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Nixon's New Deal: Welfare Reform for the Silent Majority

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Utilizing recently opened politically sensitive materials at the Richard Nixon Presidential Library, this article shows how welfare reform became increasingly important to the Nixon administration's political ambitions for a new conservative majority, consisting of southern white conservatives and northern working- and middle-class white voters. Welfare reform rose to the top of the president's domestic policy agenda for a number of reasons, but the president selected the Family Assistance Plan (FAP) over more conservative alternatives in keeping with his political aims: the FAP would redistribute federal welfare to the white working poor in northern metropolitan areas, while simultaneously increasing federal welfare spending in southern states. As the 1970 midterm elections approached, however, the predominant political focus for the FAP became the effort to appeal to blue-collar, northern white-ethnic voters. In the aftermath of the disappointing results from those elections, President Nixon and his political team became convinced that a New Deal-style redistributive strategy was ineffective in appealing to conservative voters in the "silent majority," especially southern conservatives who were opposed to any expansion of federal welfare, even when they would benefit directly. Instead, Nixon began to emphasize the FAP's value as a platform for launching strong rhetorical attacks on welfare. While the president subsequently pulled back from pushing for FAP's legislative enactment, offering an important explanation for the measure's failure, his antiwelfare rhetoric was politically successful, providing subsequent national conservative leaders with a political formula for utilizing antiwelfare rhetoric to build support among white working- and middle-class voters.

On August 8, 1969, President Nixon went on national television to promote his domestic policy plans. The centerpiece of his policy package and the focus of his national address was his proposal to replace the main federal welfare program, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), with a new program, billed as the Family Assistance

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Plan (FAP). Nixon's FAP was based on the Negative Income Tax (NIT) innovation of conservative economist Milton Friedman. It promised a basic minimum income for all families, and would have expanded coverage from AFDC's recipients, primarily non-working single mothers and their children, to cover the working poor and two-parent families. Moreover, the FAP included an incentive for adult recipients to work by reducing their welfare payment by less than a dollar for every additional dollar earned (Moynihan 1973, chap. 3 and appendix, 229-35; Steensland 2008, chap. 2). According to estimates within the administration, the FAP would have more than doubled the number on "welfare" and tripled its cost, from \$2.2 billion on AFDC in 1970 to approximately \$5.8 billion if the program had passed.¹ This was particularly surprising from President Nixon, who was expected to narrow welfare's coverage rather than propose a major expansion (Burke and Burke 1974; Moynihan 1973; Steensland 2008).

Why did this Republican president propose what would have amounted to the largest increase in federal welfare spending since Franklin Delano Roosevelt's Social Security Act of 1935? Scholars have focused less on the motivations behind the initiation of the FAP than they have on the reasons for its failure (Burke and Burke 1974; Davies 1996, chap. 9; Kornbluh 2007, chap. 7; Moynihan 1973; Quadagno 1990). For accounts that do address the president's choice of the FAP over other alternatives, none feature politics as the focus of their research (Davies 1996, 216-218; O'Connor 1998, 113-14; Steensland 2008, 101, 104-07). This article provides a sustained study of the connection between Nixon's welfare reform and his broader efforts to establish an "emerging Republican majority."² By emphasizing the politics of welfare, rather than civil rights, the analysis highlights the emergence of a "northern strategy" for President Nixon. Forged with veiled racial references, meant to appeal to the anxieties of northern white working- and middle-class ethnic voters, this strategy has become increasingly important in contemporary conservative politics (Lassiter 2007; Sugrue and Skreteny 2008). The recent opening of hundreds of thousands of pages of politically sensitive materials at the Richard M. Nixon Presidential Library (RNPL) offers a fresh opportunity to reexamine Nixon's welfare reform proposal within the context of his political strategy.³

1. The estimate is based on President Nixon's chief Domestic Affairs Counselor Arthur Burns' analysis of Secretary of Labor George Shultz's proposed version of the Family Security System. Arthur F. Burns, July 12, 1969, Memorandum to the President, 3, White House Special Files (WHSF), Subject Files (SF), John D. Ehrlichman, Box 38, Folder: "Welfare Book: Family Security System 1969," 1 of 2, Nixon Presidential Materials Project, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) II, College Park, MD. These materials are no longer in the College Park NARA facility and can be found at the Richard M. Nixon Presidential Library and Museum, Yorba Linda, CA (RNPL).

2. Kevin Phillips identified a coalitional strategy for achieving a Republican Party majority and put it into practice as an aide to Republican Congressman Paul Fino's 1966 midterm election victory. Phillips was then picked up by John Mitchell to advise the Nixon presidential campaign in 1968. He published his strategy *The Emerging Republican Majority* (1969) after Nixon had become president. The book outlined a strategy for appealing to white southerners and northern white ethnics based on their opposition to civil rights enforcement and their broader racial resentments (see Boyd 1970; Mason 2004, 47-50; Phillips 1969).

3. On July 11, 2007, The Richard Nixon Library & Museum officially joined the NARA network of Presidential Libraries. Coinciding with their opening, they released 78,000 pages of previously unavailable documents, returned to President Nixon under provisions of the Presidential Recordings and Materials Preservation Act (PRMPA) of 1974. PRMPA provided for the return to the former president any records whose content was solely personal or political and not related to the president's constitutional duties. These recently opened materials include approximately 20,000 records, whose release by NARA was directly

I develop my analysis in four subsequent sections. The first section briefly reviews other studies of the FAP and illustrates the benefits of focusing on Nixon's political ambitions. In the second section, I trace the development of Nixon's overarching political strategy. The third section shows how the Nixon administration's FAP should be understood within the context of this broader political strategy. In the fourth section, I assess some of the reasons for the subsequent legislative failure of Nixon's FAP.

Placing the FAP in the Context of Nixon's Political Strategy

Studies of the FAP have addressed electoral politics only tangentially and have focused instead on the policy-making process within the White House, the congressional politics of the FAP, and the cultural context that led to the FAP's defeat. Each of these approaches, however, highlights the value of a more conscious study of the FAP's relationship to Nixon's larger political strategy. Until quite recently, most accounts of the FAP have focused on the internal politics of the White House, rather than the effort to build a national electoral majority. Scholars have traced the origins of the FAP to multiple sources inside and outside the administration (Burke and Burke 1974; Hoff 1994, 115-37; Moynihan 1973; Quadagno 1990; Steensland 2008, esp. chaps. 1-2). In addition, several studies offer detailed reviews of the FAP's failure in Congress (Burke and Burke 1974, chap. 8; Moynihan 1973, chaps. 6-7; Steensland 2008, chaps. 4-5). All of these accounts share an appreciation of the ideological and political pressures facing members of the Nixon White House and members of the Congress. A focus on President Nixon's electoral considerations provides critical context for understanding the origins of the FAP proposal within the Nixon White House, the administration's lobbying effort in Congress, and the rhetorical strategy that Nixon used for his welfare reform.

Several studies also address the FAP's origins in the growing consensus for a Guaranteed Annual Income (GAI) among economists and social welfare policy experts in the late 1960s (Burke and Burke 1974, chap. 1; Moynihan 1973, chaps. 1-3; Steensland 2008, chap. 2). Each of these accounts illustrates the consideration of broader intellectual currents by liberal policy advisors within the Johnson administration and the influence that these holdovers had in accounting for the origins of the GAI policy proposal within the Nixon White House. Unlike a perspective that focuses on political strategy, however, none of these accounts can explain why President Nixon was persuaded to pursue the more expansive FAP rather than a much smaller and more conservative alternative.

More recently, scholars have examined the influence of cultural politics and grassroots political activism on Nixon's welfare reform proposal (Chappell 2010, chap. 2; Kornbluh 2007, chap. 6; Quadagno 1994, chap. 5; Steensland 2008). In referring to "cultural politics," these studies address broad changes in the nation's race and gender relations as well as implicit moral judgments concerning who was deserving and unde-

contested by Nixon under PRMPA, and were released to NARA by the Nixon Foundation as part of a special agreement transferring ownership of the library to the federal government. As of January 11, 2010, many of these materials are available for researchers on line. <http://www.nixon.archives.gov/virtuallibrary/documents/whsreturned/index.php> (accessed April 14, 2012).

serving of government assistance (Handler and Hasenfeld 1991; Katz 1989; Steensland 2008, chap. 1). All of these studies recognize the importance of racial and gender politics in shaping the defeat of the FAP in Congress. Focusing on Nixon's political strategy emphasizes how FAP's racial politics supported a strategic effort to appeal to white working- and middle-class voters in the north, based on their resentments of black welfare recipients.

