Social Construction (Continued): Response

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try by excluding agricultural and domestic workers from coverage. As a result of these race-laden exclusions, however, OAI was established as (and remains) a centralized, national program under which the federal government pays benefits directly to citizens. Although it was racially exclusionary on its face, the administrative institutions of OAI incorporated African-Americans fairly from the beginning (Lieberman 1993a). The popularity of OAI and the public perception that benefits were "earned" generated political support for the program's expansion. Within 20 years, most excluded workers were brought into the OAI system, overcoming the negative racial construction that was built into the program at its creation. It has ironically become perhaps the closest thing to a race-blind social program that the United States has known. As long as African-Americans participate in the labor force, they are on the same footing as other recipients and are not deemed any less worthy than whites; yet OAI remains the most popular part of the American welfare state.

Aid to Dependent Children, on the other hand, had the potential to benefit large numbers of African-Americans, who were more likely to be poor and live in single-parent families. Because poor African-Americans were to be largely relegated to ADC, it was created with a parochial institutional structure that gave state and local officials most of the power to set eligibility rules and benefit levels, leaving the program open to racial discrimination and political manipulation. As African-Americans became more prominent on the ADC rolls, especially in northern cities, where they migrated in large numbers after World War II, the negative construction of African-Americans as undeserving welfare recipients became ever more pervasive. Rather than generating political support to overcome racial bias, ADC has been increasingly racially divisive and increasingly unpopular because of its association with race (Lieberman 1993a).

The fortunes of African-Americans in the American welfare system suggest that a simple story of "social construction" is inadequate to explain the changing relationship between racial groups and the state. The "social construction" of African-Americans in American politics is part of a complex set of structural relationships among groups (legal, political, and economic, as well as social) framed against a background of political institutions and public policies (Lieberman 1993b). The position of African-Americans in state, society, and economy in the 1930s—concrete factors such as voting restrictions, labor-repressive agriculture, and violent repression—both made it possible and provided incentives for white politicians to structure social policies in ways that constructed black citizens as unworthy beneficiaries of federal social policy. But in the 1950s, the place of African-Americans in these two social policies took dramatically opposing turns. Just when OAI accepted African-Americans as full beneficiaries, ADC increasingly began to impose burdens on black beneficiaries

through a series of crackdowns and retrenchment that still continues. Clearly, a singular change in the "social construction" of African-Americans cannot account for both of these policy changes. Rather, the institutional structure of the policies themselves changed the *political* construction of African-Americans in particular ways, lifting OAI to the political stratosphere and dragging ADC into the mire of racial politics.

The changing place of African-Americans in the American welfare state suggests that a more dynamic, political-construction approach will better explain the relationship between target populations and public policy than Schneider and Ingram's static, social-construction approach. Public policies do not merely reflect the character of their target populations; policies also transform target groups by transforming the political, social, economic, and legal settings in which groups exist. The constant redefinition of group identities in the political arena is an effect of politics and policy as much as a cause. In an era of increasing racial and ethnic polarization, it is imperative that we, as political scientists, adopt a perspective and pursue a research agenda that can help us understand how political institutions both reflect and shape identities so that, as a society, we can pursue both pluralism and justice.

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RESPONSE

Misreading and misinterpretation underlie many of the criticisms Robert Lieberman levies against our June 1993 article. Most importantly, we believe he attributes to our work a purpose different from the one we were pursuing. We are unsettled that our critic paraphrases one of the central ideas in our work claiming it as an independent insight without acknowledging it as part of our argument. Robert Lieberman comes at our subject from a very different perspective, however, and one that gives far less emphasis to public policy as a factor that influences attitudes and perceptions of target groups. This difference is worth discussing, especially in light of the fact that his example of welfare policy amply illustrates the importance of public policy and the applicability of our work.

We will dispense with the lesser issues first by providing a few examples of misreading. Next, we will reiterate the central intent of our work. We then turn to consider three areas of real difference between our work and the approach advocated by Lieberman. Finally, we will describe how the case study he uses makes our case for us.

