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Kem Roper
University of Louisville

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FROM THE "WAR ON POVERTY" TO REAGAN'S "NEW RIGHT," WHAT'S IN A

NAME? THE SYMBOLIC SIGNIFICANCE OF THE "WELFARE QUEEN" IN

POLITICS AND PUBLIC DISCOURSE.

by

KEM ROPER

B.A., Oakwood University, 1995

M.A., UA Huntsville, 2002

A Dissertation

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FROM THE "WAR ON POVERTY" TO REAGAN'S "NEW RIGHT," WHAT'S IN A NAME? THE SYMBOLIC SIGNIFICANCE OF THE "WELFARE QUEEN" IN POLITICS AND PUBLIC DISCOURSE

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A Dissertation Approved on

November 16, 2012

By the following Dissertation Committee

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Dr. Debra Journet

_____

Dr. Karen Kopelson

_____

Dr. David Anderson

_____

Dr. Carol Mattingly

_____

Dr. Nancy Theriot

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I suppose I could try and fool myself into thinking I have accomplished this feat alone. But, then, all of you reading this would know the truth, so there's really no point in kidding myself. To be sure, I would not have even attempted this monumental task were it not for the incredible supporting and encouraging circle of friends, family, associates and colleagues who have ushered me along this sometimes treacherous journey.

First, let me pay due homage to my Heavenly Father upon whom I have relied for strength and guidance all the days of my life. It is God and God alone who deserves all glory and honor. I am but a vessel and servant whose aim is to do His bidding. I pray my work is not in vain.

Second, I cannot think of a more fitting gift that my Creator could have given me than the handsome, intelligent, witty, supportive and loving husband that I have. Everett, I don't know if you realize how much I owe you. With your love and encouragement you have made me believe that I can do anything! I have attempted things I never would have otherwise; I have reached beyond myself and beyond what I ever would have thought possible. Through you, God has pushed me out of my comfort zone and challenged me to trust Him to do great things. Thank you for believing in me when I didn't believe in myself. Thank you for being that shoulder that I cried on in the darkness when I was sure the very shadow of death would overtake me. Thanks, also, for exercising tough love at times and telling me to "get back in there and fight." I am stronger today because of you.

Then, of course, how grateful I am for our two beautiful children! Thank you Eryn and Edyn for your hugs and kisses; for always reminding me of what's really important. Thank you for loving me for who I am and for not caring a bit about the work that I do! You two are my sunshine. You bring such joy to my heart that no words could ever fully express. I know it was hard on you when I was away and there were many nights we had only the phone lines to connect us. But, Eryn, do you remember what I told you? Sometimes doing the hard stuff now will make things easier later, and it's true! When you go through a difficult time and come out on the other side, you find that you are better in some way as a result. We made it through the tough time and now we can enjoy our time together that much more. I love you Everett, Eryn and Edyn with all my heart and soul.

Now, I dare not rank the rest of the important people in my life as you have all played such significant roles, but I suppose I must begin somewhere, so how about the beginning? That would probably be Diana Bell's Writing Pedagogy at UAH which lead to my tenure in the Writing Center, two important experiences that (unbeknownst to me)

started me down this path. I have Diana to thank for introducing me to Rhet/Comp, a discipline that was completely foreign to me before Fall semester 2000! Thank you also for always believing in me. Thank you for all the recommendations, for being instrumental in getting me my first teaching job and for always being there when I needed teaching advice. So much of my pedagogy has been influenced by you. You were a great mentor! Then, of course, there's that other beginning—at U of L. My very first graduate course at U of L was Debra Journet's *Narrative Theory* and it was in Annette Powell's *Cultural Rhetorics* course that the "naming" project was born. Certainly, these two courses were the most influential and both of you were most excellent instructors and guides. I have valued your input and your encouragement. Thank you, Debra, for believing in this project and knowing long before I did that it was going to work! Your steadfast assurance kept me going forward.

Then, when I hit "the wall" who else could have given me that kick in the pants like Michelle Bachelor-Robinson? You were like a big sister to me, leading by example. I admired your confidence and tried to stay close to you so some of that would rub off on me! I will be eternally indebted to you for jump-starting this project when it had stalled in the prospectus stage. Without your sound advice, invaluable feedback and constant motivation I might not have made it to this point. Thanks for your time and energy, for meeting me in B'ham and letting me take up an entire Sunday at your house! Of course, I must thank Phillip Blackmon for your input and feedback also. I will never forget the great food and conversations we had. Knowing I wasn't in this thing alone helped me believe I would make it just like you guys did. I also can't forget my girl, Joy Karega. We've been travelling a similar path together. You've been a great friend and I can't wait to attend your graduation, next!

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love them and they love you brought me so much comfort and allowed me the peace of mind to forge ahead with my work knowing that they were in good hands.

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Well, in order to keep these acknowledgements from becoming as long as the dissertation, let me just say thanks to all of you—family, friends, associates and colleagues—who have kept me afloat throughout this process with words, prayers and random acts of kindness. There are too many of you to mention by name, but none of you is forgotten.

May God bless you all.

ABSTRACT

FROM THE "WAR ON POVERTY" TO REAGAN'S "NEW RIGHT," WHAT'S IN A NAME? THE SYMBOLIC SIGNIFICANCE OF THE "WELFARE QUEEN" IN POLITICS AND PUBLIC DISCOURSE.

Kem Roper

November 16, 2012

This dissertation is a rhetorical analysis of the political discourse surrounding the

role of poor African American women within the American social and political economy

beginning in 1965 with Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty initiatives and extending to

the early 1980s with Ronald Reagan and the "religious right." I argue that an ideology of

whiteness permeates both the Johnson and Reagan administrations even though each

worked towards different ends. In Chapter 1, I begin by discussing how America's

establishment as a capitalist society made it a nation ill-fitted for government-funded

social programs. In particular, I discuss the impact of distinctions between the "worthy"

and "unworthy" poor on African Americans and I outline the three theoretical

frameworks within which I position the public and political discourse surrounding

welfare, welfare reform and welfare recipients: (1) Narrative and Rhetoric, (2) Feminism,

and (3) Whiteness. In Chapter 2, I analyze Daniel Patrick Moynihan's 1965 report, *The*

Negro Family: The Case for National Action which was intended to rally government

officials to approve programs specifically targeting black communities. However,

because of the pervasiveness of a whiteness ideology, the report sparked controversy and

political backlash instead. In Chapter 3, I focus on the rhetorical devices and narrative

strategies that contributed to Reagan's political successes from the beginning of his

political career in the 1960s until the beginning of his own presidential term in 1980. I argue that the significance of Reagan's use of The Welfare Queen trope is his reliance on an inherently racist ideology. In Chapter 4, I discuss how race, gender and class work in political discourse, and I argue that The Welfare Queen is a "site of political struggle," in that she represents a convergence of these contending forces. In Chapter 5, I propose that rhetoric and composition scholars enact a "trickster" rhetoric that exposes the multiplicity of a name such as The Welfare Queen. By inserting new meanings into such names, I argue that scholars have an opportunity to shift popular discourse from dominating whiteness ideologies to a more empowering *otherness* ideology.

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PREFACE

One who attempts a cultural-rhetorical analysis must approach texts with the understanding that cultures are comprised of competing ideas, ideals and individual experiences that constrain and construct the meaning of those texts. Additionally, the ideas, ideals and experiences of the individual who attempts a cultural-rhetorical analysis will inevitably color that analysis which means that any claim to the significance of a particular text or texts will always be modified by one's position within ideological and experiential frameworks. This distinction is made here in order to remind us that taken-for-granted truths and assumptions, when viewed from the perspective of culture and rhetoric—two terms that imply vested interest and ulterior motive—should always be accepted with a grain of salt. This makes the work of cultural-rhetorical analysis both complex and exciting, both compelling and confusing, not to mention unending, because for every assertion there is at least one, but often more than one, equal and opposite—or at least alternative—reaction. Yet, such responses should be welcomed, for without the checks and balance of ideas and perspectives we would be left with Rhetorical analysis, with the capital "R," which hides perspective and particularity behind the façade of abstract thought and universal reality which only results in a partial view. All of the messiness of multiples is lost, then, in the neat and tidy analysis that is based on accepted parameters and theoretical measurements. Realities are reduced to reality and Truth shuts out truths.

I do not wish to go there...to that place of so-called pristine knowledge.

In spite of all its glory and light, in spite of its apparent flawlessness, I always sense that "difference" is lurking in the shadows, in the periphery of scholarly endeavors. In the shadows of the mainstream is where I live, peering out at the world as one who peers out at a bright public place from a darkened room. I am invisible, as is my point of view, yet I can see them clearly, all those who are out there sharing their views and truths. Thus, at some point, I must step out of the shadows and share what I know, to put my two-cents into circulation in the marketplace of ideas. Without that exchange, there would always be a monopoly; thus, in this interrogation, I bring my racialized and sexualized scope to bear on the political, sociological and rhetorical exchange about a racialized, sexualized figure who, I think, is more fantasy than fact.

INTRODUCTION

The history of African American[1] women in this country is fraught with

challenging and painful realities. The physical and psychological abuse they endured

within the institution of slavery extended far beyond emancipation, making it necessary

to position any analysis of African American women's identity within a historical

context. A historical context is essential because the past lays a foundation upon which

future experiences and realities are built. History is narrative, and knowledge of the past

is based upon the stories that are passed on and repeated until their validity is taken to be

a matter of fact. Promoted by leadership and pushed through media, stories' impact and

influence are ensured by cultural uptake.

In the 1970s the narrative of the African American woman as "welfare queen"

emerged. This narrative characterized many poor African American women as lazy,

immoral, hyper-sexed and greedy. The trope of The Welfare Queen as a villainous threat

to America's economic well-being was central to the public and political discourse of

welfare reform. According to Julilly Kohler-Hausmann, the term was first used by a

Chicago journalist about one woman, Linda Taylor, who cheated the Illinois welfare

system. Early estimates of Taylor's elaborate schemes claimed she had "100 aliases in

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[1] For the purpose of this project I will use the terms "black" and "white" with lower case letters (except in quoted passages) to describe those individuals who identify themselves as descendents of African and European ancestry respectively. My use of lower case reflects my belief that these terms are of less importance than the more precise ethnic designations "African" and "European" which will also be used. It should be noted that racial markers (black/white) are socially-constructed and not biological realities, an issue which will be discussed to some extent later in this study.

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12 different states" and received "over $200,000" of illegal aid (334). This proved to be an overstatement, however, as Taylor was ultimately charged with "defraud[ing] the state of $8,000 using four separate aliases" (334). Interestingly enough, although welfare fraud was not Taylor's only sin (she had had other run-ins with the law), "welfare queen" was the only label that stuck.

Responding to the rising concern over welfare abuses, Ronald Reagan used this narrative as part of his platform during his first presidential campaign. Although he lost that race for the White House, he succeeded in tapping into Americans' worst fears about welfare recipients, and the "caricature" he created "stripped...of its context and peculiarity," garnered "national visibility," becoming a symbol of everything that was "wrong" with welfare and those who receive it (Kohler-Hausmann 335). Drawing a parallel between welfare recipients and deviancy, as the story of Linda Taylor does, allowed Reagan to argue persuasively for the need to decrease government assistance to the poor, which he would eventually do.

Utilizing the image of a black woman to convey this message worked because of the long-established narrative of black women in this country. A black woman cheating honest, tax-paying citizens merely confirms in the minds of many Americans what they already believe to be true. What Franklin Gilliam, Jr. says social psychologists call "scripts" are, in essence, a shorthand for predicting what an individual is likely to do based on a particular set of expectations (49). These expectations were set up long before Linda Taylor's schemes and have continued long after. Daniel Patrick Moynihan's 1965 report, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* (often referred to as "The

Moynihan Report"), pushed the narrative of poor black women into the forefront of political discourse, while Reagan's Welfare Queen trope gave that narrative a name.

In this project, I look at how an ideology of whiteness permeates "The Moynihan Report" and Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty, as well as Republican ideology and rhetoric best represented by Ronald Reagan; this whiteness ideology maintains and protects both capitalist and patriarchal interests. As Mimi Abramovitz and other "radical" feminists (Davies, Brewer, Quadagno) recognize, sexist ideology informs both economic, social and political structures, and racist ideology further extends the oppressive nature of hegemony. At the same time that American capitalism was founded upon patriarchal ideas, and what Abramovitz calls the "family ethic," it was simultaneously established on the backs of slaves and an ethic of racism. Together, racism and sexism converge upon so-called "black" women as they are—and always have been—caught at the crossroads of race and sex. Coeval with capitalism is classism, as capitalist ideology adheres to a "survival of the fittest" approach to wealth and prosperity which assumes that those who don't attain them are inherently unworthy of them. As a penniless, black female, dependent upon the state, then, The Welfare Queen personifies everything that America, as defined by wealthy white men, is not.

Considering the way language, narrative, ideology and rhetoric work together to create and control "reality" to benefit capitalist, patriarchal interests, I offer a rhetorical analysis of the public discourse surrounding welfare, welfare reform and the emergence of the trope of The Welfare Queen following its introduction into the public lexicon as a result of the Linda Taylor case. By "public discourse" I mean the confluence of voices, perspectives and ideologies that appear within the public sphere—news outlets,

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government reports and legislative amendments. Such documents are considered within the context of historical texts, statistical data and sociological analyses.

To conduct this analysis I rely on a black feminist epistemology informed primarily by black feminist scholar Patricia Hill Collins. In her book, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, Collins sets out to establish, on its own terms, the basis for and characteristics of a particularly black, feminist epistemology that results from the peculiar "standpoint" of black women in America. Collins defines epistemology as "standards used to assess knowledge or why we believe what we believe to be true" (298). Her discussion of a black feminist epistemology draws upon the scholarship on standpoint theory, which she defines as "a social theory arguing that group location in hierarchical power relations produces common challenges for individuals in those groups. Moreover, shared experiences can foster similar angles of vision leading a group knowledge or standpoint deemed essential for informed political action" (300). I am also challenged by Krista Ratcliffe to consider that "standpoints are not autonomous points of static stases but rather complex webs of dynamically intermingled cultural structures and subjective agency" (209). Avoiding binaries, then, my emphasis is on the intersectionality of race, class and gender that informs individual standpoints. Likewise, I adhere to the reconceptualization of feminism proposed by bell hooks which forsakes being for doing. Rather than seeing feminism as an exclusive subculture or alternative lifestyle, hooks calls for a political commitment to end sexist oppression in all its forms. Therefore, my assumption here is not that a black feminist epistemology will be able to incorporate all of the multiple and dynamic standpoints of self-identified "black" women, nor will it focus on the

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experiences of one group of women in opposition to other groups for the express purpose of privileging one over another. Rather, I consider race, class and gender in use within the political discourse and attempt to disrupt the "either/or dualistic thinking that is [central to] all systems of domination in Western society" (hooks, *Feminist Theory*, 29).

I will also continually resist utilizing racial categorizations in ways that portray such categories as immutable, natural, scientific realities because, as AnnLouise Keating points out, "continual analysis of racialized identities undercuts [the] belief that 'race' is a constantly changing sociohistorical concept, not a biological fact" (902). However, I find myself constrained by the ubiquity of these terms. For example, how does one analyze "whiteness"—or "blackness" for that matter—without conflating these terms, which are abstract, with white or black people, who are concrete? Then, there is the further challenge of determining what exactly "whiteness" is other than "a nonracialized, supposedly colorless, 'human nature'" (Keating 904), while at the same time observing its real-world effects. Furthermore, how does one extract from "whiteness" what truly is "human nature," and how does one avoid an analysis of The Welfare Queen trope that makes simplistic binary distinctions between "bad whites" (who are merely privileged and uncaring agents of oppression) and "good blacks" (who are merely helpless victims of oppression)? Whether or not I am able to address all of these questions in full, my goal is to move forward under the assumption that race is socially constructed; therefore, I must consider the way the concepts of race have been used in public and political discourses and for what purpose(s).

By examining the rhetoric of welfare reform and the perpetual images of black women on welfare in this way, I intend to demonstrate the convergence of culture and

rhetoric as articulated by Thomas Rosteck's claim that rhetoric's "central concern" is "understanding how language and other symbolic systems provide frameworks through which we make sense of experience, construct our collective identity, produce meaning, and prompt action in the world" (2). The "language and other symbolic systems" used in the welfare reform debates suggest how black people, in general, and black women, in particular, come to be known and recognized in the public sphere. My specific goals, then, are to

1. demonstrate the historical limitations of welfare discourse and policies

2. problematize the iconic American image of motherhood

3. challenge commonly-held assumptions about poverty, race and gender

4. challenge "readers" of welfare discourse to reconsider the significance of The Welfare Queen trope

In Chapter 1, "The Undeserving Poor, an American Tale," I begin by discussing the context of welfare in America, particularly how America's establishment as a capitalist society made it a nation ill-fitted for government-funded social programs. In particular, I will discuss how those in power have made distinctions between the "worthy" and "unworthy" poor and will consider the impact these distinctions have had on African Americans. I, then, focus specifically on the expansion of welfare programs as a result of civil rights movements in the 1950s and 1960s and the accompanying increase in welfare restrictions and public outcry against such programs.