Brian Steensland (2008) offers the most comprehensive scholarly study of the FAP yet, based on research with Nixon administration archives available at the time. Since 2007, hundreds of thousands of previously inaccessible materials have been made available for research at the RNPL. These records highlight the political concerns that shaped the policy-making efforts of the Nixon White House and add a new dimension to his analysis. Steensland studied the broader effort to achieve a national GAI in the United States, and argued that the FAP must be understood within the context of cultural distinctions between the deserving and undeserving poor (2008, chap. 1; see also Katz 1989; Orloff 1988; Skocpol 1988; Weir 1992). Steensland (2008) shows how the FAP confounded these deeply entrenched cultural categories by proposing to aid both the working and nonworking poor under the same program and how this undermined the policy's political success. Placing political calculation at the center of the analysis provides insight into Nixon's motivations for covering both the working-poor and the non-working poor under the FAP, a critical addition to Steensland's work and an essential part of the explanation for FAP's legislative failure.

Pursuing the “Emerging Republican Majority”

President Nixon pursued his “silent majority” among both southern whites and northern white ethnics, or blue-collar workers (Frymer and Skrentny 1998; Lassiter 2007; Mason 2004). Nixon's southern strategy—an effort to appeal to white southern Democrats by opposing further liberalization of federal civil rights policy or stronger enforcement of civil rights law—has been well documented (Black and Black 2002, 210-11; Carmines and Stimson 1989, 51-54; Davies 1996, chap. 8; Edsall and Edsall 1991; Frymer and Skrentny 1998, 141-44; Kotlowski 2001; Lowndes 2008, chap. 5; Phillips 1969). Less well documented, but no less important, were Nixon's political efforts to appeal to northern white Democrats, many of whom resented the Great Society antipoverty and welfare programs, and who were anxious over urban race riots and mass protests against the Vietnam War (Flamm 2005; Frymer and Skrentny 1998; Lassiter 2007; Mason 2004; Sugrue and Skrentny 2008). While these efforts were in many ways complementary, appeals for these new conservative coalition constituencies were different in their focus. Welfare reform addressed a number of political objectives for the Nixon administration, including an effort to redistribute federal aid to southern states. Over time, however, the predominant political focus of the FAP became the effort to appeal to blue-collar, northern white-ethnic voters.

Originally, Nixon sought a moderate domestic policy strategy that would redirect the benefits of liberal social welfare policies toward conservative voting blocs (Davies

1996, chap. 9). As president, Nixon sought to both consolidate and challenge the New Deal order, reforming the liberal programs of the New Deal state to appeal to conservative constituencies (Milkis 1993, 223-28). His centrist approach to domestic policy, moreover, was rooted in the moderate Republican principles advanced under President Dwight Eisenhower and articulated by his speechwriter and political advisor Arthur Larson (Stebenne 2006). As Eisenhower's vice president, while Nixon's rough-edged anti-Communist politics had engendered resentment and suspicion from Democrats, he had always been a centrist in domestic policy, supporting civil rights reforms and sustaining New Deal programs throughout his long political career (Wicker 1995, esp. chap. 10). Moreover, despite the complaints of civil rights leaders in the late 1960s that Nixon was an obstacle to forward movement on black civil rights, historians have noted that Nixon did in fact carry out the desegregation of southern schools, while also promoting the first federal affirmative action program for government construction contracts, the so-called Philadelphia Plan (Hoff 1994, chap. 3; Kotlowski 2001, chaps. 1, 4; Yuill 2006, chap. 7). Indeed, much of his domestic policy agenda reflected this moderate approach (Hoff 1994, chaps. 1-4).

On his right, however, Nixon faced a new conservative movement led by Senator Barry Goldwater (R-AZ), California Governor Ronald Reagan, and William Buckley Jr., founder of the *National Review*. Despite Goldwater's landslide loss in the 1964 presidential election, "new right" activists were still a potent force within the Republican Party. Nixon's 1968 campaign and his presidential politics aimed at the center of American politics: between the liberal 1960s, Goldwater conservatism, and the moderate Republican approach of President Eisenhower, best reflected at that time by New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller (Stebenne 2006, chap. 9).

Expanding the Base

By the time Nixon reached the presidency, fractures with the Democratic Party were becoming increasingly prominent, offering him the opportunity to move beyond the moderate Republican stance of the 1950s and to contemplate building a new Republican majority (Burnham 1970, chaps. 5-6; Edsall and Edsall 1991, chaps. 2-3; Fraser and Gerstle 1989, pt. II; Phillips 1969; Scammon and Wattenberg 1970; Sundquist 1983, chaps. 16-18). Nixon's political strategy became much more than simply a patchwork of policies intended to appeal to various conservative constituencies. Instead, it was a holistically woven tapestry of racial fears, economic conservatism, support for increased law and order, opposition to expanding federal welfare for the poor, and support for extending federal assistance to white, urban, blue-collar Democrats (Flamm 2005, chap. 9; Lowndes 2008 106-7, 120-25, 135-39; Mason 2004; Sugrue and Skrentny 2008). Moreover, while the strategy's core concept was stable, it evolved from the 1968 campaign into a far more sophisticated political program by the 1970 midterm and 1972 presidential elections. The centerpiece became the growing white backlash against federal support for civil rights and for liberal social policies assisting poor African Americans.

Nixon and his political advisors aimed to take advantage of the splits within the Democratic Party that had become painfully obvious by the 1968 presidential campaign. Their political strategy evolved over the course of the 1968 campaign and his first term as president. In that campaign, Nixon positioned himself as the centrist candidate, taking the unoccupied space between the antiwar candidacies of Robert Kennedy and Eugene McCarthy, and the right-wing populist candidacy of Alabama Governor George C. Wallace (Mayer 2002). He spoke about a “new alignment for American unity” which included: “Republicans, ‘new liberals,’ the ‘new South,’ black militants and the silent millions.” (*Time* 1968, 1). Later admitting that he had been somewhat unrealistic in this speech, Nixon said that the most significant line was the part about “silent Americans” (Mason 2004, 28). By the eve of the 1968 election, Nixon had sharpened his appeal, calling for a cross-party majority coalition: a “new coalition of Republicans and Democrats and Independents.”⁴

In addition to appeals for law and order, Nixon sharply criticized the Great Society programs and welfare, linking such attacks to racial appeals for white voters:

I intend to begin this administration by telling black Americans and the rest of Americans the truth. . . . I am going to propose new programs the purpose of which will be to get people off welfare rolls and onto payrolls.⁵

Accepting his party’s nomination, Nixon pleaded for the nation to listen to “the voice of the great majority of Americans, the forgotten Americans—the non-shouters, the non-demonstrators” (Nixon 1968). Although the central themes of that speech and of his campaign were focused on ending the Vietnam War and reestablishing law and order at home, Nixon linked “law and order” to the failures of the Great Society and welfare:

For the past five years we have been deluged by Government programs for the unemployed, programs for the cities, programs for the poor, and we have reaped from these programs an ugly harvest of frustrations, violence and failure across the land . . . Black Americans—no more than white Americans—do not want more Government programs which perpetuate dependency. (Nixon 1968)

Nixon sensed that his 1968 victory had been achieved by the management of temporary conflicts over Vietnam and urban racial violence, but he also believed that there was great potential for a conservative realignment that would reconstitute the moribund Republican Party as an invigorated majority of “forgotten Americans” (Mason 2004, 36-38). On his fifty-sixth birthday, Nixon wrote a memo to his White House aide John D. Ehrlichman, who would become his top domestic policy advisor within a year’s time, noting that the 1968 victory had required expanding beyond the “base of the Republican party” to reach “millions of Independent and Democratic voters.”⁶

4. Richard Nixon, November 4, 1968, “Transcripts of questions posted to Nixon and his replies,” Box 6, Folder 11, Nixon Presidential Returned Materials Collection (RM): White House Special Files (WHSE), NARA, RNPL.

5. *Ibid.*

6. Richard Nixon, January 9, 1969, “Memorandum from RN to Ehrlichman. File: 1969: January 9, Box 1. RM, WHSE, RNPL.

The "Northern" Strategy

At first, the administration's political strategy for reaching northern Democrats and Independents was only vaguely formulated. However, his southern strategy had been established in the 1968 campaign (Mason 2004, 29).⁷ In that race, Nixon positioned himself as opposed to segregation but also against forced busing, thereby conceding the deep southern states to the openly segregationist Governor Wallace while remaining to the right of the Democratic Party nominee, Vice President Hubert Humphrey (Black and Black 2002, 210-11). Once he assumed the presidency, however, a northern strategy became increasingly important. Beginning as a broad appeal for "forgotten Americans," Nixon and his advisors began to focus more and more on designing a concrete political strategy for appealing to northern white voters as they approached the 1970 midterm and 1972 presidential elections.