MISREADING AND RESTATEMENT

Lieberman interprets our fourfold classification scheme of *advantaged, dependents, contenders,* and *deviants* as a unitary, all-or-nothing formulation. Social constructions of target populations differ along many dimensions, varying from positive to negative, from strongly constructed to barely constructed, from heterogeneous to homogenous, from contended to virtually consensual, from rapidly changing to long stable. Having made clear the fundamental differences among quadrants that undergird our typology, we described the theoretically interesting variations in social constructions of target groups (p. 331). Far from lacking a sense of history, we wrote that the social construction of some target groups varies over time and that during the course of evolution, opinion is often divided as to the target's characteristics. To illustrate change, we provided historical examples of the evolution of social constructions (see also Ingram and Smith 1993). We hope that further research will allow political scientists better to understand the causes and patterns of consensus or division about social constructions.

We give more than the "merest hint" that our typology outperforms others (e.g., Lowi's, Wilson's). We build upon and contribute to the strong literature within public policy research relating characteristics of policy to politics. An extended discussion specifically compared our argument with Lowi's and Wilson's (pp. 344–45). We suggest that an understanding of the social construction of target populations is essential in appreciating why some people mobilize when confronted with policies that are disadvantageous to them and others do not.

Lieberman writes that we lack a clear causal argument and that what we suggest appears tautological. The difficulty, we think, is that he has condensed our logic and that the phenomenon he believes we were trying to explain is actually peripheral to our main concern. We were trying neither to trace the roots of group identity nor to explain policy outcomes. Our interest is in policy *design* and the ways public policy serves or fails to serve democracy (Ingram and Schneider 1991a, 1991b, 1993; Schneider and Ingram, 1988, 1990a, 1990b). In the article in question, policy design is an intermediate factor: our ultimate interest is citizen perceptions, orientations toward government, and political participation. The article contains dozens of causal propositions, some of which already are being tested by policy scholars (Blumenthal 1994; Brown 1995; Donovan 1994; Furlong 1994; Holmberg 1992; McDonnell 1994; White 1994).

In our theory of causation, motivations of elected officials are linked to the types of policy designs they construct, which affect people's experiences with the policy and the lessons and messages they take from it. These, in turn, influence people's values and attitudes (including their group identities), their orientations toward government, and their political participation patterns. This "final" effect becomes part of the subsequent environment that is assessed by officials as they search for policies that offer political rewards and attempt to avoid politically risky policies.

For any problem that might be considered, officials could construct a variety of policy designs. The possibilities include which persons and groups will be chosen as the target populations. Public officials have options such as whether some target groups will receive more benefits or burdens than others or whether all will be treated generally alike by the policy. There are choices among the possible rules, tools, implementation structures, and rationales.

We contend that policies are often formulated within a highly politicized environment in which officials are motivated by concern over reelection, albeit constrained by the need to appear interested in solving important societal problems. Thus officials anticipate the reactions of their challengers, the media, the target groups themselves, the opposing political party, and the broader public to their choice of target groups and to the other design elements. The dynamics of the U.S. political system motivate officials, especially elected ones, to provide beneficial policy to target populations who have political power and are constructed as *deserving* and punishment or other costs to those who lack political clout and are constructed as *undeserving,* deviant, or violent.

We hypothesize that differences in the power and social constructions of target populations will be associated with differences in each of the other elements of design. For example, advantaged populations will disproportionately receive beneficial policy delivered with capacity-building or other noncoercive tools and will have rationales that link their interests to important, broad-based, public concerns. Deviant populations will disproportionately receive punishments along with rationales that legitimate the policy.

