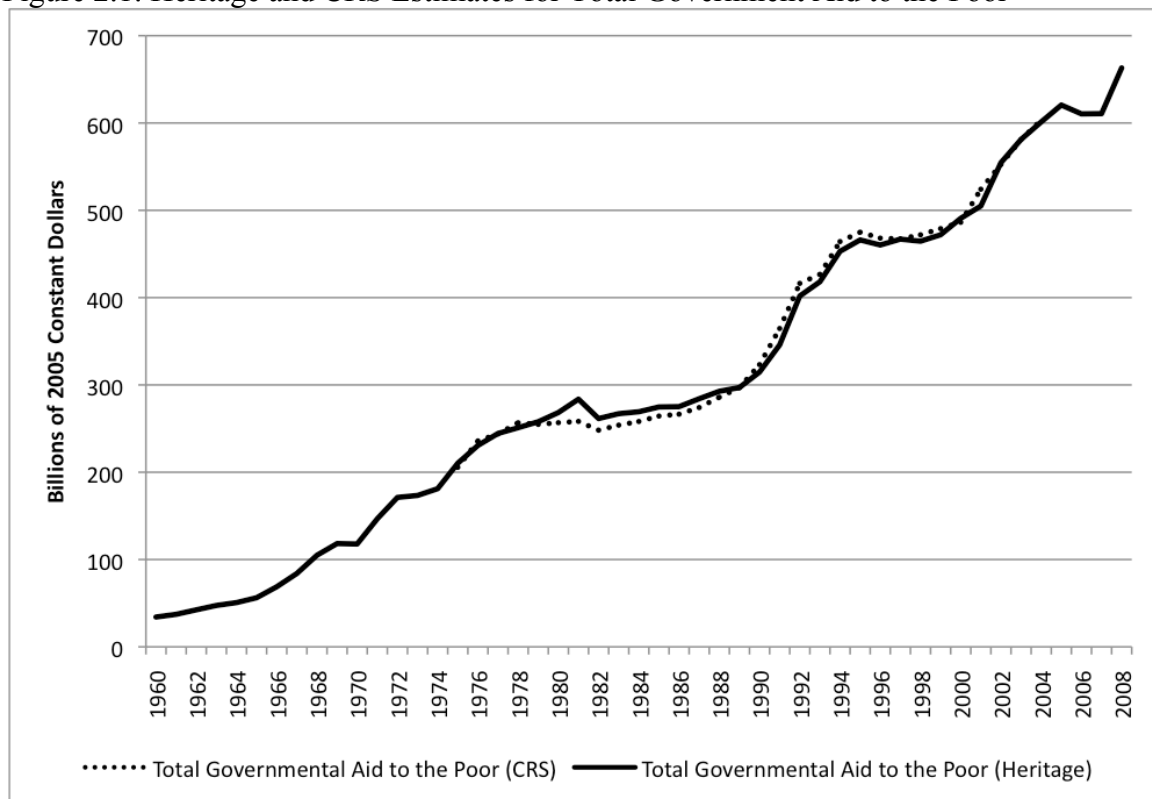


Figure 2.1 demonstrates that inflation controlled means-tested aid has grown consistently, regardless of the political party controlling the presidency or Congress. Funding for means-tested programs increased by more than 19 times between 1960 and 2008. Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon increased spending at a greater rate than any other presidents. Inflation-adjusted spending decreased in six of the 48 years in this study. The largest decrease, about 8%, occurred between 1981 and 1982, at the beginning of Reagan's presidency. However, that was the only year in which Reagan managed to decrease the means-tested aid. Clinton slightly decreased spending in two years of his presidency, both after the passage of welfare reform. One of the biggest increases occurred in the first term of George W. Bush, when spending increases by almost 20%. Recall the quantitative history, which suggested that the spending boom of the 1960s and 1970s preceded large cuts and then slowly decreasing generosity. Before adding context,

the increases in poverty aid seem drastic and consistent, completely different than the qualitative history.

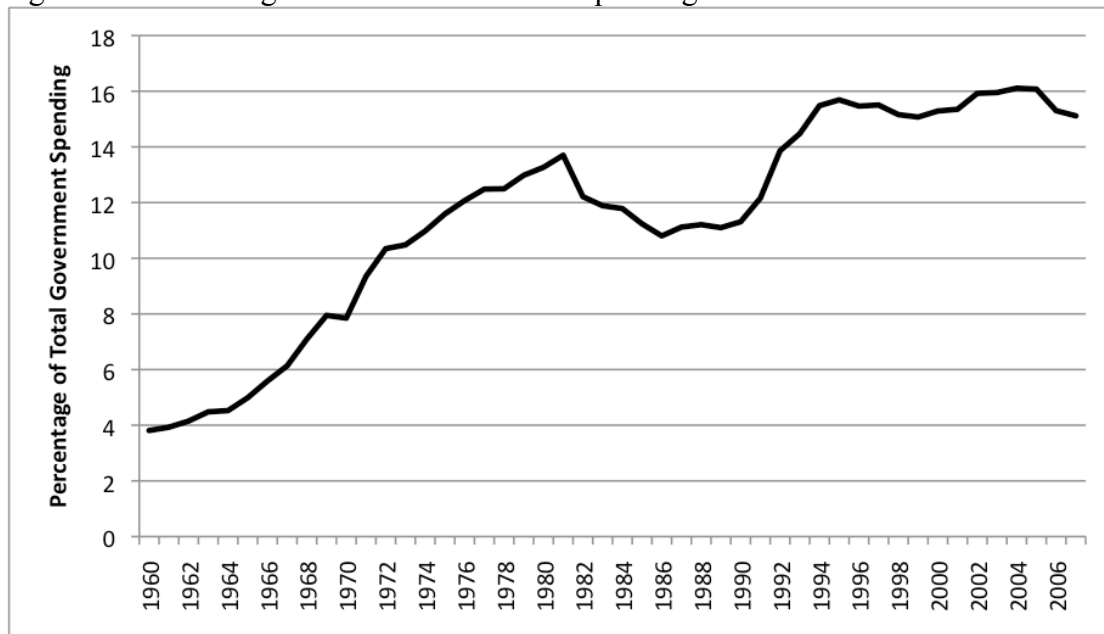
### ***Spending Changes Relative to Resources***

The total means–tested aid, as cited by Rector et. al. (2009) only tells part of the story. In part, generosity depends on the size of the country’s government and economy. A country with more resources has more to spend on the poor. In other words, a millionaire who gives \$100 to a foundation is not as generous as a toddler who donates half of his \$1 of birthday money to the neighborhood homeless shelter. The common conception of generosity depends on available resources. Because the size of the economy and total amount of United States spending has increased at such a rapid rate, funding for almost every type of government program has increased (Blank 1998). A growing economy, especially with the amount of the increasing population and inequality of the United States, will naturally spend more on the basic safety net. Therefore, means–tested aid will increase with the size of the government. That increase in means–tested aid does not necessarily show a more generous government.

To control for available resources, existing literature uses Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (for example, Moller et al. 2003, 35) or total government spending (Blank 1997, 87). In this case, the distinction makes little difference because the poverty spending as a percentage of government expenditures correlates closely with the poverty spending as a percentage of GDP (See Appendix, Figure A.1). The Government Generosity Index uses total government spending. Data comes from the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB), and combines local, state and federal levels. Figure 2.2 shows means–tested as a percentage of total government spending.



Figure 2.2: Percentage of Total Government Spending that Goes to Means-Tested Aid



The percentage of government spending that goes towards poverty increased significantly, by almost four times, between 1960 and 2008. Even as the overall government spending increased, poverty aid made up an increasingly large portion. The presidents between Kennedy and Carter expanded the welfare state at a remarkable pace, from 4% of total spending to almost 14% by 1981. Then, Reagan presided over sharp cuts, to less than 11% by 1986. Although the Reagan administration promised cuts in all areas of policy, this shows that the government cut poverty aid disproportionately, even as a recession was leading to increased need. Between 1990 and 1994, the Democratic Congress, under Presidents Clinton and Bush, expanded poverty spending from 11 to 15% of total expenditures. However, the welfare state has remained stagnant since welfare reform. Breaking down the types of spending provides more insight into these trends, showing that the medical and nonmedical policies show different patterns.

### ***Medical v. Nonmedical Spending (1960–present)***

Understanding the percentage of spending that goes to poverty requires looking closely at increasing health care costs. An increasing large portion of government aid to the poor comes from health care expenses. Here, I compare a brief qualitative history of medical poverty policy to the percentage of total government spending which goes to medical means–tested aid. Health care expenditures for the poor increased steadily even when lawmakers cut other types of aid.

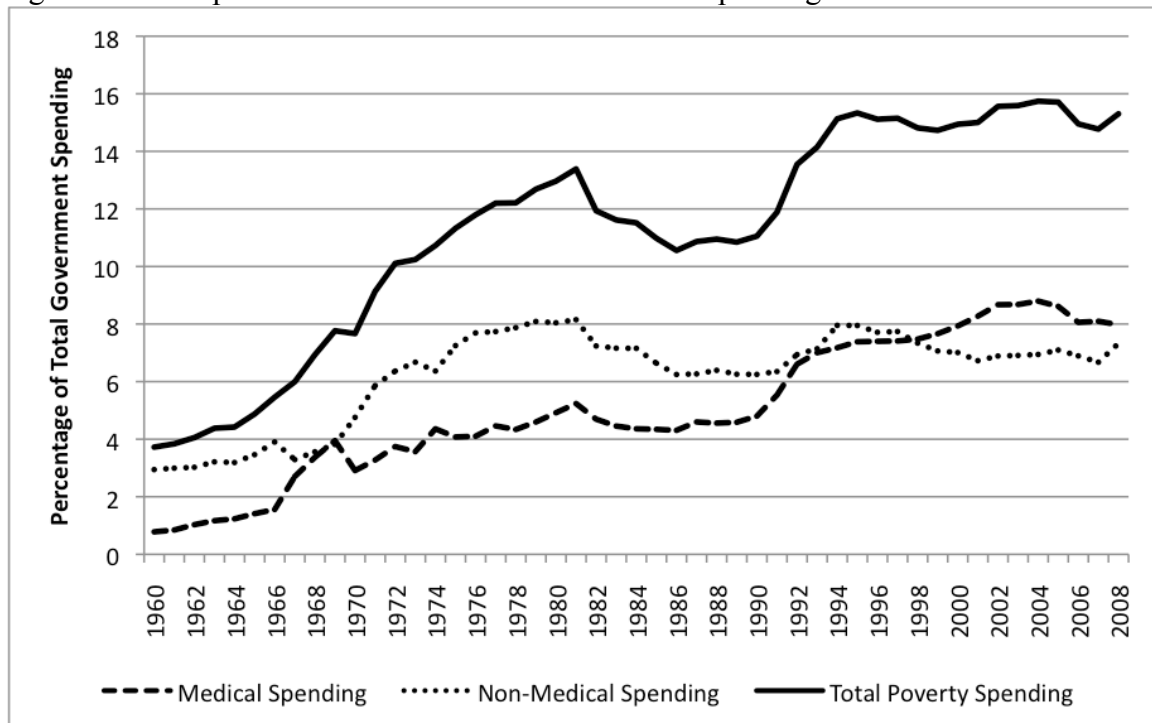
In the last 50 years, the primary approach of the government towards providing health care for the poor has been to increase the availability of public health insurance (Swartz 2009). Medicaid, implemented in 1965, covers the poor. Although originally limited by the stigma coming from its attachment to AFDC, the number of recipients has grown steadily, along with the costs of coverage (Currie 2006, 36–37). Between 1984 and 1990, Congress passed seven separate acts that expanded eligibility (Swartz 2009, 336). By 1990, Medicaid covered all children under six and mothers with incomes under 133% of the poverty line (336–337). While those eligibility expansions and the recession contributed to part of the large spending increases in the 1990s, much of the increasingly expansive health care aid came from creative financing by the states, who used the matching federal money to pay for expensive hospitals (338). In 1997, Congress created the State Children’s Health Insurance Program (SCHIP), which gives block grants to states based on the number of children who have incomes under 200% (300% after a 2009 bill signed by Barack Obama) of the poverty level. SCHIP was the biggest new program of government health aid for the poor since Medicaid (339). Attempts by several presidents to curb spending have thus far proven unsuccessful. Costs are rising for the aged and disabled poor, which account for 73% of Medicaid spending, causing an

increase in total expenditures (332–347). Still, not all poor receive coverage, including one-third of the non-elderly with incomes under the poverty line (346–347). Health aid for the poor expanded consistently due to a combination of:

- 1) Increasing enrollment, because of poverty and eligibility expansion;
- 2) Rising health costs, due to increased services offered, the costs of those services, and creative billing from the states.

Figure 2.3 shows the percentage of total spending for health and non-health poverty aid.<sup>3</sup>

Figure 2.3: Comparison of Medical and Non-Medical Spending on the Poor



Whereas spending on health care accounted for a minor part of poverty aid 50 years ago, it now makes up more than 50% of total government aid to the poor. At the same time, it grew from less than 1% of overall government spending to more than 8%. This matches closely with the qualitative picture, outlined by Swartz (2009). Since 1979, the medical

<sup>3</sup> The Heritage Foundation provided a break down of the data used in Rector et. al. (2009). The figures for medical spending, available in the Appendix, stem from that data. Heritage controls for inflation in medical costs, by using the personal consumption price index for medical care, a measure from the Bureau of Labor Statistics that takes into account rising health costs (37).

spending has increased as a percentage of total government spending, but the nonmedical spending has decreased, leading to a small net increase. The increasing health spending shows an important trend in the nature of government aid. While medical policy has become increasingly generous, the non–medical aid has moved in a different direction.

Now, I have used the total government spending to establish changes in the proportion of government resources that goes to poverty. Yet, this measure remains sensitive to economic changes.

### ***Controlling for Extent of the Problem***

In times of increased need, automatic triggers require increased social welfare spending.

As poverty decreases, certain types of government means–tested spending automatically contract. Much of the existing literature that quantifies changes in the United States social policy ends with dividing the amount of means tested aid by either total spending or GDP (Blank 1997, 87; Huber and Stephens 2001; Kenworthy 1999; Moller et al. 2003, 35).

This study controls for changes in need by dividing the expansiveness of poverty spending by the extent of the problem to which the government responds. Later in this chapter, I introduce a measure of the problem, the depth of poverty, which demonstrates that the poor have gotten much poorer in the last 50 years.

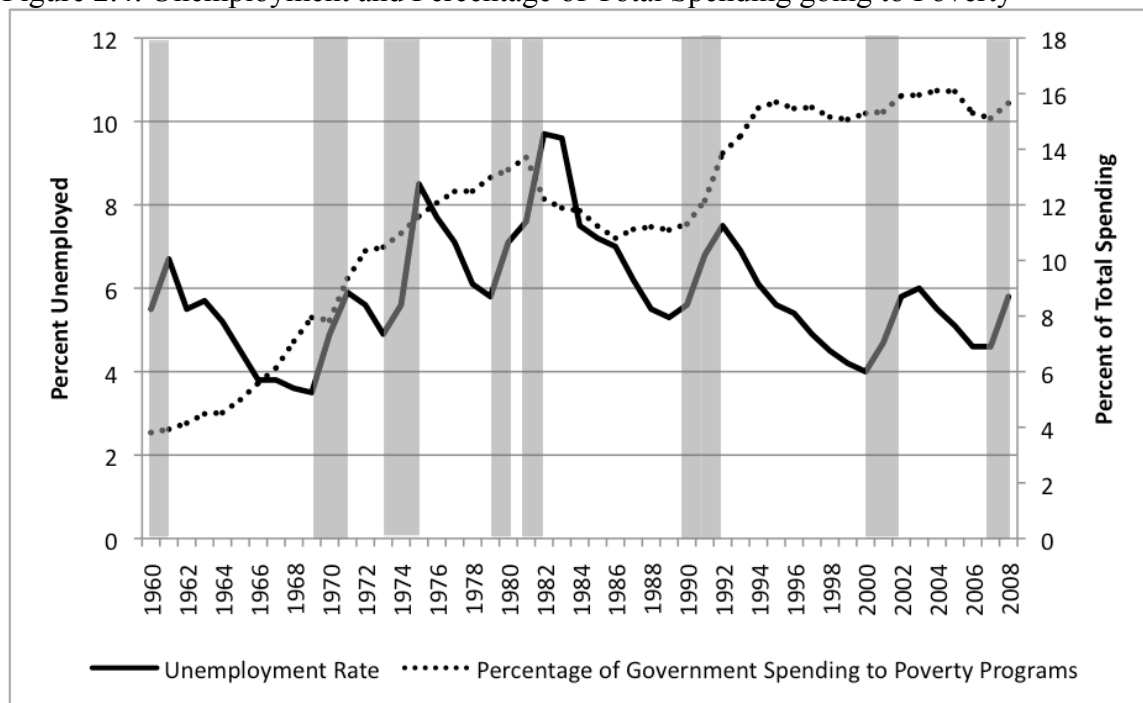
The government has two types of spending, mandatory and discretionary. Mandatory spending includes entitlement programs like Medicaid and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program<sup>4</sup> (SNAP), and the appropriations process has no substantial control. Anyone who meets the criteria for eligibility can apply for and receive benefits. The programs require a substantial change in law to alter eligibility, so they fluctuate

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<sup>4</sup> Formerly known as food stamps, the Farm Bill of 2008 led to a change in name in an attempt to reduce the stigma attached to recipients.

closely with economic trends. As more people become poor, more people receive SNAP and other mandatory programs. Discretionary spending, on the other hand, changes based on each appropriations bill. Congress sets the amount of money each year for a program such as TANF, and the programs provide benefits only until that money runs out. Because of the mandatory spending, the poverty aid shows changes during economic fluctuation. Figure 2.4 compares the percentage of government spending that goes towards poverty to the unemployment rate.

Figure 2.4: Unemployment and Percentage of Total Spending going to Poverty



*Note:* Grey shading highlights biggest growths in unemployment. Unemployment rates are averages of the monthly calculations, from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Many of the largest increases in spending growth have occurred in bad economic times, as more people demand programs. Until about 1965, the poverty spending expanded despite decreasing amounts of unemployment. After the passage of Food Stamps and Medicaid, the most dramatic increases in unemployment lined up closely with large

increases in the percentage of spending that goes to poverty. The one large exception occurred during the time of the Reagan Cuts, when poverty spending decreased in the middle of increasing unemployment. The general direct relationship between poverty spending percentage and an economic indicator suggests that spending sometimes changes based on the extent of the problem. Poverty spending increased by 0.7 percentage points, from 15.4 to 16.1%, in the first term of George W. Bush, despite a lack of policy changes. Instead, the recession added demand for food stamps and Medicaid and led to an increase in mandatory spending.

This Index measures changes in policy. If the amount of poverty were to double, and the spending on SNAP doubled, that would show no change in policy. On a broader note, the percentage of total spending that goes towards poverty often fluctuates as the economy fluctuates, because of changes in the amount of need. As the amount of poverty changes, so does the amount of mandatory spending. Unemployment and poverty spending do not correlate perfectly, because Congress often makes changes to eligibility, the level of benefits and the amount of discretionary spending. The challenge is to isolate those changes, because they demonstrate a changing intent of United States lawmakers. Showing these policy changes will require controlling for the extent of the problem, which will help to separate policy decisions from automatic reactions to need.

### **An Index of Government Generosity**

What problem does the government try to address with means-tested aid? This study makes the assumption, more controversial than it sounds, that poverty is the problem and that the goal of government anti-poverty aid is to reduce the amount of poverty. Some would say that aid exists only to make sure that everyone in the United States has a basic

standard of living, such as shelter and food to survive. Samuel Fleischacker, in *A Short History of Distributive Justice*, chronicles the fascinating history of the philosophical ideas of the government responsibility in increasing living standards for the poor. He writes that distributive justice, the idea that everyone deserves a certain level of material means, only developed in the last two centuries (Fleischacker 2005). The current debate, except for a small minority that argues that the state should only protect property rights, centers on the extent of the material goods each person should have and the role of the state required in producing that distribution (5). If a person should have only enough food to survive, then the market might take care of itself. If each person deserves health care and equal education, then the government will have an increasing role. If wealth should be spread equally, the government might have to completely disregard property rights (5). By measuring poverty, and enacting policy in an attempt to reduce poverty, the United States has set a barometer for just distribution that falls far short of equal wealth but deplores severe economic hardships.

It follows that changes in the amount of poverty represent changes in the problem to which the state responds. A measure based on annual household income remains the primary source of data for most research on the amount of poverty in the United States. However, social scientists have measured poverty in many different ways. Wealth poverty calculates the amount of assets in a given household. While wealth provides a useful measure of available resources, very little data exists (Burtless and Smeeding 2001, 34). Researchers have sometimes used social indicators, such as the presence of heat or a car, to measure economic hardship and affluence (34). However, the effectiveness is limited because these social indicators depend on the preference of

individual households. Other scholars have defined poverty based on consumption (32), or the access to services like health care or housing (32–33). All of these efforts and others are limited by both the availability of data and the extent to which they describe economic hardship accurately. The most reliable data on poverty is based on income, the amount of money a family takes in each year.

Efforts to calculate income poverty on the national level started in the last 50 years. In 1961, Mollie Orshansky, an economist in the Social Security Administration, began to develop a national poverty line. She used earlier data that concluded families of three or more spent about one-third of their after-tax income on food (Citro and Michael 1995, 109). The poverty threshold simply multiplied by three the amount a household would need to sustain a minimum food diet. Any person in a family with an income under that level is in poverty, according to the official measure. The line was first published in 1964 and became official in 1969. At that point, the U.S. Census Bureau considered poor any male-headed families of four with an annual income of less than \$3,715 annually. Since, the official poverty threshold has remained the same, adjusting only for inflation.