The president's political team embraced the analyses of both the conservative strategist Kevin Phillips (1969) and the democratic strategists Richard Scammon and Ben Wattenberg (1970). Phillips' analysis emphasized the divisions of the Democratic Party over race, while Scammon and Wattenberg had a broader analysis centering on multiple issues, including civil rights, law and order, urban rioting, antiwar protests, and the counter-culture. Phillips had been hired as an assistant to John N. Mitchell, Nixon's campaign director for the 1968 campaign and his attorney general during from 1969 to 1972. During the '68 campaign, Patrick J Buchanan ("Pat"), Mitchell's assistant and one of the more conservative members of Nixon's White House, read the manuscript for Phillips' book *The Emerging Republican Majority* and recommended hiring him to focus on selecting issues for appealing to key groups.⁸ Phillips advocated appealing to southern whites, based on their opposition to civil rights enforcement, and to "lower-middle-class and ethnic Americans" based on their anxieties over urban rioting (Phillips 1969; Mason 2004, 39, 63-65). As time went on, Nixon began formulating a more conscious strategy for reaching out to northern voters. According to the January 8, 1970, notes of his politically powerful Chief of Staff Harold R. Haldeman, in the midterm elections Nixon wanted to pursue the support of "old-time ethnics," that is, "Poles, Italians, Irish," and not to pursue "Jews and Blacks. Look at the new coalition" he admonished (Kotlowski 1998, 211).

Just as the midterm elections started to approach, in the spring of 1970, Richard Scammon and Benjamin Wattenberg's book *The Real Majority* appeared, warning fellow Democrats that a Republican majority could be achieved based on a conservative strategy capitalizing on the divisive "social issue." The "social issue" was a composite, amalgamating resentment of domestic opposition to the Vietnam War, urban unrest, campus protest or youth rebellion, and drugs. These issues, they argued, were splitting the

7. At the 1968 Republican Party convention in Miami Beach Nixon faced a challenge from Ronald Reagan on his right. He struck a deal with Strom Thurmond, senator for South Carolina, for support among southern conservatives. Nixon assured them that he would be conservative on civil rights in return for their support of his nomination (Mason 2004, 29).

8. Bell [no first name given], July 12, 1968, "Memorandum to Patrick Buchanan re: Kevin Phillips," Box 36, Folder: 9, RM, WHSF, RNPL.

Democratic Party coalition, pitting white working-class union workers and southern white conservatives against racial minorities and their liberal allies.

Nixon recognized these splits in the Democratic coalition as political opportunities. Between November 1969 and August 1970 his political team became increasingly attentive to white working- and middle-class voters. On November 3, 1969, Nixon made his historic “silent majority” speech, appealing for these voters’ support for his Vietnam War policy (Mason 2004, 61-65; Reeves 2001, 144-45). That speech was a tremendous political success, and it identified the potential for a new conservative majority that still had to be defined more concretely (Mason 2004, 61-65).⁹

The job of defining the “silent majority” was given to Charles W. Colson. Colson joined Nixon’s political team in the fall of 1969, explicitly for the purpose of pursuing the votes of white working-class voters traditionally allied with the Democratic Party. According to Ehrlichman, Colson quickly became one of the president’s closest advisors, working as an “outside liaison” to various “special-interest” groups (Ehrlichman 1982, 79-80). Colson, known as “Chuck” by Nixon and his political team, concentrated his efforts on “blue-collar” groups, including labor unions. By January of 1970, Nixon had become more explicit about the “new coalition” he wanted to pursue, based on the “silent majority” and consisting of “blue collar, Catholic, Poles, Italians and Irish” (Haldeman 1994, 117-18). In May of 1970, after a march of 60,000 construction workers on Wall Street in support of Nixon’s invasion of Cambodia, the president told his advisors how much he appreciated “the support from “workingman” hard-hat workers who had visited the White House that day.”¹⁰ The president wanted this publicized, and he urged continued efforts to encourage this kind of public support.

In August of 1970, Pat Buchanan, who had become one of Nixon’s speechwriters and political advisors, wrote to the president about the significance of the Scammon and Wattenberg approach for the 1970 midterm election. After noting the rise of conservatism among the electorate, from 46 to 51% of the voters, he pointed out that “a poor white from the Midwest was a likely Nixon voter; a poor white in the south a Wallace voter, and a poor black in the cities a Humphrey voter.”¹¹ In a follow-up memo, Buchanan pointed out that liberals are trying to “win back white collar and blue collar defectors using the Scammon and Wattenberg approach.” He recommended Nixon focus on antiwar demonstrations, riots, and other elements of the “social issue.” In the margins, Nixon responded to Buchanan: “RN wants hard line on these issues.”¹²

9. Afterwards, a follow-up Gallup poll indicated 77% approval of the president’s speech. Overall approval ratings for the president began to improve as well, reaching 67% on November 17 (Reeves 2001, 144-45; Gallup Poll, Presidential Approval Ratings, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/124922/Presidential-Job-Approval-Center.aspx> [accessed July 26, 2011]).

10. H. R. Haldeman, May 27, 1969, “Memorandum to Charles Colson, Harry Dent, Herbert Klein, William Safire, and Ron Ziegler,” WHSE, Staff Member and Office Files (SMOF), Charles Colson, Box 2, File: HRH memos 1969-1960, NPM. (On the hard-hat demonstrations, see Mason 2004, 71-72; Reeves 2001, 216-17.)

11. Patrick Buchanan, Patrick, August 4, 1970, “Memorandum for the President,” Presidents Personal Office Files (POF), Name/Subject file 1969-1974, File: Buchanan, Elections of ’70 and ’72. NPM.

12. Patrick Buchanan, August 24, 1970, “Memorandum for the President,” POF, Name/Subject File, 1969-1974, File: Buchanan, Memos for the President, Box 6, NPM.

After the 1970 midterm elections, the importance of the northern strategy grew. In those elections, Republicans lost 12 seats in the House and gained only single seat in the Senate. In response to these losses, Colson wrote to H. R. Haldeman about more consciously organizing the "Northeast." Colson was convinced that the one bright spot in the 1970 midterm elections was that the "social issue was very powerful in the Northeast," and that it would continue to be powerful in 1972 in this region.¹³ He followed up with a second memo where he noted that "In major races that we won, we did generally very well with the blue collar and middle income vote."¹⁴

After reviewing the analyses of the 1970 midterm elections from his political advisors, President Nixon wrote a lengthy response to Haldeman in which he agreed that they needed to focus on "the heavy industrialized states" going into the 1972 presidential election. Nixon wondered whether Colson's emphasis on the blue-collar white ethnics or the analysis of Donald Rumsfeld, a more moderate member of Nixon's cabinet, emphasizing the "suburbanite[s] . . . who are not members of Labor unions and are generally White Collar," was the right one.¹⁵ Either way, however, he agreed that Catholic voters were of "vital importance" and that they "should work hard on the white ethnics, particularly Eastern Europeans and Italians."¹⁶

Colson suggested a new effort to appeal to "urban, middle income, white ethnics" by "cultivat[ing] the right Catholic leaders in several key Northeastern states."¹⁷ In February of 1971, Colson proposed a poll to explore the "attitudes and voting patterns" among "middle to lower-income white ethnic, predominantly blue-collar voters." He believed that in the 1972 election they could "make very significant inroads in what has traditionally been a heavy Democratic vote."¹⁸ Buchanan was also arguing that Nixon focus on white Catholics and to do so while downplaying racial minorities: "there are more Queens Democrats than there are Harlem Democrats and they are a hell of a lot easier for a Republican to get."¹⁹ Buchanan was ebullient, telling the president,

There is a clear potential majority out there. The President could be the new Roosevelt, who put it together, or he could be the last of the liberal Presidents. But . . . it means tell-

13. Charles Colson, November 13, 1970, "Memorandum to H.R. Haldeman, *Eyes Only*," Box 4, File: Charles Colson, November 1970. RM, Contested Materials (CM), WHSF, SMOF, RNPL.

14. Charles Colson, December 22, 1970, "Memorandum to H.R. Haldeman," 1, Box 14, File: Charles Colson: White House/Strategy Memoranda, RM, CM, WHSF, SMOF, RNPL.

15. President Nixon, November 22, 1970, "Memorandum to H.R. Haldeman," 1, Box 229, Folder: P Memos 1970, Part II, H. R. Haldeman, RM, CM, WHSF, SMOF, RNPL. Rumsfeld was an elected member of the House of Representatives before becoming Nixon's director of the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) the headquarters for Johnson's War on Poverty. He went on to be President Ford's chief of staff, and President George W. Bush's Secretary of Defense. See Jeffrey (2003) for a brief history of Rumsfeld and Cheney's beginnings in the Nixon administration.