In this chapter, I also outline the three theoretical frameworks within which I position the public and political discourse surrounding welfare, welfare reform and welfare recipients: (1) Narrative and Rhetoric, (2) Feminism, and (3) Whiteness.

Narrative theory asserts that the human propensity for storytelling infiltrates every aspect of reality because it is how we situate ourselves within the world around us. The social and political impact of narrative is determined by the power of individuals or groups to compel others to accept dominant narratives. Thus, narratives are also rhetorical as they are a means of persuasion. In this project I also merge the perspectives of black and socialist feminisms in order to assess how race, class and gender interact in the particular oppression experienced by poor black women. "Whiteness" is a key component to this discussion as it forms the backdrop or ground upon which the welfare narrative plays out. Although whiteness is an ideology that begins with race, it is not limited to those who are self-identified as "white" (Keating). However, whiteness-as-framework articulates the seemingly universal voice of reason and the "common good" while still actualizing the goals of white male dominance. Thus, I will consider how a "whiteness" ideology constrains political discourse. In response, I will propose an alternative which I call *otherness* as a way to counteract its negative effects.

In Chapter 2, "Narrative & Rhetoric in Moynihan's Negro Family," I consider the way narratives of knowledge in the social sciences validated Patrick Moynihan's (and Lyndon Johnson's) characterization of the black family. My major focus in this chapter is Daniel Patrick Moynihan's report, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action.* Although "The Moynihan Report" was initially intended to be a "call to arms" for government officials to rally for programs specifically targeting black communities as part of Johnson's "War on Poverty" initiative in 1965, it quickly became controversial. In the report, Moynihan attributes the "pathology" of the black family to its matriarchal structure that arose as a result of African Americans' experience during slavery when the

traditional family structure was destroyed. Although intended to help black Americans, the report—released to the public just after the Watts riots in August 1965—was quickly taken up by political conservatives as further proof that blacks are deviant and undeserving of government aid. It was also abandoned by black leaders who had initially supported it, as they took issue with the argument that poor black families suffered from a "tangle of pathologies" rather than from a racist, capitalist system. Moynihan's report has been credited with both creating and confirming historically-based views of the African American familial structure and its inevitable effects. However, in spite of the apparent effort to help poor black families, the Johnson administration's War on Poverty sparked controversy and political backlash from the public at large and conservatives in particular. I argue that through the lens of a whiteness ideology, poor black women have always been (and will always be) seen as deficient, even by those who seek to do no harm.

In Chapter 3, "From the War on Poverty to the War on Welfare: Narrative, Rhetoric & Race in Reagan's 'New Right,'" I discuss the backlash rhetoric of Reagan's political campaign that spanned two decades—from the beginning of his political career in the 1960s until his own presidential term began in 1980. My focus is on the rhetorical devices and narrative strategies that contributed to Reagan's political successes during this time period. I further consider the absent presence of race that operates throughout his rhetoric. The significance of Reagan's use of The Welfare Queen in his presidential campaign, I will argue, is his reliance on an inherently racist ideology. Although Reagan exalts the Founding Fathers and the American Dream, the reality of racism, sexism and classism in this country undermines that patriotism and problematizes the American tale.

In Chapter 4, "A War of Words: The Limitations of Race, Gender and Class in Popular & Political Discourse," I discuss how these contending forces—race, gender and class—factor in political discourse. Although The Welfare Queen is assumed to represent poverty, I argue that she is what cultural-rhetorical theorists Brummet and Bowers call a "site of political struggle," meaning that the significance of this trope has as much to do with her proximity as her pathology. Rather than viewing poor black women through the lens of dominant discourses, then, I contend that we should consider them within their social and political contexts and take into account their particular standpoints.

In Chapter 5: "Changing the Game: The Rhetoric of Naming," I conclude with a proposal that rhetoric and composition scholars enact a "trickster" rhetoric that exposes the multiplicity of a name. I argue that The Welfare Queen is a signifier with multiple significations; thus, we cannot assume to know poor black women on the basis of that trope. By inserting new meanings into such names, however, rhetoric and composition scholars have an opportunity to replace dominating whiteness ideologies with an *otherness* ideology which involves an intentional shift in perspective.

In this project, I take as part of my task as a socially-identified "black" woman intellectual, a responsibility similar to what Royster describes in "A View from a Bridge: Afrafeminist Ideologies and Rhetorical Studies." I, too, believe that I must not only see, define, name and interpret what has been reality for many poor black women in America, but also suggest and take "appropriate action in our own [black women's] interests and in the interests of whatever alliances for progress and change across the sites and sources of knowledge-making that we may be able to forge" (276). Thus, although this project

focuses on the image of a small segment of the American population, its relevance need not be limited to those of us who are the most like them in race, class or gender. Rather, my goal is to demonstrate the interconnectivity that exists between and amongst the citizens of this nation by virtue of our shared history. It is a connection that is too often ignored or overlooked in favor of emphasis on differences and distance. Yet, The Welfare Queen was born in the minds of a people who should not be allowed to distance themselves from the moment of her birth. When something or someone is given a name, those who assign the name do so with intention and purpose. Thus, although the one who bears the name is often the one who garners the most attention, we must not lose sight of those who named her, for their story is inevitably linked to hers.

CHAPTER 1
THE UNDESERVING POOR, AN AMERICAN TALE

"If this is going to be a Christian nation that doesn't help the poor, either we've got to pretend that Jesus was just as selfish as we are, or we've got to acknowledge that he commanded us to love the poor and serve the needy without condition , and then admit that we just don't want to do it" (Stephen Colbert).

Introduction

In this chapter, I adapt the socialist feminist perspective articulated by sociologist Mimi Abramovitz in *Regulating the Lives of Women* in order to demonstrate how The Welfare Queen stands in stark contrast to the ideals of a capitalist patriarchal society which has less to do with her material existence than her symbolic significance and her function as a red herring for capitalist motives. I argue that in the rhetoric of poverty and welfare in America, black women are positioned as "undeserving" of government aid because of their own inability to attain the ideal model of womanhood and motherhood. Yet, in a capitalist society, the pursuit of resources and low-wage workers surpasses the pursuit of liberty and equality. Therefore, black women become scapegoats for the economic woes of black citizens rather than the system which facilitates their oppression. By identifying the conflict between welfare rhetoric and welfare realities, the lens of a black, socialist feminism allows me to complicate our understanding of poverty and to challenge our perception of what is "real".

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To begin, I will examine how capitalist, patriarchal goals mediated America's development as a "welfare state" so that power and resources are maintained at the top by creating categories of elaborate distinctions between deserving and undeserving people. I then discuss the way narrative provides the tools for the rhetoric that socializes American citizens to accept the hierarchical structures which are in place to preserve the status quo. I end with my assertion, which will be elaborated in more detail in the final chapter of this dissertation, that "whiteness" is the ideological backdrop of welfare discourse and that it is an inaccurate, insensitive, potentially racist framework that should be challenged.

"We can think about poor people as 'them' or as 'us.' For the most part, Americans have talked about 'them'" (Katz, The Undeserving Poor).

1.1 The Evolution of a Welfare State

The ideological work of The Welfare Queen trope in political rhetoric can best be understood within the context of America's development as a "welfare state". The political structure of American society is the result of the founders' careful establishment of a democratic society that allowed for a dynamic relationship between leaders and citizens; thus, as sociologist Sharon Hays says: "a nation's laws reflect a nation's values" (3). However, a nation is made up of people with varying degrees of power, influence and resources and, as Julie Drew says, "competing ideologies and complex, contesting (albeit unequal) social forces" (400). The values of the nation's majority and powerful inevitably influence which laws are implemented and what resources are dispersed to whom. This means that although, to some extent, "public attitudes toward welfare and poverty…tell us something important about the nature of our society and the passions and

concerns that animate Americans' political views" (Gilens preface), there is always a segment of the population whose views are either ignored or mis-, or underrepresented. Abramovitz defines ideology as a "*relatively* coherent system of beliefs and values about human nature and social life generated by a society for itself" (my emphasis 36). Yet, as a society develops and individuals are stratified into upper, middle and lower segments, "the relatively coherent system of beliefs" to which Abramovitz refers takes shape around the daily interactions between citizens as they compete with one another for possession and control of limited power and resources. Therefore, as one observes the evolution of the welfare system—or how this country cares for its poor—it is evident that, in spite of periodic shifts and changes, certain underlying principles remain consistent as a result of these contentious relationships.

Abramovitz describes two primary political theories—Liberalism and Marxism—that have determined the way in which political economies function. I will describe the difference between these two schools of thought—which represent two distinctly different approaches to government—in order to explain the premise upon which politicians base their rhetorical platforms. Understanding these competing ideologies[1] will put into perspective both the political perspective of the "New Right" as well as the ostensibly liberal perspectives of the "Left." Later I will argue for a potentially new perspective that is neither left or right, but *other*.

According to classical liberalism—upon which America's economic system is based—there may be the need for limited state involvement as a neutral, policing force that protects the country from "internal disorder and external threat" and guarantees "individuals freedom" (Abramovitz 15). Yet, according to this theory, as liberalism

evolved, it "gradually accepted more government involvement on behalf of business" and "began to justify limited state intervention to mitigate the worst effects of the market economy…and provide a minimum standard of living for the poor" (16). Although the two political parties—democrats and republicans—battle over the extent to which the state should be involved in the market, both groups ascribe broadly to this classic liberalism. The philosophical differences between these political parties, then, is over the manner in which the established system should function, not over the validity or value of the system itself. However, the characterization of the state as a benign, disinterested entity, contrasts with Marxist theories which assert that the capitalist state, far from being disinterested, "is the institution through which those with power rule" in order to "create the conditions necessary for the profitable accumulation of capital" and to establish hierarchies of advantage and disadvantage (16). The role of the state in a capitalist society, according to Marxists, is to "maintain the power of the dominant class" (16). Marxism, then, is a critique of the entire system rather than entities operating within it. Rather than seeing the welfare state developing, as American politicians might argue, in order to be a neutral arbiter of the needs of upper and lower class citizens, Marxists argue that its primary goal is to ensure the 'reproduction and maintenance of the labor force' (17; see also Cloward and Piven). Thus, the ebb and flow of government involvement in social matters is determined by the extent to which those matters affect the proverbial bottom line, regardless of the political affiliation of the controlling party.

Marxism has a blindspot, however. Although useful for casting a critical light on the merits of capitalism, Marxist critiques often overlook the role of race and gender in America's political economy, a point that feminist theorists take up with vigor (Glenn &

Dill, McIntosh, Fox-Gonovese, Eisenstein). However, Liberal feminism argues that the primary failure of Liberalism is "the denial of equal rights to women and their differential treatment on the basis of sex" (Abramovitz 21), while radical feminism locates "the imbalance of power between women and men in the biological differences between the sexes" (23). Radical feminism "focuses primarily on the private sphere and the gender domination of women's reproductive capacity, sexuality, mothering, family life, interpersonal relations, and culture" and in this sense finds that, the "personal is political" (23). Yet, socialist feminism goes beyond both liberal and radical feminism by including public as well as private spheres in its critique of Liberalism and Marxism. Synthesizing Marxism and radical feminism, a socialist feminist ideology "locates the oppression of women in the ways that the power relations of capitalism (class domination) and patriarchy (male domination) together structure ideology, the social relations of gender and class, and the overall organization of society" (24). A socialist feminist perspective, then, applies the logic of radical feminist and Marxist theories not only to the way in which a capitalist society constrains the personal lives of women, but also their public lives. In fact, this perspective sees the public and private spheres in a complementary relationship, as the social norms of the patriarchal home carry over into the patriarchal marketplace and both keep women subjugated to men.

As a critical stance against both Classical Liberalism and traditional Marxism, the socialist feminist view is most appropriate for an examination of The Welfare Queen since it is a perspective which looks beyond the image to the way it functions to maintain a particular political structure. Yet, many scholars recognize that in addition to class and gender, race has played a role in the development of the welfare system in this country[2]

as well. (Handler & Hasenfeld, Davies, Brewer). Jill Quadagno in *The Color of Welfare*, even argues that entrenched American attitudes about race is *the* underlying reason that social relief programs have always lagged behind that of other countries (5). What *black* feminists (Brewer, hooks, Crenshaw, Lubiano) bring to the conversation is an understanding of the way in which not just gender or race alone, but the intersecting forces of race, class and gender have informed the formation of the welfare state in general and the experiences of black women in particular. American capitalism has preserved a patriarchal order that keeps women subordinate to men in both domestic and public spheres, and that keeps the nation's wealth in the hands of the powerful and elite who are also white and male. In this project, I critique American capitalism from a socialist, black feminist perspective in order to present another side of a story that is so familiar within American political discourse that it is taken for granted. It assumes to know The Welfare Queen while ignoring the way she came to be. By examining the birth of this trope, so to speak, one may be able to reassess that knowledge and reconsider its claim on an absolute truth.

In the next section, I will discuss the way the capitalist patriarchy has divided the poor into two groups—deserving and undeserving, as well as the way race and gender have factored into this arrangement. Next, I will show how merging a black feminist standpoint with Abramovitz's socialist feminism provides a more comprehensive approach to assessing the unique experiences of black women on welfare.

1.2 Establishing Hierarchies: Socialization of Deserving/Undeserving

The philosophies of theorists such as John Locke and William Sumner permeate our history and are echoed still by political conservatives. However, despite the ambitions

of this country's founders, historian Michael Katz says that prior to the 20th century most

people in America were poor.[3] In his book, *The Undeserving Poor*, which looks critically

at the "vocabulary of poverty" in America over the past two centuries, Katz finds that

prior to industrialization, communities were scattered and families had to be self-

sufficient, living off of the land and pooling resources with those who lived nearby. As

for providing for the needs of those without the support of family or community and/or

those who were unable to support themselves, the question was "who among the needy

should be helped? What should they be given? [And,] [h]ow should relief be

administered?" (Katz 11).

Early on, such determinations were made less on the basis of morality, says Katz,

and more on the basis of familiarity; the distinction was between neighbors and strangers.

Only people who were part of a particular community were extended the courtesy of aid

which was provided locally (Katz 11, see also Handler, Gilens). Newcomers to a

community—read "outsiders"—who needed help were sent back to the communities

from which they came. This is telling in that from the beginning, helping others was as

much about maintaining sameness as it was extending relief. Members of the community

were protecting their way of life by assisting those who would not disrupt it. This

discrepancy between what welfare discourse says versus what welfare reforms actually

do is seen again and again. Thus, from the start, the privileged were those who were

familiar and accepted as a member of a given community; the unprivileged were those

who were strangers and unaccepted (or unacceptable).

Determining who was worthy or unworthy was also a moral issue. Individuals

were judged by their lifestyle and behavior or how nearly they emulated the accepted

norms of the time. Historically, people who deviate from norms have been viewed with suspicion and scorn. In poverty discourse, a distinction is made between those whose circumstances are the result of their own behaviors and choices and those who have succumbed to external circumstances deemed beyond their control. In a sermon given in 1834 for the grand opening of a new poorhouse in Portsmouth, NH, a minister by the name of Charles Burroughs explained to his audience that while poverty is "unavoidable," pauperism is a more serious offense as it is "the consequence of willful error, of shameful indolence, of vicious habits...a misery of human creation, the pernicious work of man, the lamentable consequence of bad principles and morals" (qtd in Katz 13). Burroughs carefully outlines how individuals should be judged by evoking Biblical mandates; the validity of judgments against the poor are, apparently, undisputable as they come directly from God. Yet, God does not make these judgments in the flesh. It is those who have the power on earth who must discern His will.

Using morality as a measuring stick for determining one's deservedness, however, deflects from the politics of dispersing limited resources; moreover, the means for determining morality through the years have proven to be arbitrary, often subject to change with the times and/or who is in control (Katz 10). Katz explains how "predispositions toward moral definitions of poverty [have] found support in the latest intellectual fashions: in the antebellum period in Protestant theology; after the Civil War, in the work of Darwin and early hereditarian theory; and in the twentieth century, in eugenics" (15). Abramovitz further notes that Social Darwinism and the eugenics movement "applied a biological explanation" for poverty and that Darwin's "survival of the fittest" concept, in particular, was used to explain that "the possession of wealth

evidenced 'fitness' and that it's opposite, poverty, signaled inherent weakness" (148).

Abramovitz goes on to argue that such "theories rationalized the accumulation of wealth,

held the poor in contempt, and justified the rampant nativism and racism that developed

following the Civil War" (148).[4] As these examples show, the condition of the poor in

America often results directly from the values and beliefs that American leaders and

lawmakers hold. Whether social, moral or scientific, these beliefs are distributed to the

populous like alms and accepted as indisputable truths. Rhetoric and ideology work to

justify the exclusion of some from the realm of cultural acceptance while deflecting

attention away from the consequences of this exclusion. As a result, the validity of those

whose views or experiences happen to fall outside of the realm of dominant ideologies is

obscured.