Differences in designs result in various experiences, lessons, and messages for the target populations. Differences in experiences, messages, and lessons are associated with differences in citizen attitudes, orientations toward government, and participation patterns. We suggest that policy designs for advantaged populations send messages that their problems are important to the national interest and that they can expect to be respected (Schneider and Ingram 1993, table 1). We propose that their orientations toward government will be supportive and that they will believe that their interests coincide with the "public interest" and that others do not have such legitimate claims. The political game will seem open, fair, and winnable—because they usually win. Deviants, by contrast, receive messages that they are bad people, that their problems are their own fault, and that they can expect disrespect or even hate; government is the enemy and should be avoided. Contenders and dependents experience policies that teach lessons and send messages that are distinctly different from advantaged and deviant and that also differ from each other.

SUBSTANTIVE DIFFERENCES

Even if Robert Lieberman had followed our argument correctly, we believe he would continue to differ with us in three important areas: (1) we were writing about the social construction of *target groups,* while he is interested in the origins of *group identities*; (2) we are interested in the intricacies and effects of public policies upon democracy, while he focuses upon historical evolution of institutions and their effects on group identities; and (3) the standards we apply to evaluate evolution and change differ from his. We will consider each of these controversies in turn.

It is important to distinguish between target populations and social groups. We very carefully show that target populations are created by policy and may or may not be contiguous with any identifiable social group. In fact, we argue that public policy better serves democracy if it cuts across traditional cleavages rather than perpetuating or exacerbating existing patterns of social advantages or disadvantages. The power of policy is partly exercised through setting target boundaries that include, exclude, or divide social groups. When a target group is delineated along the same boundaries as social groups with a cohesive identity and a clear image or social construction, then the social construction of the target group will be the same as that of the social group. Public policies often cluster similarly constructed people together (separating them from those who have different constructions) and devise specific design characteristics for each. As Donovan (1994) shows in his study of AIDS, the Ryan White Act systematically singled out the more "deserving" groups of persons who have HIV/AIDS (e.g., mothers and children) for disproportionately more funding and other groups that are more negatively constructed (e.g., drug users and homosexual men) for disproportionately less funding.

Public policies can create distinctive clusters that did not previously exist. The history of juvenile justice policy is that public officials have carved from the larger population of "criminals" a separate and less reprehensible group designated as "juvenile delinquents" and from this group an even more sympathetically constructed target called "status offenders," who can be portrayed as neglected and deprived rather than deviant (Ingram and Schneider 1993, 81). The systematic differentiation of targets permits elected officials to direct punishment at some and beneficial policy toward others. Through these kinds of differentiations, public policy can reinforce prevailing constructions or can work against the grain to serve as a source of change in constructions.

We are interested in the impact of social constructions as they affect and are affected by policy, but we never suggested that policy was *the* source of social constructions and sole creator of group identities. We say more about origins of social constructions and the way they change than our critic suggests, however. Early in the article we wrote that social constructions are created by politics, media, literature,

culture, socialization, history, religion and the like (p. 335). Later we refer to carriers of social constructions, specifying media, movies, literature, and music. We say that the creative imaginations and critical skills of artists, writers, journalists, academics, and others have an important impact and that these, along with dramatic events, may serve as catalysts for changing social constructions.

Lieberman contends that we neglected institutions and history. Since we focused centrally on public policy and considered the dynamics of the process, as well as historically oriented examples, we can only assume that he does not recognize public policy as a type of institution or its history as a type of history. Substituting institutions and history as intermediate variables is not an analytical improvement. The possibility that political science can illuminate the types of policy choices that will contribute to more democratic forms of politics becomes remote if vague notions of history and institutions, rather than concrete empirical concepts such as public policy, are the focus of analysis.

Institutions are given the following definition by Lieberman, which we believe is too broad in some ways and too narrow in others. He defines institutions as "formal rules or informal patterns that organize political processes and behavior by regulating incentives and opportunities." This definition is not helpful because it joins many unlike things including political parties, agencies, legislative bodies, courts, markets, families, the economic system, and (not noted by our critic) public policies.

Regulating incentives and opportunities is too narrow a view of the role of institutions in society. Lieberman's definition is similar to that used by scholars who assume people are motivated largely by rational, self-interested, instrumental behavior—a contention that we strongly reject. Drawing attention to the values, symbols, stereotypes, and images that drive behavior in nonutilitarian directions is one of the contributions of our article. Public policies are a type of institution that provides not only incentives and disincentives but that also distributes symbols and values.