16. *Ibid.*

17. Charles Colson, November 13, 1970, "Memorandum to H.R. Haldeman: *Eyes Only*," Box 4, File: Charles Colson, November 1970, RM, CM, WHSF, SMOF, RNPL.

18. Charles Colson, February 9, 1971, "Memorandum to H.R. Haldeman: Middle America Poll," 1, Box 3, File: February 1971, RM, CM, WHSF, SMOF, RNPL.

19. Patrick Buchanan, September 23, 1971, "Memorandum to John Ehrlichman, H.R. Haldeman and Charles Colson," Box 2, File: Charles W. Colson: Meetings File, Presidential notes/conversation, RM, CM, WHSF, SMOF, RNPL.

ing . . . the New York Times that, no, we have not done anything for the blacks this week, but we have named a Pole to the Cabinet and an Italian Catholic to the Supreme Court.²⁰

This strategy continued to be important to Nixon, having a large role in encouraging the president to adopt a controversial wage and price controls policy in the summer of 1971, with an eye toward the upcoming 1972 presidential election (Matusow 1998). In the spring of 1972, Colson observed that the swing voters for the election would be southern whites, northern labor and Catholics.²¹ Recognizing the opportunity to persuade union members to vote Republican, Colson pushed for the appointment of a “heavy weight in the labor field” to his staff to help make the appeal to blue-collar voters in the northeast. He recommended Peter J. Brennan, who had earned Nixon’s gratitude for leading the pro-Vietnam “hard-hat” demonstration on Wall Street in May of 1970. Brennan was eventually nominated to be the secretary of labor and served in both the Nixon and Ford administrations in that capacity.²²

The “Blue-Collar” Working Group

The importance of this group to the administration’s politics led to the assembling of a working group in the Department of Labor, focused on the problems of the blue-collar worker. In the spring of 1970, the Domestic Council, which was set up to provide the president with a similar kind of advisory mechanism for domestic policy as the National Security Council provided for foreign affairs, circulated a memorandum from Assistant Secretary of Labor Jerome Rosow on “The Problem of the Blue-Collar Worker” (Mason 2004, 71). Daniel P. Moynihan, chairman of the new cabinet-level Urban Affairs Council (UAC) and the leading proponent of the FAP in Nixon’s cabinet, began organizing discussions of “blue-collar workers” on a weekly basis, involving key members of the White House, including Haldeman, Ehrlichman (who now directed the Domestic Council), Attorney General Mitchell, Secretary of Labor George P. Shultz, and the director of the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO), Donald Rumsfeld. They also included a number of Nixon’s top political advisors, including Harry Dent, his southern politics advisor, and Bryce Harlow, his congressional liaison.²³ The blue-collar working group was activated just as Nixon’s advisors were beginning to focus attention on the white working- and middle-class: in the spring and summer of 1970.

20. *Ibid.*, 6.

21. Charles Colson, August 3, 1972, “Memorandum to President Nixon,” Box 3, File: Charles W. Colson: Memorandums for the President, 1 of 2, RM, CM, WHSF, SMOF, RNPL.

22. Charles Colson, May 2, 1972, “Memorandum to H.R. Haldeman: Labor Man,” Box 3, File: Charles W. Colson: HRH Memos, 2/3, RM, CM, WHSF, SMOF, RNPL. Brennan served in the Nixon and Ford administrations as secretary of labor, from 1973 to 1975. See also McFadden (1996).

23. Daniel P. Moynihan, April 13, 1970, “Memorandum to: The Attorney General, The Secretary of Labor, Martin Anderson, Alex Butterfield, Harry Dent, John Ehrlichman, Peter Flanigan, Bob Haldeman, Bryce Harlow, James D. Hodgson, Jeb Magruder, Ed Morgan, Jerome M. Rosow, Don Rumsfeld, and Herbert Stein,” Series I, Box 255, Folder 10: Blue Collar, 1970., Daniel P. Moynihan Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC (Moynihan papers).

In June of 1970, Shultz directed a memo to Ehrlichman on behalf of the “working group,” on the “situation of the lower-middle-income worker.”²⁴ He recommended that Ehrlichman’s Domestic Council address the white working class’s growing resentment of racial minorities, pointing to welfare as one of the key policies to address:

Living in close proximity to the poor and the near-poor . . . They feel the relentless pressures of the minorities in their immediate neighborhoods, at the job site, in the schools, and in the community. Observing the welfare programs for the poor, they feel excluded and forgotten. As taxpayers they help pay the freight for “free riders” and get none of the apparent help.²⁵

Politically, the group hinted at both the potential to gather these voters’ support and the danger of continuing to ignore their growing resentment of blacks and welfare recipients:

In the absence of attention to his specific problems by either political party, he will support politicians such as Wallace. (Outside of the South, 22 % of blue-collar workers were sympathetic to him, vs. 10 % of white-collar workers). Resentment against blacks and even against the government is likely to worsen.²⁶

Although this report offered few specific policy recommendations, the resentment of white workers against blacks and welfare recipients featured as a repeated motif in the working group’s analysis. They put together a table entitled: “*Welfare Recipient VS Blue Collar Workers*” (see Table 1 below), which showed that states with “liberal welfare provisions” gave distinct advantages to the welfare recipient over the blue-collar worker.²⁷ The White House’s belief in the potential for welfare policy to help or hinder their efforts to appeal to the “blue-collar” constituency is demonstrated by the devotion of top cabinet-level officials and political advisors to the planning efforts of this working group and by their focus on welfare as one of the few specific policy issues featured in their report.

The Southern Strategy

While welfare featured fairly prominently when formulating their “northern” strategy, it was almost totally eclipsed by civil rights when considering appeals to the south (Graham 1991, 1996; Kotlowski 2001). Nixon was, nonetheless, interested in ensuring that his welfare reform would be acceptable to Republican Party leaders in the south and to southern Democrats in the Congress. The south was, of course, central to their overarching ambition to cement a new conservative majority. Harry Dent, who was Nixon’s main political operative in the south, wrote to Haldeman and Ehrlichman early on in Nixon’s first term, recognizing the south’s centrality to their political ambitions:

24. George Schultz, June 20, 1970, “Memorandum to John D. Ehrlichman,” Series I, Box 255, Folder 10: Blue Collar 1970, Moynihan papers.

25. George Schultz, June 20, 1970, “Memorandum for John D. Ehrlichman: Executive Secretary Tantamount, Domestic Affairs Council,” pp. 1-3, Series I, Box 255, Folder 10: Blue Collar 1970, Moynihan papers.

26. *Ibid.*, 3.

27. *Welfare Recipient VS Blue Collar Workers*, n.d., Series I, Box 255. Folder 11: Nixon Administration Files, Blue Collar Workers, George P. Shultz Discussion Group 1970, Moynihan papers.

TABLE 1
Welfare Recipient vs. Blue-Collar Workers

	<i>Welfare Recipient</i>	<i>Blue Collar Workers</i>
1. Income	Up to 4,000 a year	4,000-8,000 a year
2. Work	Does little or none	Works regularly and hard
3. State Income	Up to 4,000 a year	None
4. Taxes	Pays none	Pays about 5-8% of income*
5. Government	Eligible for: Benefits	Eligible for none of these benefits
	– Food stamps	
	– Medical care	
	– Child Care	*Percentages are for a family of 4, with
	– Legal aid	\$5,000 to \$7,500 income, in 1973. (No tax
	– Public housing	will be paid on \$4,000 income.) Figures do
	– Family planning	not include social security tax (about 6% of
		income) and state and local income, sales
		and property taxes (about 7% of income.)

Note: Comparison portrays inequitable position of low-income workers vis á vis welfare recipients (example based on state with liberal welfare provisions).

Source: Papers of Daniel P. Moynihan, Series I, Box 255, Folder 11, Nixon Administration S File, Blue Collar Workers, George P. Shultz Discussion Group 1970.

[W]e must look to the south politically to further develop the two-party system, get new Congressmen and Congressional control, win Congressional support for the Nixon program, and . . . re-election in 1972.²⁸

But while the “southern strategy” was a pillar of their political efforts, civil rights was the dominant issue for this region. Dent noted five major issues that would define the president’s image in the south, and welfare was not included.²⁹ Likewise, in a November 1970 meeting between Nixon and southern leaders, including South Carolina Senator Strom Thurmond and Arizona Senator and former presidential nominee Barry Goldwater, the issue of welfare was notably absent from the discussion.³⁰

Dent defined the Nixon southern strategy as a centrist one: “The only policy we have with respect to the South is to include it as an equal part of the country, to apply the same rules” as are applied everywhere else (Boyd 1970, 63) Nixon had always pursued a moderate strategy on civil rights, consciously making a “distinction between desegregation and integration, saying the former represented his policy.”³¹ He pointed out to southern leaders that he was being forced to carry out court orders for desegregation but that his stand against busing would be steadfast. At the same time, he reassured them

28. Harry Dent, February 3, 1969, “Memorandum to Bob Haldeman and John Ehrlichman,” POF, Box 1: File: President’s Handwriting, February 1969, NPM.