Social scientists have identified a number of both original and new weaknesses in the measure, including: a disregard for changing medical costs, changes in the tax burden on low-income individuals, changes in government benefits for basic needs, and differences in the costs of living by geographic areas (Citro and Michael 1995). Much literature argues that a poverty measure should acknowledge expenses such as clothing, shelter and other needs (Citro and Michael 1995). Several experimental poverty measures have taken these critiques into consideration and used existing surveys to adjust the



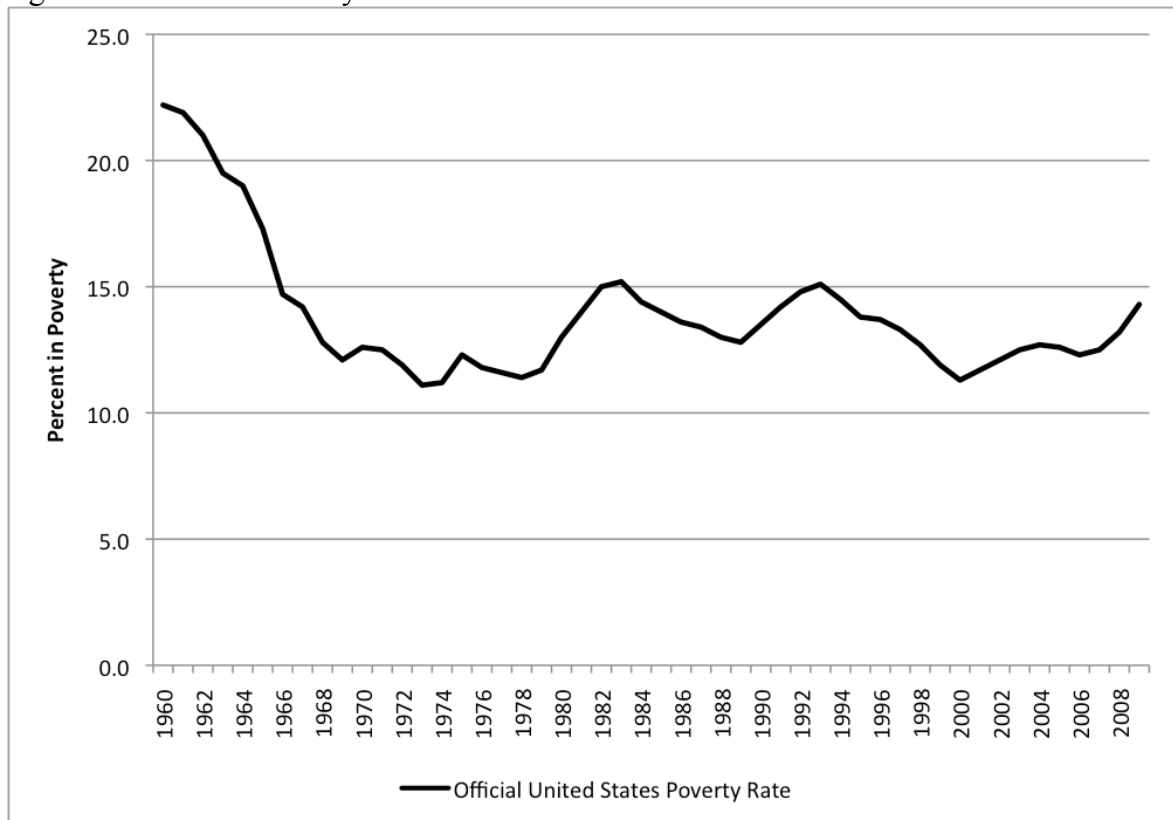
income thresholds (for example, Burtless and Smeeding 2001). The most recent experimental measures, based on recommendations published for the National Academy of Sciences in Citro and Michael (1995) show slightly higher rates than the traditional measure, but similar directional trends in the amount of poverty. This Index uses a measure based on the long-time government poverty thresholds, which remain the most common measures for poverty scholars and policy makers, and which have the most complete historic data. The thresholds serve as measurements and determinants of eligibility for many government poverty programs.

### ***Three Poverty Measures***

Each year, the U.S. Census Bureau, in the Current Population Survey, calculates the nation's poverty numbers based on the thresholds. However, the Bureau produces various ways of viewing the income poverty, which could serve as controls in the Government Generosity Index. The most commonly used measure of United States poverty is the rate, which takes the number of people in poverty and divides by the size of the population. However, using the thresholds, the Census also produces estimates describing the number of poor people or the depth of poverty. Here, the chapter shows why the depth of poverty, which shows the distance of the poor's income from the level of the official thresholds, does the best job of describing the problem to which government responds.

Figure 2.5 shows changes in the poverty rate, the percentage of people in the United States that live in families under the official thresholds.

Figure 2.5: Official Poverty Rate



Between 1960 and 1973, the official poverty rate decreased by 50%. Since that time, between about 11 and 15% of the total population have lived under the thresholds.

Poverty since 1973 was sensitive to economic cycles (Blank 2009; Cancian and Danziger 2009). When unemployment increased, so did the percentage of people in poverty. When the unemployment decreases, the poverty rate goes down as well.

The official poverty rate is a good measure of poverty in the United States for public awareness, and a simplified demonstration of the problem. Breaking down poverty by other measures provides a different perspective. The current number of poor people is near the same as 1960, while the poverty rate has decreased by more than 40%. Since the early 1970s, the population of the United States has increased steadily, while the poverty rate remained within a range of a few percentage points. The number of poor people has grown by about two-thirds during that time. Almost 11 million people entered poverty

between 1978 and 1983. More than 7.5 million people entered poverty between 1989 and 1993. So, a rate does not show as much detail about the extent of the problem as a measure showing the absolute amount of poverty. If the eventual and dream goal of policy is to eliminate poverty, then the extent of the problem should show the absolute amount of poverty.

### **The Poverty Gap v. Number of Poor**

Two measures could better depict the extent of the problem, based on U.S. Census data: the number of people in poverty and the depth of poverty, also known as the poverty gap. The depth is the total amount needed to put every poor person in the United States at the poverty threshold. It uses data on the income deficit, the average amount families and unrelated individuals fall below the poverty line. So, does the number of poor people or the poverty gap more accurately gauge the amount of poverty? The example of a fictional three-family community demonstrates a key difference. Table 2.2 compares the number of poor and the poverty gap in 2008. The Joneses are a family of four with an income of \$15,000. The Williams family has three children and a combined income of \$15,000. Linda Smith is a single mom with two children and an income of \$15,500. Using the 2008 thresholds for poverty, in the fictional town, the gap is \$18,600. Because the three families earn less than the threshold for their respective family sizes, there are 12 members of the community in poverty.

Table 2.2: Poverty Gap in 2008 for Fictional Town

<b>Family Name</b>	<b>Number of People in Poverty</b>	<b>Income</b>	<b>2008 Poverty Threshold for Family Size</b>	<b>Income Deficit</b>
<b>Jones</b>	4	\$15,000	\$21,200	\$6,200
<b>Williams</b>	5	\$15,000	\$24,800	\$9,800
<b>Smith</b>	3	\$15,000	\$17,600	\$2,600
<b>Total</b>	12	\$45,000	\$63,600	\$18,600

Compare those measurements to the town in 2009, shown in Table 2.3. The residents have maintained their previous income. If the Census Bureau measures this town, the number of poor people remains the same. However, the amount of need has increased. Because of inflation, that same amount of income will buy less, so they have a lower standard of living than the previous year. They can buy less food, save less money, and put less towards their rent. That is to say that the government of this town is responding to a more severe problem, even though the number of poor people remains the same. Between 2008 and 2009, the depth of poverty of this town increased by \$2,550 while the number of poor people remained the same. The income deficit reflects that increase in need because it takes into account inflation, using the official thresholds.

Table 2.3: Poverty Gap in 2009 for Fictional Town

<b>Family Name</b>	<b>Number of People in Poverty</b>	<b>Income</b>	<b>2009 Poverty Threshold for Family Size</b>	<b>Income Deficit</b>
<b>Jones</b>	4	\$15,000	\$22,050	\$7,050
<b>Williams</b>	5	\$15,000	\$25,790	\$10,790
<b>Smith</b>	3	\$15,000	\$18,310	\$3,310
<b>Total</b>	12	\$45,000	\$66,150	\$21,150

As the examples above show, the use of the number of people in poverty can miss key trends in the extent of the problem that policy would address. In 2009, the official poverty line for a family of four was \$22,050. Data for the number of people under the poverty line counts a family that makes \$22,000 the same as a family with an income of \$10,000. However, deeper poverty can mean significant differences in the educational achievement and development of youth. Every \$1 thousand dollars of income can raise the achievement of these students (Spillane 2010). Data for the number of poor does not differentiate between the range of incomes under the poverty line, failing to take into account changes in inequality. The depth of poverty shows when the poor become poorer or when they get closer to the poverty line. It shows the intensity of the poverty,

important for a government that wants policy to put all people over the poverty line. Therefore, the gap best measures the extent of the problem.

### ***Extending the Measurement of Depth of Poverty***

Several researchers use the depth of poverty in their research. Ziliak (2005), in his analysis of various measures from the poverty thresholds, concludes that the poverty gap provides a better measure than the number of poor. In particular, the gap can help policy makers understand the extent to which means-tested programs fill the safety net (Ziliak 2005). However, Ziliak and others who have used and analyzed historical trends in the poverty gap (Burtless and Smeeding 2001, 52; Scholz and Levine 2001; Weinberg 1985; Ziliak 2003; Ziliak 2005) have had little data of the pre-1975 poverty gap. The Census Bureau has only limited historical data on the level of income for those under the poverty rate. So, this study uses a regression to predict the poverty gap between 1960 and 1974.

Because of disagreements as to what income should count towards the poverty gap, several different versions exist (Weinberg 1987). However, the most cited measure lines up with the census estimates by using the income level calculated after receiving certain government benefits (231). This index will use that version of the gap, with data provided by Arloc Sherman, a senior researcher with the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP), a left-leaning think tank that works on poverty and fiscal issues. Sherman's data extends between 1975 and 2005 (See Appendix, Table A.1).

So, a regression is necessary in order to predict the poverty gap for 1960–1974 and 2006–2008. The regression uses the total number of poor people, the poverty rate and the Heritage Foundation data for means-tested aid. The total number of poor people and poverty rate share the same data source as the gap, the U.S. Census. Also, studies show

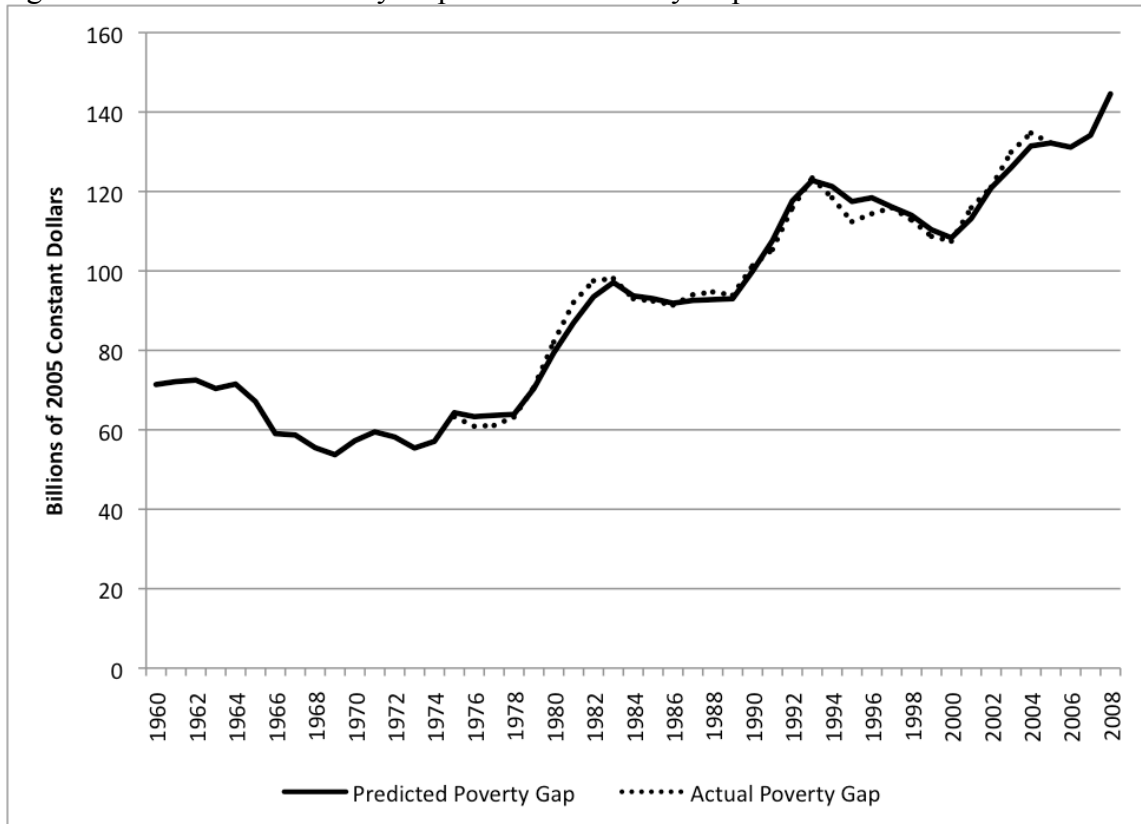
that total government spending on means-tested aid helps to reduce the poverty gap (For example, Scholz and Levine 2001), so it could help predict the poverty gap. The regression closely predicts the poverty gap for the missing years:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Estimated poverty gap (billions of 2005 constant dollars)} = & -5.94 * (\text{poverty rate}) \\ & + 5.12 * (\text{millions of people in poverty}) + 0.032 * (\text{billions of 2005 constant dollars} \\ & \text{in means-tested spending}) - 1.68 \end{aligned}$$

$$R\text{-squared} = 0.9856$$

The regression confirms that the three variables predict much of the poverty gap. There is a strong mathematical correlation between these measures and the poverty gap for the years of 1975–2005. The regression found an adjusted r-value of greater than 0.98, so the three independent variables explain more than 98% of variation in the poverty gap for those years. Figure 2.6 shows that the estimated gap resembles closely the actual gap for 1975–2005, the years in which the data overlaps. So, the study will use the predicted gap for 1960–1974 and 2006–2008, and CBPP’s data for the remaining years. The final result is a dataset for the poverty gap between 1960 and 2008 (see Appendix, Table A.1, for both the actual and estimated poverty gaps).

Figure 2.6: Calculated Poverty Gap v. Actual Poverty Gap

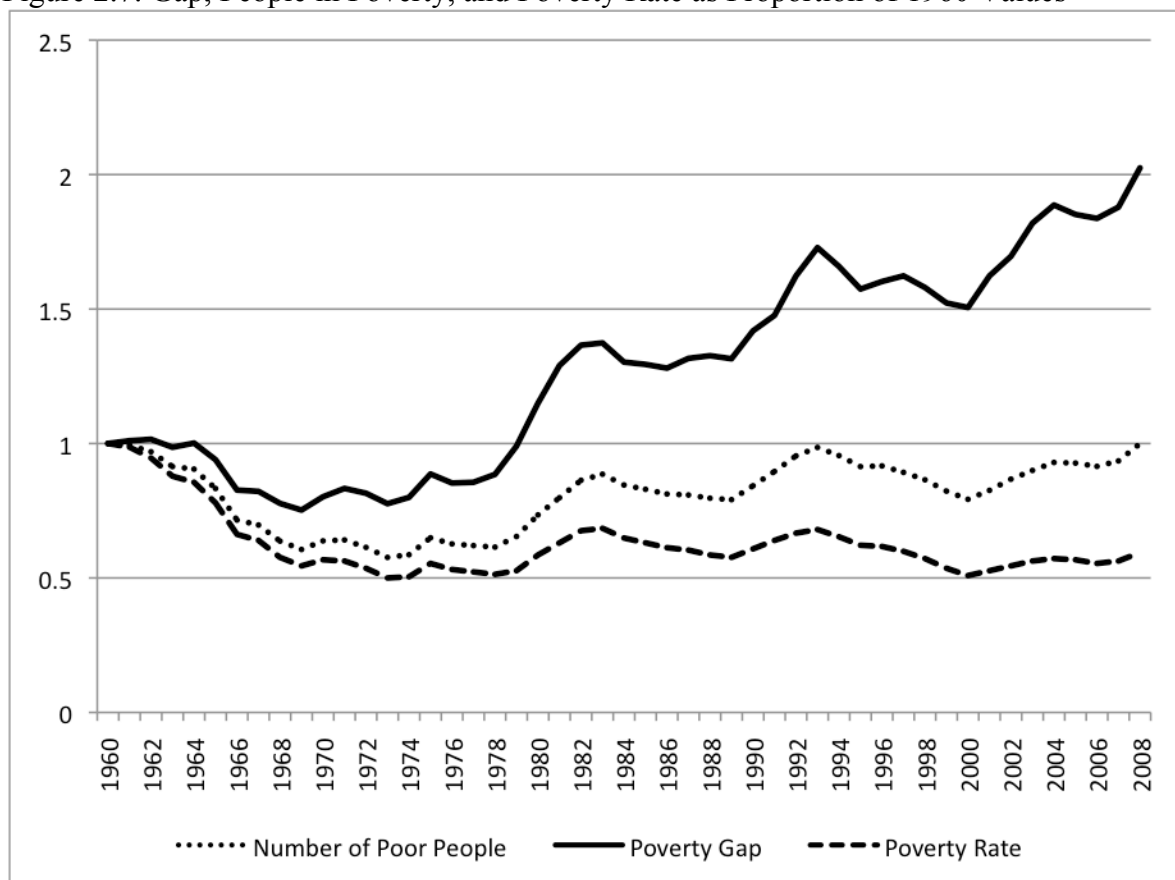


The poverty gap doubled between 1960 and 2008. The depth of poverty in 1960 was \$71.34 billion and reached a low of \$53.72 billion by 1969. The gap, as with rate and number of poor people, has some correlation with unemployment starting in about 1971. The periods of a decreasing poverty gap (1971–1973, 1975–1976, 1983–1986, 1988–1989, 1993–1995, 1997–2000, 2004–2006) all occurred in periods of decreasing unemployment. However, decreased unemployment did not always correlate with decreases in the poverty gap. At three points during this period, the poverty gap has increased in the middle of strings of decreased unemployment. First, between 1976 and 1979, during much of Carter’s time in office, the poverty gap climbed 16% as unemployment decreased by about 25%. At the end of Reagan’s term, from 1986–1989, there was a 3.5% increase in the poverty gap as unemployment fell by 21%. Finally, around the time of Clinton’s Welfare Reform, from 1995–1997, a 3% increase in the

poverty gap accompanied a 12.5% decrease in unemployment. The poverty gap tells a story of consistently increasing poverty, with only small decreases in times of low unemployment.

It is a very different story than the more traditionally used measures, such as the poverty rate or the number of poor. Figure 2.7 shows the number of people in poverty and the depth of poverty, as proportions of their 1960 values.

Figure 2.7: Gap, People in Poverty, and Poverty Rate as Proportion of 1960 Values



The directions of the poverty gap and number of poor people have correlated for most years since 1960. However, the poverty gap has increased faster in the bad years and decreased slower in the good years. In 2009, the number of people in poverty reached more than 43 million, slightly higher than 50 years ago. On the other hand, the depth of poverty in the most recent data is double that of 1960, at more than \$140 billion. Between



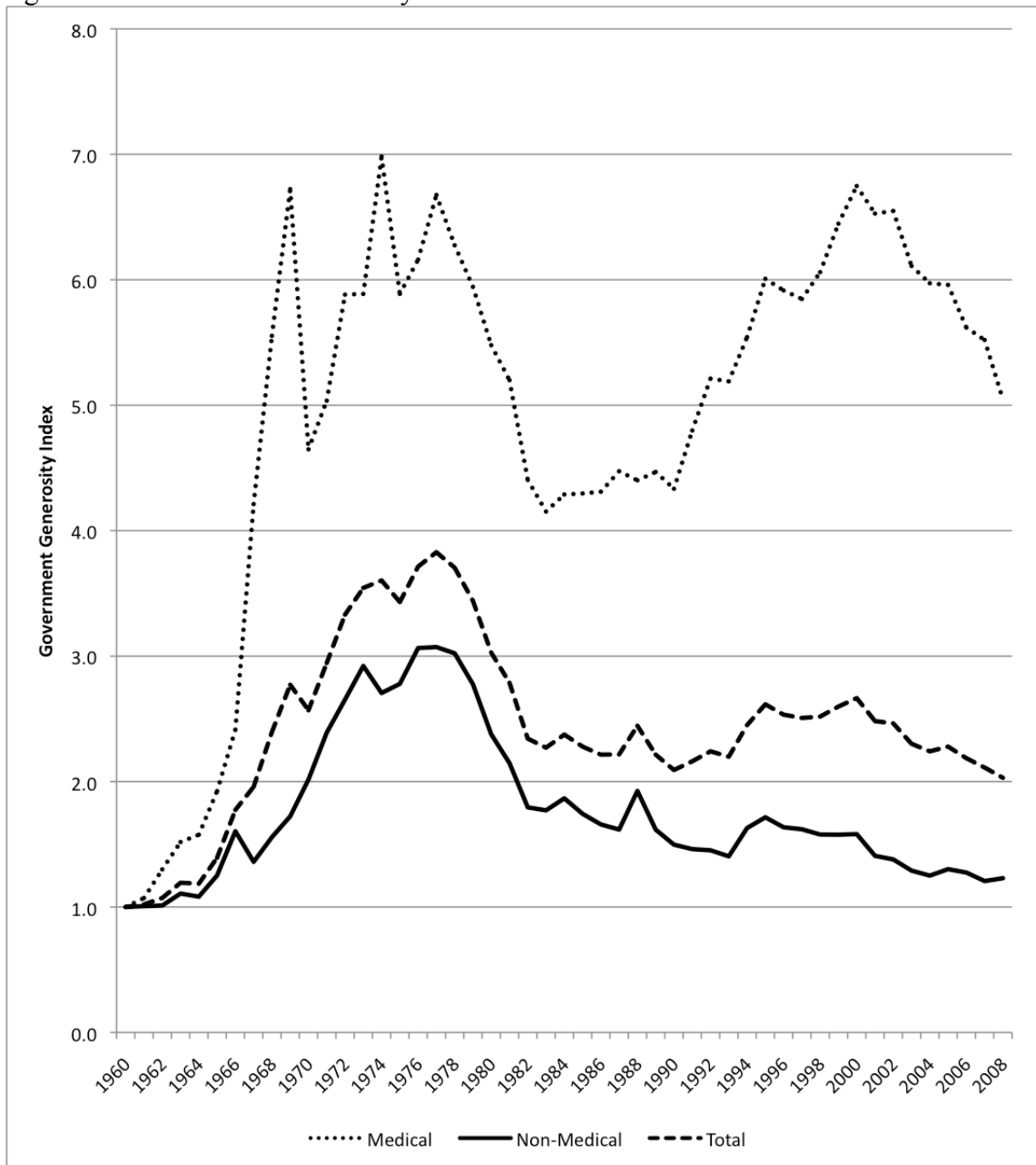
1960 and 1973, the number of poor people fell by 42%. The gap decreased by 22% during that same period. While the number of poor stayed below the 1960 levels, the depth has steadily increased since the early 1970s. The poor have gotten poorer and the size of the problem to which the government responds has increased.