Public policy is one of the institutions viewed as a primary problem solver for society. Hence, its study deserves a special place within political science rather than one lumped together with all other societal phenomena that might be called "institutions." An important contribution our article makes to political science is to focus on policy design as a subject for analysis and to provide a fuller and more textured meaning for policy than can be captured through the simplified characterizations to which public policy is sometimes reduced. Public policy is an active agent for social change and should be of far more interest to political science than broader and more deterministic notions of institutions and history. Public policy is an especially important phenomenon to study because it reflects human agency in a way that many other kinds of institutions do not. Through public policy, collective choices are made with significant conse-

quences to how and whether problems are resolved, how benefits and costs are distributed, how target groups are viewed by themselves and others, and how such groups regard—and participate in—politics. Public policy is a complex combination of elements, including goals and objectives, agents and implementation structures, targets, tools, rules, and rationales. Each of these elements can vary in theoretically interesting ways. Together they form patterns with profound effects upon society. Charting which effects can be expected from which policy choices is relatively unmapped territory that political scientists are well positioned to explore.

The third area of substantive contention between Lieberman and ourselves relates to our treatment of evolution and change. Change is an important part of our analysis that we are evaluating along specific dimensions important to democracy and citizenship. The theory of change we consider begins with the question whether a political process dominated by the pursuit of self-interest, unequal political power among various groups in the society, and widely differentiated social constructions contains any self-correcting mechanisms such as that suggested in pluralist theories of democracy. We offer three possible paths of change.

First, we posit that the political attractiveness of providing beneficial policy to advantaged groups may result in their being the beneficiaries of so many rewards from policy that their constructions shift from "deserving" to "greedy" or selfish, with a corresponding change in the kinds of policy designs they will receive. Similarly, so many ordinary people may be swept into the highly attractive punishment policies that the negative stereotypes of "deviant" may no longer be credible, and the groups may be able to muster more effective resistance. Thus these persons may be able to increase their political power (moving toward the contender part of the continuum) or to reconstruct themselves as dependent rather than deviant, correcting the excesses of punishment-oriented policy. A second model of change is far less predictable and posits that external dramatic events, opportunities, and skillful manipulation of entrepreneurs may alter constructions. The third possibility is the path most damaging to democracy, where there *are* no self-correcting mechanisms. Instead, cycles of constructions and policies reinforce one another and continue unabated. The advantaged continue to gain in power, positive constructions, and beneficial policy even as the nation incurs increasing deficits and engages in deceptive explanations regarding who is actually receiving what from policy and why. Those constructed as deviants receive even more punishment and retribution that serves as a release for public frustration but is legitimated on the grounds that it is the only effective way to ensure domestic tranquility.

These are fine-grained propositions about possible models of policy change and in our view are a significant advance over more generic and older notions of policy feedback. In his limited discussion of policy feedback, Lieberman ignores literature that goes all the way back to David Easton's work on systems and includes the many scholars who have delved into how policy creates politics (e.g., Lowi 1972; Smith and Lipsky 1993; and contributors to Ingram and Smith 1993). How policy design both reflects contexts created in part by past policies and provides human agency for social change is a subject of continuing interest among policy scholars. The case Lieberman avers can be seen as building upon this literature and bolstering our theory.

THE WELFARE POLICY CASE

Social Security and AFDC are excellent examples of how the elements of policy design, including the delineation of targets, tools, and rationales, can have empowering and disempowering effects important to justice and citizenship. Lieberman was making our point with this case, but failed to see it. The target populations of the social security section of the original act, passed in 1935, cut across racial, ethnic, class, and economic lines and did not require means testing. The eligible groups were required to pay into the fund, thereby legitimating the policy on the grounds that all recipients were deserving and only receiving their due. That some self-employed agricultural workers and domestically employed persons were excluded in the original act does not appear to have been racially conscious, as the overwhelming proportion of such persons were white. These groups seem to have been excluded instead on the grounds that they did not fit the industrial-worker model that served as the basis of the act (Berkowitz 1991). Self-employed persons were both employee and employer, agricultural workers received significant in-kind benefits that did not count as part of their salary (e.g., food and board), and domestically employed persons worked for a large number of different people. The difficulty of keeping very good records for these employees complicated administration (ibid.).