29. *Ibid.*, 1.

30. Gregg Petersmeyer, August 12, 1970, “Memorandum for Mr. Brown: Dent minutes for last Thursday’s meeting of Southerners and other Conservatives with the President,” Attached Report from Harry Dent, August 6, 1970, Box 292, Folder: HRH-Political-1970. RM, CM, WHSE, SMOF, H. R. Haldeman, RNPL.

31. *Ibid.*, 3 (see also Kotlowski 2001, chap. 1; Graham 1991, 1996).

that his Department of Justice would not actively enforce desegregation: “[T]here will be no lawyers sent to the South for the purposes of coercion.”³²

Southern leaders had also expressed concerns about northern racial conflict, especially the housing integration policies being pursued by Nixon’s Housing and Urban Development Secretary, George Romney. Referring to Romney’s efforts, Nixon again reassured: “[T]his was not the policy of this administration,” and he would block any further such efforts.³³ His racial conservatism was designed not only to gain the support of southern conservatives, but to do so while avoiding alienating northern white voters. Therefore, he opposed federally enforced housing integration policy in the north, trumpeted his efforts to appoint a southern conservative to the Supreme Court for the south, and vigorously opposed busing to appeal to conservatives in both regions and parties.³⁴

Nixon’s conservatism on civil rights was a sharp contrast to the aggressive civil rights leadership of President Lyndon Johnson. Johnson had passed historic civil rights legislation, ending *de jure* segregation and providing strong enforcement of voting rights for blacks throughout the south (Graham 1990, pt. II). Nixon sought to do only what the courts required but nothing more (Panetta and Gall 1971). On the other hand, Nixon was much more of a centrist on this issue than many conservatives, especially in contrast to the openly segregationist Wallace and to the principled conservative opposition to federal civil rights enforcement from Goldwater (Carter 2000; Graham 1996; Hoff 1994, chap. 3; Kotlowski 2001; McGirr 2001).³⁵

Nixon pursued a new kind of racial conservatism. He told his second Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW), Elliot Richardson, that southerners did not “want to be thought of as racist . . . there’s as much racism in the north as in the south” (Ehrlichman 1982, 232). Ehrlichman wrote that a “subliminal appeal to the anti-black voter was always in Nixon’s statements and speeches on schools and housing.” Nixon “couched his views in such a way that a citizen could avoid admitting to himself that he was attracted by a racist appeal” (Ehrlichman 1982, 222, 223).

Although welfare reform was not central to the southern strategy, the administration remained committed to pursuing southern support for the FAP. Harry Dent was not part of the planning of the FAP and was only involved when Nixon wanted to generate congressional support for his welfare reform (Kotlowski 1998, 211). Still, Moynihan thought that the FAP would be particularly beneficial for the south, telling Nixon that 8 of the 10 states with the highest percentages of welfare recipients at the end of 1969 were in the south, and that the region also had the lowest average welfare payments. These states would have their benefit levels raised most significantly by the FAP, while

32. Gregg Petersmeyer, August 12, 1970, “Memorandum for Mr. Brown,” 9, Box 292, Folder: HRH-Political-1970. RM, CM, WHSF, SMOF, H. R. Haldeman, RNPL.

33. Ibid., Attached Report from Harry Dent: “Minutes on President’s Meeting with Southerners, August 6, 1970,” 10.

34. President Nixon, January 20, 1971. “Memorandum for H. R. Haldeman,” Box 230, Folder: P Memos 1971. RM, CM, WHSF, SMOF, H. R. Haldeman, RNPL.

35. Goldwater had been the Republican Party’s presidential nominee in 1964, losing every state except the five deep-south states and his home state of Arizona. Wallace had run as a Democrat in 1964, as an independent in 1968, and again in 1972 until a failed assassination attempt crippled him from the waist down and ended his presidential bid.

welfare spending by the states of the deep south would be cut by 50 % (Burke and Burke 1974, 47; Moynihan 1973, 40-41). In July of 1970, Moynihan gave a speech where he argued that the FAP would not only “abolish poverty,” but that it would “heal the wounds of the south” and “make one people out of one nation.”³⁶

Welfare Reform and Nixon’s Political Strategy

The welfare issue reached the top of the president’s domestic policy agenda for reasons that were more urgent than Nixon’s long-term political objectives. Still, the president selected the FAP over conservative alternatives largely because it was the only plan that would redistribute welfare to the working poor, the majority of whom were white. As the 1970 midterm elections approached, the value of FAP to the president’s political efforts became more pronounced. Nixon’s welfare rhetoric became increasingly targeted for this purpose, criticizing AFDC for assisting mostly nonworking single mothers while promising that FAP would aid working, two-parent families.

However, in the spring of 1969, political strategy was only one of many considerations in designing a welfare reform package. First, Nixon wanted to sharply distinguish his domestic program from his liberal predecessors. Although President Johnson had launched a War on Poverty in 1964, welfare had been consciously restricted from his antipoverty policy, as Johnson favored services programs over expanding federal income support (Davies 1996, chaps. 1-2). Nixon would do what Johnson had not: he would take on the task of reforming federal public assistance. Moreover, as Nixon contemplated his competition for the 1972 campaign, he understood that Massachusetts Senator Edward Kennedy would likely be his opponent and that he, or any other candidate that he would face, would probably advance more liberal social welfare programs.³⁷ Nixon sought to clearly distinguish his approach from liberals that might challenge him politically. At the same time, the FAP was an effort to gain power over New Deal bureaucracies, especially in the Department of HEW, and to thereby dismantle institutionalized Democratic Party power. It would eliminate the AFDC program entirely, remove state governments from any welfare administration, and transfer responsibility from HEW to the Social Security Administration. Moreover, the FAP was an incomes strategy and would therefore remove social workers from the implementation of federal welfare. This was particularly important to the president, who strongly disliked social workers. In April 1969, just after a cabinet meeting where the president decided upon the FAP, Moynihan told a colleague in the UAC, “The President asked me, ‘Will the FSS [Family Security System, which was later renamed FAP] get rid of social workers?’ and I promised him it would wipe them out!” (Burke and Burke 1974, 67).

36. Daniel P. Moynihan, July 1, 1970, “Remarks by Daniel P. Moynihan before the Urban Coalition Action Council,” Box 6, File: July 1970, WHSF, SMOF, POF, President’s Handwriting, NPM.

37. In March of 1969, Nixon approved around-the-clock surveillance of Senator Kennedy by his on-staff detective, Jack Caufield. On July 20, 1969, when Kennedy crashed his car off a bridge in Martha’s Vineyard, killing Mary Jo Kopechne and fleeing the scene, Nixon sent Caufield to pose as a reporter. Nixon remained concerned about Kennedy’s candidacy for the 1972 election, and on December 9, 1970, Nixon sought to have pictures of the senator dancing with an Italian princess circulated to other Democratic Party candidates (Reeves 2001, 67, 100-01, 281).

The FAP was also an effort to address the urgent problems of exploding growth in AFDC and the threat of further urban rioting. Racial violence had wracked American cities every summer since the Watts riot of 1965, and the president had campaigned on a “law and order” platform. He and his advisors were intent on preventing any racial violence in the summer of 1969, and there were strong reasons to believe that improving federal welfare could be an effective component of this prevention effort (Kerner Commission 1968; Moynihan 1973, 75-82; Steensland 2008, 68-69). Nixon’s first act as president was the creation of a new UAC modeled after the National Security Council (Nixon 1978, 424-25). In his first news conference, he identified the “problems of our cities” as one of the most urgent matters facing the nation (Nixon 1970, 1-A). The welfare reform package would be hatched from the UAC rather than HEW or OEO, revealing the administration’s conceptualization of the welfare problem being directly related to the urban crisis.