1.2.1 Undeserving Women

In the nineteenth century, when women found themselves in economic straits

there was "outdoor" and "indoor" relief, almhouses and workhouses,[5] and in the early

20th century Mother's Pensions were established. However, these provisions were only

available to "'fit and deserving' mothers [who] turned out to be widowed and white"

(Abramovitz 200). Black women, no matter how virtuous, were never able to fulfill the

ideal of "true womanhood." What Abramovitz calls the "family ethic" is an adaptable,

yet basically consistent belief system that perpetuates the productive and reproductive

concerns of capitalism (13). It defines the epitome of "true womanhood" as a "good"

wife who is subordinate to her husband and diligent in her work as caregiver and nurturer

of children who eventually become laborers and caregivers themselves. Yet, "true

womanhood" was reserved for married white women only.

For black women, "the family ethic" was but another means of oppression. As slaves, they were subjected to white male dominance over their sexuality and their physical labor and were denied the protection of the patriarchal structure while simultaneously exploited by the capitalist drive for wealth accumulation. While sexual differentiation was considered a natural—rather than social—construct, colonists did not extend this belief system to black women who had to work alongside black men and were expected to do the same kind and amount of work (60). Abramovitz finds that "In contrast to the support given to the formation and maintenance of white families, slave-owners and government officials ignored and, in some cases, destroyed the black family" (62).

This dual oppression of black women continued long after emancipation, though with greater subtlety. With the establishment if the Social Security Act in 1935, the federal government put measures in place that would allow money from the working to provide a basic income for the nonworking and ensure a minimum income "below which no one was expected to live" (215). Yet, even in the establishment of this federal safety, there were limits as to who could receive it as Handler and Hollingsworth explain:

> AFDC[6] is one of the public assistance 'categorical aides.'" One of "five public assistance programs administered under the Social Security Act: Aid to the Blind, Old Age Assistance, Aid to Families with Dependent Children, Aid to the Permanently and Totally Disabled and Medicaid. Historically, it refers to the nineteenth century process of making special provisions for certain categories of the poor (not for poor people in general). (16)

Abramovitz argues that the 1935 Social Security Act marked the state's takeover of patriarchy (215); it was then that the federal government stepped in as the father to the fatherless and husband to the widow. Rather than solely relying on the local support of

the community, the federal government began to take some responsibility for the country's poor.

Yet, the way in which aid was administered and the stipulations put in place to manage its disbursement was still based upon racist and sexist ideals. According to Gilens, when the Social Security Act was established, states were allowed the freedom to dictate who was eligible for assistance and what kind of assistance they were eligible for. This benefitted southern legislators, in particular, who represented the largest number of black residents, but who resisted giving aid to its black citizens. Legislators removed the clause that would have mandated that ADC provide "'a reasonable subsistence compatible with health and decency'" (105) and, as a result, southern states were able to give blacks the least amount of benefits possible. Gilens says, in 1940, the "average ADC payment was about $13.00 per month per child" (105); yet, black children in Arkansas and South Carolina were receiving between $3 and $4 per month (105). In the south, states also provided only "seasonal benefits to blacks, eliminating assistance when additional labor was needed in the fields during harvest time" (Gilens 105-106, see also Piven and Cloward 138). Black women were denied aid in greater numbers than white women, specifically because of their perceived eligibility for work in the fields. White women, in general, were not expected to do fieldwork which exemplifies the distinct difference between what was deemed acceptable and unacceptable for a woman based solely on her race.

In addition to the over-use of what was referred to as the "'employable mother' rule,'" "suitable home" and "man-in-the-house" rules further impeded support for destitute black families. According to an article in the 1961 edition of *The Yale Law*

Journal, suitable home provisions were meant to dictate the behavior of parents or guardians. A home would be deemed "unsuitable" if, for example, the mother engaged in "illicit cohabitation," or even if a mother had given birth to an illegitimate child prior to applying for welfare benefits. Interestingly enough, if a home was deemed "unsuitable," no further provisions were made for the child; it simply meant that the family would not receive financial support ("Suitable Home" 1194). Clearly, although ostensibly concerned with providing support for needy children, the target of ADC policies [before 1968] was often "the ADC mother and her behavior, not the discovery of child neglect" (Abramovitz 326). Furthermore, of those affected by the suitable home rule, "ninety-three per cent of the cases closed, and nearly 95% of the children excluded, were non-white" (1194). This calls into question the true motives of the aid program which discriminated against women in general, but against black women in particular.

Further evidence of this is seen in "the especially vigorous enforcement of man-in-the-house rules in Southern states" (Piven and Cloward 138). In order to prevent "able-bodied" men from accessing any undeserved benefits, the "state" became a jealous husband to single women on welfare, conducting "parked car surveillance" and surprising them in midnight home raids (Piven and Cloward 127, see also Abramovitz 324) to ensure that there were no men in their lives. Additionally, Abramovitz picks up on the subtly sexist language of ADC policies: "ADC regulation referring to 'parent or relative' appeared gender neutral on paper, but in practice [was] not. Men were not known to have illegitimate" children nor was the word 'promiscuous' typically applied to male behavior" (326). However, men affected by ADC policies were compelled to "take any work at any age" and often in order for families to stay together wives and children

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had to work too (Piven and Cloward 127). The difference between the rhetoric of welfare and the actual manifestation of it is unmistakable. As Cloward and Piven argue, welfare stipulations were "justified in the language of moral virtue" even though "their economic effect" was an abundant "pool of marginal workers" (127). In practice, "policies and procedures" were designed to "punish and degrade recipients as [befit] their socially defined station" (148). Government officials negated the value of black women and their families; they were the outsiders who might threaten the sameness of the community. Handler and Hollingsworth find that a "dominant theme of relief legislation was the protection of society by the prevention and control of deviant behavior" (18)—deviant being anything that does not align with the "norm"—and it seems that "[t]he 'deserving poor'" was never meant to include "husbandless mothers and their children" (211), especially husbandless *black* mothers.

The distinction between deserving and undeserving recipients of federal aid has been predicated on the socially accepted position of individuals in American society as well as what is economically beneficial to the nation's most powerful people. The entrance of more women into the workforce in the early twentieth century disrupted the patriarchal structure and introduced competition for men; thus, the "labor and social welfare legislation that emerged enforced the gender division of labor and otherwise reasserted patriarchal structures in the family and the market" (Abramovitz 33). The two competing ideologies—"the nineteenth-century liberalism rooted in the thinking of Thomas Hobbes and John Locke which "distrusts government and values individual rights" (Gilens 24)—and the "American family ideal of a breadwinning husband and a domestic wife" had to be reconciled (Hays 14). Capitalist/patriarchal goals necessitated

women staying home, caring for the young and sick and ensuring the reproduction of labor, not competing for men's jobs; however, there was also a need for women's low-wage labor. Therefore, by dividing women between deserving and undeserving, these conflicting priorities are accommodated (Abramovitz 35). Those who are unable to be self-sufficient, and whose families consist of some configuration that does not include the "breadwinning husband," are a prime target for stigmatization, and the most likely to be pushed into the low-wage labor market as a result. Whether a single woman goes on welfare or into the workforce, she fits into neither category—neither wife nor breadwinner. If she is ineligible for welfare she is often undereducated and thus un—or underemployed as the only jobs available to her are those that perpetuate her impoverished condition. Yet, as Piven and Cloward argue while "[t]he indignities and cruelties of the dole are no deterrent to indolence among the rich...for the poor...the specter of ending up on 'the welfare' or in 'the poorhouse' makes any job at any wage a preferable alternative" (xvii). In other words, laborers are conditioned by the dominant discourse. Laziness is to be avoided and "hard work"—no matter how economically inadequate—is virtuous.

Yet, the inadequacy of the alternatives for poor women goes unnoticed in the public sphere. Poor black women who are also heads of their households are assumed to be solely responsible for their circumstances even as they are positioned as completely incapable of properly caring for their families. However, "to pull poverty discourse away from family and toward power, requires surmounting the strongest conventions in Americans' social vocabulary" (Katz 8). By shifting attention away from political

structures and onto the individuals within those structures, welfare discourse imposes an awful silence "about the real politics of poverty" (237).

Additionally, feminists argue that the dual threat of a capitalist patriarchy to women is that it prioritizes economics over human life. According to a recent NPR report, for example, over a forty-five year period ending in 1974

> [n]early 7,600 men, women and children as young as 10 were sterilized under North Carolina's eugenics laws. While other state sterilization laws focused mainly on criminals and people in mental institutions, North Carolina was one of the few to expand its reach to women who were poor. *Sterilization was seen as a way to limit the public cost of welfare. Social workers would coerce women to have the operation under threat of losing their public assistance.* (Rose, my emphasis)

At the expense of their families and potentially their own lives, poor people have been persuaded to believe that the judgment of others is more reliable than their own. The poor have been deemed incapable of making wise choices and the determination of what is "wise," "right," and "good," have been the prerogative of those in power. Circumstances that render people incapable of supporting themselves are judged, but the political forces that work to shape circumstances are not similarly scrutinized. A socialist feminist interpretation of this trend recognizes the work of a capitalist patriarchy which upholds a certain view of women's roles while simultaneously meeting the economic needs of the privileged few on the backs of the unfortunate masses. A black feminist perspective hones in on the experiences of black women who are always the "undeserving" by virtue of their racial identity. Together, a black and socialist feminist lens sees race further complicating the intersecting categories of gender and class.

1.3 Merging Black Feminist & Socialist Feminist Thought

Merging a black feminist with a socialist feminist perspective is especially

valuable because, as Rose Brewer points out in "Gender, Poverty, Culture, and Economy:

Theorizing Female-Led Families,

> [r]acism has been as powerful a determinant of oppression as class
> exploitation and gender oppression...It is the deep interrelationship and
> embeddedness of these social forces that is constitutive of poor Black
> women's positioning in American society...This is an interactive,
> multiplicative relationship rather than an additive reality (175).

There has been a distinct division within feminist circles between those who believe

gender impacts the lives of all women moreso than race or class and those who see race

as a "primary force" that "situates genders differently" (Zinn, et al). While mainstream

(or Liberal) feminists—predominantly middle-class (white) housewives—took to the

streets in the 1960s demanding that they be allowed into the workforce—their rhetoric

allowed black women on welfare to be positioned as "lazy" by "just" staying home with

children. Yet, bell hooks criticizes the disconnect between the ideology that powered the

second wave of the feminist movement and the real-world experiences of the majority of

women in this country. She argues that popular feminist rhetoric about the "freedom"

and "liberation" of work and the need and desire for "women" to be "equal" to men in the

workforce was painfully myopic. The kind of equality for which feminists strived was

actually not equality with men in general, but equality with *white men* in particular. The

material realities of class and race quickly strip away the assumed universality of the term

"equal" to the specific manifestation of "equality" within America's stratified social

economy. Black women have historically been "equal" to *black* men in the workforce,

laboring equally in the fields as slaves and sharecroppers; black women have also shared

equally with black men in the effects of racially discriminatory job and housing policies. It is doubtful, however, that middle-class white feminists shouting in the streets for equality with "men" considered this "equality" with black men that black women have always experienced. That sort of "equality" was far from the ideal for which white feminists advocated as Benjamin Barber argues:

> [w]ork clearly means something very different to women in search of an escape from leisure than it has to most of the human race for most of history. For a few lucky men, for far fewer women, work has occasionally been a source of meaning and creativity. But for most…it remains even now forced drudgery…to eke out the wherewithal of material existence. (qtd in hooks 96)

Those who have observed feminism from what bell hooks calls "the margin," recognize the difference that comes from one's experience of oppression. Feminists of color understand that the "substantive content" of the majority of black female experiences in the US for centuries has been directly impacted by the legacy of racism as much as, if not more than sexism.[7] Therefore, the black feminist standpoint upon which Collins and others (hooks, Hull, Lubiano, Crenshaw, Davis, Royster) build their theory draws upon the notion that experience shapes knowledge, but also takes into account the extent to which race has shaped the experiences of black women, in particular, and the significance of the knowledge gained as a result. The knowledge gained by inclusion of more perspectives—men, women, children, black, brown, yellow, gay, straight, bi-sexual—broadens the base upon which a society may grow. This knowledge questions the primacy of dominant norms, challenges individuals to expand their understanding of human relationships and illuminates the nature of power to corrupt what should be a mutual sharing of ideas, resources and materials between and among people of all ages, races, genders and economic means.

hooks calls for a realignment of feminism as action rather than identity—action against all forms of domination (29); this kind of black feminism does more than assert the perspectives of an oppressed group in relation to a dominant one, but rather emphasizes the intersectionality of those standpoints when race, class and sexuality are factored in and disrupts the male/female binary of mainstream and mainstream feminist theories. Intersectionality disrupts the "additive analysis" of oppression which Elizabeth Spelman criticizes in the work of feminist theorists such as Mary Daly who argues in *Beyond God the Father* that "it is most unlikely that racism will be eradicated as long as sexism prevails" (qtd in Spelman 44). An additive analysis ranks the types of oppressions such as sexism and racism in order from greatest to least pervasive and damaging. The additive concept assumes that these oppressions are experienced the same by everyone—that black and white women experience sexism in the same way, for example—and that there is no interaction between 'isms' that alters their impact. However, Spelman argues that this way of thinking "obscures the differences between black and white women's struggles [because] the black woman's struggle cannot be compartmentalized into two struggles—one as a black and one as a woman"—she is both at the same time and experiences both oppressions at once (44). It is the convergence of racism and sexism that results in black women's oppression; they experience sexism differently from white women who never have the added experience of racism with which to contend.

In her article "Black Women's Studies: The Interface of Women's Studies and Black Studies," Beverly Guy-Sheftall cites historian William Chafe's assessment of black

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women's unique oppression which also explains how an additive analysis is an inadequate measure of oppression for black women. Chafe says

> the collective oppression of blacks, the physical abuse they have suffered, is substantially greater than that of white women...there is physical distance between whites and blacks...white women live in close contact with white men, which gives them greater access to the sources of power than is the case with black women. (qtd. in Guy-Sheftall 37, 38)

Furthermore, says Guy-Sheftall, black women "have not been sheltered, protected or idealized by their men...[and] economic realities...have forced [them] into the labor force to a greater extent than white women" (38). This is the kind of experiential difference of black women which informs their ways of knowing and ways of being. Therefore, as I consider the images of poor black women on welfare, it is with an understanding of the way history has established a precedent upon which black women's future experiences are built. That historical stance is a way of knowing (or presuming to know) and perceiving black women that is willingly or unwillingly oblivious to black women's lives.

1.4 The War on Poverty, a New Day?

Katz says "capitalism measures persons, as well as everything else, by their ability to produce wealth and by their success in earning it" (7); he finds that on both sides of the issue of poverty—whether conservative or liberal—the discourse comes down to three basic issues: "[1] the categorization of the poor, [2] the impact of poor relief (welfare) on work motivation, labor supply, and family life; and [3] the limits of social obligation" (4). However, none of these issues addresses the capitalist structure or the organization of society that provides privilege for some, but hardship for others. Furthermore, it is this disconnect between the structure and the individuals within it that

determines the direction of all policy and circumscribes the direction of discourse—even the discourse of so-called "reform."

This disconnect was exemplified in the early 1960s. Influenced by the pressure from Civil Rights movements and in conjunction with Lyndon Johnson's declared "War on Poverty"—the ADC was renamed the AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children) to include provisions for both mothers and children (Gilens 18). In 1968, the Supreme Court invalidated "man-in-the-house" rules for welfare eligibility, and as the number of families on welfare rolls grew, the percentage of funds provided by the federal government increased; "the fastest growth in AFDC came between 1965 and 1975" (Gilens 18; see also Abramovitz 327 & 335). However, according to Gilens, the timing of the more liberal legislation coincided with other social factors and societal perceptions beginning in the early 1960s and peaking in 1973 before gradually declining from the mid 1970s to the mid 1980s. Although the plight of poor blacks shifted from periphery to center stage during this time, and access to aid became less difficult for them, negative perceptions of the "undeserving" poor persisted.

Gilens says that "even though [blacks] are disproportionately poor, they comprise only a minority…of all poor people" (68). Nonetheless, he argues, "public perceptions are more important than demographic realities" (68). Gilens surmises that in the 1960s, negative images of rioting and unrest in the urban areas across the country brought the reality of African American poverty into the spotlight, while simultaneously compromising any potential for public sympathy towards their plight. Vanessa Johnson attributes the skewed perception of black women on welfare to poor black women's involvement with the National Welfare Rights Organization (NWRO) started by George

Wiley in 1966. (1044). Yet, when Lyndon B. Johnson delivered a commencement address at Howard University in 1965, and declared that the next phase of the civil rights movement was the reformation of the "Negro" family, the connection between poverty and black family dysfunction was solidified.