### ***The Government Generosity Index***

After adding the depth of poverty, the Government Generosity Index (GGI) now controls for the extent of the problem and the amount of available resources. Because the history of medical spending differs from the rest of means-tested aid, the study will present three different calculations. First, I will examine calculations for the GGI for medical, non-medical and total spending, before comparing the non-medical Index to the qualitative history outlined earlier in this chapter.

The final calculation comes from dividing the percentage of total spending that goes to means-tested aid by the poverty gap for each year. Figure 2.8 shows the resulting measure, the Government Generosity Index for medical, non-medical and total spending. Increases in the Index indicate more generosity while decreases show stinginess.

Figure 2.8: Government Generosity Index

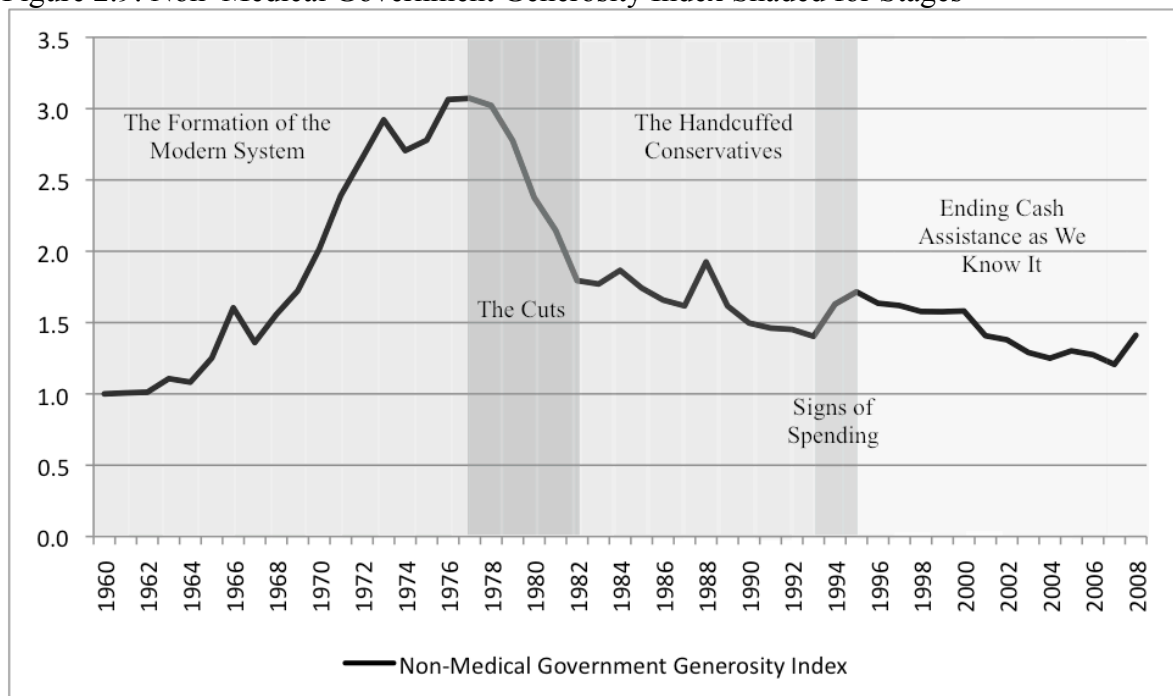


The three measures show distinct pictures of changes in government poverty policy. For medical means-tested spending, the generosity increase is five-fold, while non-medical poverty generosity has decreased consistently in the last 30 years. By 1977, the medical generosity increased by about 6.7 times while the rest of means-tested generosity increased by 3.1 times. After that peak, both the medical and non-medical GGI fall

rapidly during the end of the Carter presidency and beginning of the Reagan presidency. In the rest of the 1980s, medical generosity followed a similar trend to the other measures. However, in 1990, the medical index reached a low and began to increase rapidly. Between 1990 and 2000, the medical generosity increased by more than 50%. At the same time, the non-medical generosity increased by less than 10%. The government's generosity towards the poor in medical programs increased at a much more rapid rate than all other poverty aid, both before 1977 and between 1990 and 2000. While the medical generosity remains below its earlier levels, it has shown growth when other types of poverty aid fell. The rest of this thesis will focus on the non-medical GGI, but further study would try to explain the politics that lead to changes in medical means-tested spending response. How did medical poverty aid become exempt from criticism as lawmakers cut cash assistance such as Aid to Families with Dependent Children? How has the framing of medical assistance differed from the rest of poverty aid, and how much does this explain differences in policy changes?

The non-medical measure matches closely with the quantitative picture. Figure 2.9 shows the non-medical Government Generosity Index, with shading for the five stages of poverty policy.

Figure 2.9: Non-Medical Government Generosity Index Shaded for Stages



The quantitative history of government generosity matches closely with the five stages of poverty policy. The government was 1.23 times more generous towards the poor in 2008 than in 1960. The first two stages showed the largest movement. Almost all of the years of growth occurred during the first stage, The Formation of the Modern System. Between 1960 and 1977, the generosity grew by a factor of three, as each president added more programs to the system. The largest uninterrupted increase in generosity occurred between 1967 and 1973, including the end of Johnson's presidency and most of Nixon's. In only two years, 1967 and 1974, during this period did the generosity decrease. Between 1966 and 1967, the poverty gap decreased. At the same time, the amount of anti-poverty spending fell by almost 6.3% in inflation-adjusted dollars as the total government spending increased by 11.3%. During this budget, the Vietnam War significantly cut the amount of money Johnson could request for the Great Society programs, leaving many underfunded (Special to the New York Times 1966). The other

cut in this period, between 1973 and 1974, occurred as Nixon dismantled the Office of Economic Opportunity, ending all federal aid to community action organizations, which developed services in local areas (Rosenthal 1973). In that year, non-medical generosity fell by about 7.4%. The total generosity increased by three times during this first period, as funding went up and poverty decreased. Lawmakers rethought the government's role in combating income hardships.

The second stage of poverty policy, The Cuts, showed a quick response. In four years, the generosity decreased by about 40%, in part because of the increases in the poverty gap. The largest one-year decrease in generosity, about 15%, actually occurs between 1979 and 1980, towards the end of Carter's administration. As expected, the Reagan administration began to make some cuts in means-tested programs. The first two years of Reagan's Administration quickly moved towards greater government stinginess.

However, Reagan began to see increases in poverty, forcing higher levels of funding in the 1983 budget, the start of the period of The Handcuffed Conservatives. In that period, from 1983 to 1992, the generosity decreased by about 20%, without any years of large decreases. Only in two years during that period did generosity increase. The largest increase, about 19%, occurred between 1987 and 1988. In that budget, the Congress, worried about debt increases, cut military spending while exempting most domestic programs from reduced funding (Fuerbringer 1987). By 1993, the generosity had declined at slow rates for almost 10 years, reaching the level of the late 1960s.

The final two stages appear as expected in the non-medical Government Generosity Index. In the 1994 and 1995 budgets, the generosity increased slightly, as Clinton increased expenditures for programs like the Earned Income Tax Credit. The

generosity begins to decrease, interestingly, before the 1996 passage of welfare reform.

The first budget of the new Republican Congress, delayed because of a political stalemate that led to government shutting down, included large cuts to poverty programs. The slight downward slope in generosity continued for more than ten years. By 2008, the GGI reached 123% of 1960. With the exception of a few years, the generosity towards the poor fell consistently for three decades, to about 40% of the 1977 peak. The generosity appears poised to continue falling.

## **Conclusions**

This chapter has detailed the changes in government generosity towards the poor of the period from 1960 through 2008. The entrance of John F. Kennedy into the American politics brought a beginning of expansion in the government's role in poverty, which continued until the late 1970s. During that time, the government generosity grew by three times. However, after the political defeats of Carter, the government began to contract, even as the amount of poverty grew. The generosity declined by 40% in the span of four years. Overall, the government was slightly more generous in 2008 than 1960. However, the end of the time period of this study shows a continuing decline in poverty action.

For government expansiveness, the study uses the total means-tested aid divided by the total spending, before dividing by the depth of poverty. The methods present a new way of looking at the amount of government generosity. Unlike other studies, I have controlled for the extent of the problem. The Government Generosity Index used a regression to predict the data for several previously unavailable years of the poverty. The large increase in poverty gap during this period asks whether United States poverty research should look more closely at measures that consider distance from the poverty

line. Finally, the chapter compares the resulting measure, a Government Generosity Index for non-medical aid, to five stages of a quantitative history of poverty policy. Further study would break down this measure for different types of nonmedical and medical spending. For example, when have the major shifts occurred in spending on education? Or, how have shifts in generosity towards the elderly compared with shifts in generosity to youth programs? With this data, the index could go further than existing measures in comparing changes in the different types of poverty policies.

So, in poverty policy, a huge increase in generosity was followed by cuts. Now, policy has reached a long equilibrium, as generosity declines slowly. Next, I will present one possible explanation, chronicling the different ways in which society has talked about the poor during this period. Later, I compare the changing policy with the changing dialogue, testing whether the tendency of society to focus on one facet of a multi-faceted issue contributes to large shifts in government action.

### 3

## **Framing the Poor**

A Philadelphia police officer had just killed an unarmed boy, shooting the 16-year-old in the chest as he ran from the scene of a robbery. Francis Smith, a Philadelphia city council member, worried that riots would result. For President Lyndon B. Johnson, that meant an opportunity. “Frank, have you got any influence—any of your friends, or associates—with any of these Republicans in the House of Representatives?” he said in a telephone conversation (Johnson 1964), explaining that he needed votes on a poverty bill. Smith realized that he had a friend in Delaware County. “I’d just tell him that you’re going to get some people out of these riots and out of these pool halls and out of these bars and put them to work,” Johnson said. “[It will] help everybody, and if he’ll help you, why, you’ll find some way to help them.” With riots in the urban cities of the North, the public conversation focused on the poor as creators of social disorder, threatening to disrupt normal life unless the government provided a solution.

The way in which the public talks about the poor changes, influenced by events, political figures and economic conditions. While poverty is a complex issue with many different causes and symptoms, the limited public attention requires a focus on a limited number of facets of a multi-faceted issue. Smith and Johnson focused on the poor as a cause of social disorder, expressing concern about the potential consequences of a mobilized low-income group. For Johnson, that focus meant an opportunity to advocate a more expansive government as the solution. At other times, the public conversation has



focused on low-income people as lacking motivation, content to sit at home and collect welfare benefits. The different facets of a poverty debate compete for limited attention.

The previous chapter presented a method of evaluating government generosity towards the poor. Here, I qualitatively outline the changing dialogue surrounding poverty in the United States. This chapter begins by presenting the theoretical basis of agenda setting and framing. Then, I describe the existing literature on poverty framing, pointing out the niche for this work. The chapter then moves to tracing the history of five major frames: underclass, social disorder, economic and physical barriers, laziness and dysfunction, and cheating, which I will examine quantitatively in the next chapter.

### **The Theoretical Basis of Framing and Attention**

As described in the previous chapter, the policy towards the poor has moved disjointedly. Generosity increased at a rapid rate followed by a steep decline and then a leveling off. For explanations, I turn to the areas of agenda setting and framing. There are two aspects of attention to public issues: tone and amount (Baumgartner and Jones [1993] 2009, 61). Agenda-setting focuses on the amount, when and why an issue enters the public eye, and how that attention affects policy. Framing examines the tone, the tendency and importance of the public's focus on limited facets of multi-faceted, complex issues.

According to Baumgartner and Jones ([1993] 2009), attention changes occur not in a gradual manner but disjointedly. The authors start with the idea that most policies exist in temporary equilibrium, maintained by cognitive restraints of political actors and friction in the political system that makes change difficult. Therefore, as Jones and Baumgartner (2005) explain, only a small number of policies receive attention at any given time. To explain the cognitive limitations, Jones (2001) uses the idea of bounded

rationality, that cognitively, as individuals and as a system, the public can only pay attention to a certain number of issues. Most dramatic policy changes, they write, follow access to the political agenda (Jones and Baumgartner 2005, 20). Traditionally, scholars have thought of policy in terms of negative feedback. That is, when a policy veers off course, it inevitably corrects itself. Baumgartner and Jones ([1993] 2009) use the idea of positive feedback, that issues rapidly enter the public eye and receive political attention, creating institutions that greatly alter policy.

Framing literature suggests that the way in which the American public sees and talks about a target population affects aid. Schneider and Ingram (1993) first applied this idea, called social construction, to politics and policy. Social construction of a target population is 1) the recognition of shared characteristics and 2) the attribution of specific values, symbols and images to those characteristics. No one source creates the constructions, but a combination of media, culture, history, religion and politics. Society could construct the poor as lazy, benefitting from the work of others, or disadvantaged, not at fault for their poverty (335). The policy solutions differ based on both the positivity of construction and the amount of power of the target population. Negatively constructed populations, especially those with little power, become easy targets for politicians, who need not fear political retaliation (336).

Framing influences both public opinion and politicians who look for advantageous political issues (Downs 1972; Walker 1977). Baumgartner and Jones ([1993] 2009) show that the media can direct attention to different aspects of the same issue. The authors see destabilizing punctuations in coverage, meaning times of relatively little attention followed by spikes in press. So what causes large-scale changes in

attention and focus? The punctuations come from a variety of sources. Several authors have emphasized the importance of large-scale triggering events in determining what reaches the political agenda. Triggering-events, like natural disasters or scandals, grab the public attention and force action on an issue (Birkland 1997; Cobb and Elder, 1972). However, others have found that attention changes come from a much more complex combination of events and environment. Baumgartner et. al. (2008) write that a 2000 rise in attention to the death penalty resulted from a type of “perfect storm,” a combination of events such as exonerations and political action (133-134).

Framing can fundamentally alter public understanding of an issue, focusing attention on a particular facet of a multifaceted issue. However, change in the tone of issues does not matter, Baumgartner and Jones ([1993] 2009) conclude, if the attention to that issue remains low. The authors detail the changes in nuclear policy, finding that attention to nuclear spiked in the 1950s and the early-1960s, with the tone overwhelmingly positive (59-82). During that period, the Congress set up regulatory agencies and allowed for private nuclear industries, allowing for many more nuclear facilities. In the mid-1960s, a cascade of attention began to focus on the potential safety risks. The previous positive tone began to slide toward the negative, accompanied by changes in the public opinion. Attention began to spike again in the 1970s, as Ralph Nader and other environmental groups filed suit in court. No new nuclear power plants have been ordered since 1977. The authors find that same trend, changes in attention and tone followed by policy changes, with pesticides and tobacco (83-102). The authors conclude that increased public attention occurs with dissatisfaction with the status quo and leads to the creation of new policy subsystems.

As Baumgartner et. al. (2008) note, previous research on framing has been mostly conducted at an individual level (13). In *The Decline of the Death Penalty and the Discovery of Innocence*, the authors developed a new, systemic method of studying framing and policy, by combining statistical and qualitative methods. The authors notice a shift in the framing from moral and constitutional to innocence in the last decade of the study. Baumgartner and his colleagues then find that the rise in the innocence frame directly led both to a decline in public support and decreased use of the death penalty, which they judge as the best indicator in public policy.

The issue of poverty is fundamentally different, but studying the changes in the amount and tone of attention should lead to an understanding of what influences policy changes. Much quantitative and qualitative literature suggests the importance of framing to poverty policy (For example, Gilens 1999; Handler and Hasenfeld 1991, 1997, 2007; Katz 1989; Pimpare 2004). In a study, Hamill et. al. (1980) assigned subjects an article about an irresponsible Puerto Rican welfare recipient, who received checks dating back many years. To some of those who read the article, the authors gave statistical information that showed the woman to be typical of welfare recipients. To others, they gave information that showed the woman as atypical of welfare recipients, having stayed on welfare much longer than is common. To a third group, the researchers gave no statistical information. The authors found that the statistical information had little effect on the group's attitudes towards welfare recipients. In the end, all of the groups that read the article about the irresponsible welfare recipient had a negative impression of the poor. The authors conclude that the public makes extreme generalizations from unrepresentative samples (Hamill et. al. 1980). The study shows that anecdotes, single

examples, can have more power than statistics when defining the social construction of welfare recipients.

Gilens (1999) builds on this work, looking at how the changing race of media depictions of the poor has led to changing public opinion. He codes major newsmagazines and television programs, finding that blacks are disproportionately prevalent in stories with negative connotations about the poor. Then, he finds a correlation between the increase in photos of blacks and both the increased belief in racial stereotypes and decrease in public support for the particular welfare programs which disproportionately affect blacks (Gilens 1999). Gilens and others have chronicled even more closely the effect of race on public opinion of welfare reform. In an edited volume dedicated to the effect of race on poverty politics (Schram et al. 2003), Gilens (2003) codes photos by topic, finding that blacks are more present in photos accompanying topics that involve negative constructions of the poor. Avery and Peffley (2003) built on previous work by presenting test subjects with newspaper articles that varied by the race of the parent and the tone. The researchers found that the subjects, all white adults, responded differently depending on the race of the parent in the article (Avery and Peffley 2003). The respondents placed more blame on the black mother as compared to the mothers of other races. Gilens (1999) points to the mid-1960s as the time of the increase in attention to blacks on welfare, and points to changes in AFDC during that period as a possible indication of correlating policy changes. Yet, as Chapter Two demonstrates, government generosity surged during the 1960s. Any alterations in cash assistance had little effect. That does not discount the effect of race on benefit levels or

the politics of Welfare Reform. Johnson (2003) writes that the racial composition of potential clients has a large, independent role on TANF state benefit levels.

Ange-Marie Hancock (2004), in her book about the political battle surrounding Welfare Reform in 1996, challenges the sole focus of other studies on race, class or gender in welfare politics, and encourages inter-sectional analysis. Hancock examines newspaper articles and congressional arguments and finds that the media and politicians constructed a public identity of AFDC recipients as “Welfare Queens,” defined by stereotypes such as laziness and a tendency to have many children. Hancock determines that this framing helped to play a role in the final policy of Welfare Reform.

Hancock showed the framing around a short time period, focusing on AFDC, only one of the many poverty-related programs. This study moves the discussion from that short period to a more system-level analysis, detailing and analyzing changes in the public conversation about poverty over time. To do so, I introduce five distinct frames, analyzed qualitatively and then quantitatively. By doing so, I hope to provide an explanation for the changes in the generosity of government, outlined in the previous chapter. Next, I outline the origins of the five different frames, all of which existed for the entirety of the study and which have played prominent roles in the debate. The frames have either supported a more generous or stingy government.

### **The Ways in Which We Talk About the Poor**

This study examines comprehensively the evolution of the debate, tracking the variety of ways in which we have described the poor. After reviewing the literature on poverty politics and reading hundreds of articles spanning the time of this study, I have identified five overarching frames that make up much of the discussion on poverty:

- Underclass
- Social Disorder
- Economic and Physical Barriers
- Laziness and Dysfunction
- Cheating

Each of these frames encompasses many different subframes, more specific ways of talking about poverty. Not every conversation on poverty falls easily into these categories, and the frames overlap in many ways, but they provide a starting point. Here, I describe and track the qualitative history of each of these frames, including analysis of the conversations sparked by the major scholars and political figures. All of these frames have existed throughout the period of the study and most existed much earlier. This thesis is about which frames come to the forefront and how that affects the poverty policy. The framing matters because the way in which the public views the scope of the problem determines the possible solutions, according to Kingdon (1984), who wrote one of the first books on how an idea reaches the public eye. Kingdon starts with thinking about which items reach the political agenda out of all the problems on which policy makers could focus. After identifying those problems, policymakers have a number of alternatives for government action (Kingdon 1984, 4). If lawmakers believe that welfare keeps recipients from working, then they would look for alternatives that involve a stingier government, because reducing aid would solve the issue of dependency. On the other hand, if the problem with poverty stems from economic barriers, the alternatives would likely advocate a more generous government, creating jobs or investing in education. In this study, the underclass, social disorder and economic and physical

barriers frames would likely lead to consideration of alternatives that advocate a more generous government. The laziness and dysfunction and cheating frames would result in the consideration of stingier alternatives. I first outline the three generous frames before moving to the stingy frames.