It is not surprising that the 1950 amendments to the act brought into coverage the self-employed, agricultural workers, and domestic help, given the political attractiveness of the policy. These newly admitted groups would have to pay into the system before they could receive from it—thereby ensuring that they could be constructed as deserving and, more importantly, that they would bring enormous new resources into a system that was badly strapped for sufficient funds. One of the rationales underlying this policy change was that bringing in, for example, the domestically employed on condition of receiving benefits only if they paid into the fund would be far better than the politically unattractive alternative of including them in some kind of federally funded welfare program. Our theory suggests policy changes of exactly this type. Eligibility will be extended and benefits increased until the funds are insufficient. Policy changes to avoid bankrupting the system will occur periodically.

The targets of AFDC had from the beginning a dependent social construction. These people had very few political resources or power but were considered to be "good" people, although not particularly capable or independent. Poor and widowed mothers and their children who could not provide for themselves were the initial targets. The AFDC portion of the 1935 Social Security Act drew ideas from the mother's pension laws in the states and presupposed that mothers should be able to stay at home and care for their children. According to Berkowitz (1991), children in this group were overwhelmingly white at the time the act was passed (86%), and an estimated 85% of the recipients were children whose fathers had died.

Means tests are common features of policy for dependents and efforts to direct aid only to the truly deserving were always part of the AFDC policy design. We have argued that policy aimed toward dependents is typically undersubscribed, that there are never enough resources to serve the policy need, and that administrators and others revising policy are always pressured to establish new rules to eliminate the benefits to the least deserving (Schneider and Ingram 1994). Over time, the recipients of AFDC changed dramatically. By 1962, only 7% of the AFDC caseload involved children whose fathers had died and most were recipients because their father had left home or had never lived with them at all. The proportion of recipients who were African-American had increased substantially.

As suggested by our theory, the growing negative construction of the group has made it even more politically risky to direct beneficial policy toward them, resulting in rules and tests for eligibility that are increasingly stringent and directed to disqualify those easiest to construct negatively. Lines were proposed—and some drawn—to exclude "welfare cheats"—particularly households harboring able-bodied men, women who were able to work but did not, women who might be birthing children to increase their welfare check, women who bore a second illegitimate child, and those whose homes were ruled "unsuitable." The negative characterizations of these target groups, unfortunately, coincides with the stereotypes inflicted by racial prejudice since many welfare recipients are African-American. Current welfare reform proposals reflect social constructions of targets as deviants, badly in need of character reform to reject welfare as a way of life.

Lieberman's criticisms imply that we expect some kind of unitary change in the social construction of African-Americans to account for the inclusion of the self-employed, agricultural workers, and the domestically employed in the Social Security system (groups that are overwhelmingly white and all of whom must pay into the system if they are to receive from it) and to account for the exclusion of people, especially African-Americans, from AFDC. This reduces our theory to something quite different.

Lieberman, unwittingly it seems, actually draws our conclusion from the welfare cases, though with less attention to the way the elements of policy design deliver effect. Like us, he sees that public policies do not merely reflect the character of their target populations, they also transform target groups by transforming the political, social economic, and legal settings in which groups exist. The welfare policy case nicely illustrates one of the central lessons of our work for improving policy design for democracy. The delineation of targets in social security, which was oblivious to racial and other established cleavages and purposely included old-age survivors of all economic and social classes who had paid into the system, was the better design for democracy. It empowered older Americans and added to their political power and positive social construction. In contrast, AFDC, targeted to match economic and later racial and social classes, disempowered its intended targets. We hope our article will stimulate similar examinations of pathologies and consequences of policy designs.

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