It was soon discovered that Johnson's mission had been informed by the findings of Assistant Secretary of Labor Daniel Patrick Moynihan in an in-house government report entitled *The Negro Family: A Case for National Action*, one of the "most controversial" social science documents ever written (Katz 24). In addition to a number of other derogatory characterizations of African American people, it solidified the negative image of single black women on welfare in the public sphere. Already stigmatized by welfare officials who weeded out recipients whom they deemed unworthy, now black women on welfare became the target of public animosity. As the impact of Moynihan's report filtered into the public sphere, news of drug-dealing, prostituting, cheats and swindlers took on the shape and form of the "black matriarch" of *The Negro Family* on whom Moynihan places the responsibility of the decline in Negro homes and communities. In Chapter 2, I will discuss "The Moynihan Report" and Johnson's War on Poverty initiative more fully.

Thus far I have indicated the degree to which capitalist, patriarchal goals mediated America's development as a "welfare state" so that power and resources have remained at the top, while shame and disgrace have been the plight of those who remain at the bottom. Black women, in particular, have historically been there—at the bottom of American social and economic hierarchies—the ever-present "undeserving" group who are blamed for their own misfortune and unjustly treated. The complexity of their

oppression necessitates that an analysis of the-poor-black-woman image in poverty

discourse take into consideration their unique position at the intersection of race, class

and gender; a black and socialist feminism is able to do this. In this next section, I

discuss the theoretical concepts that inform this project, arguing that narratives provide

the tools for the rhetoric that socializes American citizens to accept dominant ideologies

and cultural divisions as natural constructs; I see "whiteness," in particular, as a way of

thinking that evades detection even as it infiltrates every aspect of American culture and

shapes our sense of reality.

<u>1.5 Rhetoric & Narrative</u>

Interrogating the images of black women throughout history, feminist scholars

Hortense Spillers, Barbara Christian and Diane Roberts have analyzed the stories written

and circulated by white men, discovering that the epistemologies held by those who

recorded this nation's history "colored" the stories they chose to record, and, as a result,

solidified black women's placement within hierarchical structures that carry over into

subsequent generations. This recognition of the power of narrative corroborates the

assertion that narrative provides the means by which we (humans) explain reality, make

sense of our world and construct our selves (or our "identities") within it (Bruner,

Gergen, Hinchman, Kerby, Novitz, Schafer). In *Acts of Meaning,* Jerome Bruner even

argues that human beings have a biological propensity for narrative and that every culture

has "canonical" narratives, that is, particular ways of explaining the meaning of things

(77).

As social identities are woven into the fabric of culture, narrative scholars find

them to be "politically significant"–derived from both our memory of past events and our

daily interactions (Novitz 144). "Narrative identities," says Novitz "are neither God-given nor innate, but are painstakingly acquired as we grow, develop, and interact with people around us" (144). Gergen and Gergen agree: "[t]he self-narrative is a linguistic implement constructed and reconstructed by people in relationship, and employed in relationships to sustain, enhance, or impede various actions" (163). Consequently, through narrative, a group or individual articulates "reality" to the self and to others; then the impact of that narrative is determined by the power of individuals or groups to compel others to believe and accept it. Epistemologies and experiences inform the way we process what is true. If the past is a narrative, it is like a text that can be written, revised and interpreted; yet the "object of study is less the text itself than the interpretations through which we attempt to confront and to appropriate it...rewriting [it] in terms of a particular interpretive master code" (Eagleton, et al 10). American historical records and literary narratives established the tropes and archetypes—the "master code"—by which the past-as-text is interpreted. However, re-reading the past allows for a re-reading and, perhaps, reinterpretation of that text.

If past narratives become the history (and myths) to which present narratives allude, either explicitly or implicitly, it is valuable, then, to consider black women's experience in this country in light of narrative theory. Rather than explain how black women can or do resist or respond to oppressive structures, I attempt to pull back the curtain on those structures in order to unsettle their taken for granted validity and power. I consider the way narratives and names have been used to mark "black" women and the way dominant ideologies are infused with assertions and assumptions about them as women and as mothers which determine how they are treated by, and within, institutions

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of power. In her article, "In Politics, Perception is Reality: Exploring the Backlash Rhetorics of Anti-Affirmative Action," Heather Bruce explains how, in political discourse, "buzzwords, images and slogans" often become detached from their historical significance and manipulated to serve specific rhetorical functions. I believe that The Welfare Queen is one such term that was able to "transfer the logic of the master narrative into a variety of discursive sites where the ideology itself [was] not…able to assimilate" (124).

In a post-Civil Rights society it would not be prudent for a political leader to directly deride black women as lazy and sexually out of control, but by using terms that carry with them the weight of that meaning, he can still achieve the same effect as the now symbolic code travels and accumulates meanings with each new utterance. Ideological codes, says Bruce, control the public discourse and, as Douglas and Michaels suggest, they may not tell us what to think, but they do tell us what to think about (179). As Higgins and Brush point out, those who are in positions of power and leadership "have established *ethos* in the literal sense: They are recognized characters or actors in a larger drama" (697). This recognition comes from their access to resources that allow their perspectives to be heard. Douglas and Michaels show how, once Reagan began touting anecdotes about welfare queens to the media, journalists began seeking out similar stories. Although there were only a few actual welfare fraud stories, these were repeated frequently and through multiple media leading to an inevitable result:

> polls showed that Americans, in part because of the sensationalized 'welfare cheat' stories in the press, vastly overestimated how much welfare fraud actually existed. In some polls, Americans guessed that 40 percent of those on the dole cheated, while Health and Human Services estimated that *less than 4 percent* of recipients actually lied about their financial situation. (emphasis added 186)

Because of this power and influence—this accumulated ethos on one side—welfare

mothers are left with little or no ability to establish any ethos of their own to counter their

representation. The presence of The Welfare Queen in this social drama is inevitably one

of object not subject, which, as Douglas and Michaels argue, diminishes any possibility

that her perspective will have value in the public sphere. In the debates about welfare

reform,

> [n]early 60 percent of the sources on the news were government officials;
> 9 percent were from think tanks or advocacy groups; and a whopping 71
> percent were male. Only 10 percent were welfare recipients themselves.
> At the same time, conservative (largely) male politicians and pundits on
> talk shows like *The McLaughlin Group* repeatedly identified the single
> mother, and especially the poor, single African American welfare mother,
> as the cause of everything bad, from the 'epidemic' of drug use to the
> national debt to rising crime rates…Thus, it wasn't just that conservative
> politicians and the news media sought to tell Americans that welfare
> mattered; they told Americans how to conceive of and personify the issue.
> (180)

The fact that "politicians and news media" chose to "personify the issue" of welfare

through the image of The Welfare Queen also demonstrates the power of narrative as a

rhetorical device. By providing Americans with an image of the welfare "problem" that

corresponds with always-already negative images present in the American imagination,

political agendas are accomplished and poor black women are cut down by the rhetorical

ax.

In Johnson's and Reagan's speeches as well as in the news reports of welfare

fraud and "The Moynihan Report," it is not only the labels "welfare queen" or "welfare

mother" that serves a rhetorical function. What is left unsaid can speak just as loudly. As

Lubiano argues, in discussions of welfare and poverty, one must consider "what are we

asked to remember? Narratives work by what is called on in connection with them"

(333). The Welfare Queen is often implied, even when she is not specifically named because in media representations "the welfare-dependent single mother is...the synecdoche, the shortest possible shorthand, for the pathology of poor, urban, black culture" (335). This potential for rhetorical silences is telling in that it demonstrates the way a trope can become so ubiquitous that its articulation is unnecessary for it to have effect. The presence or (apparent) absence of The Welfare Queen trope provides us an opportunity not only to see the way this image is used and for what purpose, but also to see (or hear) how its absent presence still functions to achieve other (similar?) purposes.

One way to do this is by observing the rhetorical strategies that speakers and writers use in order to direct our attention in a particular direction. In her article,"Feminist Rhetoric and Representational Fatigue," Eve Wiederhold argues, that "when it comes to attempts to represent, it is one thing to note that elisions are unavoidable and quite another to consider how their placement in narratives makes ideas intelligible" (127-28). By applying the concept of "whiteness-as-framework"—which I discuss in the next section—I can look for the moments when language and ideas reinforce the goals of whiteness while leaving "otherness" out of the frame. Thus, I look for what Wiederhold calls "the quiet elision," that makes certain knowledge apparent and other knowledge obscure. In "The Art of the Contact Zone," MaryLouise Pratt says "when linguistic (or literate) interaction is described in terms of orderliness, games, moves, or scripts...only legitimate moves are actually named as part of the system" (5). The problem with this is that "legitimacy is defined from the point of view of the party in authority—regardless of what other parties might see themselves as doing" (5) and it is to this other (potential) point of view that I would like to call our attention. By ignoring the

perspective of black women and their experiences, dominant epistemologies assume to know, and thus make irrelevant, the voices of the women themselves. By showing where the public discourse surrounding welfare reform comes from, I place in different perspective what is often assumed to be self-evident.

Another critical aspect of this analysis is observing the way narrative is employed as a rhetorical device, tapping into that collective unconscious and shared ethos as a foundation for shared knowledge. "The Moynihan Report," I will argue in the next chapter, relies on earlier narratives then becomes, itself, a narrative upon which future politicians relied. Here, as I consider the social positions of black women on welfare, I am struck by the way in which their material reality is a living narrative, an ongoing social drama that bears a striking resemblance to that of black female slaves in the legal institution of slavery. It is this relationship between female slaves and their white slave masters that Brewer evokes as she identifies "the state" as "a structure of material domination manipulated by leaders and interest groups" and the embodiment of "racial/class/gender relations" ("Gender" 166). What she calls the "capitalist racial patriarchy" is a "structure of White male-dominated social arrangements" (166). Brewer argues that this "capitalist patriarchy" which we might call "*The White Man*," has the power to organize, manipulate and control the economy and industry in such a way that "*The Black Woman*" becomes his slave all over again. Not a literal slave, to be sure, but welfare reform, promoted, then enacted by white-male-dominated power structures creates an "exploitable class of female labor" (168). African American women are "the greatest recipients of the punitive nature of…new reform policies" (Johnson 1042), and although one senator opined that welfare only goes to people who urinate on the bus

station floor, "the reality is that welfare assistance involves…mostly children and women" ("Dethroning the Welfare Queen" 2018).

Furthermore, because most women who are on welfare have little or no education, welfare reforms that push for them to enter the job market merely solidify their poverty as the only jobs available to them are those in the service sectors that pay minimum wage (or less) and make it difficult, if not impossible for them to support themselves and their children. As the social drama plays out, business owners (usually white and male) continue to benefit from tax incentives and subsidies that add up to billions of dollars: "government support for private firms in the United States, including subsidies, tax expenditures, loan guarantees, and low-interest financing amounted to almost 14 percent of GNP in 1980" (Brewer "Race" 121).

This relationship between black women and the predominantly white-male-owned power structure is made more significant when one considers arguments used to justify withholding and withdrawing support for single black women and mothers on welfare as discussed earlier in this chapter ("suitable home", "employable mother", "man-in-the-house," etc.). Ironically, the State-as-Master was also the State-as-Husband as it was positioned in such a way that it provided for the basic needs of single women. Yet, as "Master" the State was also in full control of women's lives: able to dictate where they lived, what groceries they bought and with whom they spent their time.[8] The State, by virtue of its position as Savior to the poor and destitute was also Judge—that is, able to determine who received what, when and for how long. This duality meant the poor would be indebted to the State at the same time that they despised (and, perhaps, were despised by) it.

While those in leadership positions draw on familiar forms and tropes to build their own credibility at the expense of the powerless, their access to and control of media legitimizes their rhetoric about the poor and silences the perspective of those with less power. Not only in control of public perception, but also the everyday lives of poor black women, the State is positioned to dictate what and who will be acceptable within the public sphere. In the next section I will discuss the ideological structure that creates this material reality.

1.6 whiteness/blackness/otherness

In "Yeats and Decolonization," Edward Said lays out the fundamental basis of Western imperialist thought arguing that the very foundation of American culture has relied for centuries on narratives of dominance (i.e. the Enlightenment, also what hooks calls the "ideology of domination") and power. "Eurocentrism" according to Said is a mode of thought (epistemology) that considers all non-European, subjugated peoples "naturally subservient to a superior, advanced, developed, and morally mature Europe, whose role in the non-European world was to rule, instruct, legislate, develop, and at the proper times, to discipline, war against, and occasionally exterminate non-Europeans" (Said 72). In order to maintain economic supremacy in the world, Europeans and, eventually, Americans had to not only physically subjugate indigenous and enslaved peoples, but also to subdue them psychologically and convince them of their own depravity. The systematic destruction of native cultures—whether through the extermination of Native Americans or the enslavement of Africans—was a concerted effort to achieve total domination and complete erasure of non-European culture and identity.

Thus, European narratives reflected European ideologies (doctrines/beliefs) which were shaped by epistemologies (the reasons for those beliefs) that characterized the "dominant," first and foremost, as European (later to be designated as "white") and the "oppressed,"[9] first and foremost, as non-European (later to be designated as "black" or "of color"). This broad description is further delineated by defining "dominant" as rational (Changfoot 479); both "god-like" (Spelman 52) and human (Collins 44); "overprivileged" (Wise) and normal/universal (Frankenburg). Concomitantly, the "oppressed" are characterized as emotional (read: not rational); "underprivileged" (Wise); "animal-like" (Spelman 52); sub-human (Collins) and "radical" (Frankenburg). While white men are associated with mental capabilities which are 'of highest value to society,'" (Spelman 51), blacks and women have been oppressed through their association with bodily functions—"sex, reproduction, appetite, secretions and excretions" (Spelman 53).

These characterizations are not unlike the image of The Welfare Queen as ignorant, lazy and lascivious. The distinction between white and black, high and low is indicative of The Enlightenment chain of being which ranged from the "'lowliest Hottentot' up to Newton and Milton" (Roberts 5). Roberts says, "[w]hite culture [has always] tried to place Africans at the losing end of every scale upon which they measured themselves" (5). Establishing the differences between white and black people, then, has historically been important for the preservation of white power, authority and access: "'[r]ace has become a trope of ultimate, irreducible difference between cultures…which—more often than not—also have fundamentally opposed economic interests" (Gates qtd in Roberts 4).

This project focuses on the ideological versus material experiences of race in this country, and "whiteness" is a key component to this discussion; it is the "ideology of domination" that I have just outlined. "'Whiteness'" Keating argues, "has functioned as a pseudouniversal category that hides its specific values, epistemology, and other attributes under the guise of a nonracialized, supposedly colorless, 'human nature'" (904). It should be understood, however, that by "whiteness" (and "blackness") I do not (only) speak of skin color or phenotype, but also to the "conscious awareness by [individuals] of being part of a group...with a particular place in history and a political relationship to other groups within the geopolitical site of the United States" (Lubiano 330). *Race* is a social not a biological construct established for the benefit of European slaveholders and landowners who found it economically beneficial to keep blacks and Indians bound by their supposed skin inferiority. However, racial ideology, such as "whiteness," only begins with race. We must be careful in an analysis of "whiteness" or "blackness" not to conflate these ideologies with white or black *people*. As Keating argues, the relationship between ideologies and skin color are conditional: "the fact that a person is born with 'white' skin does not necessarily mean that s/he will think, act, and write In...'white' ways...nor does the fact that a person has 'brown' or 'black' skin automatically guarantee that s/he will *not*" (907).

Ultimately, who a person is and who they become is not pre-determined by biology. Instead, physical characteristics become infused with meaning and significance in particular contexts at particular historical moments and are impacted by multiple influences that include (but are not limited to) class and gender. Therefore, "whiteness" and "blackness" are socially-constructed ideologies of race and place in American culture

and to study "whiteness" is to identify the function of power and privilege that is often determined by racial categorizations. There are white women, black men and women as well as other minorities who have adapted "whiteness" either consciously or unconsciously, often in an effort to assimilate the dominant culture, to attain the successes of the wealthy and/or move beyond racial rhetoric and prove that "we're all the same" on the inside. Nonetheless, "whiteness" is a product of the white male power elite, so efforts to separate "whiteness" from racially marked "white" people ultimately circles back to the fact that those who benefit from the ideologies of "whiteness" are inevitably white and male. Even though non-whites try to adapt this ideology to unsettle its power, as Audre Lorde would say, it is difficult to use the master's tools to dismantle the master's house.

"Whiteness" may be defined, then, not necessarily or only as the insidious ideology of overtly racist skinheads or KKK cavalries, but rather as the subtly benign and disinterested concepts of right and wrong which filter through discourses, unseen and sometimes unfelt, but ever present. Whiteness is the backdrop or scene of so much political and social discourse couched in terms like "American values" and in the reverential esteem for the Constitution as a document as holy as the Christian Bible— both of which are evoked for their clear assertions against evil and injustice and defense of all that is "good". Yet, one's understanding of whiteness is not so much understood by evaluating it directly, in the same way that peering directly at the sun would only cause blindness. By studying "whiteness" one risks being "blinded" by the racial undertone of the term. Some have argued that "whiteness studies" are merely a clever ploy to turn attention away from women's studies and cultural studies, for example, in order to secure

the position of white people over all others (Keating 213). It could also be assumed that discussing "whiteness" in a study of black women is an attempt to build up a "straw man" against which to rail.