Several scholars have written histories of poverty politics and policy, on which this quantitative section builds. Piven and Cloward (1971) track the welfare responses to disorder since about the 15<sup>th</sup> Century. O'Connor (2001) traces the history of the social science of poverty. Katz ([1986] 1996 and 1989) and Trattner ([1974] 1999) have written more general histories of welfare. In addition, numerous scholars have focused on a specific aspect of poverty, or a more narrow time period (to name a few, Gilens 1999; Handler and Hasenfeld 1991, 1997 and 2001; Mead 1986 and 1992; Murray 1984; Pimpare 2004). An extensive collection of the audiotapes of President Lyndon B. Johnson, made easily accessible through the University of Virginia's Presidential Recordings Program, provides insight on how Johnson used the public discussion in his private negotiations. Finally, this qualitative section draws on articles from the historical archives of the *New York Times*. Although I expect each of these frames to exist throughout the time of the study, the literature on framing suggests that the dominant focus will change.

### ***Underclass***

The underclass frame, popularized by Michael Harrington in *The Other America*, is an image of the poor in urban slums. This is a frame sympathetic to increased government intervention in poverty, although very negative in its outlook on the culture and interaction of poor families, especially in black communities. The underclass frame



differs from the laziness and dysfunction frame principally in the explanation for the original cause of poverty. The laziness and dysfunction frame entirely blames the poor, while the underclass sees the cultural differences in poverty as a result of historical forces like slavery and Jim Crow. I expect the underclass to be the dominant frame in the early 1960s, before the rise of the Great Society.

One of the first works of social science that examined black families as a unique group came from W.E.B. Dubois. In a little noticed, but methodologically innovative study of Philadelphia neighborhoods, he examined income and expenditures, dividing the poor into different categories (O'Connor 2001, 34) and concluded that the American poor had very different characteristics than others. "Probably few nations waste more money by thoughtless and unreasonable expenditures than the American Negro," he wrote (34). He attributed these differences to the combination of the history of slavery, immigration and the social environment of Philadelphia (37). The solution, he wrote, was to end racial discrimination. The frame did not come to the public attention until much later, when it became a kind of national obsession, and Dubois received little attention in the still segregated academia. But Dubois' work rings with many of the same themes that would become controversial 60 years later.

O'Connor argues that Dubois' work focused more on political economy: blacks were overwhelmingly poor because of racial discrimination in jobs and industry, than because of any cultural pathology (74). Yet, the cultural aspect, the focus on behavior as a root of poverty, would eventually come to take up much political attention. When anthropologist Oscar Lewis introduced the term "culture of poverty" in 1959, it referred to shared traits between low-income neighborhoods that "transcend regional, rural-urban,

and even national boundaries.” (117) Lewis had largely studied families in Mexico and Puerto Rico, and from that work he determined what he called distinctive personality traits, including lack of impulse control and the inability to defer gratification (118). According to Lewis, that culture was generational and called for revolutionary action. Although his work did not receive extensive attention, the 1960s brought a major turning point in the way we talk about the poor. In the 1960s, urban poverty began to grow and the number of people on welfare roles more than doubled. In that decade alone, Lyndon Johnson signed the Food Stamp Program, Medicare and Medicaid. In *The Other America*, Michael Harrington brought attention to poverty in the United States. His writing, enormously influential, is not easily categorized as showing the poor as deserving or undeserving. He wrote about the poor as affected by racism and discrimination. The poor, according to Harrington, have fundamental differences from the rest of society. “The poor are not like everyone else. They are a different kind of people. They think and feel differently; they look upon a different America than the middle class looks upon. They, and not the quietly desperate clerk or the harried executive, are the main victims of society’s tension and conflict.” (Harrington [1962] 1981, 146) The writing advocates large-scale social change. But, the change focuses on the “culture of poverty,” the deficiencies and self-confidence of the poor instead of the economic barriers (Harrington [1962] 1981). The work of Harrington began to bring poverty to public attention, but by focusing on the cultural and psychological issues, he undermined support for large-scale social change (O’Connor 2001, 122).

The critique of culture, instead of the political economy, became the dominant way of advocating for policy change. Following in that line, Daniel Patrick Moynihan,

then an employee of the U.S. Department of Labor and later a U.S. Senator, authored a report that placed the blame for black poverty on breakdowns in the family dating back to slavery (Moynihan 1965). The report, *The Negro Family: the Case for National Action*, produced a national backlash and hatred from all political spectrums. However, its arguments were not new among sociologists, as evidenced by the work of Dubois. The report provided much of the intellectual background for Johnson's June 1965 commencement address at Howard University (O'Connor 2001, 207), in which he said:

For Negro poverty is not white poverty. Many of its causes and many of its cures are the same. But there are differences—deep, corrosive, obstinate differences—radiating painful roots into the community, and into the family, and the nature of the individual. These differences are not racial differences. They are solely and simply the consequence of ancient brutality, past injustice, and present prejudice. (Johnson 1965B)

The report began to leak just before the riots at Watts, making this period in the middle of the 1960s a time to expect a rise in the underclass frame. The White House used the report, which contained statistics on family break down in Watts, as a kind of semi-official explanation (O'Connor 2001, 207). Then-White House Press Secretary Bill Moyers distributed copies to the press a week after the violence began.

This idea of underclass remained present later, but does not resurge as the dominant frame in political dialogue, despite a book by sociologist William Julius Wilson in 1987 that described the “urban underclass,” namely the black poor, as products of structural conditions (O'Connor 2001, 265-283). That same year, *Fortune* ran a story next to a photo of a 16-year-old pregnant black girl, describing the urban poor: “Underclass describes a state of mind and a way of life...It is at least as much a cultural as an economic condition.” (As quoted in O'Connor 2001) Although the frame does not

present a particularly sympathetic picture of the poor and their families, I expect it will rise as generosity increases in the 1960s.

### ***Social Disorder***

In this frame, the poor commit crimes or riot in the streets, causing policy makers to focus on the dangers of social disorder. In 1971, France Fox Piven & Richard Cloward released *Regulating the Poor*, an important book in attempts to explain changes in the welfare state. They hypothesized that the relief system moves in cycles according to two functions: maintaining civil order and enforcing work (Piven and Cloward 1971). Here, I describe the idea that the welfare system in the United States expands in order to control unemployment just enough to prevent social disorder, to placate the angry poor. In contrast to the underclass, passive groups who need public assistance in order to survive, this frame shows the poor as an active threat to the status quo.

Piven and Cloward (1971) date this frame as far back as the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century in England. In 1536, after agricultural modernization dispossessed many farmers, Henry VIII required that parishes take care of their poor (15). That pattern continued during successive agricultural dislocations and later during industrialization and growths in manufacturing (3–38). People would be forced off of land during these periods, remaining as vagrants or crowding into the small towns. “And as the masses of unemployed swelled, disorder spread,” Piven and Cloward write (29). Democratic societies deal with this disorder, they write, because office holders depend on institutional stability and the electorate to hold power. There were three sets of extensive urban disorders in United States history: 1917–19, 1943, and 1965–1968 (Baumgartner and Jones [1993] 2009, 128). Piven and Cloward associate quelling political unrest with the

rise in aid during the Great Depression in the United States (Piven and Cloward 1971, 45-77). The aid, they argue, increased years after the widespread economic distress, eliminating economics as a possible cause for the growth in welfare. Franklin Roosevelt urged tax reform, what some called “soak-the-rich,” in 1935, only after Huey Long threatened to run for president on a populist platform that appealed to the unemployed (90-91).

Piven and Cloward then associate the increases in the size of the welfare state of the 1960s with disorder among the poor in northern cities, partially caused by migration of blacks from the South and a high rate of unemployment among urban youth (222-247). In three decades, about 4 million blacks came to the North, many in large cities where jobs remained scarce. By 1963, 25.4% of non-white male teenagers were unemployed, compared to 7.6% in 1948 (226)<sup>5</sup>. With the rise of the Civil Rights Movement, many blacks became more motivated politically, Piven and Cloward write, and more resentful of inequalities in income and other areas (233-234). What resulted, they argue, were riots in many northern and southern cities, which involved thousands of protestors and the destruction of much property. There were riots in New York, Newark, Los Angeles, Philadelphia and Detroit, as well as in many southern cities. After 1964, the municipalities responded first, reducing the restrictions on welfare enrollment and increasing the number of people receiving cash assistance (245). At the same time, the major increases in generosity came from the federal government. In private phone conversations, made public through the White House Tapes collection at the University

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<sup>5</sup> Today’s unemployment rate among non-white youth is actually much higher, at 45.4% among black males between the age of 16 and 19 in 2010 and slightly lower among Hispanics, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (<http://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat3.pdf>). However, these changes reflect a move towards schooling later in life and less emphasis on teenage work.

of Virginia, Lyndon Johnson assured Texas Congressman George Mahon that his program would quell these riots by providing work:

I've gotten every one of these cities, all these young people-nothing to do, sitting around, and I got them all to agree today, no more demonstrations, and they're asking please, put these people to work, and I'm going to put 150,000 of them to work in 90 days time on useful, hard-working projects, teach them some discipline and when to get up, and how to work all day and in two years I'll have them trained, where they can at least drive a truck instead of sitting around a pool room. (Johnson 1964b)

This purpose, of employment programs preventing riots, occurred elsewhere in Johnson's tapes. Mayor Richard Daley, the boss of Chicago, had a strong objection to the Community Action Programs of the War on Poverty (Johnson 1965a). "Well, they're trying to pressure you, Mr. President," Daley told Johnson. "And they're trying to snatch your control of this country, control of everything, just under this program." At the time, the idea of an uprising of low-income people was a serious concern for the political powers of Washington. Riots in the Watts and in big cities around the country had received massive coverage in the media. The country began to talk about anger in the big cities, generated from years of racism and inequalities.

That frame might also have given Johnson ammunition in his conversations with conservative politicians. In a separate conversation with Richard Russell, the Democratic Georgia Senator who led the southern coalition, Johnson expressed a dislike for the Community Action portion of the War on Poverty. "This Community Action Program, poverty, is a wasteful thing, they ought to cut it out. It's a dangerous thing, too, these folks are liable to," he says to Russell, before trailing off (Johnson 1966). Of course, Johnson's public speeches about the poor struck a very different frame, the poor as underclass, addressed earlier in this chapter. Johnson's actual attitudes about poverty are difficult to pin down, as he notoriously would change his tone depending on the target of

the conversation. However, this shows that he used the threat of social disorder to advocate for his policy priorities. Piven and Cloward argue that the new services and local organizations served to integrate blacks into the government, so that they demanded more from the local government. Many of the ideas for community action came from the North Carolina Fund, which helped organize the poor in demanding proper benefits throughout the state (Korstad and Leloudis 2010).

This frame involves the poor as politically motivated and upset, causing disorder. If Piven and Cloward are correct, the increases in generosity should follow increased attention to the social disorder frame, as the political figures pay more attention to unrest and political organizing. Although the authors wrote *Regulating the Poor* early in the time period described in this study, their theories predict a punctuation in the social disorder frame during the 1960s. The frame does not show the poor in a positive light, but it should lead to increased generosity as politicians attempt to restore order.

### ***Economic and Physical Barriers***

The economic and physical barriers frame is the most sympathetic, because it shows the poor as resulting from bad luck or age. The barriers frame uses images of either people incapable of working, such as children, the disabled or elderly. Or, it portrays a new poor, made so by a lack of available jobs, but looking to find work, in stark contrast to the underclass, poor for generations.

Among the first people in the United States to advocate this view towards the poor were Quakers, in the late 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. William Penn wrote often about curbing greed, which he believed caused much poverty. Without luxury, he wrote, there would be “no beggars in the land, the cry of the widow and orphan would cease”

(Frey 2009 20). In the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, inequality had increased, but most of the prominent economists still advocated laissez-faire, a lack of government intervention (101). To fill this void, a number of prominent voices began to highlight poverty and blame the economic system. Among the most prominent was Henry George, an economist and journalist, who wrote *Progress and Poverty* in 1879, critiquing the previous consensus that scarcity inevitably led to economic hardship (102). Instead, George argued poverty could disappear if productivity rose at a faster rate than the landlord's rent. He wrote in the context of the California Gold Rush, as high land values contrasted with poverty (102). George concluded, "The injustice of society, not the niggardliness of nature, is the cause of the want and misery." (103).

Not until the Great Depression did this frame emerge as a prominent part of the conversation. In the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, children began to carry a priceless social, religious and sentimental meaning (Katz [1986] 1996, 113–205). The government received responsibility for protecting children in the areas of education, labor, juvenile justice and public health. In 1921, Congress passed the Sheppard-Towner Act, a legislation providing funding for infant and maternal health (Katz [1986] 1996, 113–205). With the onset of the Depression, today's social welfare programs began to emerge. Handler and Hasenfeld (1991) argue that it represented a "dramatic change" in the construction of the moral basis of poverty for the elderly. The Depression excused the aged from work, placing them in the category of the deserving poor (Handler and Hasenfeld 1991). It did not completely erase the stigma attached to welfare benefits; people still turned elsewhere before looking to the government. However, the massive amount of unemployment caused people to temporarily erase many stereotypes of the



poor. “People everywhere spoke of the ‘new’ unemployment: a mass of respectable, hard-working family men unable to find work.” (Katz [1986] 1996, 211) Congress passed a rash of government welfare programs, including elderly insurance, and Aid to Dependent Children, which gave money to widows. “Destitution (at least in theory) was no longer regarded as a question of individual weakness.” (Trattner [1974] 1999, 293)

Although few scholarly works examine this frame, I expect the frame to become prominent in the toughest economic times, when the media sees many people in poverty as coming from white, traditional families. In 1982 and 1983, when Reagan’s benefit cuts combined with a failing economy, coverage became more sympathetic and whiter (Gilens 1999, 127). Many stories focused on Reagan’s cuts, and a smaller number centered on the “newly poor,” who fell into poverty during the recession (127). A series in the *New York Times* during the 2007 recession examined the “New Poor,” and most of the profiles have centered on people who recently lost jobs, falling from the middle class into poverty. Many of the profiled are educated, and looking for work at a frantic pace with no success. Kimberly Kaplan, in the lead of a recent article critical of the 1996 welfare reform, is close to running out of cash benefits for herself and her three children. In what she describes as a “full-time job,” Kaplan takes care of her 4-year-old son, Landon, who has psychological and behavioral problems. Kaplan is applying for a hardship exemption from working 20 hours per week. The article features three other women with young children (Pear 2010). In a different article, Monica Bostick-Thomas makes about \$15,000 per year in her job as a school security guard. She did not initially think to pursue food stamps when her husband died three years ago, but changed her mind when contacted by an outreach organization (DeParle and Gebeloff 2010). Implicit in the existence of a new

poor is an old poor, which assumedly does not look for work nor worry about stigma when pursuing government benefits. The economic and physical barriers frame should emerge most when the poor are more “like us,” the educated class. During tough economic times, more people who are “like us” fall into poverty (Handler and Hasenfeld 1997). Therefore, because society sees the people under the barriers frame as not to blame for their poverty, the government would likely provide greater aid.

### ***Laziness and Dysfunction***

The laziness and dysfunction frame portrays the poor as trying to avoid work, content to stay at home and have children. This frame puts the blame for poverty most squarely on the shoulders of the poor, due to either lacking of personal motivation or deviating from a two-parent family.

Many prominent American politicians have framed welfare as an incentive towards not working. Benjamin Franklin, who argued against most government intervention in the economy, wrote of poverty relief as “encouragement for Laziness and supports for Folly” (Frey 2009, 28). John Quincy Adams divided the poor into “the impotent poor...who are incapable of work” and “the able poor” (Katz 1989, 12). Katz (1989) describes the period of which Adams writes as the beginning of an enduring construction: between the poor and the paupers, which runs parallel to the differentiation between the deserving and undeserving (Katz 1989, 9–35). In this construction, the paupers do not deserve public assistance, because they choose not to work, whereas the poor deserve help from the government. As a result, opposition began to form in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century to many types of public assistance. People began to view the personal defects of the poor as the source of poverty. Many cities decided to attack what they saw as the

root of those personal defects: open public relief. The cities began to send people to poorhouses, where they remained separate from the general population (Handler and Hasenfeld 1991).

The earliest scholarly attempts to chronicle the amount of poverty in the United States included references towards distinctions between those who are poor because of economics, and the laziness and dysfunction frame. In 1904, Robert Hunter released *Poverty*, which found 10 million people in poverty, with the majority poor because of social wrongs and others poor “because of their own folly and vice” (O’Connor 2001, 33).

That idea of the poor as at fault for their own poverty, and certain welfare programs as catalysts for further laziness, would creep into the mainstream thinking. In May 1968, Nixon mentioned that he was studying a guaranteed income, which the liberal Robert Kennedy described as “tremendously wasteful.” “How can we pay men to stay at home?” Kennedy said (Gal 1968). The laziness and dysfunction frame began to become prominent during Nixon’s first term in office. In his most prominent speech on welfare, in April 1971, Nixon advocated greater benefits for those who worked, but “to quit helping those who can help themselves and refuse to do so” (Special to the New York Times 1971). The words attempted to frame his welfare reforms as generous to those who deserved help. However, national mood did not completely shift until later. The frame begins to emerge as a more dominant narrative in the 1980s. At the roots of the movement were scholars like Charles Murray, who argued in *Losing Ground* that the welfare programs of the Great Society made it more profitable for the poor to make bad long-term decisions for short-term profits (Murray 1984). The right argued that the

welfare state had made poverty worse. The solution, Murray argued, was to completely eliminate welfare programs for all non-elderly adults. The book had an enormous effect on the debate, and received very little equivalent challenge from supporters of the welfare state (O'Connor 2001, 250). Some scholars argue that as welfare began to focus on blacks or out of wedlock births, public support began to decrease (Gilens 1999; Handler and Hasenfeld 1991).

The public then began to have more ingrained views of the racial composition of welfare recipients that affected their opinions towards social programs (Gilens 1999). David Elwood and Mary Jo Bane, the two main authors of the Clinton welfare reforms, refused to draw any conclusions about what personal defects caused welfare dependency (Elwood and Bane 1994). However, in a series of studies beginning in the 1980s, they did argue that long-term dependency and family break-up played primary roles in causing poverty (O'Connor 2001, 253). Long-term and repeat recipients made up about two-thirds of costs for AFDC, they concluded. Clinton, like the conservative right, centered his welfare reforms on the idea of the poor as the cause of their own problems. However, the Clinton welfare reforms had different intellectual underpinnings than those proposed by Reagan. Clinton's philosophy emphasized a need to increase work opportunities and child support enforcement. He did not make the veiled references to race in the mold of some of his predecessors (Handler and Hasenfeld 1999). Yet, this attempted detachment in looking at welfare "dependency" eventually led to legislation that put much focus on the family and combating the laziness and dysfunction frame. In August of 1996, Clinton signed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, which replaced AFDC with TANF. An examination of the program's Web site shows that

TANF focuses on the laziness and dysfunction frame. Although its first goal remains assisting needy families, the other main goals attempt to fix the perceived personal defects of those in poverty. They are:

- 2) Reducing the dependency of needy parents by promoting job preparation, work and marriage;
- 3) Preventing out-of-wedlock pregnancies;
- 4) Encouraging the formation and maintenance of two-parent families.

The scope of the problem had become fundamentally altered in the minds of the United States public, and TANF matched the new public understanding of poverty. This policy change, reaffirmed 10 years later, did not do much to reduce the amount of means-tested spending. However, the emphasis on the personal issues of the poor represented a prominent victory for those who advocated stingier policy.

### ***Cheating***

The cheating frame shows the poor taking advantage of the welfare system, to get rich or reap undeserved benefits. In this construction, both the bureaucrats and recipients abuse the system, which exists for the personal benefit of a few at the expense of the taxpayers.

“She has eighty names, thirty addresses, twelve social security cards and is collecting veterans’ benefits on four nonexistent deceased husbands,” then-governor of California Ronald Reagan told one rally (Zucchino 1997, 65). He was referring to Linda Taylor, a 47-year-old Chicago woman, but greatly exaggerated many of her offenses, including the amount of money she made and the number of false names, actually four. Without referring to her by name, Reagan used Taylor at every campaign stop in the 1976 election, as an example of the problems with welfare programs. The solution, he argued, was cutting the welfare roles like he had done as governor of California. For Taylor, a

Chicago newspaper coined the term “Welfare Queen” (65), which would become synonymous with the poor who use welfare to become rich.