At the same time, Nixon had the opportunity to replace a major program of the New Deal. Part of the 1935 Social Security Act, AFDC was originally intended as support for dependent children in families without a male earner (Bell 1965; Orloff 1988, 74-75; Skocpol 1992, chap. 8). While always controversial, by the late 1960s AFDC was the target of increasingly passionate criticism, from both the Left and the Right (Chappell 2010; Ellwood 1988; Piven and Cloward 1971; Reese 2005). Between 1965 and 1970, it had exploded in size, by 113% in those five years alone (U.S. Social Security Administration, 1965, 1975, author’s calculations). Protests of welfare’s subsistence-level benefits and oftentimes demeaning eligibility determinations by the Left were countered by conservative critiques that claimed welfare discouraged work, encouraged dependency, broke-up two-parent families, and encouraged out-of-wedlock childbearing (Kornbluh 2007; Mead, 1986; Murray 1984; Piven and Cloward 1971; Reese 2005, chap. 7). By 1968, Moynihan articulated a widely held view when he identified a growing “welfare crisis” (Moynihan 1968).

It was no accident that Nixon named Moynihan as the director of his UAC, giving him the lead role in the development of the administration’s welfare reform. Moynihan was Nixon’s “liberal” appointee, the only high-level member of the Johnson administration to be in his cabinet. At the same time, he had become notorious among many liberals and civil rights leaders for his 1965 report on the “The Negro Family,” written as President Johnson’s assistant secretary of labor for policy development. The report generated tremendous controversy because Moynihan argued that African Americans had become a matriarchal society and that this produced pathological outcomes including widespread poverty and welfare dependency (Davies 1996, chap. 4; Estes 2005, chap. 5; Rainwater and Yancey 1967). Moynihan’s reputation as an outcast from the liberal and civil rights establishment made him very appealing to Nixon as his UAC chairman. Moynihan would also be a liberal foil to the conservatism of Nixon’s chief domestic policy advisor, Arthur F. Burns. Burns had been Eisenhower’s chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers and a close confidant to Nixon when he was vice president. Although Nixon appointed Burns as his primary domestic policy advisor, on welfare reform he turned to Moynihan, setting up a cabinet-level conflict between Burns, the Eisenhower Republican, and Moynihan, the iconoclastic liberal. By the summer of 1969, Nixon put

Ehrlichman in charge of his domestic policy to mediate the policy-making feuds between Moynihan and Burns (Hoff 1994, 125-29).

Nixon also appointed his 1960 campaign manager and good friend, Robert H. Finch, to be Secretary of HEW (Ehrlichman 1982, 47). Finch persuaded Nixon to appoint Moynihan and then proceeded to ally himself with Moynihan in pushing for an expansive welfare reform proposal. Early on in the process, Finch was a strong advocate for Moynihan's proposal in the Nixon cabinet (Hoff-Wilson 1991, 98). His influence, however, waned quickly, as Moynihan and Burns became the leading proponents of liberal and conservative welfare reform proposals, and Ehrlichman and Labor Secretary Shultz intervened as forces for compromise. Ehrlichman observed that Finch really was ineffectual as a policy leader, that he "had no talent whatever for running a campaign or . . . the Department of [HEW]" (Ehrlichman 1982, 47). Finch was pushed out of Nixon's inner circle when he pursued a more liberal civil rights policy early on in the administration and was frequently opposed by Attorney General John Mitchell, who had run Nixon's successful 1968 campaign (Ehrlichman 1982, 88-89).³⁸

The FAP and the Working Poor

The urban and welfare crises and the need to establish a new, conservative social policy as a contrast to Johnson's War on Poverty and other potential liberal challenges explains how welfare reform reached the top of the administration's domestic policy agenda, but not why Nixon selected the FAP over more conservative alternatives. The northern political strategy was central to this choice. The FAP would completely replace AFDC, and would extend coverage to the working poor. As the report of Moynihan's UAC Committee on Welfare noted in their first draft of the FAP, "[a]bove all, this plan would eliminate the much criticized AFDC program." Moynihan's notes from his meetings with the president in July of 1969 indicate that the president was "concerned about people who work and are poor . . . about people who work and pay taxes."³⁹ Moreover, the committee called attention to the racial dynamic involved:

These [welfare] rolls have become increasingly black . . . In 1967 46% of recipient families of AFDC were black, compared to 43.1% in 1961. At the same time, families designated as poor, but which were headed by a male not eligible for welfare were 70% white.⁴⁰

The FAP would refocus federal welfare toward this latter group. According to one estimate, while the recipients of AFDC were 51.7% nonwhite in 1969, the FAP would have been 38.6% nonwhite by 1972 (Bowler 1974, app. table 8.1).

38. Finch's archival records at the RNPL have very few records of any substance on the FAP, which only demonstrates his irrelevance to the central debates over welfare reform within the administration. See Robert Finch, Presidential historical materials, RNPL.

39. Daniel P. Moynihan, July 15-16, 1969, Handwritten notes, Moynihan papers, Nixon Administration Series.

40. Urban Affairs Council, April 4, 1969, "Report of the Committee on Welfare—DRAFT," 8-9, WHSF, SMOF, John Ehrlichman, Special Subject Files, Box 38, File: Council for Urban Affairs, Family Security System, NPM.

Arthur F. Burns proposed a relatively conservative alternative to the UAC proposal, one that would deny all welfare benefits to recipients refusing training or work. He argued against including the working poor as part of his welfare reform for three reasons:

- (1) Once the focus of . . . welfare . . . shifts from relief to work . . . able-bodied people will be on welfare only temporarily. The resentment of welfare by the working poor is a product of the long-term welfare "cheat"
- (2) The working poor don't want income supplements from government.
- (3) There are better ways of helping the working poor. . . . exempting [them] from federal income tax . . . training programs.⁴¹

Paul McCracken, chair of the President's Council of Economic Advisers, Robert Mayo, budget director, and Paul Kennedy, treasury secretary, all signed a memorandum from Burns outlining their opposition to the FAP. However, Nixon selected the FAP over Burns' proposal and his advisors' objections because the FAP was the only alternative available to him that would completely eliminate AFDC and because it would cover the working poor (Burke and Burke 1974, 95).

"The Revolt of the White Lower Middle Class"

Burns became increasingly concerned about the proposed welfare reform from Moynihan's UAC, especially about the potential backlash from the white working class. On May 16, 1969, he gave President Nixon a copy of Pete Hamill's *New York* magazine article entitled, "The Revolt of the White Lower Middle Class," along with a memo recommending against the Family Security System (FSS) (Steenland 2008, 104-07). The article identified resentment by working-class white ethnics against blacks, and particularly black welfare recipients:

Another man said to Hamill: "Who feeds my wife and kid if I'm dead? Lindsay? The poverty program? You know the answer: Nobody. But the niggers, they don't worry about it. They take the welfare and sit out on the stoop drinkin' cheap wine and throwin' the bottles on the street."⁴²

Burns argued that the "bitterness of the urban white worker, who feels he is supporting Negroes on relief" was a "social and political fact of first-rate importance." His response was to argue for a "strict work requirement." Without this, he argued, the proposed FAP would "enhance the growing bitterness of the white lower middle class."⁴³

On May 27, Nixon sent Burns' comments along to Ehrlichman and asked him to have Shultz, Finch, and Moynihan respond to the "disturbing thesis of this article and to

41. Arthur Burns, July 14, 1969, "Memorandum for the President: *A Plan for Welfare Reform*," 10-12, Box 38, File: Welfare Book, Family Security System 1969, 1 of 2, WHSF, SF, Ehrlichman, NPM.

42. Arthur Burns, May 26, 1969, "Memorandum to the President," 2, Box 39. File: Revolt of the White Lower Middle Class, attached to Memorandum from Alexander P. Butterfield to John D. Ehrlichman, June 2, 1969, WHSF, SMOF, SSF, Ehrlichman.

43. *Ibid.*, 3-4.

indicate what the government can do about it.” Moynihan responded that the FAP would alleviate the growing alienation of the white working class, because it would overcome the economic and racial divisions introduced by the liberal programs of the 1960s. The FAP “would aid the working poor (sixty percent of whom are white) as well as the wholly dependent poor.”⁴⁴ The attention given to this article from the president and his top domestic advisors suggests that the white working class had become centrally important in the decision to propose the FAP. Welfare reform would be part of the administration’s broader efforts to address the problem of the “blue-collar worker.” It would do so by redistributing liberal social welfare program benefits to the elements of the new conservative majority. Moreover, in eliminating AFDC and focusing benefits on the working poor, the FAP would be a symbolic effort to respond to the growing anger of the white working class. Just beneath the surface, in each of these elements of the larger welfare reform strategy, was the brewing racial division between northern white working-class ethnics and African Americans.