However, "whiteness"[10] as I use it is not meant to be an epithet against white people; I merely intend to understand how "whiteness" functions in political discourse. Roberts and other scholars (Morrison, hooks, Kovel, Fanon) argue that the very concept of "whiteness" can only exist in contrast to the construction of "blackness," thus, "whiteness" is everything that "blackness" isn't. On one hand, "whiteness" is obvious. It is the ideology of the power structures which are controlled by white men and which hold wealth accumulation, white male dominance, European characteristics of beauty and a particular form of Christian morality[11] in high esteem. In this way, "whiteness" is in direct contrast to poverty, non-white, non-male dominance, non-European characteristics and moral values that differ from the oppressive and judgmental forms of Christianity. Less obvious is the operation of "whiteness" which facilitates the more obvious racist attitudes; it is whiteness-as-framework or lens through which the world is viewed, people are categorized, judgments are made and policies implemented. Whiteness-as-framework articulates the seemingly universal voice of reason and the "common good" while still actualizing the goals of white male dominance.

In the 1960s, the Black Power movement burst onto the political scene as a response to "whiteness" ideology and combative black protestors shouted loudly about the need for a new black aesthetic that defied all of the oppressive western ideals. Although scholars recognize that race is a social construction (Ratcliffe, West, Gates, Fuss, hooks, Holmes, Frankenburg, Keating, Gilyard), it is, nonetheless, real in terms of

its function in American culture. To this day, people talk about the differences between "black" and "white" people in negative terms, emphasizing the good of one versus the bad of the other. Indeed, because of this world in which we live where individuals are stratified into upper and lower levels of society, constructing an identity becomes the means by which individuals either accept or resist their placement in this hierarchical social structure. If "whiteness" is the dominant ideology, "blackness" will be everything that opposes it.

As a way to emphasize the role of "whiteness" in this discussion of race, I juxtapose the visibly marked black woman with the less visible white "norm" against which she stands in stark contrast. By unsettling the assumed normalcy of "whiteness" one may find that the taken-for-granted assumptions about "blackness" become less apparent. Furthermore, I find that there are limitations to these racial ideologies and see the need to move beyond "whiteness" and "blackness" to what I call *otherness*, an ideology that does not ignore the historical baggage that "whiteness" and "blackness" carry, but attempts to go through that history and come out on the other side. *Otherness* is not the same as multiculturalism either, although it may borrow from the apparent intentions of a multicultural ideology. I will discuss this more in this concluding section as well as in the final chapter of this dissertation.

<div align="center">Conclusion</div>

In this chapter, I have discussed how The Welfare Queen stands in contrast to the ideals of a capitalist patriarchal society and how assessing welfare discourse through a black and socialist feminist lens complicates our understanding of poverty in America. Narrative provides the tools for the rhetoric that socializes American citizens to accept

hierarchical structures that are in place to preserve the status quo and a "whiteness"

ideology forms the backdrop of poverty discourse. Rather than allow it to remain unseen,

I consider how "whiteness" constructs "blackness" into a negative and how—when

"whiteness" and "blackness" collide in the public debate over welfare reform—

"whiteness," by default, is Americanness and "blackness," by default, is deviancy.[12] To

interrogate this construction of race in welfare discourse, I employ Krista Ratcliff's

"rhetorical eavesdropping" in Chapter 2 and complicate what could be a simplistic

analysis of The Welfare Queen trope. This term, which was introduced into the public

lexicon by presidential-candidate Ronald Reagan in 1974, existed in the subtext of public

discourse long before that. Rhetorical eavesdropping as I will use it in this project

"listens" for the (un)conscious presences, absences [and] unknowns" within a particular

set of discourses—in this case, "The Moynihan Report," presidential speeches and news

reports. These documents address audiences in a different time and place from where I

live and were made up of individuals with whom I differ in age, experience and (often)

ethnicity; thus, I "eavesdrop" or listen to texts that do not directly address me (91).

Nonetheless, precisely because I am not present in, but rather outside of these rhetorical

moments, I am able to hear not just what is said, but also what is meant when discourses

echo and reverberate between the past and present.

Additionally, as I "listen" I consider the inadequacies of "whiteness" and

"blackness" ideologies. These inadequacies lead me to my premise that an *otherness*

ideology is needed. I don't advocate "blackness" as a response to "whiteness" because I

find it to be retaliatory, fighting fire with fire which only circles back to animosity and

oppression. Neither do I advocate multiculturalism as it is really "whiteness" passing as

"colorblindness" and ignoring rather than acknowledging cultural histories. Instead, I advocate *otherness* which is individualistic but not self-serving; other-centered, but not for the purpose of objectifying; it is about interest in others for the sake of understanding them—or as Ratcliffe says "standing under" them;[13] it is democratic[14] not political and it recognizes commonalities and differences without judgment.

I use the lowercase and italics to distinguish this ideology not as Said's "Other" but as something *other* than the ideologies that are so inextricably linked to racial histories and so overburdened by historical baggage. It is my desire that *otherness* will be recognized as *trans*racial rather than multicultural. It does not ignore unique cultural identities, but its perspective on them is new. It is openness to possibilities and the potential for people to be evaluated on the basis of their own unique selves, against a standard not established by vested self-interests. This ideology overlaps with "whiteness," "blackness" and "multiculturalism," but there are important departures from each of these which I will discuss more fully in the concluding chapter.

Chapter 1 Notes

[1] In this section I discuss various theories about American capitalism as discussed in Abramovitz, *Regulating the Lives of Women*. For more on the perspectives of **Liberalism** see Hunt and Jaggar; on **Marxism** see Miliband, Poulantzas, Gough, Piven and Cloward; on **Liberal Feminism** see Jaggar and Eisenstein; on **Radical Feminism** see Daly; for **Socialist Feminism** see Sokoloff, Wilson and McIntosh; on **Black Socialist feminism** see Dill and Glenn.

[2] Socialist Feminists who take into account complexities of race and sex in the "political economy of the welfare state": Elizabeth Wilson, Mary McIntosh, Carol Brown, Zillah Eisenstein, and Allison Jaggar (Abramovitz 30).

[3] Martin Gilens also says this: "For most of human history, most people struggled just to obtain the basic necessities of life. But America at the turn of the twenty-first century is among the richest societies ever to exist. Today we possess the means to provide all our citizens not only with life's necessities, but with material abundance that would have astounded our nation's founders" (preface).

[4] The individualist ideology has been promoted by scholars such as Feagin, Hunt, Kluegel & Smith; Smith & Stone.

[5] "members of the community donated food, clothes, shelter or money to deserving widows or white women who could not take care of themselves; undeserving others were sent to work in poorhouses or manufactories; in either case they were always "protected" by a patriarchal figure.(Abramovitz 84-90)

[6] Aid to Families with Dependent Children, initially called ADC, Aid to Dependent Children, because lawmakers were concerned that money would be used (or misused) by immoral parents (i.e. mothers).

[7] See (hooks 2000, Moraga and Anzaldua 1984, Collins 1990, Hull, et al. 1982, Mohanty 2003, Narayan 1997, Dill 1983, Davis 1989).

[8] Remember that prior to 1968, single women who had male companions were often disqualified for welfare funds.

[9] Patricia Hill Collins defines oppression as "any unjust situation where, systematically and over a long period of time, one group denies another group access to the resources of society." I would add to that: the "oppressed" are also those who have inherited the legacy of oppression even after the systematic denial has ended; as Tim Wise says, in the same way that privilege is passed down, so too are the consequences of that systematic denial of access and resources.

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[10] Others, besides white males may socially benefit from ascribing to a whiteness ideology because to do so is to align oneself with those in power. White males benefit from whiteness when "others" subscribe to that way of thinking because it reinforces the supposed righteousness of whiteness.

[11] this Christianity is more like the hypocritical religious leaders who crucified Jesus for the sake of the law

[12] Regina Austin says in "many areas of public life, blacks are condemned and negatively stereotyped for engaging in activities that white people undertake without a second thought." Yet, she argues, "deviance is gauged, not by the intrinsic nature of an act, but by powerful people's responses to it. Deviance is a social construct and a mechanism of social control" (225).

[13] My *otherness* ideology is an adaptation of Krista Ratcliffe's rhetorical listening as beautifully articulated in her article "Rhetorical Listening: A Trope for Interpretive Invention and a 'Code of Cross Cultural Conduct.'" She says, "[t]o clarify this process of understanding, we might best invert the term and define *understanding* as *standing under*—consciously standing under discourses that surround us and others, while consciously acknowledging all our particular and fluid standpoints. Standing under discourses means letting discourses wash over, through, and around us and then letting them lie there to inform our politics and ethics" (205).

[14] World English Dictionary: "popular with or for the benefit of all."

CHAPTER 2
NARRATIVE & RHETORIC IN MOYNIHAN'S *NEGRO FAMILY*

"This is not a story to pass on... " (*Beloved*, Toni Morrison 275)

Introduction

The African American woman as "welfare queen" became a familiar image in the

welfare discourse of the 1960s aided by a particularly negative portrayal of poor black

women in an in-house government document, *The Negro Family: The Case for National*

Action, which was later leaked to the public and dubbed "The Moynihan Report."[15]

Although the term "welfare queen" was not used in the report, the characteristics of the

single black woman on welfare that the report described were expounded by media and

political pundits until depictions[16] of lazy and overtly sexual beings proliferated. The

significance of Moynihan's report, the escalating racial tensions that followed, and the

availability of this image upon which Reagan later relied in order to build his case against

welfare provides a "perfect storm" of rhetoric and political discourse to assess.

Additionally, the fact that early narratives about race and gender inform both Moynihan

and Reagan's rhetoric demonstrates the persistence and power of narrative even when it

is employed with opposite intentions. In this chapter, I begin by discussing the

Enlightenment ideologies of the 20th century that rely on science as the logical, rational

solution to all social problems. This confidence in science—which is what undergirds

Moynihan's report—is suspicious because of its historic use in justifying oppression. I,

then, contextualize "The Moynihan Report" by explaining how the timing of its release, the ethos of Moynihan and Johnson and the prevailing racial tensions put particular constraints on the report's effectiveness. Finally, the chapter ends with a rhetorical analysis of the report itself and an example of a Negro matriarch who unsettles the "welfare queen" stereotype. To my knowledge, there has been no prior rhetorical analysis of "The Moynihan Report;" yet, its complexity necessitates attention as it is a document that is foundational to the welfare discourse of the last fifty years. As authors of *Women and Children First*, DiQuinzio and Meagher attest, the release of this report and the ensuing debates demonstrate how "cultural discourse shapes, and is shaped by, both academic and public policy discourses" (1). In addition, feminist scholar, Cheryl Gilkes asserts that "the policy framework advanced by the Johnson administration's War on Poverty accomplished, more than anything else, the public labeling of Black women as officially deviant persons in American society" (297). However, in an effort to complicate what could be a simplistic analysis of the "welfare queen" trope that merely positions poor black women at the mercy of evil white men, in this analysis I employ Krista Ratcliff's "rhetorical eavesdropping." I do not wish to emphasize the victimization of black women, but rather to consider the way narrative, rhetoric and ideology have worked to make that victimization possible. To "eavesdrop" one must be positioned at the edge of one's own knowledge and that of an *other*. What this means is that as I trace the function of a whiteness ideology in welfare discourse, I offer readers the opportunity to reconsider what they know about cultures, bodies and tropes. Like Ratcliffe, my goal here is to shift our perspective of history from "origins to usage" (94). Rhetorical eavesdropping, then, as I use it in this chapter "listens" for the (un)conscious

presences, absences [and] unknowns" in "The Moynihan Report" which facilitated its impact on welfare discourse.

In Chapter 1, I discussed the way values and belief systems permeate public policies and discourses which most harshly affect those who are dubbed "undeserving". I noted that prevailing ideologies manifested in various ways throughout history, but one consistent thread has been the connection between morality and poverty as determined by religion and/or science.[17] "The Moynihan Report" emerges during a time when reliance on the social sciences was at a height—a growing "professionalization of reform" had begun after the second World War and by the time of the Kennedy administration was integral to the government's approach to solving social issues (Hayward xxvi). Portions of the report were part of Johnson's 1965 Howard University address which piqued the curiosity of reporters who learned that the speech had been informed by a "secret" government document. The buzz created by the report's secrecy only heightened its affect when it was finally made public later that year.

The timing of the report's release and the socially volatile historical moment from which it emerged must also be considered along with rhetorical issues of audience and ethos as the report was propelled from an in-house call-to-action to a catalyst of political upheaval in the public sphere. Rainwater and Yancey say "Moynihan gave considerable thought to the design and phrasing of this report for the official audience he had in mind" (299). The problem is that "[a]pparently no one involved gave comparable thought to how a document should be designed to accomplish the same goals but for a different audience—newspaper reporters and the public" (299).[18] Certainly, the change of

audience meant a change of meaning and significance since each audience had its own

unique concerns, values and biases, further complicating Moynihan's expected results.

Nonetheless, my argument in this chapter is that these rhetorical considerations

were informed not just by certain political desires, but also by an underlying narrative of

black inferiority which meant that (1) his message could easily be co-opted for alternative

ends (as it was) and (2) even its anticipated success would have been the very

perpetuation of white domination and hegemony that also resulted from its failure.

2.1 The Politics of Science in *The Negro Family*

"[S]cience's potential ...cannot be fully realized until scientists give up the twin myths of objectivity and [the] inexorable march toward truth" (Stephen Gould, The MisMeasure of Man 55).

To begin, I would like to consider how Enlightenment ideologies inform the 20th

century reliance upon the sciences. Faith in science can be problematic if accepted

without critique considering the tendency for "the ruling class...in every epoch" to

control dominant ideologies which also secure hierarchical structures (Lewontin , et al 4).

An extensive treatment of the history of anthropology, biology and the social sciences is

beyond the scope of this discussion; however, I am looking here to the work of Baker,

Gould, Lewontin, et al, and Rainwater and Yancey for their critical perspective on the

interactions of science and culture. In particular, I am focusing, in this chapter, on how

American culture has relied upon science to justify social inequality. I am considering,

also, the important critical debate among scientists (whose work is often evoked by

politicians) about the extent to which either biological or cultural determinism is at work

in our world.

In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno and Horkheimer trace the path of the Enlightenment to its beginning and argue that this system of thought, which extols the merits of science and logic, merely replaced the prevailing system of thought (which extolled the supernatural and magic), with another kind of mystical—and mythical—power: *reason*. What is interesting is that the source of power for both science and religion is language. The imposition of signs over images elevated a particular concept of reality as reality itself and "[t]he impartiality of scientific language [...] provided the existing order with a neutral sign for itself" (17). This neutrality satisfies the Enlightenment skepticism of the supernatural and transfers the power to name reality from the realm of the gods to the minds of men. According to Lee Baker, anthropologist and author of *From Savage to Negro*, Enlightenment writers considered science to be "unfettered by emotion or superstition, and by the middle of the eighteenth century science was becoming a dominant discourse on both sides of the Atlantic" (13). However, the shift from a belief in the supernatural to belief in super *men*, has proven to be a nominal change since the manifestation has served the same social and political purposes. For example, Baker traces the progression of the field of anthropology which established itself as a discipline by helping to establish the scientific basis for racial discrimination. The ascension of academic anthropology occurred "in the late 1880s and was concurrent with the rise of American imperialism and the institutionalization of racial segregation and disenfranchisement" (26). By creating a sense of reality through science and scientific study, popular beliefs about black people were given credibility. Popular narratives of racial inequality were now bolstered by "proofs" and "facts" which "buoyed existing power relationships, political goals, and economic interests [and]

institutionalized racial inferiority and socially structured categories" (Baker 13). The entrenchment of these ideas diminished the effectiveness of any attempts to resist them in the same way that supposedly God-ordained hierarchies had done before.

American scientists did not completely rebuff religion, however; anthropologists Samuel Morton, Josiah Nott, and Louis Agassiz, for example, spun stories of polygenesis[19] as a way of explaining that "Negroes origin [was] separate and apart from Whites" (13). Thus, through both science and religion, "experts" insisted that "Negroes were like children who needed direction, discipline, and the parentlike care of a master...[they] were better off enslaved because this imposed at least a modicum of civilized culture" (Baker 15). In *The Mismeasure of Man*, biologist Stephen Jay Gould discusses this sort of ideology that assumes social and economic differences between human groups are natural and fixed; that inferiorities are inherited; that intelligence can be measured, and that individuals' worth can be assigned accordingly (52).[20] The assumption is that "science is objective knowledge free from social and political taint" (52). Yet, Baker (like Gould) demonstrates the dialogical relationship between science and society: "lawmakers have used anthropology to write legislation that shapes public policy, and journalists have used it to produce media that shape public opinion [and] the discipline of anthropology, in turn, is validated by this sort of appropriation" (4). Without this validation and acceptance from the population—and in particular from the dominant power structures—the supposedly-objective sciences would be merely isolated knowledge. The very function of science within social spheres is what gives it value.