Although the term was new, conservative advocates had often tried to show welfare benefits as corrupting its recipients (Block et al. 1987). Nelson Rockefeller, governor of New York and eventually Gerald Ford’s vice president, became one of the first to crack down on the cheating frame, in 1961, when he advocated for a bill that would curb “chiselers” who came from out of town to receive the state’s benefits (Dales 1961). The corruption frame really began to emerge in the early 1970s, as Reagan reformed welfare in California. Gilens (1999), in his survey of newsmagazines found that about half of articles in 1972 and 1973 focused on cheats, either the mismanagement of welfare or on the efforts of recipients to become rich. The corrupt frame usually depicts a black woman who cunningly plays the system to receive benefits that she does not deserve or need. “Southside, Brooklyn, where half the population receives public assistance, is a neighborhood without illusions about welfare,” begins a 1997 article in the *New York Times* about welfare fraud. The article then goes on to describe women who receive welfare checks even as their husbands own property in the Dominican Republic. Other women tell their children to answer questions incorrectly on standardized tests in order to receive government disability insurance (Sexton 1997). In this frame, recipients of government benefits lie in order to receive welfare.

## **Conclusions**

In this chapter, I have identified five distinct frames. Three of the frames, underclass, social disorder, and economic and physical barriers suggest an increased need for a generous government, while the cheating and laziness and dysfunction frames blame

means-tested aid for poverty and advocate stingier policy. Each of the frames has existed throughout the period of the study and indeed almost as long as the public has discussed poverty. However, as the dialogue tends to focus on one facet of a multifaceted issue, the frames have changed in prominence throughout the period of this study. In this qualitative analysis, I have suggested several hypotheses of when the different frames will arise. The economic and physical barriers frame, for example, should correlate with changes in the unemployment rate, as conversation moves to those who have recently lost jobs and money. In the next chapter, I quantitatively show the changing amount and tone of the dialogue on poverty in the United States. The focus of that dialogue has moved from generous in the 1960s to less so today. In the final chapter, I examine how that changing conversation has altered the government treatment of the poor.

## **The Emergence of the Laziness and Dysfunction Frame**

The framing of poverty comes through many different mediums. When Lyndon Johnson spoke publicly about beginning the War on Poverty, he could have mentioned the need to prevent civil unrest in the big American cities. Instead, he declared “unconditional war on poverty” to help the poor escape from “squalor and misery and unemployment rolls.” In the 1960s, the huge amount of attention focused on the poor as an underclass or as creating social disorder. However, the public began to turn away from American poverty in the 1970s, and the remaining conversation focused on the poor as cheating or lazy. In the past 30 years, the data shows, the laziness and dysfunction frame has taken up an increasing role as overall attention to poverty continues to decrease. In the next chapter, I will explore correlations between the framing of poverty and the government generosity.

In that public conversation, the media serves both as a reflection and driver of framing. The media can decide on which speech or event to focus, driving public conversation. At the same time, when the President makes poverty the central theme in the State of the Union, as Johnson did in 1964, the media has no choice but to cover the issue. When I use the media coverage to show changes in framing, it is with the understanding that communications scholars have demonstrated that media can both drive changes in public conversation and reflect those changes. Downs (1972) and Walker (1977) argue that the media’s social construction impacts public policy. The way in which the media reports the poor influences both public opinion and politicians who look



for advantageous political issues. Baumgartner and Jones ([1993] 2009) show that the media can direct attention to different aspects of the same issue (103–125).

Kingdon (1984) argues the opposite idea, that the media just reports what is happening in Washington D.C. The author interviewed members of the media, civil workforce and political institutions to determine the influence of the different aspects of the political process. He concluded that the media has little influence, because the press: a) tends to cover a story for only a short period of time and b) enters late into the policy process (61–65). The general consensus gives the media much more power in the process, suggesting that media and public conversation have a close, two-way link.

Many scholars have argued that the social construction of the poor changes over time (Ingram and Schneider 1995; Gilens 1999; Lieberman 1995; Mead 1992). But no one has empirically tracked the change in construction. This chapter presents a system level view of changes in society's conversations about poverty, unique in the robustness of data. First, this chapter details the methods of calculating total attention to poverty and changes in the framing. Then, I analyze total poverty attention, finding that the focus on poverty is at its lowest point of the last 50 years. The chapter concludes by detailing the changing frames between 1960 and 2007. The underclass and social disorder frames dominated the 1960s, in the middle of riots and the War on Poverty. However, in the late 1960s, the laziness and dysfunction and cheating frames began to emerge. By 2007, 50% of the framing of poverty supported a more stingy government.

### ***Methods***

Methodologically, this chapter follows most closely on the heels of Baumgartner et al. (2008), who focused on the framing of the death penalty. The authors code thousands of

articles from the *New York Times Index*, coding manually every article about capital punishment. The authors found 65 unique frames, which they placed within seven different dimensions, in which specific arguments coexist (107). For example, the “fairness” frame included articles about issues of race and issues of class, which they also coded separately.

This study also starts with articles from the *New York Times*, attempting to identify the stories about poverty and then the most important dimensions. Scholars often use newspapers to show political agenda because the readers have to put in an effort to read, unlike television, and therefore absorb more information (Soroka 2002, 32–34). The reason for the choice of particular newspaper is twofold. First, other media sources often mimic the topics covered by the *New York Times*, a national newspaper. Other studies have compared the framing choices of the *Times* to other sources and found similar results (Baumgartner et. al. 2008 102–135; Soroka 2002, 105). And, *The Times* has the best available archives, with records of every story dating back to 1851.

Using UNC’s access to the database ProQuest, the study first creates the data set for total attention to poverty in the United States. I read through several years of the *New York Times Index* to find the terms most associated with poverty in the United States. For each year, the *Index* puts the abstract of each story featured in the *Times* into one of dozens of different categories, determined by primary subject. Baumgartner et. al. (2008) used the *Index* to find the dataset for total attention to the death penalty, because all of those articles exist under a single header, “capital punishment.” Unlike the death penalty, poverty is under several headings in the *Index*, ranging from education to housing. Under the education heading, while many articles focus on income disparities in testing

performance, others center on changes in New York private schools. So, use of the *Index* for calculating total attention and framing of poverty would require counting by hand each article that focuses primarily on poverty, under about a dozen headings. Instead, this study uses digital resources to find articles that focus primarily on poverty and then to identify the frames of those articles.

First, I identify the common terms used to refer to situations of poverty, such as “low-income” and “impoverished,” and form a string of search terms. Within the database, I limit the search to the abstract or citation so as to find the articles that focus primarily on poverty. The data covers the period between 1960 and 2007, the most recent year available through ProQuest. The searches attempt to prevent “negative hits,” those stories that do not focus on US poverty, by excluding articles that include one of a number of different terms. The string of excluded terms varies for each decade. For example, the search for the 1980s excludes stories that mention the Cold War because they generally relate to poverty in the Soviet Union. The articles in the 1960s and 1970s exclude the term “Health, Education and Welfare,” because many refer to non-poverty functions of the federal department by that name. However, the later decades require no such exclusion, because, in 1979, the Department of Health, Education and Welfare split into the Departments of Education, and Health and Human Services. Determining the final set of excluded terms required hundreds of different searches. In order to confirm the robustness of the set of articles, I read 120 stories for each decade, picked based on their place within the data<sup>6</sup>. For each article, I coded:

- 1) Pertinence to poverty in the United States;

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<sup>6</sup> For each year that ends with 3, 6 or 9, I read 20 stories from the beginning of the year and 20 from the end. In the 2000s, I only read 80 stories since the study uses articles between 2000 and 2007.

- 2) Frame;
- 3) Any keywords that would help to identify the frame.

Table 4.1 shows the string of search terms for total attention. Out of 560 stories, 517 related to poverty in the United States, for a positive hit rate of 92.3%. The negative hits do not substantially alter the trends shown in this study, so I use the entire set of articles.

Table 4.1: Search Terms for Total Attention

Decade	Search Terms
<b>2000s</b>	ENHAI(welfare OR poverty OR "low-income" OR "public housing" OR needy OR ghetto OR indigent OR impoverished) AND PDN(>1/1/2000) AND PDN(<12/31/2007) AND NOT ("endangering the welfare" OR Haiti OR Nazi OR Brazil OR China OR Africa OR India OR Iraq OR Europe OR Afghanistan OR animal) AND NOT AT(review)
<b>1990s</b>	ENHAI(welfare OR poverty OR low-income OR "public housing" OR ghetto OR needy OR indigent OR impoverished) AND PDN(>1/1/1990) AND PDN(<12/31/1999) AND NOT (Haiti OR "endangering the welfare" OR "Cold War" OR Iraq OR "United Nations" OR Brazil OR China OR Africa OR India OR Europe OR animal OR Soviet OR Russia OR Holocaust) AND NOT AT(review)
<b>1980s</b>	ENHAI(ghetto OR welfare OR poverty OR low-income OR "public housing" OR needy OR indigent OR impoverished) AND PDN(>1/1/1980) AND PDN(<12/31/1989) AND NOT (Rome OR Nazi OR Germany OR Panama OR "Central America" OR "Latin America" OR Haiti OR "Cold War" OR United Nations OR Brazil OR China OR Europe OR animal OR Soviet OR Russia OR India OR Africa) AND NOT AT(review)
<b>1970s</b>	ENHAI(ghetto OR (welfare AND NOT "Health, Education and Welfare") OR poverty OR low-income OR "public housing" OR slum OR needy OR indigent OR impoverished) AND PDN(>1/1/1970) AND PDN(<12/31/1979) AND NOT (Ireland OR Nazi OR Cuba OR Iran OR Germany OR Rome OR Brazil OR "Cold War" OR United Nations OR China OR India OR Europe OR animal OR Soviet OR Africa) AND NOT AT(review)
	For 9/5/1973 – 5/31/1978: ENHAI(ghetto OR (welfare AND NOT "Health, Education and Welfare") OR poverty OR low-income OR "public housing" OR slum OR needy OR indigent OR impoverished) AND PDN(>9/5/1973) AND PDN(<5/31/1978) AND NOT (Ireland OR Nazi OR Cuba OR Iran OR Germany OR Rome OR Brazil OR "Cold War" OR United Nations OR China OR India OR Europe OR animal OR Soviet OR Africa) AND NOT AT(front_page OR review)
<b>1960s</b>	ENHAI(ghetto OR (welfare AND NOT "Health, Education and Welfare") OR poverty OR low-income OR "public housing" OR slum OR needy OR indigent OR impoverished) AND PDN(>1/1/1960) AND PDN(<12/31/1969) AND NOT (Israeli OR Japan OR Russia OR Nazi OR Europe OR Germany OR Brazil OR Rome OR "United Nations" OR China OR India OR Cuba OR Soviet OR animal OR Africa) AND NOT AT(Review)

*Note:* The study uses two different strings of search terms for the 1970s. For part of the 1970s, the study omits articles indexed in the database as “front\_page,” because an error in ProQuest causes those stories to be counted twice.

After developing a set of stories for total attention, the study codes for each of the five frames outlined in the previous chapter. Each of those five frames encompasses many subframes. For example, the underclass frame includes articles about homelessness and slum living. The laziness and dysfunction frame includes single mothers and welfare dependency. Through reading dozens of articles as well as a review of the relevant literature, I identified the language that most often accompanies each frame in newspaper articles. I developed a string of search terms, shown in Table 4.2, for each of the five frames. To check the accuracy of the data, I read 20 stories in each decade for each frame. Out of the 500 articles, 467, or 93.7%, were positive hits. Because the positive hits represent such a majority of the framing searches, I use all of the articles.

Table 4.2: Search Terms for Framing

Frame	Search Terms
<b>Underclass</b>	poverty-stricken OR "urban renewal" OR despair OR shelter OR bleak OR blight OR hunger OR ghetto OR "neediest cases" OR homeless OR slum
<b>Social Disorder</b>	anger OR police OR killing OR violence OR "civil right" OR crime OR gang OR riot OR demonstrator OR (strike W/3 rent OR welfare OR worker OR union) OR protest OR ("community action" AND NOT "community action agency")
<b>Economic and Physical Barriers</b>	(student W/1 aid OR needy OR loan OR disadvantaged) OR industrial OR wage OR economy OR "affordable housing" OR "unemployment rate" OR disabled OR "poor children" OR elderly OR aged
<b>Laziness and Dysfunction</b>	able-bodied OR dependency OR "work requirement" OR mother OR "welfare family" OR father OR "welfare hotel" OR (drug AND NOT Medicaid OR Medicare OR company OR prescription) OR abortion OR "child welfare" OR workfare OR "welfare to work"
<b>Cheating</b>	chiseler OR cheat OR fraud OR ineligible OR overpayment OR corruption OR audit

The study then searches for stories within the overall set that use in the citation or abstract one or more of the framing terms. After calculating the number of stories in 1965, for example, I search within the set of articles for those focused on the poor as creating social disorder, cheating, underclass, laziness and dysfunction and facing

barriers. Table 4.3 shows the number of stories of each frame, broken down by decade and total stories. For a table of the data for each year, see Appendix, Table A.2.

Table 4.3: Total Number of Articles in Each Frame

	<b>Total Attention</b>	<b>Social Disorder</b>	<b>Underclass</b>	<b>Cheating</b>	<b>Laziness and Dysfunction</b>	<b>Economic and Physical Barriers</b>
<b>1960s</b>	7,908	812	2,433	80	238	370
<b>1970s</b>	5,901	524	874	285	515	329
<b>1980s</b>	3,190	186	422	64	520	263
<b>1990s</b>	4,404	352	391	89	937	346
<b>2000s</b>	1,662	109	122	24	363	133
<b>Total</b>	23,065	1,983	4,242	542	2,573	1,441

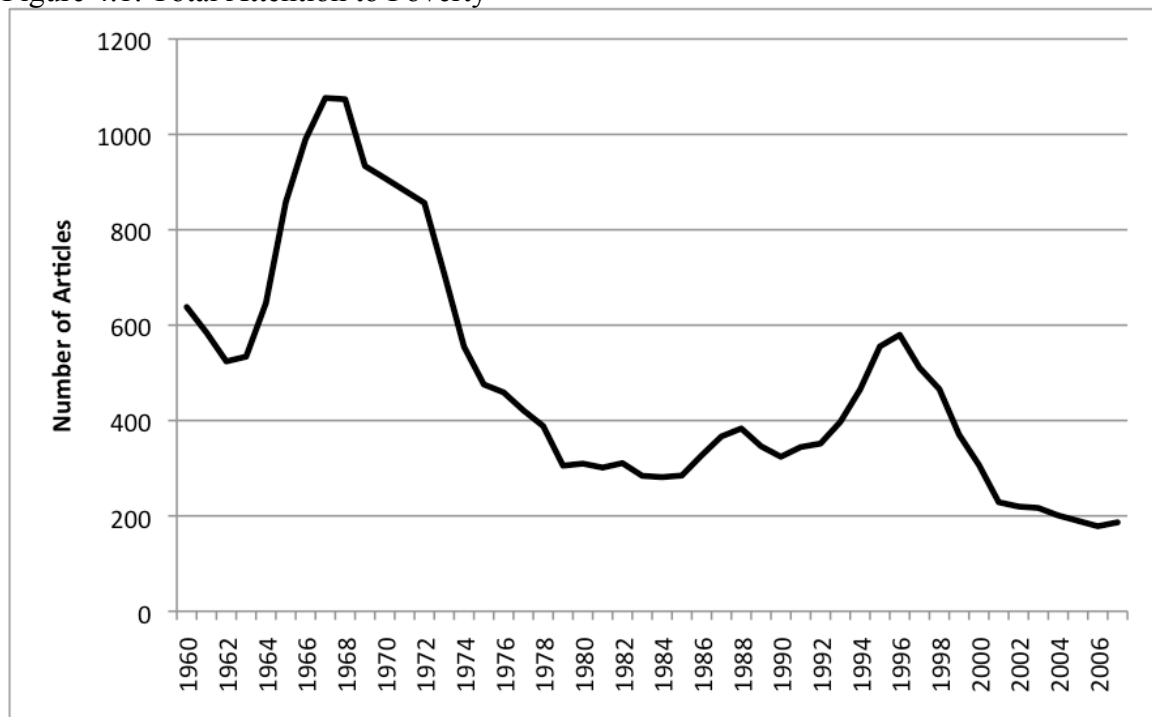
In this table, the sums of the number of framing stories do not add up to the number for total attention. That occurs for several reasons. First, many articles have multiple frames, because of a focus on several aspects of poverty. Further, this list of frames is not exhaustive. Many articles center on budget issues, for which this study does not code. Finally, by searching in the abstract and not in all of the article's text, the study finds only articles in which one of these frames is the primary focus. Many other articles use one of these frames in a few paragraphs but not as a primary theme. After searching all five frames for each year, the final product is a comprehensive look at the changing dialogue between 1960 and 2007. The study uses the framing articles as a percentage of total framing to better show the changes in focus. Now, I detail the changing attention to poverty before moving to the substance of the conversation.

### ***Total Attention to Poverty***

As the public focuses its attention on an issue, policy changes often result. Sustained attention can result in convening Congressional Hearings and the creation of executive agencies. In addition, the changes in attention often accompany changes in the framing. Public surged to the front of public attention twice in the last 50 years: during the War on Poverty and its aftermath, and as politicians debated Welfare Reform.

Figure 4.1 shows the total attention to poverty in the United States between 1960 and 2007, using the number of articles per year in the *New York Times*. The size of the *Times* has changed during the period of this study. In fact, the 1970s had the largest newspapers, bigger than both the previous and later decades (Baumgartner and Jones [1993] 2009, 265). However, Figure 4.1 shows no indication that this trend affected this depiction of changing attention. In fact, attention began to decrease in the 1970s. In order to demonstrate trends with less choppiness, I “smooth” the data, making each year’s figure for total number of articles an average of that year, the preceding year, and the succeeding year. This chapter uses smoothed data for all of the graphs.

Figure 4.1: Total Attention to Poverty



Between 1960 and 2007, approximately 23,065 articles on poverty in the United States appeared in the *New York Times*. More than half of the attention occurred in the first two decades. In 1960, about 1.5 articles per day appeared in the *Times*, and attention began to grow quickly. At the peak of attention, in the late 1960s, the *Times* carried almost three articles per day focused on poverty in the United States. In 1967, a total of 1,160 articles appeared. After that peak, the attention began to fall sharply. By 1975, less than 1.5 articles per day appeared and less than one per day in 1980. Attention fell to less than half of the 1960 level. That attention stayed at a similar level until the early 1990s. Interestingly, attention began to build before the debate on 1996 Welfare Reform, increasing by significant margins beginning in 1992. This surge in attention reached about the level of 1960, a blip compared to the huge increases during the War on Poverty. After passage, the attention again sharply declined. In 2007, the *Times* featured less coverage of poverty than at any point of the last 50 years. Of course, the worst recession



in many years began late in that year, and further exploration would look at the changes in attention during the last three years.

To check the robustness of this data, I use Books NGram Viewer, a new tool from Google that searches the text of 5,195,769 digitalized books written in several different languages between 1850 and 2008 (Michel et. al. 2011). That represents about 4% of all books written during the time period. The tool, available at <http://ngrams.googlelabs.com>, allows a search confined to books written in the English language and published in the United States. Figure 4.2 shows how often the term “American poverty” occurred in books during the period of this study, as a percentage of all books in the dataset. More books are published in later years, so using the percentage of all books offsets those changes. Because books would have even greater variability year to year, this graph uses a “smoother” of three years. Each year’s data represents an average of seven years, including the three preceding and three succeeding years.

Figure 4.2: Attention to American Poverty in U.S. Published Books



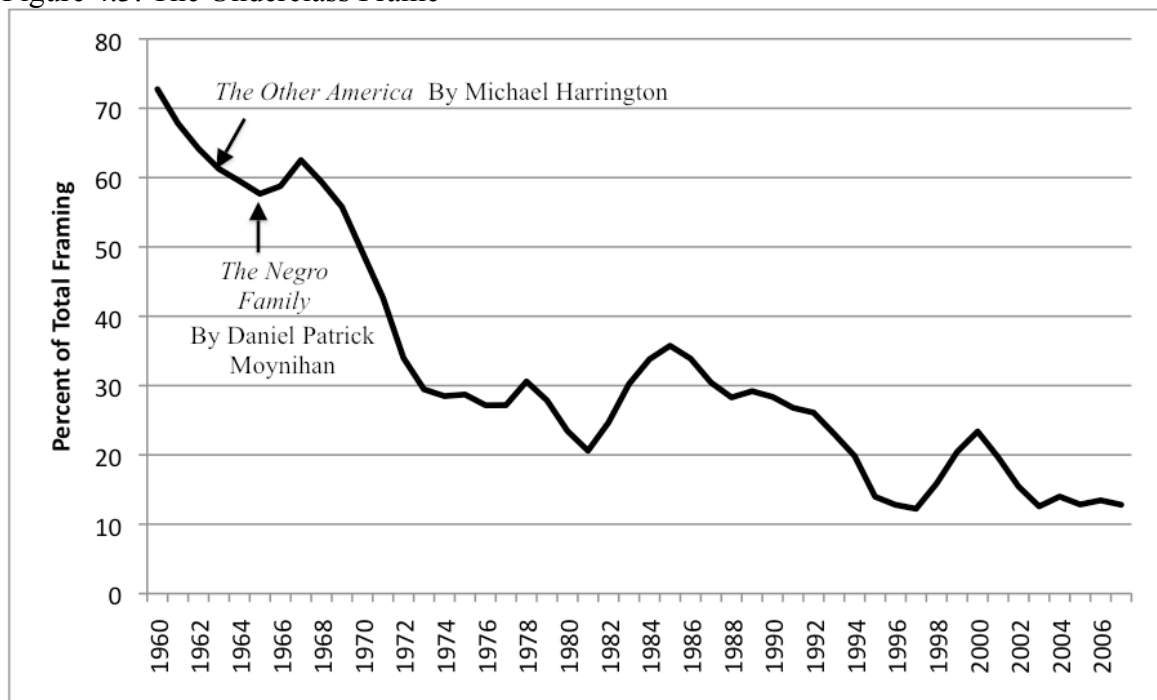
The graph follows similar trends to the *New York Times* data. Attention rises sharply in the 1960s before falling through most of the 1970s. The attention again reaches a peak in the mid-1990s before falling again. This data also has significant differences from the newspaper findings. It shows a slow growth in attention, beginning in 1980 and lasting

through the debate on Welfare Reform. Many of the differences might result from characteristics of the mediums. Books would be less likely to change subjects as rapidly, as they take some time to go to the publisher. Further study would look more closely at comparisons between books and other forms of media, as Michel et. al. (2011) acknowledge in *Science*. However, this graph does show that the trends in total attention change are more widespread than newspapers. Now, I turn to the tone and focus of that attention. The chapter first examines each frame individually, starting with those that support a more generous government before moving to the stingy frames. Finally, I look at the changes in the conversation as a whole, finding that the stingy frames have steadily advanced in the public dialogue since the late-1960s.