Selling Welfare Reform to the Nation: the Rhetorical Strategy

In preparing to present the FAP to the American people on national television in August of 1969, Nixon wanted to emphasize that his proposal would end welfare and redirect federal assistance to the white working poor. In a meeting with Ehrlichman and William Safire, his speechwriter for this address, Nixon stressed that the “most important thing about [the] speech is rhetoric.” Nixon zeroed in on his political strategy, emphasizing that they should avoid trying to “appeal to welfare unemployed blacks” but instead should concentrate on speaking “to working poor and taxpayers.” The key line that he wanted emphasized was to “get people off welfare rolls and onto payrolls,” noting at the same time that they should begin the speech with a “head on attack” on the “utter mess welfare is in” and the “need for an entirely new approach.”⁴⁵

These concerns, reflecting the increasing importance of his overarching political strategy in shaping his approach to welfare, were incorporated into the president’s nationally televised address announcing the FAP to the nation. This was meant to be a dramatic announcement that would address the welfare crisis while distinguishing his approach from the services strategy of his liberal predecessors. AFDC assisted only single mothers with children, and the FAP assisted both single-parent and two-parent families. AFDC had no work incentives or requirements, and the FAP had both. Most importantly, FAP emphasized assistance to the white working poor, rather than nonworking racial minorities. The president began by attacking the existing welfare program and promising to end it:

Whether measured by the anguish of the poor themselves, or by the drastically mounting burden on the taxpayer, the present welfare system has to be judged a colossal failure.

That is why tonight I therefore propose [to] abolish the present welfare system and that we adopt in its place a new family assistance system.

44. Daniel P. Moynihan, May 17, 1969, “Memorandum for the President,” Series I, Box 243. Folder 8: Nixon Administration, Correspondence, Memoranda, President, May 1969, Moynihan papers.

45. H. R. Haldeman, July 18, 1969, Notes in handwritten diary, Box 40, File: July–September 1969, WHSE, SMOF, Haldeman, NPM.

He recognized that welfare was “bitterly resented by the man who works,” and explicitly called attention to the benefits that his proposal would provide to working-class voters. “[F]or the first time, the government would recognize that it has no less an obligation to the working poor than to the nonworking poor” (Nixon 1969). The FAP would assist the working poor, the majority of whom were white. AFDC only assisted the nonworking able-bodied poor, and a majority of the public believed that these recipients were primarily black and that they were “the undeserving poor” (Katz 1989; Steensland 2008, chap. 4).

By the time they were approaching the 1972 presidential election, however, the emphasis on providing benefits to the working poor had been dropped in the president’s rhetoric. Welfare reform, nonetheless, remained high on the list of important issues for that campaign. Colson wrote to Haldeman in July of 1971 that there were six key issues, including “Peace,” “Times are Good,” “Drugs and Crime,” “Reduction of Property Taxes,” issues aimed at “Special Interest Pocketbooks” (including “conservative labor”), and “welfare reform.”⁴⁶ Nixon would be campaigning on the welfare issue, but he wanted to emphasize an antiwelfare rhetoric that stressed getting recipients to work. In an Oval Office discussion of welfare reform on May 12, 1971, Nixon outlined this rhetorical strategy to Haldeman:

Seventy-five percent of the people are against giving more money to people on welfare . . . *any* more money. I will not emphasize that side of it. Let Moynihan talk about that . . . This looks like Nixon supports giving more welfare to black bastards. The emphasis should be: I support welfare reform. Work requirement, work requirement, work requirement.⁴⁷

Nixon wanted Haldeman to have the rest of his cabinet to emphasize this “line.”

The Politics of FAP’s Failure

While the FAP was being positioned for political appeals to northern white voters, the support of southern members of Congress was also of great concern to the administration. The key congressional committees that would handle their welfare reform legislation were chaired by southern Democrats—Wilbur Mills in the House Ways and Means Committee and Russell Long in the Senate Finance Committee. Moreover, Nixon knew that support from conservative Democrats in the Congress would be essential to pass their legislation, given that Republicans were a minority of both houses. They therefore spent considerable energy lobbying for the bill among southern political leaders. For example, on August 11, Ehrlichman outlined the benefits of the FAP to Republican Party leaders in the southern states:

46. Charles Colson, July 6, 1971, “Memorandum for H.R. Haldeman,” Box 4, File: July 1971, RM, CM, WHSF, SMOF, Colson, Charles, RNPL.

47. President Nixon, May 13, 1971, 9:57 a.m. Oval Office Recorded Conversation on Welfare Reform with H. R. Haldeman, Conversation 498-2, Miller Center for Public Affairs, Presidential Recording Program. <http://millercenter.org/academic/presidentialrecordings> (accessed April 14, 2012).

The President's new welfare reform program should prove to be quite a political boon to the South. Approximately 50% of the recipients of the program will live in the South, and approximately 62% of the expenditures from the federal government will be going into the southern states.⁴⁸

Ehrlichman attached information that was designed to help these southern Republicans sell the program to party leadership, membership, and the public. He called their attention to the "strong work requirements" and stated that if handled correctly it could be used to "get some traditional Democrat votes loosened up and capture some votes that went the third party route in 1968."⁴⁹ However, as Moynihan, Ehrlichman, and Nixon would soon find out, southerners were less interested in the material benefits that would accrue to their region than in the overt specter of a broad expansion of federal welfare, which few whites in that region viewed positively.

Because of the threat it represented to existing inequality in all aspects of southern race relations, southern congressional leaders opposed the FAP (Quadagno 1994, chap. 5). Access to AFDC payments had historically been tightly restricted for blacks in the south (Bell 1965; Lieberman 1998). Welfare caseloads in the deep south were 50 recipient families for every 1,000 families, as opposed to 50 for every 125 families in New York City. In Mississippi, 55% of the state population was below poverty, but only 14% received any kind of assistance; in Alabama 929,000 in 1970 lacked income for a marginal diet, but only 277,000 benefited from the USDA's food assistance programs (Quadagno 1990, 24). Moreover, southern blacks who were active on behalf of civil rights or who registered to vote were often excluded from welfare, according to a 1968 report by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (Quadagno 1990, 25). The FAP would have raised the wages of blacks in the south, undermining local labor markets that depended on the regular and easy supply of low-skilled black labor. Under the FAP, instead of having to rely upon these low-wage seasonal jobs, blacks could have received welfare that would have made easy refusal of low-paying work a possibility.

As a result, despite the increased welfare assistance that the FAP would have provided for the southern states, their congressional leadership opposed it. Significantly, Phil Landrum (D-GA) was one of three negative votes against the FAP on the Ways and Means Committee. In 1964, Landrum had been the high-profile lead sponsor of President Johnson's War on Poverty legislation. However, he opposed the FAP, saying "There's not going to be anybody left to roll these wheelbarrows and press these shirts" (Quadagno 1990, 23). Landrum's support for Johnson's antipoverty program and opposition to Nixon's welfare reform dramatically illustrates the power of race in shaping the south's reaction to welfare proposals. Although the FAP would have benefited Dixie far more than any other region, the divisive issue of race undermined their support for any expansive welfare reform (Moynihan 1973; O'Connor 1998).

48. John D. Ehrlichman, August 11, 1969, "Memorandum to State Chairmen and Members of the National Committee of the Southern States," Box 39. File: Welfare Book, Reaction 1969, WHSF, SMOE, Ehrlichman, NPM.

49. Ibid.

Lobbying the Northern States

Part of Nixon's northern strategy was to support Republican leaders in traditionally Democratic states, including the big welfare states of California, New York, Pennsylvania, and Illinois, which generally voted Democratic (except for California). There were Republican governors for each of these states, and they exerted pressure on the president to provide relief from the growing cost of welfare (Burke and Burke 1974, 41; Reichley 1981, 132). New York Republican Governor Rockefeller asked that the federal government assume at least part of the costs for any supplements to the minimum FAP payment, which would be required of states with higher AFDC benefits (Burke and Burke 1974, chap. 5, esp. 96-97). This provision made it into the Nixon administration proposal, as they sought support from white Democrats in these northern states.

This political strategy was reflected in a briefing given to these governors, just prior to the introduction of the FAP. Ehrlichman's notes from that meeting tally the federal money that would be provided for key Republican-governed states, combining welfare reform and revenue sharing proposals. His notes highlight Ohio, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, California, and New York. All of these states were governed by Republicans in 1968 (Council of State Governments 1968, 133). Ehrlichman's notes for the meeting were explicit: his list was an effort to counter the claims by "big industrial states," which "say we're wooing the South, not helping [their] financial burdens."⁵⁰ The blue-collar disaffected urban white ethnics, who seemed to have captured the president's attention in the deliberations over FAP's politics, were concentrated in these states.