In their analysis of the controversy that erupted around "The Moynihan Report," sociologists Rainwater and Yancey explore the intersection of government, social

sciences and civil rights in the public sphere and, in particular, recognize the unique

position of a social scientist between presenting the "facts" of his/her research and

controlling the use to which those "facts" are put. Although scientists are not able to

control the use to which their research is put, they may consider the impact that

prevailing cultural "norms" place on them in spite of their attempts at objectivity.

However, this would require them to "eavesdrop" on the cultural paradigms within which

they are operating. As the cultural logic about race began to shift in the 1920s and 30s,

so too did the scientific mandates: "sociology and psychology, assumed the task of

destroying the intellectual foundations of racism and white supremacy" (Rainwater &

Yancey 303) that those same "scientific" disciplines had established in the decades prior.

This gradual move in "scientific research" away from assertions of blacks' biological,

anthropological, or social inferiority supports Gould's assertion that, contrary to popular

opinion, scientific study does not produce immutable truths about human nature, capacity

and potential, nor is science a purely "objective enterprise" but rather a "social

phenomenon" subject to cultural influences and constraints (Gould 53).

Thus, rather than assume that "what is biological is given by nature and proved by

science" (Lewontin et al 6), what we should learn from scientific study is that "nature" is

a dialectical relationship between biological and social elements. Scientists may see

themselves as "just doing research," but the challenge for those scientists whose research

may have direct or indirect cultural impact is to recognize the extent to which culture

influences them as researchers. While they may not be able to ascend above culture, they

may be able to turn a critical lens upon their own contribution to it and consider how they

may ask different questions of the "human and natural world" (8) than those that are

expected. I argue that Moynihan's study is based on a flawed premise. The questions that he sets out to answer predetermine the answers that he finds while his socially-privileged position as scientist and government insider bolsters the rhetoric of his report and perpetuates rather than stems inequality. His reliance on scientific data presumably absolves him from any potential for cultural biases, yet this very reliance on science actually perpetuates cultural biases and reinforces the need to reconsider the interaction of science and culture. Gould calls for scientists to turn their inquiry upon the discipline of science itself (55) and I attempt here to question the misplaced confidence in scientific theories evident in Moynihan's report and its reception. I assert the possibility that Moynihan's approach to the social problems of the Negro community were constrained by the culture of whiteness within which he operated. Had different questions been posed about the nature of the "problem," Moynihan might have drawn different conclusions which may have also resulted in different outcomes.

It is appropriate, then, to consider more carefully the relationship between scientific research—with all of its emphasis on absolute truth and indisputable fact—and cultural narratives and epistemologies—which are characterized by relativity and context. "The Moynihan Report" is a culturally significant document because it represents a convergence of science and reason with narrative and white racist ideology. The irony is that the purpose and professed intention of the document was to be a reasoned, data-driven report that would expose racism and undo its effects. Yet, as Rainwater and Yancey argue, and I agree, "The Moynihan Report" is more than a presentation of scientific data. It is a rhetorical appeal intended to be persuasive (297). Moynihan attempted to use the ethos of his position and the logos of scientific research to persuade

government officials to take deliberate steps towards eradicating poverty in the black community. However, the scientific nature of his report establishes a false sense of objectivity and inevitability which is acceptable precisely because it supports the "'naturalness'" of the "existing social order" (Lewontin, et al 4).

Additionally, as is often the case with rhetorical presentations, the success or failure of one's argument has as much to do with what is said as how, to whom and when. Thus, the timing of the report (*kairos*), the ethos of the writer and the complexities of audience and context put particular constraints on the reception and effectiveness of Moynihan's report which I discuss in the sections that follow.

2.2. The Politics of Public Discourse--Kairos/Ethos/Audience

2.2.1 Kairos

In his book *Freedom is Not Enough*, historian James Patterson takes us back to June 4, 1965, when President Lyndon B. Johnson gave a commencement address at Howard University that laid out his plans for the most comprehensive civil rights reforms ever in our nation's history. Comprehensive because Johnson's plans went beyond legislative actions that, in theory, provided equal opportunities to "blacks," towards measures intended to provide equal results in "black" communities as well: "the next and more profound stage of the battle for civil rights," said Johnson, was to "seek...not just legal equity but human ability—not just equality as a right and a theory but equality as a fact and as a result" (Johnson 126). Johnson's proclamation was received well by the predominantly African American audience as well as African American civil rights leaders. Patterson says they were "delighted" by Johnson's emphasis on "results" which were aimed at employment, health care, education and housing; yet, what would later

become the most controversial part of Johnson's plan—and the point upon which this early support would waver—was his focus on "'the breakdown of the Negro family structure'" that he said "flowed from 'centuries of oppression and persecution of the Negro *man*'" (Patterson x my emphasis).

After the speech, the news media reported that it was part of a more extensive study and eventually parts of that document were leaked to the press. However, when the full report was "officially" released to the public just a few weeks after the Watts riots as the Johnson administration's attempt to show that it was already aware of the problems in the black ghettos, it sparked a media frenzy over the plight of "black" America and the response/responsibility of the American government to address it (Patterson). This shift of audience and context meant that the report that had been well-received by black leaders in the semi-private context of a black college commencement ceremony was now an embarrassing expose of the ills of the black community as the media propelled it into the wider public sphere. The media extracted from the speech and report those points that seemed the most sensational and compelling, which were also the parts that were the most socially divisive. While Moynihan's report was more about the business of government, Johnson's speech was more about the work of diplomacy and getting consensus on the basis of widely accepted principles and notions of the common good. Timing was key to achieving both goals.

By 1965, the Civil Rights Movement was reaching a turning point. With the *Brown vs Board* decision in 1954, the passage of the Civil Rights Bill in 1964 and the anticipated passage of the Voting Rights bill in 1965, the fight for legal equality which had been the thrust of the movement prior to this time had reached its Ebenezer.[21] Now

that these laws were in place, there was a need to readjust and reassess the purpose of civil rights activities—either to identify a new cause or to lay down the weapons of war. In effect, the Civil Rights Movement in 1965 "faced the threat of destruction because of its victories" (Rainwater and Yancey 10). However, where there had been one primary focus before—civil rights legislation—now there emerged multiple issues: how, for example, to ensure adequate implementation of these laws and how to address blacks' impoverished conditions. The rising urban population in the north revealed rising problems of a different nature than those faced in the south where the movement had been attuned. The blatant racism and racial tensions in the south gave way to a more subtle racism in the north. Discriminatory housing and hiring practices made for troublesome living conditions and, according to Robert Carter, social problems were caused by an amalgamation of not just race, but also "class, culture [and] subculture...[which were] not easy to tackle" (qtd in Rainwater 11). Both civil rights leaders and government administrators began to realize that passing the 1964 Civil Rights Bill had not "solve[d] the problem of discrimination in American society nor reduce[d]...conflict between the government and the 'movement'" (Rainwater and Yancey 15). As a result, the administration and "the movement" were faced with the question of "what do next" (15). Johnson's speech, then, represented a deliberate move towards addressing this question and Moynihan's report sparked new enthusiasm within the administration as it gave them a "specific target and specific means to measure the effectiveness of existing or new programs aimed at the pathologies of the urban slums" (16).

Ultimately, the social and political moment was "the best of times and the worst

of times" for the emergence of "The Moynihan Report." Although the gains of The Civil

Rights Movement up to that point and the ascendance of a Democratic president desirous

of a "Great Society," pointed to the dawn of a new day, Johnson and Moynihan's

optimism over the outcome of the report and the speech collided with the American

public sphere. The resistance of cynical Republicans uninterested in spending tax dollars

on the "undeserving" poor, a skeptical media that wondered how such reforms could be

enacted in the midst of escalating tensions in Vietnam, and one particularly surprising

catastrophe—the Watts riots—that derailed what had been a steady train of civil rights

reforms spelled doom for the Johnson administration (Patterson 72). As spring turned to

summer and fall in 1965, the briefly positive and hopeful moment that was LBJ's

Howard commencement address passed away before his thought could become action.

2.2.2. Ethos

There was much at stake for Moynihan and Johnson when the report was first

leaked then, later, released to the public. Moynihan's report was a call to action;

Johnson's speech was an appeal for support of that proposed action. While construction

of a strong ethos for Moynihan meant building a case that was scientifically sound, a

strong ethos for Johnson meant building an image of sympathetic leadership.

Daniel Patrick Moynihan,[22] who held a PhD in political science, became Assistant

Secretary of Labor and Director of the Office of Policy Planning and Research in 1963

(Rainwater & Yancey 18). Rainwater and Yancey describe him as "one of a new breed of

public servants, the social scientist-politicos, who combine in their background both

social science training and experience and full-time involvement in political activity"

(18). Moynihan shared Johnson's political views as well as his concern for improving

the plight of low-income "blacks" and "wished to see the notion of family welfare as a

reference point by which to evaluate the desirability and success of particular poverty

programs" (21).

In the report, Moynihan uses numbers and statistics to show trends demonstrating

what Johnson referred to in his speech, that "the Negro" unemployment is "twice as

high" as that of whites and that the "median income of Negro families compared to

white…dropped from 57 percent to 53 percent" (Johnson 127). In fact, Moynihan's data

show African Americans in the negative on every measure from "fertility" and

"illegitimacy rates to "percent of women without husbands," unemployment rates and IQ

results. As a scientist, Moynihan relies on scientific data in the report and maintains a

subject position that is at a safe distance from the personal nature of the subject matter; he

is simply the messenger delivering the bad news. Although not a Washington outsider,

Moynihan was not in a political role when he compiled the report. He was appointed to

his position, not voted in. Thus, although he had an interest and concern for political

matters he was under no specific political pressure to do anything.

Johnson, on the other hand, had something to prove. When he was sworn into

office in 1963, following the assassination of John F. Kennedy, Johnson "pledged [his]

support for President Kennedy's legislative agenda, which included civil rights and

education legislation" (The Lyndon Baines Johnson Foundation). Early in 1964, he laid

out his vision of a "Great Society" which was free of poverty and racial injustice and

signed the Civil Rights Act in July of that year, demonstrating his commitment to

achieving his goals. Yet, the relationship between movement leaders and government

officials had historically been tenuous (Rainwater 15). Each group had its own vested

interests to protect. Suspicious of, yet reliant upon government, social leaders had to

walk a thin line between demanding government action and cooperating with

administrative leaders in addressing the needs of the community. Government leaders,

such as Johnson, needed to be in control while still appeasing the citizenry who voted

them in. Although Johnson had won the presidency with a historically record-breaking

number of popular votes, many of which had been from the "Negro" community,

Rainwater and Yancey argue that "he wanted to be President of 'all the people'" (14) and

"used the strategy of developing a 'consensus image' in order to push his administrative

programs" (14). In order to achieve this, however, he would need to establish an amiable

relationship with civil rights leaders who, themselves, were having difficulty coalescing

diverse goals and agendas.

2.2.3 Audience

Although Moynihan's report inspired Johnson's speech, each one served a

different purpose and had unique characteristics. While both had at their core the same

concern—the status of the Negro—there were also competing goals that distracted from

this focus. In his report, Moynihan needed to convince government officials to act, but in

his speech Johnson needed to convince the American populace to approve of government

action. In the report, Moynihan's audience and purpose were, thus, much more narrowly

confined than were Johnson's. The divergent perspectives of black civil rights leaders

and white republican voters also meant higher stakes for Johnson than for Moynihan.

Johnson's shift of focus from government responsibility, which is in Moynihan's report,

to the responsibility of the American people in Johnson's speech marks the first

indication that these divergent needs would complicate what Moynihan, perhaps, had hoped would be an open and shut case.

According to Rainwater and Yancey, because Moynihan wanted to sway public officials to take seriously the plight of poor black people—not wanting the government to rest comfortably on its political laurels now that the Civil Rights Act of 1964 had been passed and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was soon to be—he set out with intention to convince "the highest levels of the administration" to consider a different strategy and a "basic redefinition of the civil rights problem" (26). Prior to this time, the federal government had been slow to move on behalf of the Negro, more often being compelled by pressures from Civil Rights demonstrations and civil unrest. Yet, Moynihan saw Johnson's openness to change and his War on Poverty initiative as an opportunity for the government to get out in front of the "problem" rather than lead from behind. Indeed, in his speech, Johnson challenges the American people to take up the fight of the American Negro for freedom. He admits that "[i]n far too many ways American Negroes have been another nation: deprived of freedom, crippled by hatred, the doors of opportunity closed to hope" (Johnson 125). He then insists that in spite of the political progress that has been achieved, "freedom is not enough" because the "ability to" does not provide the "means to" act on the freedom given (126).

Moynihan's data show a rising trend of black men out of work, black women securing jobs as maids and domestics and black children born into broken homes headed by single mothers. He acknowledges that slavery and segregation have established this trend, but also indicates that the result is a "tangle of pathology" in the black community that has "begun to feed on itself" (Moynihan 47). Moynihan relied heavily on the work

of E. Franklin Frazier, a black sociologist, and Patterson surmises that Moynihan felt his claims would be validated by his reliance on someone with a vested interest in the people under study. Yet, when the report was made public several months after Johnson's Howard address, certain passages in the report "framing highly sensitive issues in near-apocalyptic terms, seemed to suggest that deep-seated historical forces had all but irreparably savaged black culture" (xiv).[23]

What further complicated the effectiveness of this document is the complex web of race, class and social history that clouded the reception of a report written by a "white" man criticizing "black" people. Race is a naturally divisive subject in any public discourse, thus, it should not be surprising that Johnson and Moynihan's bold proclamations about and on behalf of black Americans would stir controversy. When Johnson said "The Negro...will have to rely mostly on his own efforts" to overcome "poverty and prejudice," some listeners did not hear his follow-up statement: "[b]ut he just cannot do it alone" (Johnson 129). Instead, many white Americans believed it was black people *alone* who were responsible for their problems. This is because the paradigm upon which both Johnson and Moynihan built their case preceded the controversy and determined the outcome long before either one wrote or spoke a word.

First of all, the focus on *Negro* men indicates a reliance on a particular epistemology that is "whiteness" as it places black *cultures* in direct opposition to white *culture* (Ratcliffe); second, the focus on Negro *men* indicates the same ideology which places men in a hierarchy above women, confines women to specific roles that are subordinate to men and distinguishes between those women who are acceptable and those

who are blameworthy. In the following section, I will look more closely at each of these issues in *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action.*

2.3 "The Moynihan Report"—an Analysis[24]

"The Moynihan Report" was written and circulated among government officials before Johnson delivered his Howard address. However, Johnson's speech made the report known to the public. Thus, although "The Moynihan Report" was created first, it was Johnson's use of the report in his speech that brought attention to its existence. In this section, I will be looking at the language of the report as expressed in both Johnson's speech and in the report itself and I will use Ratcliffe's "eavesdropping" as a way to consider "what gets displaced in the origins mode" of reading history which is "the presence of the past in the present—or, the *then-that-is-now*" (92). To do so, I will be looking at the way past experiences bleed into present realities—how concepts of race, class and gender inform the politics of public discourse and reveal the underlying assumptions that fuelled "The Moynihan Report" controversy. These assumptions perpetuate (still) an uneven justice for politically and socially marked people. The point here, is not so much that there is a direct causal relationship between slavery and the state of black families in the 1960s and 70s. However, I do argue that the relationship between the white power structure and poor black families follows a similar pattern as that of the earlier period; the perpetuation of that pattern is evident in the political rhetoric about black poverty and the status of poor black families.

2.3.1 Problematic Paradigms

First of all, Moynihan's effort to "redefine" the "problem" and restructure the government's role in addressing it would have required a reconsideration of how the

problem came to be. Moynihan attempted to do so by analyzing government sociological studies, statistics and history. Yet, Rainwater and Yancey say "the basic paradigm he worked with was that of the social and economic analysis that had laid the ground work for [previous] poverty programs" (26). Although Moynihan intended to redefine and restructure the problem, he based his plan on an established paradigm which set as its standard the average middle-class (white) American family. Without a reconsideration of this standard, the inevitable result was that "the black family" was in trouble. Moynihan's assertion was that the cause of the economic gap between poor black families and middle class white families was black family dysfunction. This was an attempt at redefinition in that it shifted from the economic effects of slavery to its social effects which, he argued, lead to economic disparities. His goal was to increase the amount of aid provided to poor black communities, but in order to do so he relied on basic assumptions about blacks and whites that had established social and economic disparities in the first place.