### ***Underclass***

The underclass frame focuses on the poor in the urban slums, as subjects of public pity. This focus supports government intervention in poverty, and often blames the history of Jim Crow and slavery for creating a “culture of poverty.” Figure 4.3 shows attention to the underclass.

Figure 4.3: The Underclass Frame



A total of 4,242 articles focused on the underclass frame between 1960 and 2007.

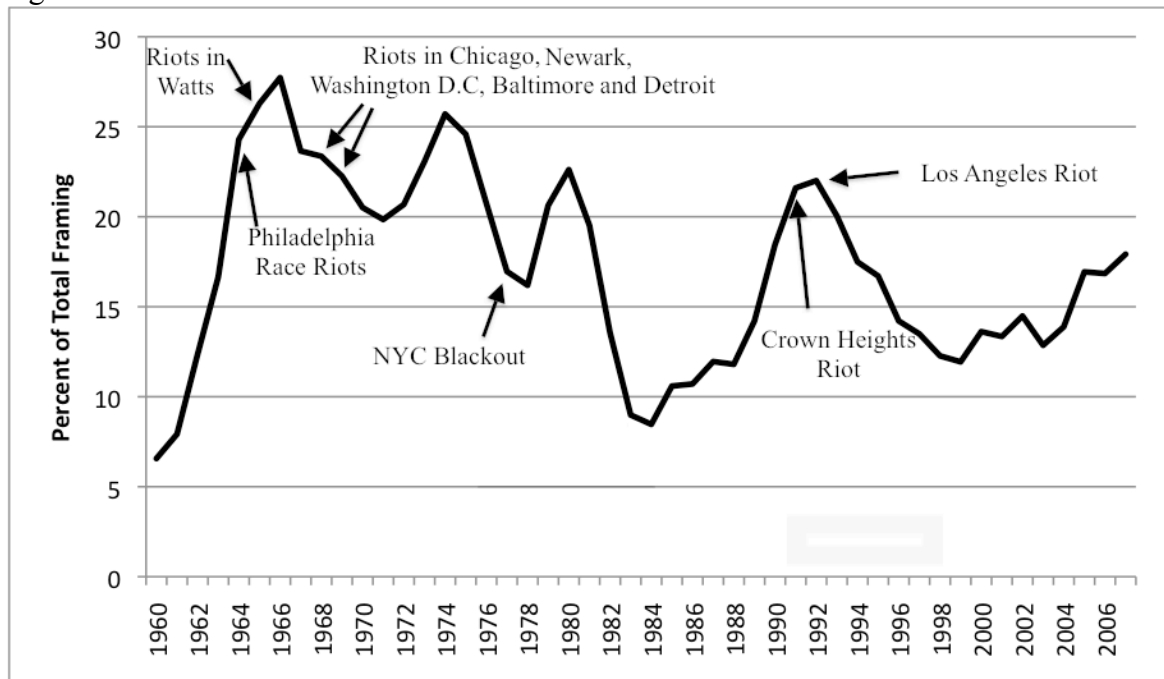
Underclass began the 1960s as dominant, accounting for more than 70% of all framing of poverty. However, after 1960, the frame declined rapidly. Interestingly, much of the literature credited with spreading cultural explanations for poverty became popular in the early-1960s, when the underclass frame had already begun to decline. Michael Harrington released *The Other America*, widely credited with bringing attention to an invisible, suffering poor, in 1962. This preceded huge increases in overall attention to poverty, but this new type of poverty, the underclass frame, had already begun to decline as the dominant frame. This suggests that Harrington, and similarly Moynihan's *The Negro Family*, might not have had a large effect on the prevalence of the underclass frame, instead reflecting the already dominant conversation. By the early 1970s, as Richard Nixon takes office, the underclass frame accounted for less than 30% of the framing of poverty. Two other small spikes occurred in the underclass frame. First, in the

mid-1980s, in what I would hypothesize to be backlash to Reagan's cuts of poverty programs. Also, the underclass frame rippled in the early 2000s, as attention focused on the recession. By the end of this study, the underclass frame accounted for 12% of framing. It began the 1960s as dominant, but by 2007 accounted for a small part of the public conversation. Because this frame had its largest presence just before the War on Poverty, I expect to find underclass correlates with increases in government generosity.

### ***Social Disorder***

In the social disorder frame, low-income people commit crimes, cause violence or riot in the streets. It tests Piven and Cloward (1971), who wrote that welfare states expand in response to disorder of low-income communities. The social disorder frame, shown in Figure 4.4, grew before and during the large urban riots.

Figure 4.4: The Social Disorder Frame



Between 1960 and 2007, almost two thousand articles focused on the poor as angry and causing disorder. The disorder frame starts at less than 10% and experiences much

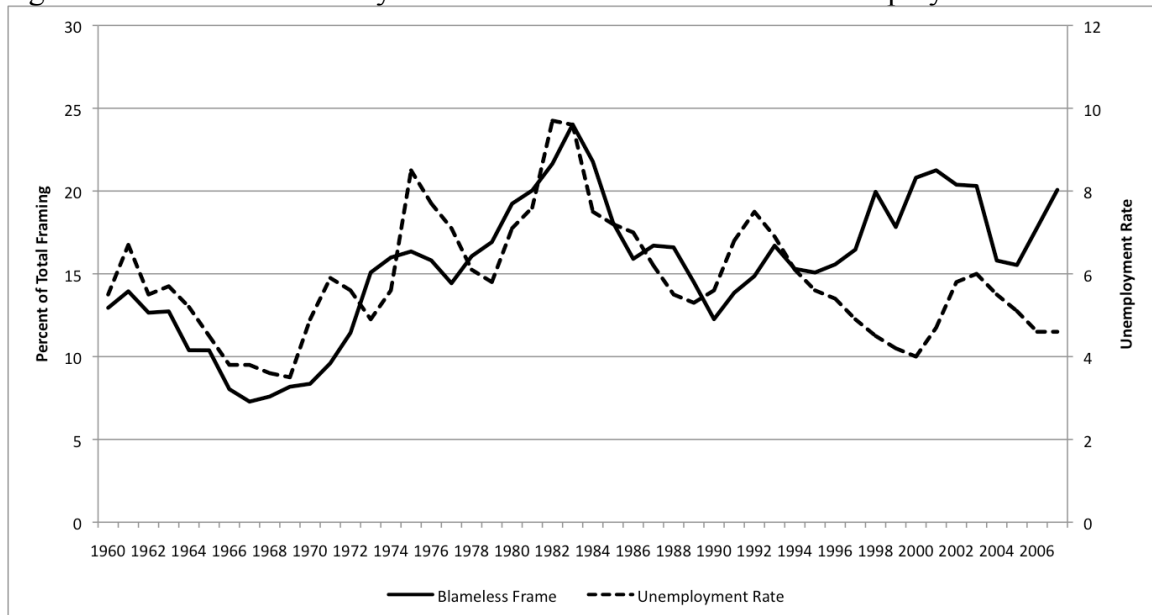
movement during the period of this study. By 1965, the frame grew by a factor of more than four, to 27%, as people throughout the United States rioted in the streets, protesting poverty and racial inequality. Between 1964 and 1969, riots occurred in Philadelphia, the Watts, Newark and Chicago, among other cities. For that period, attention to the angry poor made up more than 20% of the framing. When Piven and Cloward made their famous hypothesis, they focused on the conditions surrounding the Johnson's War on Poverty. The data from the 1960s appears to closely match their idea that public attention turned to increased disorder among low-income communities. The increases in the social disorder frame occur at roughly the same time as large increases in the Government Generosity Index. However, the later spikes in the frame do not correlate closely with increased government aid. The next two punctuations, in 1974 and 1979, preceded the large decrease in generosity.

The last punctuation occurs in 1991 and 1992, during riots in Los Angeles and Crown Heights. Importantly, with both the punctuations of the 1960s and of the 1990s, the disorder frame actually began to increase in prominence before the riots. This suggests that the rioting did not single-handedly cause increased attention to the social disorder frame but that the attention built in the lead-up to the rioting. Overall, the social disorder frame appears to have a mixed effect on the amount of generosity. Social disorder might sometimes rise in response to cuts and at other times as a catalyst to increase government intervention. However, I predict that we will see correlation with a more generous government.

### ***Economic and Physical Barriers***

The economic and physical barriers frame shows the poor as victims of economic forces or as unable to work because of physical handicaps or age. In the previous chapter, I predicted that the barriers frame would decrease in prosperous times and increase during recessions, as more people lose their jobs. Figure 4.5 shows a comparison between the barriers frame and the national unemployment rate. Statistics for the national unemployment rate, an average of the monthly totals, come from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), a division of the Department of Labor.

Figure 4.5: Economic and Physical Barriers Frame v. National Unemployment Rate



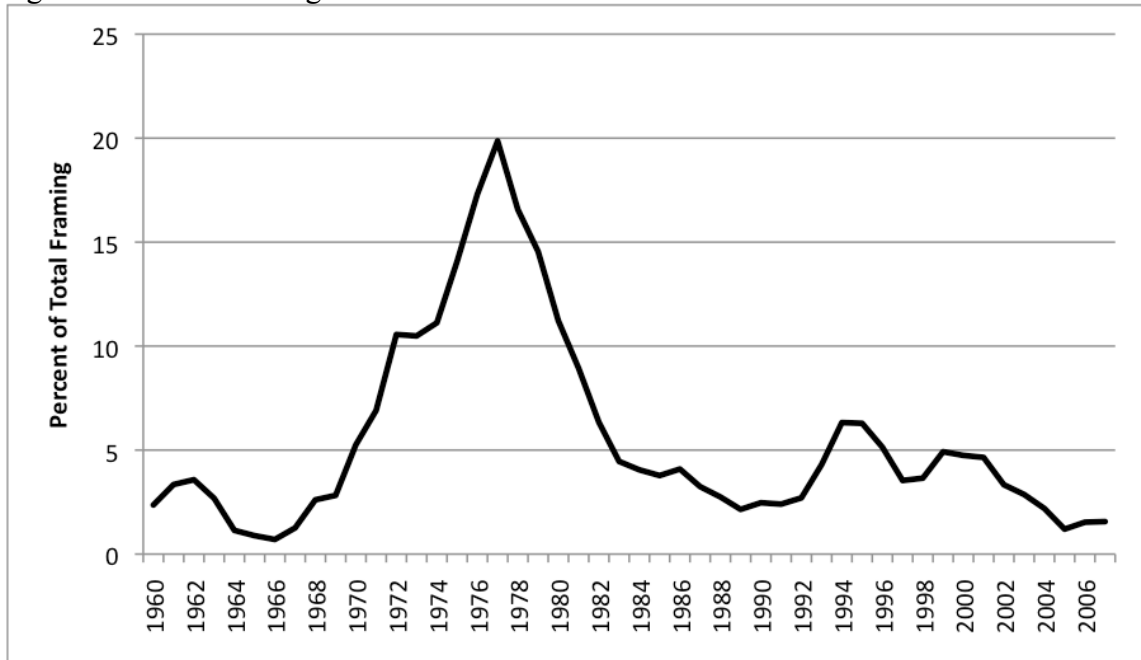
Plotted on different axis so as to show changes in movement, the barriers frame and the unemployment rate move together. In 1960, the barriers frame made up about 13% of the framing of poverty. It experienced two relatively large spikes, during two of the toughest recessions of the last 50 years. First, between 1977 and 1983, the barriers frame moved from 14% of the framing to 24% of the framing. After reaching the 1983 peak, the barriers frame began to decline again. The second punctuation occurred between 1990 and 2001, as barriers moved from 12 to 21% of the framing. During nearly the entire

period of the study, the changes in unemployment and presence of the barriers frame moved in the same directions. The one exception occurred post-Welfare Reform, when the barriers frame increased even as the unemployment rate decreased. This split could come from articles featuring people affected by the law change. Overall, unemployment correlates with the barriers frame. The Pearson Correlation Coefficient, 0.49, indicates a positive and medium strength correlation between the barriers frame and the unemployment rate. Because the public sympathizes with those facing insurmountable barriers, I expect the frame to correlate with increases in generosity. Now, I move to the laziness and dysfunction and cheating frames, which I expect to create more stingy government action.

### ***Cheating***

The cheating frame, which began with N.Y. Governor Nelson Rockefeller and Ronald Reagan, shows the welfare system as corrupt and subject to abuse from both the poor and the administrators. Figure 4.6 shows changes in the cheating frame.

Figure 4.6: The Cheating Frame



The cheating frame was almost non-existent in the early 1960s. In 1966, it accounts for less than 1% of the total framing. By 1976, cheating took up more than 20% of the framing of poverty. The frame is remarkable both for how quickly it enters the dialogue and how quickly it leaves. President Ronald Reagan certainly accounted for some growth in the cheating frame, which increased from 11 to 21% between 1975 and 1976, when he campaigned on ending fraud. However, it began to emerge before Reagan made the “welfare queen” famous. Between 1970 and 1971, the presence of the cheating frame increased by nine times. Once Reagan took office, the cheating frame all but disappeared, remaining below 5% of the total framing for all but a slight increase during the debate on Welfare Reform. The cheating spike occurs directly preceding decreases in government generosity. I expect to find the cheating frame associated with a more stingy government.



### ***Laziness and Dysfunction***

The laziness and dysfunction frame shows the poor as unwilling to work, preferring to stay home, and unable to take care of their families. It blames welfare for many of the problems in the family, at times suggesting that the rational decision for welfare recipients is to not work. Figure 4.7 shows that it has become increasingly prominent in the public dialogue, despite no change in the percentage of low-income people who work. The statistics for the percentage of adults in poverty who hold at least a part-time job come from the U.S. Census Bureau, and are only available since 1978.

Figure 4.7: The Laziness and Dysfunction Frame



The laziness and dysfunction frame has gone from about 5% of the dialogue to 50% in the most recent figures. The only frame to grow consistently, the laziness and dysfunction frame jumped by more than four times during the Nixon Administration, from about 5% in 1968 to more than 20% in 1972. Several scholars, including Mead (1986), suggest that

the change in political focus occurred because of large numbers of people who receive government benefits but do not work. Yet, this graph shows that even as the percentage of people in poverty who work stayed constant during the last 30 years, the laziness and dysfunction frame increased from 20 to 50% of the public conversation. The dialogue has focused disproportionately on what conservative scholars see as the problem, even as their identified problem has not changed. Many scholars have questioned the idea that welfare recipients do not work, including finding that 83% of children from low-income families have at least one parent employed (Douglas-Hall and Koball 2004). The conversation has focused increasingly on a problem that has not increased. This frame will likely correlate with a more stingy government.

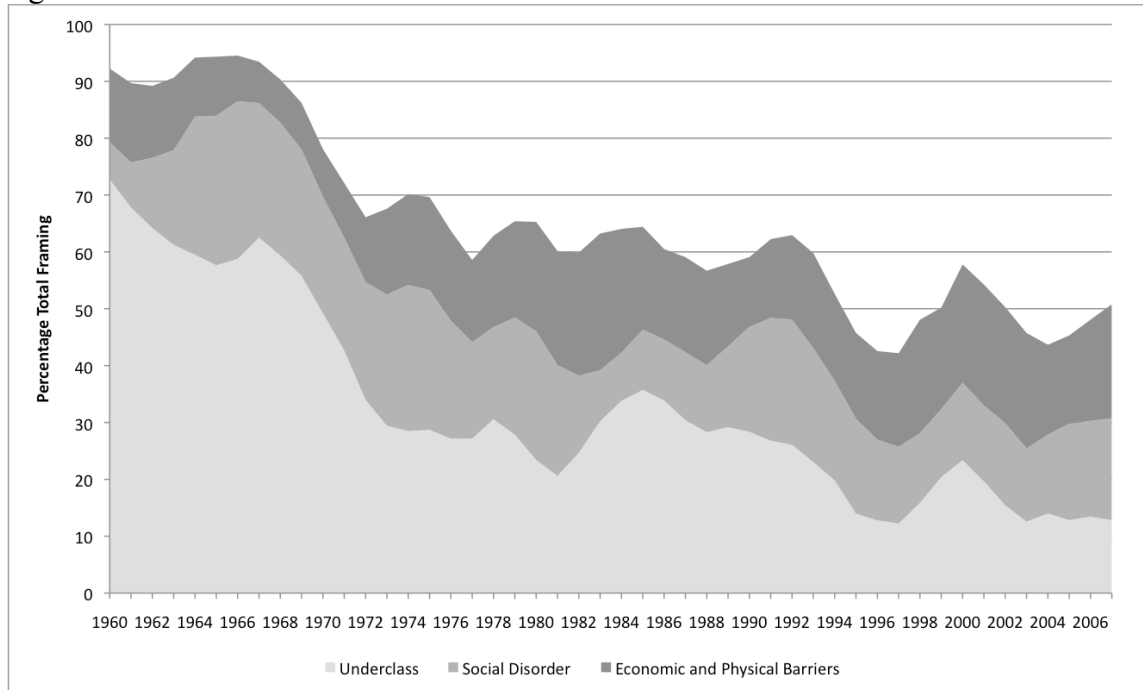
### **The Overall Narrative**

Of course, the individual frames tell only one part of the story. As I show in several of the individual frames, changes have not necessarily correlated with increases in the problem or with any one event. The social disorder frame rose before race riots and the laziness and dysfunction frame increased despite stagnant employment among low-income people. With a limited attention span, the American public and press can focus on only a limited number of facets of any multifaceted issue. So, the frames constantly compete to be the primary focus. The stakeholders attempting to control attention, politicians, scholars and the public, focus on a particular aspect of the narrative that they believe will eventually result in their preferred policy recommendations. It is difficult to determine what makes a frame successful, but the scholarship suggests that this happens at unpredictable moments (Baumgartner and Jones [1993] 2009). Within the five frames detailed in this study, social disorder, underclass and barriers generally look more

positively on expansion of poverty policy. Therefore, I classify them together as the generous frames. On the other hand, laziness and cheating are stingy frames, because they support a lesser government role in poverty. In the debate surrounding poverty policies in the United States, the frames that support a more stingy government have increasingly taken over the debate. Here, I show the entire narrative, which I will later compare to the changes in the Government Generosity Index.

Figure 4.8 shows the frames that support increased government generosity, calculated by adding the social disorder, underclass and barriers frames.

Figure 4.8: The Fall of the Generous Frames

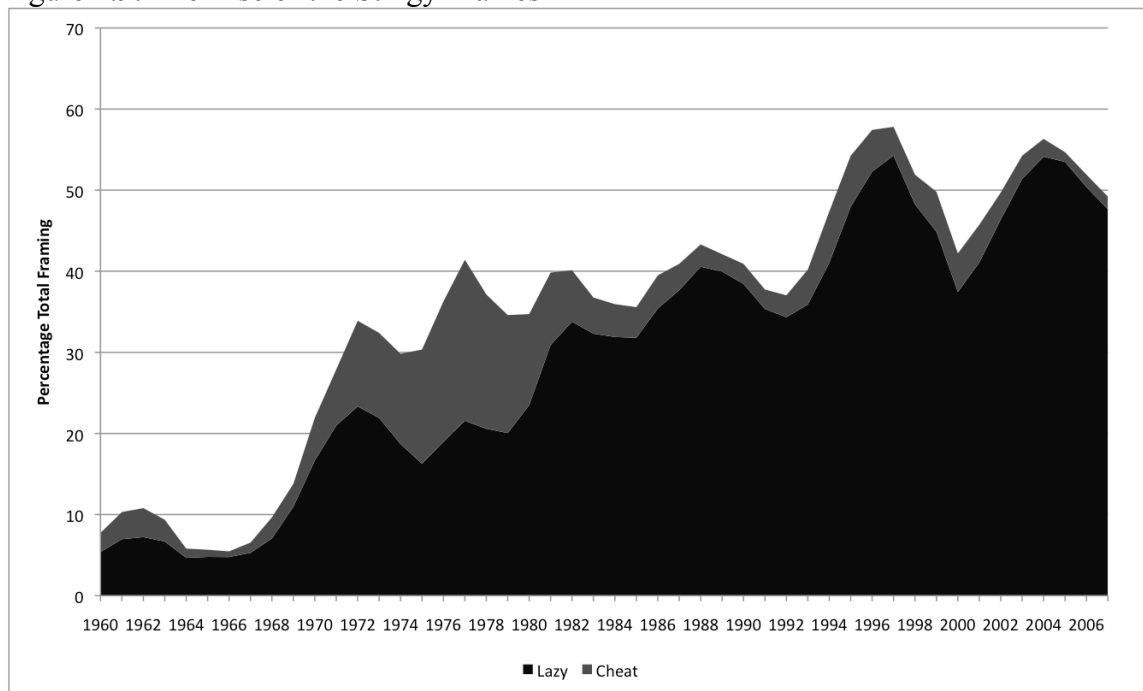


In 1960, more than 90% of the poverty framing advocated a more generous role for the government. Both the social disorder and underclass frames rose together. By the peak, 1965 and 1966, more than 94% of the framing of poverty supported increased generosity towards the poor. Late in that decade, the generous attention began to decline rapidly and the disorder and underclass frames did not correlate as closely. By 1972, 66% of the

framing supported a more generous government. That attention continued to decrease, with only the barriers frame increasing in prominence. Generous framing accounted for less than 50% for the first time during the debate surrounding Welfare Reform. By 2007, underclass no longer accounted for the majority of articles supporting a more generous government, as both the disorder and barriers frames accounted for larger discussion. Generous framing decreased by about 45 percentage points during the period of this study, and the underclass went from the majority to barely one-third of generous framing.