The Failure of New Deal Politics for the Silent Majority

While the political goals that the administration sought to meet with FAP were in keeping with a new conservative, populist agenda, the program elements themselves were liberal. As the midterm elections of 1970 illustrated the failure of their proposal to appeal to an emerging conservative majority, Nixon began to back away from his legislative proposal. The FAP became more and more an opportunity for launching campaign rhetoric attacking welfare. This too was aimed at the white working class, predicated upon their growing resentments of African Americans on welfare.

Indeed, the president, according to more than one account, was at best ambivalent regarding the passage of his proposal and possibly even opposed to it actually being enacted (Ambrose 1989, 2: 290-99, 405-06; Kellerman, 1984, chap. 8). After the House Ways and Means Committee reported out a clean committee bill on March 11, 1970 (HR 16311), the House passed the measure by a roll-call vote of 243-155. Democrats voted 141-83 in favor of the bill, and Republicans voted 102-72. The south was widely opposed to the FAP because, as noted above, the bill threatened the racial low-wage labor system that institutional arrangements under the AFDC program permitted. Seventeen southern representatives voted for the measure, and 85 opposed it. The FAP would encounter its greatest problems, however, in the Senate Finance Committee. As soon as the committee

50. John D. Ehrlichman, 1969, "Handwritten notes," n.d. Box 39, File: August 1969. WHSF, SMOF, Ehrlichman papers.

began hearings on the bill, opposition emerged from both sides of the aisle. After only three days of hearings in late April and early May of 1970, the committee, under Russell B. Long's (D-LA) chairmanship, sent the measure back to the White House for reworking. A revised plan was sent back to the Senate on June 10 (Congressional Quarterly, Inc., & CQ Press 1973, 624-27).

If Nixon was interested in ensuring his proposal's enactment, he did not seem to work energetically to persuade members of congress to vote in its favor. Immediately after the introduction of his proposal to the Ways and Means Committee, which Moynihan and others mistakenly felt would be more difficult to traverse than the Senate Finance committee, Nixon left for San Clemente for a month (Haldeman 1994, 79-85). At a later point in the legislative process, one month after the Finance Committee sent the bill back to the White House in June of 1970, Nixon privately remarked to Haldeman and Ehrlichman that he wanted to make sure that the FAP was defeated. This was to occur surreptitiously, as Haldeman recounted in his diary, referring to President Nixon as "P":

P emphasizing basing all scheduling and other decisions on political—emphasize Italians, Poles, Elks and Rotarians, eliminate Jews, Blacks, Youth—about Family Assistance Plan, wants to be sure its killed by Democrats and that we make a big play for it, but don't let it pass, can't afford it. (Haldeman 1994, 181-82)

For Nixon, once passage of the FAP became difficult, it was only useful to him as a rhetorical wedge issue, aimed at appealing to white working- and middle-class ethnics.

Nixon recognized that the FAP faced a challenge in the Senate Finance Committee. Nonetheless, Barbara Kellerman's (1984) interviews with key finance committee members indicate that Nixon did little lobbying of them. By mid-September of 1970, Nixon stopped any lobbying, holding only one further meeting with members of the finance committee prior to their crucial November vote. The recollections of those in attendance at this meeting were that the president was lukewarm in his enthusiasm for his own proposal (Kellerman 1984, 142-44). Moynihan's memos to the president at this time reflected his frustration with the inaction of the president on behalf of the FAP. In May of 1970, he virtually begged the president to ramp up his lobbying efforts:

I wonder if you would consider taking personal charge of the effort to get Family Assistance through the Senate . . . I think we need you to take personal command . . . I think it is extremely important that you ask Senator Williams down for lunch.⁵¹

The president, however, never followed up with Moynihan's requests. By July of 1970, Moynihan despaired: "At least half a dozen persons with whom I have talked in the past two days have said to me that the when they have visited Senators on this subject they have been told the administration really isn't behind the bill."⁵²

51. Daniel Moynihan, May 11, 1970. "Memorandum to President Nixon," Box I 244, Folder 11: May 1970, Moynihan papers.

52. Daniel Moynihan, July 2, 1970, "Confidential Memorandum from Daniel P. Moynihan to President Nixon," J Box I 244, Folder 13: July 1970, Moynihan papers.

As his legislative efforts declined, however, Nixon increased his rhetorical efforts on behalf of his FAP. In October and November, the president “pitched FAP to the public at nearly every stop” (Kellerman 1984, 143). After the defeat of the original FAP by the Senate Finance Committee, Nixon reintroduced the proposal as HR 1. In his 1971 State of the Union message, Nixon returned to his rhetoric concerning the FAP, calling it the most important of his six legislative priorities. In July of 1971, Colson responded to a request from Haldeman for a list of the “key issues of 1972.” Colson listed only six, with “Welfare Reform” the final entry: “We have a real opportunity here, particularly if we have succeeded in the enactment of our legislation. Everybody is against welfare loafers and we are well out front on this issue.” He also noted that they could appeal to the “hard hats” and “Teamsters.”⁵³ Again the rhetoric was the point. After campaigning for congressional midterm elections on this issue, once it became clear that the bill would be difficult to pass, Nixon dropped his active support. Moreover, the substance of the rhetoric was not aimed at calling attention to the benefits of the proposed FAP for the working poor, but was rather aimed at accessing the antiwelfare resentment that the “blue-collar” working group and that Pete Hamill had identified among white ethnic, working- and middle-class voters in the north. Kellerman found that during this time Nixon did not lobby labor, business, members of the press, or professional groups to promote his policy. Nor, did he reach out to the Republican minority leadership on the Finance Committee such as Wallace Bennett (Kellerman 1984, 152). The Finance Committee did not act to approve HR 1 in 1971 and in 1972 dropped the FAP completely. The FAP was essentially a dead proposal.

Conclusions: The FAP’s Political Legacy

While the FAP never passed, the episode left an important political legacy for subsequent conservative strategists. While a New Deal redistributive approach was discredited as a conservative political strategy, the veiled racial backlash embodied in Nixon’s antiwelfare rhetoric remained a powerful component of subsequent efforts to draw together a new Republican majority coalition (Chappell 2010; Edsall and Edsall 1991; Lassiter 2007; Reese 2005). There were a multitude of reasons that welfare reform reached the president’s agenda, but Nixon selected a liberal welfare reform proposal over conservative alternatives because only the FAP would have completely replaced AFDC, and only the FAP alternative would have covered the working poor. But the effort to provide financial assistance to southern states for their welfare expenditures was a failed policy. While Republicans and Democrats voted for the bill—with 63% of Democrats and 59% of Republicans voting for it in the House, no votes came from Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, or South Carolina (Moynihan 1973, 437-38). George H. W. Bush, who voted in favor of the FAP as a member of the Texas House delegation, faced a subsequent election challenge by Lloyd Bentsen, who accused him of having voted to put “millions more on welfare” (Moynihan 1973, 438).

53. Charles Colson, July 2, 1971, “Memorandum for H.R. Haldeman: Your Memo of June 29—Key Issues of 1972.” J Box 4, File: July 1971, RM, CM, WHSE, SMOF, Charles Colson.

Conservative leaders since Nixon have learned well the lessons of FAP's failure. Just as Nixon learned from Barry Goldwater's failed bid for the presidency that opposing civil rights would win few votes outside of the south, Ronald Reagan learned from Nixon's failed FAP that expanding welfare to the working poor would garner few votes from conservatives. By 1968, welfare had become a politically charged issue, a conduit for public anxieties over race, gender, and broad cultural change (Reese 2005; Schram, Soss, and Fording 2003; Steensland 2008). Nixon operated from within a New Deal politics paradigm, seeking to redirect federal welfare benefits toward his preferred constituents (Lowi 1979; Milkis 1993). But those constituents never rallied to support the extension of federal welfare, despite the fact that they would have been the direct beneficiaries. Just as southerners opposed the FAP as an expansion of welfare, northern white voters supported Nixon's antiwelfare rhetoric but saw the FAP as a proposal to put white workers on welfare, something that was an anathema to the emerging cultural backlash against welfare. Reagan, however, understood that the paradigm had shifted, that cutting welfare provided much more political mileage than redistributing it toward the working poor (Palmer and Sawhill 1984; Stockman 1986).⁵⁴ By the end of Reagan's presidency, the potential to "end welfare as we know it" had become increasingly tangible—both as a policy reform and as a political appeal for the votes of the "silent majority." The realization of that goal before the end of the twentieth century reflected the triumph of political culture over political economy in American politics.

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54. David Stockman, President Reagan's director for the Office of Management and Budget, wrote candidly about the budget-cutting agenda of President Reagan: "The Reagan Revolution as I had defined it, required a frontal assault on the American welfare state. . . . Forty years' worth of promises, subventions, entitlements and safety nets issued by the federal government . . . would have to be scrapped or drastically modified" (Stockman 1986, 8).

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