By shifting the focus from the economic to social causes of black poverty, Moynihan assigned poor blacks' economic woes to a social failure which positioned the government as both savior and judge.[25] Such a dichotomy—what Sarah Lucia Hoagland calls a "'predator/protector' logic"—positions oppressed groups in an ironic relationship to their oppressors (qtd in DiQuinzio and Meagher 2). At the same time that Moynihan's focus is on alleviating poverty, his assessment of its causes simultaneously reinforces the inevitable state of the Negro community as impoverished. As Iris Marion Young says, "'central to the logic of masculinist protection is the subordinate relation of those in protected position" (qtd in DiQuinzio and Meagher 2). As long as the Negro community

is characterized as deficient, the white-run power structure will always be positioned as superior to it. As a result, it is assumed that those in need must be protected from their own self-destruction. Rather than a reassessment of or adjustment to the system, then, the focus is on adjusting the people to better fit into it; yet, the very nature of a capitalist patriarchal system presupposes that some people are more "fitting" than others.

2.3.2 American Righteousness

In his reference to slavery, Moynihan seems at first to fault American racism, but then just as quickly to shift the focus back to black pathology as *the* problem: "American slavery was awful in its effects," he says (Moynihan 61). Nevertheless, "the *fundamental* source of the weakness of the Negro community at the *present time*"[26] is the "Negro family" (my emphasis Moynihan 5). Similarly, in his speech, Johnson credits America with being an "ally to progress" once being "called to action" by the peaceful protests of "the Negro" (Johnson 125). While acknowledging the injustices imposed on its black citizens, Johnson, nonetheless, reverts back to American righteousness—America had apparently only suffered from a momentary lapse in justice, this was not the primary component of American ideology.

In both Johnson's and Moynihan's rhetoric, then, there is a clear distinction made between the virtues of American culture and the inability of black Americans to attain it. Moynihan says: "The Negro community has been forced into a matriarchal structure which, because it is so out of line with the rest of the American society, seriously retards the progress of the group as a whole" (Moynihan 29). Within this framework, there is no consideration for the adaptability or survivability of a people, a point which Rainwater and Yancey defend by saying that Moynihan did not want government officials to be able

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to sidestep reforms by arguing that black people were surviving in spite of their disadvantages (31). Although Moynihan admits, "[t]hat the Negro American has survived at all is extraordinary," he counters "[b]ut it may not be supposed that the Negro American community has not paid a fearful price for the incredible mistreatment to which it has been subjected over the past three centuries" (29).

What's troubling here is that in order to achieve his rhetorical aim, Moynihan had to draw on the familiar narrative of black inferiority, side-stepping any emphasis on the inadequacies of the dominant culture. Granted, he does say that enslavement caused the problems of "the Negro community," but most of the report is not about the cause, but about the result. The focus is not on those who enslaved, but on those who were enslaved. It is these people who are now causing a "startling increase in welfare dependency" (Moynihan 58). It is the way Moynihan brings history to bear on the circumstances of black Americans that conveys the message: regardless of the "roots of the problem" (61) for the Negro American, the problem for "average" Americans in 1965 was a population of people who were a burden on the economy.

Another issue with Moynihan's report has to do with the move away from complex categorizations towards delineation of simplistic binaries. In the title *The Negro Family: the Case for National Action*, the definitive article "the" and the singular noun "Negro family" suggests that there is only one kind of black family. Furthermore, the content of the report indicates that this family is flawed primarily because it is out of sync with the[27] middle-class norm. Moynihan's collapse of pathology into one category: "the" black family as if this is an adequate demarcation of the underclass is also problematic. His report was based on an "intensive study of the life of central Harlem"

that found "massive deterioration of the fabric of society and its institutions" (Moynihan 4). Drawing a parallel with the Negro community at large; he determined that "what is true of central Harlem, can be said to be true of the Negro American *world* in general" (my emphasis 4). Later in the report he corrects this assertion by saying "[t]here is no one Negro community...no one Negro problem...no one solution. *Nonetheless...*" (Moynihan 30). And in this fatal negation, he returns to his previous assertion that—despite the possibility of other conclusions, other explanations, other realities—the "*center* of the tangle of pathology" is not discrimination or economic disadvantage, but "the" community that is (or isn't?) one cohesive entity.

2.3.3 Metaphors of Darkness & Light

Diane Roberts says in slave society "whites...built their culture around not being black. The stories they subscribed to about the meaning of black skin...shaped their construction of what whiteness meant" (6), and in Johnson's speech and Moynihan's report, there are also several prominent references to darkness and light which cast a shadow on black citizens. Johnson makes several references to skin color as a blight that can't be changed. He says "Negro" oppression has been different from that of other minorities as blacks have been "excluded by...color—a feeling whose dark intensity is matched by no other prejudice in society" (Johnson 129); he recognizes "the burden that a dark skin can add" (129) and declares that "success and achievement...do not change the color of a man's skin" (130). These references to skin color are in a context of sympathy—he understands that "the Negro community is buried under a blanket of history and circumstance" and that they cannot "emerge from poverty and prejudice" alone. Yet, the expressed motive of the speech is haunted by the presence of whiteness

that lingers like an apparition between the lines of his text. The repeated reference to color marks blacks as "Other." The assertion of his goal, that a time will come when "the only difference between Negroes and whites is the color of their skin," gives prominence to that difference and gives the unmistakable impression that no matter what social changes occur, the biologically determined difference—that unfortunate burden of blackness—will remain (129).

Roberts says "[t]he ideology of slavery was based on an ever-refining set of hierarchies demonstrating the radical difference between black and white bodies" (6). This "difference" is not that which radical feminists assert as the more complex and nuanced means of categorization, but rather a "difference from" the "norm" which is white. As Roberts and other scholars (Morrison, hooks, Kovel, Fanon) argue, the very concept of "whiteness" can only exist in contrast to the construction of "blackness;" "whiteness" is everything that "blackness" isn't. Thus, Moynihan touts the success of the dominant white culture which "has achieved a high degree of stability," and notes that "[b]y contrast, the family structure of lower class Negroes is highly unstable, and in many urban centers is approaching complete breakdown"(Moynihan 5). He makes reference to "a black middle class" that has managed to escape the culture of black poverty and pathology,[28] but for the most part he conflates class and race so that middle-class is equivalent to "white" and lower class is equivalent to "black."

2.3.4 Victims of Culture

Regardless of the economic or social gains that blacks make, both Johnson's speech and Moynihan's report convey a sense of inevitability; from their perspective, the extent to which black people's condition can be changed is limited by an inherent

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difference that is unchangeable. Additionally, while Moynihan is able to acknowledge the economic effects of disenfranchisement, his main argument is not so much economic as it is social. His focus on "black" culture aligns him with "culture of poverty"[29] theorists who place blame on individuals more than on the structure within which individuals exist. People who live in a "culture of poverty" are in "a class by themselves" says Katz. Their "behaviors and values [have] converted their poverty into an enclosed and self-perpetuating world of dependence" (16).

Indeed, Johnson insists that although black poverty had some similarities to white poverty, there were significant differences that were "deep, corrosive [and] obstinate," exasperated by the "increased concentration of Negroes in our cities" (Johnson 128) who live in a world separate from the rest of America (129). The difference and distance from the dominant culture is what dooms them to their fate; "the poor remain poor because...[of their] unique culture [of] twisted, pathological values and practices" (Hays 180). Yet, as "culture of poverty" critics argue, the problem with such theories begin in their inability to adequately define "culture" (Katz 41). A 1977 *Time* magazine article entitled "The American Underclass" identifies the "underclass" as those poor people— mostly "impoverished urban blacks"—who live "behind the [ghetto's] crumbling walls [who are] more intractable, more socially alien and more hostile" than not only the "majority," but also "the majority of the poor" ("The American Underclass" 1 of 1).

Yet, how is this group distinguished from "the majority of the poor" if they all live together in the same environment, and how does one explain why this select group develops such antisocial behaviors while their neighbors and friends do not? Certainly, Moynihan's identification of poor black families who live in urban settings leaves many

unanswered questions about the nature of this culture and its "boundaries" (Katz 41).

However, Moynihan makes an important observation in the chapter of his report entitled

"The Tangle of Pathology," saying, "because of housing segregation...children of

middle-class Negroes often...grow up in, or next to the slums, an experience almost

unknown to white middle-class children" (29). This passage is an example of one of the

occasional gestures Moynihan makes towards the system of discrimination which creates

the circumstances that he describes. He demonstrates here that the difference between

black and white middle-class life has to do with the legacy of racism. By virtue of their

skin color, not just their economic status, upwardly mobile African Americans are limited

in ways that are completely foreign to Caucasian Americans. Yet, although Moynihan

acknowledges the blurring of boundaries between the economically stable and the

economically unstable—between the healthy family and the pathological one—he,

nonetheless, views the black culture of poverty as a contagion that is catching. Because

of this close proximity, Moynihan fears that constant exposure to the damaged population

will result in black middle-class children being "drawn into it" (30).

Implicitly, he justifies whites' distance from black culture(s) as he empathizes

with middle-class blacks who are unable to escape. Although it is a "world that white

America has made for the Negro" (Moynihan 30), there is no further discussion of what

to do about those power structures that maintain it. Instead, he returns to his earlier

assertions that "most of the aberrant, inadequate, or anti-social behavior that did not

establish, but now serves to perpetuate the cycle of poverty and deprivation" can be

ascribed to the "weakness of the [black] family structure" (30).

The "ethnocentric" tendency of culture of poverty theorists calls such categorizations of "pathology" into question as only one set of standards—that of white, middle-class Americans—is applied in their evaluations (Katz 42). Brewer criticizes defining "differences as pathologies [and] failing to appreciate their positive, adaptive significance...validity and coherence" (Katz 42). She calls, instead, for an assessment that moves the discussion about black families away "from [the] current popular discourse [of] pathology" (Brewer "Gender" 165). The fact that more Negro men were unemployed and more Negro women employed in 1965 may not just speak to the failure of Negro men, but the failure of an economic structure that hired more black women than men, yet paid them less and steered them into lower-paying professions. Moynihan shows that Negro girls performed better in school than Negro boys, yet the educational system is not in question. Instead, the functionality of the boys themselves is in doubt and attributed to the "tangle of pathology." Again, it is the "disorganized" black family that leads to a matriarchal home and mothers who push harder for their girls to succeed than their boys (Moynihan 30, 31).

Sharon Hayes argues that it would be more accurate to assume there are *cultures* rather than *a culture* of poverty (182). But, as Katz says, even as culture of poverty definitions vary, theorists assume the primacy of socialization while ignoring situational explanations which are equally plausible. The most compelling aspect of Moynihan's argument was his contention that Negro youth are in "*danger*"[30] of becoming "entrapped" by a vicious cycle of degradation (Moynihan 29). Yet, critics argue that in the same way that parents may pass on certain traits to their children, so too can "each generation...recreate parallel subcultural patterns as it adapts to similar [social]

constraints; [thus], links between subcultures, social institutions, and social structures remain unspecified" and the question of how cultures are "shaped by the distribution of power and resources" is yet unanswered (Katz 41).

2.3.5 Objectification

The reliance on a so-called, objective analysis of "Negro" problems is another aspect of the report that is problematic. In her article, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," feminist scholar Hortense Spillers argues that in the slaver's ledger, as in Moynihan's report, one sees the "'atomizing' of the captive body...the procedures adopted for the captive flesh demarcate a total objectification, as the entire community becomes a living laboratory" (68). In 1965, the "captive" flesh of the Negro was at the mercy of Moynihan's diagnosis of "pathology." Moynihan was no slave owner and neither did he advocate slavery, but his position as representative of the government authority, predominantly controlled by white men, lent him power to influence Americans' perception of the Negro community. While the symptoms of "Negro" problems may have been easy to identify under the scope of his sociological study, the cause and treatment of those symptoms may have required a second and third opinion.

During slavery, sick and ailing slaves were sold in the market for medical research and during the summer and fall of 1965, the social ills of the black ghettos were sold in the political, ideological market as "The Moynihan Report" became public. As slaves had been subject to inspection by the uncaring and unsympathetic masses, so too were the subjects of this report. Negro mothers and children were scrutinized by commentators, journalists and welfare officials alike. Yet, no discussions centered on the

role that the substitute "father" played within the Negro family. Although Moynihan had

tried to assert that slave masters caused the demise of slave families, no descendents of

slave masters suffered scrutiny. While Moynihan faults American slavery for pillaging

"the black family," he makes no reference to the intimacy or involvement of white people

in the establishment of it.[31] However, the attempt at "othering" black culture breaks down

when one considers this history; for even as the biological relations between mothers,

fathers and children were disrupted in slavery, Spillers points out, they were also

somewhat maintained as white slave owners (1) fathered slave children and/or (2) filled

the patriarchal role in plantation families with or without the Negro father's physical

presence.

It would seem, then, that the black slave "family" suffered as much (if not more)

from the absence of the Negro male, as from the *presence* of the White "father," who

rendered inconsequential—if not impossible—any attempts at survival and wholeness in

the "black" community. Yet, while Moynihan introduces the consequences of slavery, he

just as quickly turns his attention away from that cause to its assumed "result"—Spillers

returns our attention to that cause and invites us to consider its then-that-is-now

connection (Ratcliffe). She says "we might interpret the whole career of African-

Americans…in light of the intervening, intruding tale…which [is] already inscribed, as a

metaphor of social and cultural management" (79), meaning, the peculiar institution of

slavery established a pattern of social arrangements that are perpetuated by narratives and

continually reinforce the place and position of people in a hierarchical structure. "There

is probably no single fact of Negro American life so little understood by whites" than the

Negro family, says Moynihan (5). However, in light of the historic disruption and

dissolution of the family that was so integral to the institution of slavery, it is ironic that "Negro American life"—assuming this label is monolithic—is yet "so little understood." Nonetheless, it is this very reification of the "Other" and distance from it that must be maintained in order to justify hierarchical divisions.

In "Terrorists, Madmen, and Religious Fanatics: Revisiting Orientalism and Racist Rhetoric," Anissa Wardi reveals the work of narratives in political rhetoric such as Moynihan's report. These narratives

> are the means by which sense is made in and of the world; they...provide the means by which those who hold power (or influence the maintenance of power) make or attempt to make sense of the world *for others*. Such narratives are so naturalized, so pushed by the momentum of their ubiquity, that they seem to be reality. (35)

Moynihan's conclusions made "sense" as his narrative was familiar and did little to unsettle the superiority of whiteness. His use of social science methodology and his position in such close proximity[32] to those in power ensured that his assertions about black pathology would be accepted by the Johnson administration. As the spotlight was turned upon the lives of the racially-troped in Moynihan's report, it reinforced stereotypes of blacks in general and black women in particular. Rather than garnering support and sympathy for poor black families, it was more effective in solidifying already accepted narratives about Africa-descended people and maintaining their material reality. This was possible because an ideology of "whiteness," does not see the complicity of American capitalism, the historical entanglement of black and white families or dominant white male perspectives on women and gender that all play into the interpretation of poor blacks' condition.

Furthermore, Moynihan's proposed solution to the plight of poor Negro families was rehabilitation defined in terms of how nearly black families emulate the white middle class. His assessment of the black community sets this model as a constant and evokes the historical experiences of slaves without considering the parallel experiences of slave masters. His study suffers from the kind of scientific reasoning that takes for granted the premise from which a scientist begins as he/she sets out to answer the question at hand. For his part, Moynihan sets out to objectively study the "problem" in the black community and pose a "solution." However, he does not recognize the way his line of questioning is focused outward only. His is a "false science" (Ratcliffe) that takes for granted the foundation of his hypothesis, that the white middle-class is "normal" and that it is detached, separate and completely unaffected by its relationship to the black community.

Yet, as Lewontin, et al argue "the world—both humans and other living organisms—[interact] with environments that in turn changes themselves and their surroundings" (12). Are we to assume that the relationship between white slavemasters and their slaves had no influence on the subsequent relationship between white and black cultures, families and communities in the decades that followed? Why can Moynihan argue successfully that black people's degradation during slavery could still be evident hundreds of years later, but not consider whether or not there were parallel consequences evident in white people? Ratcliffe says the "practice of whiteness essentializes blackness and whiteness as biological destiny; it also obscures their status as tropes and ignores power differentials between definers and defined as well as the potential of language use for personal and social change" (104). Moynihan had the power to define the Negro

problem, but the distance that he maintains from that "problem" stems from an

assumption that it belongs to someone else. The potential for his language in the report

to bring about real social change is undermined by this blindness to the interactive nature

of relationships between social groups and the assumption that one group can stand,

unchanged and unchangeable above and against all others.

2.3.6 Sexism & the Patriarchy

Moynihan believes that because "the Negro community has been forced into a

matriarchal structure which...is so far out of line with the rest of American society" that

its progress as a group is "retarded" and a "crushing burden" is imposed on "the Negro

male." Like a judge, Moynihan dictates what should be the goal of the black family: to

be led by black men in the same way that white men have led their white families. Like a

savior, Moynihan is in favor of increased involvement of government in place of absent

black fathers, but in either case, the "white father" maintains his authority and power and

"whiteness" maintains its privileged status.