Since the late 1960s, the frames that advocate a more stingy government have continuously increased their share of the total debate, as Figure 4.9 demonstrates.

Figure 4.9: The Rise of the Stingy Frames

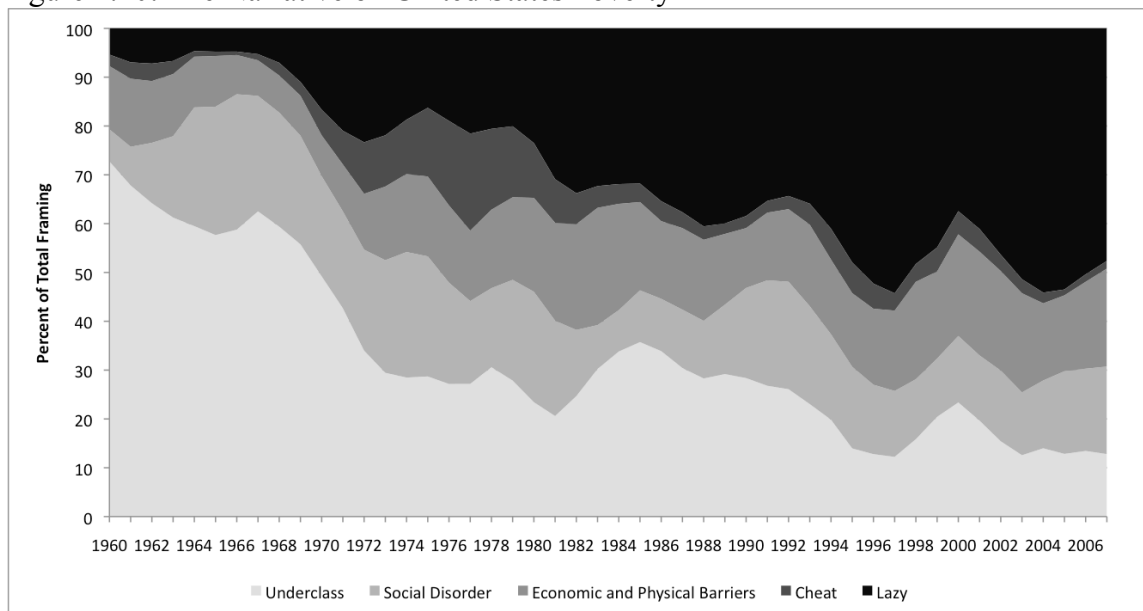


Between 1966 and 1976, both the dysfunction and cheating frames grew quickly. More fluctuation actually occurred in the laziness and dysfunction frame, while attention to the cheating frame rose nearly every year during that period. By 1976, they accounted for almost equal amounts of the national debate. After that year, the composition of stingy

attention began to change. The cheating frame decreased rapidly as the laziness and dysfunction frame continued to grow. Although the idea of the Welfare Queen still receives substantial attention in scholarship, this demonstrates that fraud and abuse of welfare no longer make up a substantial portion of the public dialogue. Instead, the stingy frames now focus almost exclusively on work ethic and the issues within poor families. And that focus now makes up about half of the conversation on poverty.

Finally, looking at the frames together shows a complete picture of the changing dialogue in the United States. In Figure 4.10, the three lightest frames support increased government generosity and the two darkest frames advocate for a stingy government.

Figure 4.10: The Narrative on United States Poverty



The public conversation has become increasingly stingy since about 1967. During the period of this study, the underclass and laziness and dysfunction made up the largest portion of the public dialogue. Overall, the laziness and dysfunction frame has grown almost without end. The only exceptions occurred directly after Welfare Reform, when the barriers and underclass frames briefly spiked. In this narrative, the advocates for a more stingy government have successfully pushed a dialogue that paints the poor and

programs that support the poor as at fault for poverty. Of course, the dialogue is still split, with generous frames taking up about half of the total conversation. But, at this rate, the public conversation will support an increasingly stingy public policy.

## **Conclusions**

Three sets of conclusions emerge from this chapter: methodological, poverty framing and additional avenues of exploration. First, I will address the methodological lessons. This chapter has built on the methods of Baumgartner et. al. (2008), providing a new degree of automation to exploring system-level framing changes. Without manual coding, the study has identified a highly reliable and large set of stories on poverty, more than 20,000 articles, and then coded for five different frames. Anyone interested in chronicling changes in the framing of a policy issue could replicate this method. Say, a researcher want to talk about variation in the conversation on climate change. First, she would identify a set of stories on the issue using a string of search terms, including “global warming,” “climate change,” “carbon emissions,” etc. Then, the researcher, after identifying the most important frames using literature, could produce a string of search terms for frames such as “green jobs,” “scientific doubt” and “environmental damage.” These methods make chronicling changes in conversation more manageable.

Here, I have shown that the stingy frames in the framing of poverty have increasingly become a prominent part of the mainstream conversation. While the poor as an underclass or creating disorder dominated in the 1960s, the underclass frame declined as the laziness and dysfunction and cheating frames became more prominent. Even when the conversation turned away from the poor as cheating in the late 1970s, attention increased to personal habits and dependence on the welfare state. For the last 30 years,

the stingy frames increased, and at the end of this study, they made up about 50% of the dialogue. Several avenues would further confirm these results. First, I would like to check against other newspapers to determine whether they have framed the issues similarly to the *New York Times*. As mentioned earlier, scholars have looked at this question and found that a variety of newspapers contain similar framing (Baumgartner et. al, 2008 102–135; Soroka 2002, 105). However, a comparative examination of the framing in other newspapers would confirm that theory. Second, I would like to examine a more diverse group of sources, both other types of media and government transcripts. This study shows changes in the public conversation, not just the media coverage, as the *New York Times* generally leads other sources. However, a look at Congressional committee meetings, public opinion polls on poverty and television news coverage could address the closeness of this relationship.

Finally, further exploration would break down these five frames and examine more closely issues of race, gender, and immigration. By developing a string of search terms, I can answer key questions about the race and gender make-up of the conversation. What percentage of the laziness and dysfunction frame talks about the race of the poor? When the conversation shows recent immigrants as in poverty, what frame becomes more likely? How has increased Latino immigration changed the public conversation on poverty? Further study could also look at what frames become more prominent when discussing specific government programs. How do we talk about the people who receive AFDC and how does that differ from the discussion on recipients of Head Start? Many additional questions remain to be explored within this dataset. And, obviously, the most

recent recession, which many call the largest since the Great Depression, has changed the focus on many issues. A close look at the last three or four years would prove fascinating.

Before moving to the next chapter, which will address the correlation between the conversation and policy, I want to mention a struggle that I have had with this thesis. On a certain level, I understand that the political conversation requires that a certain frame win, coming to dominate the conversation. However, describing the last 48 years of poverty conversation has helped me to realize how much the discussion focuses on the poor as caricatures, even when supporting increased government intervention. In this conversation on poverty in the United States, we turned to personal responsibility as a fallback when the causes for poverty certainly come from much more complex roots. In the next chapter, I will show what that change in conversation has meant for the public policy. However, even if no connection existed, the conversation surely contributes to the formation of a public image of a class of people as possessing different personal characteristics than the average American. That alone suggests that the United States reexamine the conversation, because of the way it marginalizes people based on income alone. In the Generosity Index, I demonstrated that the government efforts towards the poor, although much lower than the levels of 40 years ago, still exceed pre-War on Poverty levels. In the next chapter, I will examine the relationship between the changing conversation on poverty and the changes in the government action.



## **Stingy Frames and Stingier Government**

When unpredictable events, a riot in the Watts, a wave of controversial scholarship or a prominent political leader, lead to a changing public conversation on poverty, the government responds. As the dialogue has shifted from a focus on frames that ask for a stronger government intervention to facets of the issue that call for a smaller welfare state, the programs which aid the poor have contracted. The growth in attention of the early 1960s, dominated by the image of the poor as either creating disorder or as helpless slum dwellers, came before large expansions in means-tested programs. As the conversation began to change in the 1970s, with an increasing focus on the poor as lazy and welfare programs as the problem, cuts found a more receptive public. When President Ronald Reagan took office, his cuts reflected a shift in the dialogue that began ten years earlier, when stingier framing begun to take up more of the conversation. The substance of the conversation has changed little since Reagan's presidency, and the slowly decreasing government generosity has reflected the more negative framing.

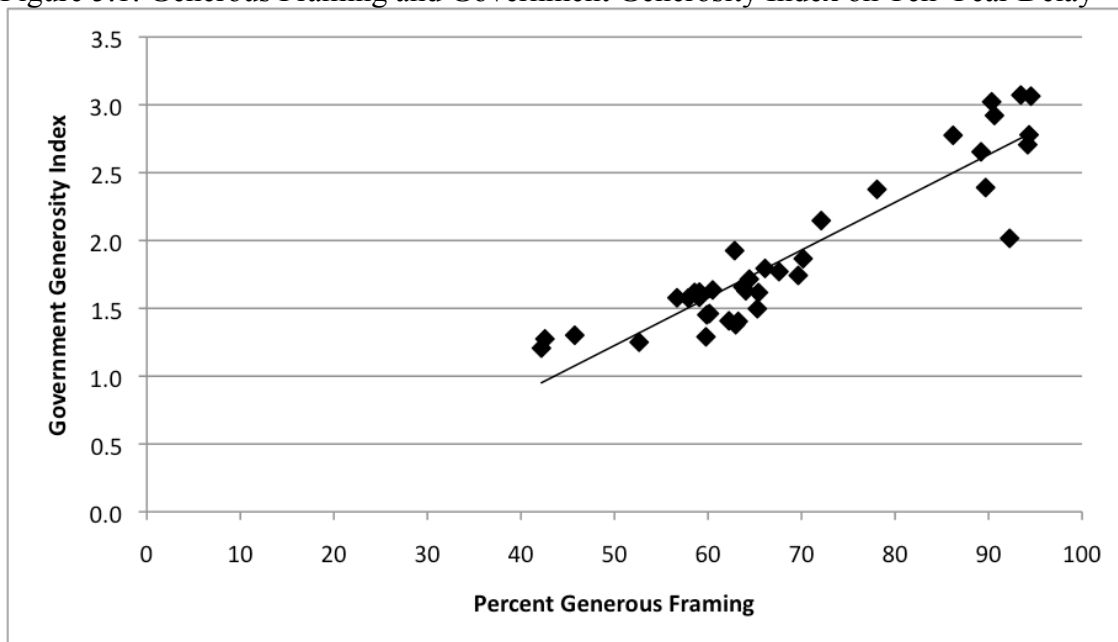
In the past chapters, I outlined both the changing policy and conversation on poverty in the United States between 1960 and 2008. In this, concluding chapter, I compare the changing dialogue to the government's action. In the process, I examine the implications for questions about the responsiveness of government to the public, finding a possible distinction between system level changes in fiscal and social issues. I conclude that although the conversation has turned sour for those who advocate increased

government intervention on behalf of the poor, a new, generous narrative could serve to inspire the next generation of public attention and resulting policy.

### ***Comparing Generosity and Conversation***

Kingdon (1984) established that public attention to a certain problem can result in large policy changes, and that the scope of the problem determines the possible policy alternatives. Previous chapters outlined the changing attention to poverty, as well as changes to policy that targets the poor. As poverty becomes a more public issue, politicians begin to pay attention. Overall, the changes in policy, represented in this study by the Government Generosity Index, should follow spikes in attention, represented by the total number of articles that focus on United States poverty. However, that attention can focus on one of many different facets of the multifaceted issue of poverty. The government adapts policy solutions that depend on the facet of poverty on which that attention focuses, represented by the percent of framing which suggests a more generous government. The changing conversation leads the policy. The focus of the political dialogue changes, but the policy takes time to go into place. While the increased attention might result in new policy institutions immediately, the changes in overall policy happen over time. While President Johnson enacted Medicaid, the biggest funding increases and expansions occurred later, under President Richard Nixon. Figure 5.1 shows the correlation between the generous framing and the non-medical Government Generosity Index. The figure examines the Index ten years after the framing, to account for the delay in government reaction to the changing conversation. For example, the graph plots the generous framing of 1960 with the Government Generosity Index of 1970.

Figure 5.1: Generous Framing and Government Generosity Index on Ten-Year Delay



Generous framing and the Government Generosity Index have a close, positive relationship, with a Pearson Correlation Coefficient of 0.925. The Government Generosity Index already controls for both the amount of poverty and the total amount of government spending. Further investigation could control for the amount of unemployment, which differs from the depth of poverty in its trends, public opinion on welfare and the public mood towards general government spending. In addition, a control variable accounting for the employment of people receiving welfare benefits would answer the critics who link lack of public support for the welfare state with recipients of taxpayer dollars not looking for employment.

Having established that close correlation, the focus now turns to explaining the historical United States changes in poverty policy, using the changing public conversation. Figure 5.2 shows this study's measures for attention, scope of the problem, and policy change on the same graph. In this figure, the framing is shown as net generosity, found by subtracting the number of stingy articles in each year from the

number of generous articles. The figure shows the Index on a separate axis in order to compare trends.

Figure 5.2: The Conversation and The Policy on Poverty in the United States



For the most part, large shifts in attention preview later policy changes, this graph demonstrates. The generous framing and attention, which use the axis on the left, increased quickly in the mid-1960s. Ten years later, the Government Generosity reached a peak. Public attention built, focusing on the poor as worthy of government aid, because of causing disorder or lacking the ability of self-help. And the government responded, increasing generosity by more than three times. After that initial attention, Medicaid and Food Stamps went into law. Through most of the 1970s, the policy did not reflect an increasingly stingy turn in the conversation. Even as the attention began to fall and the focus became more negative, generosity shoots up, as the Great Society expands.

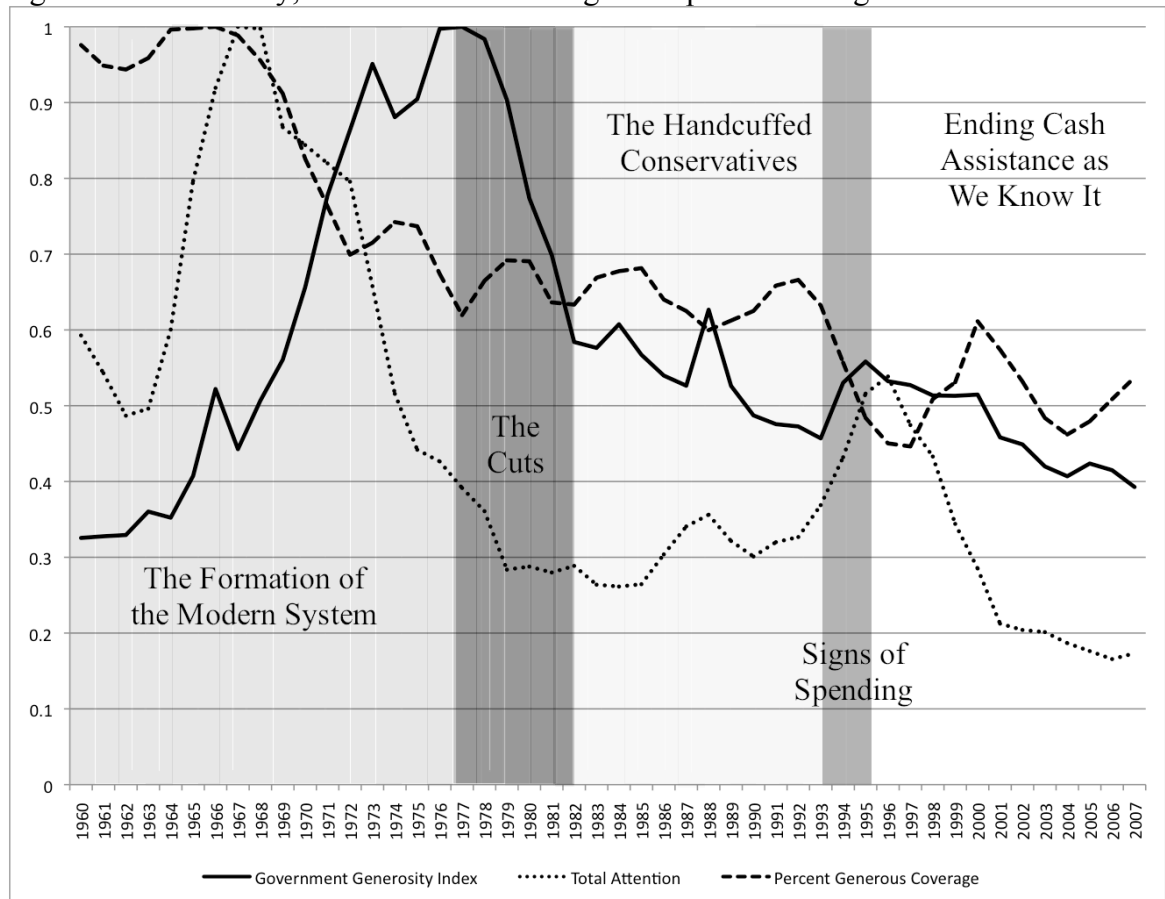
Generosity fell only after the coverage turns to perceived personal defects of the poor. Notably, the cuts occur in a time of relatively little attention to the issues of poverty. This large cut disagrees with the hypothesis that changes in government policy follow spikes in attention, when conversation discovers a new face of a multifaceted issue. Although the focus of the public conversation changed from the poor as underclass to the poor as lazy or dysfunctional, that change occurred only as the amount of attention decreased. Both the net generosity of framing and the total attention peaked in 1966. The next figure compares the percentage generous framing to attention and policy, demonstrating the same trend. The generosity of the coverage began to fall at the same times as the overall attention. This shows that the changing conversation, which previewed the eventual cuts, occurred as poverty disappeared from public attention. How could Congress make such a large change in policy without the attention of the public? In this case, it could result from a focus by the media on other issues, such as deficits, which politicians used as an excuse to cut spending across the board. The problem, deficit spending, had little relation to poverty, yet the alternative solutions for deficit spending included cutting aid for the poor. This is both surprising and significant. The changing focus of poverty attention might have made the target populations easier to marginalize. However, the decreasing attention during the same period indicates that an intervening force might have played a role. Without any increased focus on the issue of poverty, a change in policy can result.

During the debate on Welfare Reform, attention spiked to almost 600 articles per year. The focus became stingier than at any other point in this study. However, the policy, in contrast to the large change during the increase in attention of the 1960s,

experienced very little change. This could result from the focus of the intense debate on a small part of the poverty policy in the United States, the reform of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). So, any resulting cuts after the elimination of AFDC do not appear as large changes in the Index. At the end of this time period, the three indicators reached one of their lowest points. Attention is near the lowest level of any point in the last 50 years. The framing rivals the time surrounding welfare reform in its lack of generosity. And, the policy has reached its most stingy point since the late 1960s.

In Chapter Two, I outlined five stages of poverty policy in the United States, demonstrated with quantitative and qualitative data. Figure 5.3 shows the generosity, attention and percent generous framing, shaded for the different stages. The graph shows the data as a proportion of each variable's highest value, so as to better illustrate directional trends. Instead of using the net generosity, this graph shows the percent generous framing, which gives a slightly different perspective.

Figure 5.3: Generosity, Attention and Framing as Proportion of Highest Values



Out of the five identified stages, the first two are most important for understanding the changes in poverty policy. During The Formation of the Modern System, between 1960 and 1978, the amount of government generosity increased by about three times. Interestingly, the generosity of framing began the era near its highest level, even before the most significant increases in total public attention. Only in the mid-1960s did the public really begin to increase attention to the issues of poverty. When attention increased, it focused on those generous frames, and particularly the poor as an underclass. In 1966, attention to poverty began to decrease and become more negative. As framing became more negative, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the government generosity grew at its fastest rate. As the public lost interest, the composition of the remaining

attention began to change. The public mood was turning and the atmosphere becoming more open to slashes in the welfare state.

In that atmosphere, of decreasing interest and increasing skepticism, The Cuts began. Generosity decreased by 40% in the period of three years. That significant policy change occurred without any evident changes in attention. In fact, the attention continued to drop throughout this stage. By 1978, attention reached about 30% of the level ten years earlier. It also had a more stingy focus than at any other point. After 1982, the generosity cuts stopped as a recession contributed to increasing amounts of poverty. Since that time, both the policy generosity and generous framing have decreased steadily. During the first years of the Clinton Administration, the Signs of Spending era correlated with increasing attention, suggesting the possibility of a new period of generosity. However, that attention focused on the stingy frames, and particularly the poor as lazy or dysfunctional, as the cheating frame had largely disappeared. The public is paying less attention to poverty and that attention focuses more on government as the problem. As a result, the amount of generosity has reached the lowest point in more than 40 years.

### ***Implications for Policy Responsiveness***

In most respects, poverty policy works much like other public issues. Increasingly generous policy follows large increases in attention, accompanied by a more positive social construction of the poor. In the 1960s, the conversation centered on the “culture of poverty” in urban slums, a problem that called for government intervention. In response, the amount of means-tested aid increased. In the case of Welfare Reform, about half of the conversation centered on the poor as lazy or dysfunctional, content to sit at home and receive welfare money. The government replaced Aid to Families with Dependent



Children with Temporary Aid to Needy Families. The changes in conversation, creating a new political environment, led to policy changes ten years later. Taken as a whole, this suggests that the government listens to the changing public conversation, and enacts policy that addresses the public concern.

However, the main negative punctuation, during The Cuts between 1979 and 1982, presents a different image of government response than what other studies have found. The existing literature on political science suggests that stakeholders attempt to change the venue of debate on a public issue in order to enact a preferred policy (Kingdon 1984). Typically, those policy changes happen following spikes in attention, when the conversation changes to focus on a new part of a multifaceted issue (Baumgartner and Jones [1993] 2009). Recall, from Chapter Three, Baumgartner and Jones' description of attention changes with regard to nuclear power. Nuclear policy changes followed spikes in attention, one spike positive in tone and the other spike negative. The authors wrote that changes in the tone of coverage do not matter if the attention is low (61). However, in the case of poverty policy, the large cuts of the late 1970s and early 1980s occurred without an accompanying increase in attention to issues of poverty. In fact, the amount of attention decreased as the framing became more negative. The framing changed, but fewer people listened. I suggest that this presents a new question for those who study framing. Policy change might have occurred through attention to a completely separate issue, the nation's fiscal health. As the attention focuses on the need to trim the federal budget, politicians have to decide which public policies to make stingier. However, where do policy makers cut when, as is the popular message in today's obsession with the public deficit, everything is "on the table"? In the

dependent variable, I control for the total amount of government spending, so the decrease of the late 1970s and early 1980s meant that lawmakers cut poverty spending disproportionately. Framing remains important in this equation. The targets of government programs that have more positive social construction would make unlikely first targets for cuts. On the other hand, the poor, with little political power and an increasingly negative public image, make easy targets. While attention during a budget fight centers on the middle class or defense spending, cuts to poverty spending might result in the smallest political backlash. This suggests that while a more generous policy requires an increase in public attention, a more stingy policy can result from a simple lack of attention when conversation focuses on austerity. This also suggests that, at a system level, framing of fiscal issues behaves differently than social issues. Baumgartner et. al. (2008) do not have the same questions, as the death penalty can exist without much examination of other public policy issues. Of course, this idea would require further investigation. Future scholarship could test the budget cut effect by creating a control variable that demonstrates changes in attention to the public deficit. If correct, the tendency to cut funding for the weakest populations in times of budget crisis serves as a warning to lawmakers as they detail the budgets intended to decrease this nation's long-term deficits.

### ***The Importance of Framing in Poverty***

In the United States, increasingly generous government has followed changes in the amount and tone of the conversation on poverty. And that policy had a substantial effect on the amount of poverty.

As John F. Kennedy took the presidency, the poverty rate hovered above 20 percent. In the 1960s and 1970s, a surge of attention focused on the poor as an underclass, encouraging government intervention. At the height of that attention, the *New York Times* wrote more than three articles per day. This study has shown that the increased attention led to a remarkable sequence of events. Government generosity increased by three times, and the poverty rate fell by half, the depth of poverty by 25 percent. Scholars still associate that decrease in poverty to a combination of the healthy economy and a large change in the government's role. Today, the policies of Medicaid and SNAP remind us of the importance of that surge from the 1960s and 1970s. Public attention to poverty, focused on government as a positive, meant a lasting series of institutions and programs that remain crucial to the American safety net.

So, what caused the attention increase of the 1960s? That is, as John Kingdon asked, when does an idea's time for public attention come? With the War on Poverty, the process looked like a whirlwind, as focusing events, key figures and new scholarship all entered the public sphere within a few years. Authors released several significant books, including *The Other America*, which brought attention to the poor in urban slums, the downside of the times of prosperity. At the same time, large race riots of the mid and late-1960s meant a focus on the underlying conditions that led to protesting in the street. Public leaders brought the issue to the public sphere, including Kennedy's suggestion in his 1961 inaugural address that "man holds in his mortal hands the power to abolish all forms of human poverty." Taken together, I argue that attention is complex and impossible to attribute to any one cause or sequence of events. This story does not provide a clear-cut recipe for enacting social change. It does, however, provide optimism

for the efforts of those who advocate more government effort in poverty. I explain that optimism soon, but first address what this study shows about changes in framing.

### ***Falling Generosity, Increasing Poverty***

Changes in the focus of political attention are similarly difficult to attribute to any one cause. Poverty is a complex issue, with any number of roots and possible solutions. Yet, the conversation tends to focus on distorted or downright false aspects of poverty. The underclass frame accounted for more than 90 percent of the debate in the early 1960s, showing an image of the poor as different from the rest of the population, living in slums and unable to help themselves. The laziness and dysfunction frame, portraying the poor as unwilling to work and dependent on welfare, began to rise in the late 1960s. Now, nearly half of the conversation centers on an image of the poor as preferring not to work. What caused the shift in the social construction of the poor? No one event or person can alter the way the public looks at a population. As the amount of government spending skyrocketed, conversation change could have resulted from a backlash against an increased role of the welfare state. Further study would look at the rise of conservative think tanks, which molded a narrative of government waste. The shift in conversation could result from the high profile stories of a small number of welfare recipients who abused the system. At the same time, Nelson Rockefeller in New York and Ronald Reagan in California used cutting welfare abuse as a political score point. The explanation for the emergence of the laziness and dysfunction frame likely exists in some combination of Reagan, public mood and other factors. Those who advocate a stingier role for government have successfully advanced their preferred narrative since the late 1960s.

This changing focus of the conversation has clear implications, according to the findings of this thesis. Since conversation began to focus on more stingy frames, the government generosity has decreased and the amount of poverty in this country has grown consistently. In 2008, the poverty gap was twice the level of the 1970s. The United States has worse income mobility than almost any other developed nation, putting up a barrier to general economic development (OECD 2010). Further, the change in conversation certainly has less measurable effects, increasing embedded stereotypes that the poor have different characteristics than the rest of the population, making communities less tight knit and more contained within a single income bracket. The more the public talks about the poor as not wanting work, the more it becomes true in the public's mind.

As I finish this thesis, cuts in poverty aid appear likely as the nation attempts to reduce the long-term deficit. If this round of cuts looks anything like the early 1980s, the government could reduce poverty aid when the poor have not come close to recovering from the recession. In this year's budget, President Barack Obama proposed slashing discretionary spending, which makes up a comparatively small part of the budget but makes an easy target. His budget includes cuts of \$300 million from community development block grants and half of the nearly \$6 billion for low-income heating aid. The Republican Congress would go further, cutting the development grants by \$2 billion and eliminating the service program AmeriCorps, just to name a few targets. In the short term, increased attention to poverty could prevent cuts. However, long term, the country struggles to find methods of replacing manufacturing and agricultural industries, and will require new employers and a newly educated workforce. In North Carolina, former

tobacco farming areas have struggled to find new areas of work. Without a dramatic change in conversation, the government generosity will continue to decrease, making it more difficult to take down this country's barriers to social mobility. Yet, no clear alternative to the current narrative on poverty has emerged.

### ***Constructing a New Narrative on Poverty***

The people who advocate an increased role in government must construct a new narrative, which learns from the inadequacies of previous movements. That narrative, while respecting the dignity of each person, can help inspire a new generation of political attention and policies to address income inequalities. The work and policy ideas of the many innovative nonprofits will have a venue and the ability to expand projects to a scale that fits the scope of the problem. I hope that the next frame will show the poor as like any other member of our society, capable and active, but in need of a reduction in the country's growing barriers to social mobility.

Despite the current trend, this thesis makes me optimistic about the possibility of that social change. To the scholars, non-profit leaders and policy advocates working on anti-poverty issues, it will come as no surprise that the negative tone and lack of attention prevent new poverty programs from receiving consideration in Congress. However, this story suggests that the conversation can and will change with the actions of committed groups or individuals. For the anti-welfare movement, conservative scholars wrote about corruption and waste in the poverty programs, and the politicians told anecdotes of Welfare Queens getting rich. They presented a compelling narrative, which, when paired with the unique circumstances of their time, resulted in sustained policy changes. In the 1960s, the committed groups included progressive scholars and the poor, organized and

rioting in the streets as Johnson, who grew up poor in the Hill Country of Texas, took the presidency. In the following decade, the amount of poverty fell as the government acted strongly and with new and innovative programs. The movement had many flaws; many programs failed and the poor remained caricatures in the public conversation. However, it shows that the government can respond admirably to the demands of the American people and make a measurable dent in poverty.

# Appendix

## Chapter 2

Table A.1: Constructing the Government Generosity Index

	Heritage <sup>7</sup> : Total Poverty Spending (Billions of 2005 Dollars)	CRS <sup>8</sup> : Total Means- Tested Spending (Billions of 2005 Dollars)	Heritage: Medical Poverty Spending (Billions of 2005 Dollars)	Nonmedi- cal Poverty Spending (Billions of 2005 Dollars)	OMB <sup>9</sup> : Total Governmen- t Spending (Billions of 2005 Dollars)	CBPP <sup>10</sup> : Poverty Gap (Billions of 2005 Dollars)	Predict- ed Poverty Gap (Billion s of 2005 Dollars )	Non- Medical Governm- ent Generosit- y Index
1960	33.35		7.00	26.35	896.0		71.40	1.00
1961	36.37		8.01	28.36	947.8		72.14	1.01
1962	41.39		10.52	30.87	1021.1		72.51	1.01
1963	46.30		12.36	33.94	1057.6		70.39	1.11
1964	49.49		13.80	35.69	1119.5		71.51	1.08
1965	54.94		15.92	39.02	1127.8		67.10	1.25
1966	67.18		19.18	48.00	1230.9		59.03	1.60
1967	82.05		37.02	45.03	1369.4		58.69	1.36
1968	102.47		49.84	52.63	1478.8		55.50	1.56
1969	115.54		58.79	56.75	1488.4		53.72	1.72
1970	115.10		43.70	71.40	1501.5		57.25	2.02

<sup>7</sup> Heritage Foundation, which put together measures of total poverty spending as part of a report, “Obama to Spend \$10.3 Trillion on Welfare”. Rachel Sheffield, a research assistant and co-author of the report provided the raw data and helped in repeated requests for additional parts of the data that went into their calculation.

<sup>8</sup> Congressional Research Service, which put together the data as part of a report on benefits and eligibility, “Cash and Noncash Benefits for Persons With Limited Income: Eligibility Rules, Receipts and Expenditure Data, FY2002-FY2004.”

<sup>9</sup> White House’s Office of Management and Budget, which compiles current and historical data for government expenditures and receipts.

<sup>10</sup> Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, which calculated the gaps from Census data. Arloc Sherman, a senior researcher, provided data the data and answered follow up questions.

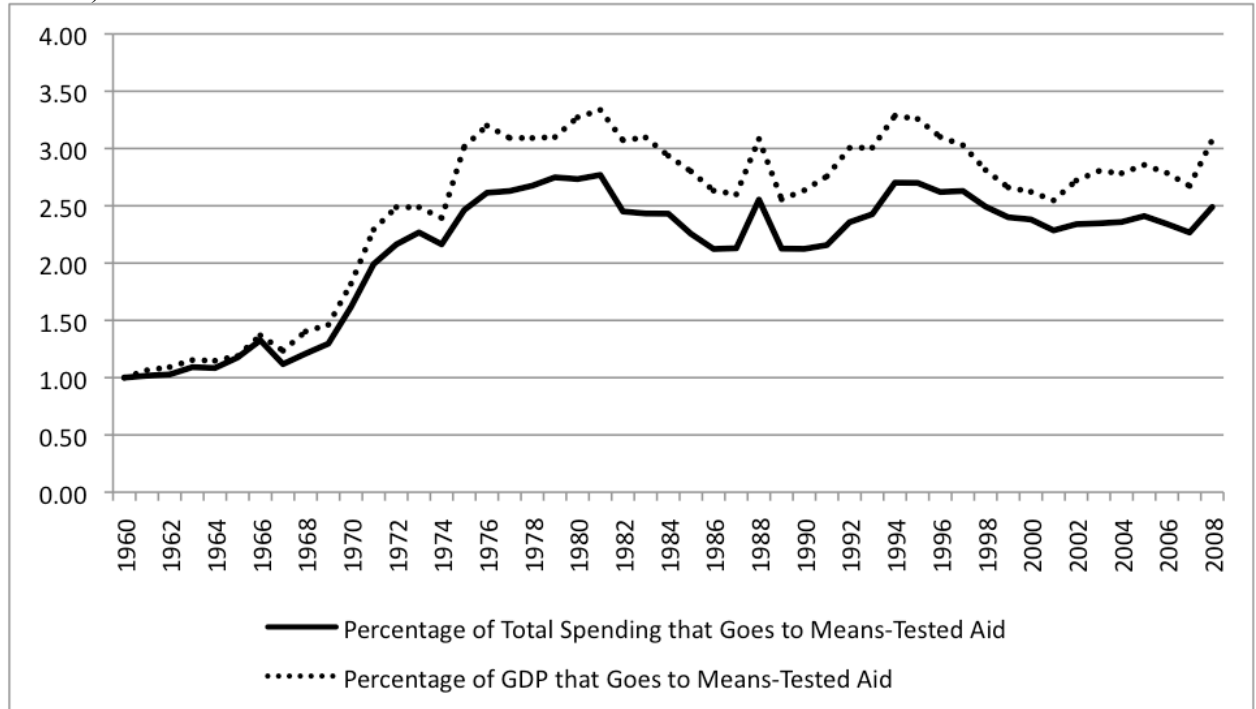


<b>1971</b>	143.29		51.40	91.89	1569.1		59.47	2.39
<b>1972</b>	167.17		61.93	105.24	1654.4		58.19	2.65
<b>1973</b>	169.39		59.04	110.35	1654.8		55.41	2.92
<b>1974</b>	176.94		71.93	105.01	1650.0		57.09	2.71
<b>1975</b>	205.42	205.63	73.95	131.47	1814.3	63.3	64.31	2.78
<b>1976</b>	225.33	235.81	78.42	146.91	1911.1	60.9	63.31	3.06
<b>1977</b>	238.73	243.85	87.34	151.39	1957.8	61.1	63.63	3.07
<b>1978</b>	245.18	256.66	87.12	158.06	2008.7	63.2	63.89	3.02
<b>1979</b>	251.86	254.79	91.29	160.57	1986.4	70.7	70.38	2.78
<b>1980</b>	262.13	256.74	99.50	162.63	2022.9	82.1	79.36	2.38
<b>1981</b>	277.11	258.21	108.45	168.66	2070.7	92.1	86.95	2.15
<b>1982</b>	254.87	248.18	100.55	154.32	2141.2	97.5	93.49	1.79
<b>1983</b>	260.87	253.93	100.10	160.77	2246.9	98.1	97.10	1.77
<b>1984</b>	263.02	258.11	99.66	163.36	2284.8	93.0	93.73	1.87
<b>1985</b>	268.40	264.34	106.18	162.22	2445.6	92.4	93.02	1.74
<b>1986</b>	268.75	266.49	109.74	159.01	2546.9	91.4	91.86	1.66
<b>1987</b>	277.60	274.09	117.54	160.06	2555.8	94.0	92.57	1.62
<b>1988</b>	315.24	285.90	119.07	196.17	2612.0	94.7	92.79	1.93
<b>1989</b>	290.14	296.88	122.80	167.34	2676.4	93.9	93.00	1.62
<b>1990</b>	307.41	323.29	133.60	173.81	2782.6	101.3	99.93	1.50
<b>1991</b>	337.87	364.62	157.36	180.50	2844.8	105.4	107.62	1.46
<b>1992</b>	392.54	416.30	191.55	200.99	2899.3	115.9	117.63	1.45
<b>1993</b>	408.45	426.68	202.32	206.13	2888.4	123.4	122.76	1.40
<b>1994</b>	442.55	464.21	210.01	232.54	2926.2	118.4	121.27	1.63
<b>1995</b>	455.25	474.92	219.36	235.90	2970.4	112.4	117.48	1.72
<b>1996</b>	449.59	468.12	220.23	229.36	2975.9	114.4	118.42	1.64
<b>1997</b>	456.14	467.21	223.22	232.92	3012.0	115.9	116.12	1.62

<b>1998</b>	453.84	471.92	229.16	224.68	3064.9	112.8	114.00	1.58
<b>1999</b>	461.04	479.00	240.02	221.02	3131.6	108.7	110.36	1.58
<b>2000</b>	479.43	486.26	254.66	224.77	3210.2	107.5	108.33	1.58
<b>2001</b>	493.25	524.17	272.16	221.09	3289.3	115.9	113.19	1.41
<b>2002</b>	541.75	552.58	302.09	239.66	3483.1	121.1	120.90	1.38
<b>2003</b>	567.74	581.02	316.24	251.49	3643.4	129.9	125.97	1.29
<b>2004</b>	587.29	603.22	328.39	258.90	3732.4	134.7	131.45	1.25
<b>2005</b>	606.19		332.56	273.63	3860.1	132.2	132.20	1.30
<b>2006</b>	596.31		321.54	274.77	3989.8		131.15	1.27
<b>2007</b>	596.58		327.18	269.40	4040.3		134.15	1.21
<b>2008</b>	647.71		337.68	310.03	4234.3		144.56	1.23

This table shows the different components of the Government Generosity Index, broken down by year. This chart includes each of the parts needed to calculate the final index, which shows generosity as a proportion of 1960 values. All of the figures in Chapter Two use this data in some form, and anyone can check the Index with this table simply by dividing the fifth column, nonmedical spending, by the sixth column, total government spending, and a combination of the seventh and eighth columns, poverty gap. For the years in which no data exists in the CBPP column, use the predicted gap. Finally, take the calculated values as a proportion of the 1960 value and the result is the ninth column, non-medical Government Generosity Index. Descriptions of Figures 2.1 and 2.8 refer to the data.

Figure A.1: Poverty Aid as Percentage of Total Spending and GDP (Proportion of 1960 Values)



The Government Generosity Index use total government spending to control for the increase in available resources. However, this figure, referenced just before Figure 2.2, demonstrates that GDP and total spending follow very similar trends. The Index, therefore, effectively controls for changes in both the GDP and total spending.

## Chapter 4

Table A.2: Number of Stories in Each Frame by Year

	Total Attention (# of Stories)	Underclass (# of Stories)	Social Disorder (# of Stories)	Economic and Physical Barriers (# of Stories)	Laziness and Dysfunction (# of Stories)	Cheat (# of Stories)
1960	542	234	13	36	14	2
1961	734	199	26	41	18	12
1962	477	120	22	33	21	11
1963	361	99	26	12	8	2

<b>1964</b>	764	170	63	41	13	4
<b>1965</b>	814	154	98	26	12	2
<b>1966</b>	995	311	119	41	29	3
<b>1967</b>	1160	447	188	51	32	6
<b>1968</b>	1074	462	154	48	41	17
<b>1969</b>	987	237	103	41	50	21
<b>1970</b>	740	173	77	30	55	5
<b>1971</b>	998	179	65	29	92	39
<b>1972</b>	909	123	78	48	90	36
<b>1973</b>	662	78	79	45	73	39
<b>1974</b>	553	78	59	46	47	24
<b>1975</b>	450	52	50	27	25	20
<b>1976</b>	424	48	41	29	30	40
<b>1977</b>	503	49	22	31	50	36
<b>1978</b>	337	50	29	19	37	32
<b>1979</b>	325	44	24	25	16	14
<b>1980</b>	254	15	21	16	21	11
<b>1981</b>	350	20	28	22	39	11
<b>1982</b>	300	24	9	20	31	4
<b>1983</b>	282	34	8	27	38	6
<b>1984</b>	270	38	11	29	32	4
<b>1985</b>	292	57	13	24	51	5
<b>1986</b>	292	56	21	20	52	7
<b>1987</b>	397	50	18	34	70	8
<b>1988</b>	411	69	31	46	102	2
<b>1989</b>	342	59	26	25	84	6
<b>1990</b>	285	46	26	19	56	4

<b>1991</b>	345	43	43	20	62	3
<b>1992</b>	403	53	48	37	70	6
<b>1993</b>	307	40	26	22	48	5
<b>1994</b>	481	39	47	42	100	16
<b>1995</b>	607	36	35	31	114	21
<b>1996</b>	578	28	42	39	143	9
<b>1997</b>	554	36	34	54	156	9
<b>1998</b>	400	30	28	35	120	9
<b>1999</b>	444	40	23	47	68	7
<b>2000</b>	267	34	14	16	57	9
<b>2001</b>	210	19	15	21	27	3
<b>2002</b>	209	9	10	23	41	3
<b>2003</b>	240	18	19	13	80	4
<b>2004</b>	201	13	12	23	44	2
<b>2005</b>	162	10	10	9	38	1
<b>2006</b>	206	9	21	8	52	0
<b>2007</b>	167	10	8	20	24	2
<b>Total</b>	23065	4242	1983	1441	2573	542

This chart, referenced with Table 4.3, shows the total number of articles and the number of stories of each frame in the *New York Times*, organized by year. It is the base of all of the framing calculation. However, the figures used in the chapter attempt to better focus on macro trends by making each data point an average of three years.

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