Spillers says "Moynihan's 'Negro Family'...borrows its narrative energies from

the grid of associations, from the semantic and iconic folds buried deep in the collective

past" (69). I view Moynihan's assessment of the black family—within the ideological

context of 20th century politics and rhetoric—as symbolic of the physical relationship

between black slave women and white slavemasters. While scapegoating black women as

the source of degeneracy in the black community, Moynihan suggests a reinstatement of

the patriarchy by providing opportunities for black men to get jobs and to be the

breadwinners of their homes. Echoing the same ideology of the patriarchal family that

Abramovitz identifies, Rainwater and Yancey say Moynihan believed "the government

should not rest until every able-bodied Negro man was working even if that meant that some women's jobs had to be redesigned to enable men to fulfill them" (29). This is problematic because it proposes a solution within the narrow confines of a capitalist patriarchy which places men's roles in positions of dominance over women's. The proposed redesign of "women's" jobs, then, would likely be implementing changes that preserve the hierarchy between men and women. It may be ventured, however, that it could maintain racial hierarchies as well.

Moynihan is troubled that "[a] fundamental fact of Negro American family life is the often reversed roles of husband and wife" (30). This is a problem, though, precisely because it flies in the face of the established norms of white society. His emphasis on the plight of the Negro man indicates a sexist perspective on the relationship between men and women; the logic is that Negro problems can be solved with White (male) solutions. What is further distressing to Moynihan is that "Negro families have the largest number of children and the lowest incomes" because Negro men cannot find work adequate to support them (25). As a result, 56% of Negro women work as compared to 42% of white women (25). Yet, "this dependence on the mother's income undermines the position of the father and deprives the children of the kind of attention [...] which is now a standard feature of middle-class upbringing" (25). Moynihan is insisting that the way to restore order in society and in the Negro community is by re-establishing the family ethic of the breadwinning husband and the stay-at-home wife. In order for "Negro men" to gain power and, presumably, the Negro family to be whole and functional again, Negro women must be booted out of the workforce and back into the home where they belong.

There is no questioning of this model and no reconsideration of its value in addressing the needs of the Negro community.

Rather than assessing the capitalist marketplace in which jobs are stratified by race and gender, Moynihan proposes that the hierarchy remain, and that black women merely be allowed the "privilege" of white women to stay home with their children. Yet, the emphasis in the report is on too many black women and too few black men working; thus, ideally, black women would leave these jobs and be replaced by their men. The unwritten code here is that white men will maintain power and control of businesses and black men will take over low-wage jobs previously held by women.[33] What, then, would really change for the black family other than more black men would be working? The assumption is that "work" equals fair and competitive wages and that black men in the workforce would automatically result in black families rising to middle-class. The report is silent, though, about the reality of the "work" that black men would likely do, the hardship that would result if jobs were no longer available for black women, and the remote possibility that black men's unemployment might *not* be the reason for female-headed homes within the black community.

2.3.7 Black Mothers vs Black Matriarchs

Another contradiction in Moynihan's argument is the way he evokes then ignores the historical experiences of black women. He says "the Negro family [has] made but little progress toward the middle-class pattern of the present time" (Moynihan 16) because of Negro women [who are] 'accustomed to playing the dominant role in family and marriage relations" (17). Yet, even as he attributes black women's misplaced power in the home to the institution of slavery, he stops short of identifying the similarity in

social constraints that necessitated her taking that position, as if it were the result of nature, rather than necessity. Again, we must consider here the evidence of "then-that-is-now" (Ratcliffe). Black slave women filled the dominant role within a context of powerlessness and the matriarchal structure of many poor black families is within a similar context. As Spillers argues, and I agree, "the dominant culture, in a fatal misunderstanding, assigns a matriarchist value where it does not belong: actually misnames the power of the female regarding the enslaved community" (80). While the pattern established in slavery does, indeed, absent the Negro man and leave an apparent matriarchy, the term evokes an image of power that is misleading and in a sleight of hand gesture confers upon black women a nominal power where it is lacking. Robbed of power where it is most present—black women are credited with destroying the family, but not with keeping it together.

Historically, black women's roles as "mother" have been demeaned in the dominant culture. Female slave reproduction was an economic function of slavery in the same way that the cotton gin aided the harvesting of cotton; both made possible the continuation of an establishment. To be "mother" for a black woman really meant "laborer": one who gives birth and who works. The children she bore would be additional workers on the slave plantation and the property of the white master. Additionally, the "values and behavior patterns necessary to maintain" (Spillers 79) white domination are conveyed through the stories told about black women, black mothers and black families such as in Moynihan's crediting black women with "crushing" black men economically, academically and socially; and his urging that black men reproduce the "values and behaviors" of men in the dominant culture (79).

As conceptions of race, class and gender will convene in the trope of the "welfare queen," what comprises the significance of this trope is this very history of black women laborers whose social identities are so different from their white counterparts: "black slave women were not identified, as white women were, with the roles of wife and mother, but primarily and specifically with the roles of mother and worker" (Christian 7). Yet, Spillers says black women have "been robbed of the parental right, the parental function" (78), meaning what is "natural" about the relationship between black mothers and their children and families has been corrupted by social impositions. In the absence of a universal definition of "mother" one treads dangerous ground in assuming to understand any familial arrangement outside of its social context.

Like Roland Barthes' myth, "at the level of denotative meaning" the white American middle-class image of motherhood assumes a particular relationship between a mother and child; yet, "[a]t the level of connotative form," this image can be a "'mythic signifier,' a powerful icon and conductor" of whiteness ideology (Thomas 364). The convergence of laboring and mothering in the lives of black women makes it difficult to accept the dominant culture's insistence that they emulate white middle-class motherhood. For centuries black women have mothered white children as nannies and housekeepers, yet this mothering work has been for others. After slavery, this mothering has been paid labor. How, then, might a black mother who has had to mother other people's children to survive imitate her employer in the mothering of her own children and in what ways would doing so benefit her? As Lewontin, et al argue, the "past...imposes contingencies on the present and future" (11). The middle-class ideal of

motherhood is based on a middle-class life of privilege and wealth, a past to which poor black women do not have access.

Yet, this should not necessarily be understood as a disadvantage. Their own past which imposed its own set of contingencies means that motherhood for black women will take shape around *other* experiences—not necessarily (or only) good or bad; not necessarily (or only) black or white. Besides their experiences in relation to the dominant culture, black women inherit their own culture of motherhood from their mothers, grandmothers, aunts and other women in their lives. To judge black mothers against one standard makes invisible their own reality and distorts, that is "twists apart" (Thomas) their own experiences. The injustice, then, is not that she has "failed" to achieve middle-class, but that the middle-class has failed to recognize the characteristics of her familial relationships on their own merits.

<u>2.4 Rosa—Matriarch of a Negro Family</u>

As an example of this misreading of black women's lives, I turn to a case study of a mother named Rosa, who in 1905 "came to the Minneapolis Family Welfare Society (MFWA) looking for work" (Tice 32). Rosa's story occurs before Moynihan and Reagan and even before the 1935 Social Security Act; however, I am using her story here, precisely because she does not exemplify Moynihan and Reagan's "welfare queen." She represents another version of the poor-black-woman story which is not nearly as familiar, yet shows how the ideology of welfare discourse in the latter half of the 20th century remained connected to that of the earlier period. The welfare officials who met with Rosa in the early 20th century, like Moynihan (and later Reagan) insisted that the saving grace of The Negro Family was to simply be more like The White Family.

In "Mending Rosa's 'Working Ways': A Case Study of an African American Mother and Breadwinner," Karen Tice notes that the move towards a more "scientific" approach to social work was occurring at the turn of the century.[34] As a result, "[t]he reconstitution of the supposedly weak characters of 'bad' mothers became a key component of this new social work" (Tice 31). This effort to transform "bad" mothers into "good" ones, however, was based upon the nebulous distinction between what is "good" and what is "bad," as well as the material realities required in order to fully achieve the ideal. Certainly, the family ethic was at work here, in which mothers were expected to be homemakers and fathers expected to be breadwinners. However, Rosa's story is a prime example of the limitations of this model. Rosa was an African American mother of three and wife to an elderly and sickly husband. Because he was physically unable to work, Rosa shouldered the burden of being both mother and primary wage-earner.

Although she was seeking work not charity, Rosa did eventually obtain aid from MFWA who provided her family with clothing, some medical care for her husband and educational and disciplinary assistance with her son who was having trouble in school. Additionally, "the caseworker contacted the Society for the Blind on behalf of the family" procuring "fifteen dollars a month from them" (34). In exchange for these services, however, the caseworkers earned the right to monitor Rosa's personal life and had regularly scheduled meetings, often in her home, to discuss the family's condition and needs. The supervisory position of these caseworkers granted them the authority to judge Rosa's behavior and daily practices. However, Tice notes that Rosa's values and that of the welfare system often clashed. The emphasis of every report filed was on the

cleanliness and neatness of the home and on the hardship placed upon the family by

Rosa's outside work. Reminiscent of racial stereotypes long accepted by white people

about black people, a probation officer characterized her family as "a dirty lazy outfit;" a

MFWA fact sheet characterized her husband, William, as lazy and "shiftless." The effort

to transform Rosa from a working mother to the model stay-at-home mother is evident in

the MWFA insistence that Rosa was a "poor housekeeper" who "works too much." A

Child Protective worker found her to be "pleasant" and "most interested in her children;"

yet, a Society for the Blind worker found her to be a "superior woman" who has,

nonetheless, "failed to care properly for her children" and clean her house (32).

The swing of the pendulum from Rosa as hard worker to Rosa as "bad" mother is

the theme, emblematic of the conflicting roles of a working wife and mother, especially

one who happens to be black. The tone of every report was critical. The welfare officials,

viewing her through the lens of a whiteness ideology, attempt to transform her into their

ideal of a wife and mother while simultaneously ignoring the reality of her own day-to-

day life and responsibilities. While it would seem that Rosa's strong work ethic and

diligence would be admirable, she is chastised for it and told that she should "give up

four work days a week so that 'she could better take care of family and keep the house in

better shape" (35). Yet, this word "care" is used in conjunction with the cleanliness of

the home rather than the well-being of the people in it. If Rosa were to work only three

days a week, her impoverished living conditions would only be exacerbated! Although

the social workers seemed to think William was shiftless and lazy, the reports indicate

that he had been injured in a car accident and blinded by cataracts. This disconnect

between the physical reality and the ideological expectations meant continual clashes

between Rosa and her caseworkers as Rosa persisted on living her life as she saw fit. In the following case report, Rosa expresses her view on the situation:

> [Rosa] agreed that the children needed her at home and also that it was very hard for her to continue working as hard as she was, but that she could see no way out of it.... She explained that *although it might appear to the average person* coming into her home that she did not care how she lived, she really had a dream about how she wanted to live and hoped that someday she might obtain it. (my emphasis 35)

Rosa is clearly aware of the contrast between her reality and that of this stranger visiting her home. In Rosa's understanding, the "average" person is someone who is not like her; someone who is not poor and, likely, not black. Nonetheless, unlike whatever the appearances may tell, Rosa insists that she too has "a dream" of something better. She is not without hope in spite of the threat of the social worker's white glove and measuring stick. Rosa attempts to unveil what is not apparent to her visitor: the fact that she works every day but Sunday, comes home in the evenings and cooks dinner, puts the children to bed, then rushes to her "dressmaking" night job in the evenings. While she admitted that her schedule was exhausting, she repeated that "she could see no way out of the situation" (35). Tice says "Rosa's caseworker...was not moved by Rosa's dream, nor...impressed with Rosa's resolve to provide for her family; she insisted upon middle-class norms for cleanliness and motherhood while failing to acknowledge the enormous efforts undertaken by Rosa to provide and care for her family" (35).

It is unfortunate that "over the years, Rosa's caseworkers recorded a tale of a woman who failed to care properly for her family, not the tale of Rosa's resolve" (37). It would be easy to explain this insistence on women's-roles-in-the-home rhetoric as the sexist paradigm of the time, but it seems to be more than that. It is not just a commitment to sexist ideals that influences the criticism of Rosa and her family; it is also the

embedded racism which associates blackness with dirt and laziness. In *White Racism: A Psychohistory*, Joel Kovel says "the blackness of black skin has been fused with the idea of dirt, and more generally, with the image of anything that can pass out of the body" (qtd in Thomas 385). I believe that the interactions between Rosa and her "visitors," demonstrate the way perceptions can be skewed, even blinded, by such entrenched ideologies. Although she finds ways to sustain her family, Rosa is unable to be free from the vestiges of slavery which limit the way her mothering is perceived.

Ratcliffe says we should view the past "not simply as a series of fixed points on an abstract historical continuum, but rather as a series of inscriptions in discourse and on our material bodies, inscriptions that continually circle through our present and form our identities" (95). By eavesdropping on these stories of black women—as told by Moynihan as well as by Rosa's social workers—we position ourselves on the edge of our own knowledge and theirs. And by doing so we are able to circle back through history and find those instances when bodies, tropes and cultures collided. Tracing the social and political discourses that create and sustain identities, we can see how real-world realities are created and recreated.

Within the American cultural logic, for welfare mothers—particularly those of African descent—as with their enslaved predecessors, "motherhood as female blood-rite is...denied, at the very same time that it becomes the founding term of a human and social enactment" (Spillers 80). They are at the mercy of those who are appointed to give aid, yet are subjected to the perspective of those who misunderstand their realities. As Allison Berg says "[w]e are told that [welfare women's] unwillingness to marry leads to fatherless homes, criminally inclined sons and daughters. [D]isparagements of black

motherhood [also]help to 'persuade people that racial inequality is perpetuated by Black

people themselves'" (2). Yet, one has to wonder, how often welfare mothers are more

like Rosa, victims of circumstance, mothering with minimal resources, and doing their

best to stay alive?

Moynihan's naming of the black matriarchal power in the midst of powerlessness

obscures the fact that—just as slave mothers had no claims to their own children (80), nor

the freedom to be "mothers" beyond the role of lifegivers—in the political rhetoric, black

welfare women are not free to be mothers in the white, middle-class sense of the word.

Although black women are mothers by virtue of giving birth to children in the same way

that white women are, this biological reality is altered by the social constraints. Ratcliffe

says "[t]he past is both a cultural structure and an individual embodiment of that

structure" (95) What that embodiment looks like depends on our individual experiences

"with(in)" that structure" (95). Mutari, et al found that [f]or the first hundred years after

slavery, relatively few African-American men earned wages sufficient to support a

family, a so-called 'breadwinner wage' (41). This means that the cultural structure

necessitated the cultural embodiment of black women as workers. However, they are

[often] also mothers—to their own children and to the children of their employers which

further complicates their "cultural embodiment": "employers, including the white

women who hired black women as domestics, viewed African-American women as

workers first, to the detriment of their [own] family lives...Black women's family

responsibilities, *despite the hegemonic ideology of women's domesticity*, were more

likely than those of white women to be perceived as a drain on their availability as

workers" (my emphasis 41).

Although Rosa's case workers attempted to transform her into the white middle-class "norm," the reality of her life undermined those attempts. The historically disadvantaged position of women, like Rosa, places particular restraints on them that are difficult to break. They are hemmed in by a "cultural structure" that places them at a disadvantage by virtue of their race, class and gender. Moynihan's identification of the problem with the "Negro family" as its "matriarchal structure" denotes a particular expectation of what a mother is—or should be—in a home, but it is an expectation that is inapplicable to many black women precisely because of the flip side of the patriarchal coin which is race. As Berg says, the norm from which welfare mothers are assumed to deviate is not specified, but it is implied. While the assumption is that "the qualities of a good mother [are] a matter of national consensus, transcending differences of race, class or culture" (3), in reality, it is deeply embedded in each of these social categories.

It is not possible, then, to know the true meaning of such labels as "black" or "woman" without peeling back the layers of what it means to be "black" and to be "woman" within a particular context and history. As Secombe, et al point out, "[w]elfare was originally created to protect women who were single mothers from vulnerabilities beyond their control, such as violence, abuse, or desertion" (852); yet, in light of her role as the so-called powerful "matriarch" of Moynihan's "Negro Family" and against the backdrop of historical expectations that she is a laborer first, black welfare women are often denied sympathy, compassion and understanding. Preceded by the "peculiar institution" and following an established narrative pattern, it seems that Johnson's speech and Moynihan's report merely maintain the material and discursive location of black

women in poverty—that is, in the absence of wealth or recourse, or, as Rosa said, they must carry on with "no way out."

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed the political climate that propelled the image of poor black women on welfare into the public sphere. In his report, Moynihan made Negro women the hated "matriarchs" of the ghettos, as he credited them with emasculating Negro men and driving them to desertion, desperation and crime. Narratives of racial difference were at work in the political rhetoric of Johnson and Moynihan as each attempted to "help" the Negro community at the same time that they insisted on Negroes' inferiority to whites. In spite of the capitalist structure that stratifies society into privileged and unprivileged groups, the focus of criticism for social woes was not the system, but certain people. In Chapter 4, I will discuss the way this narrative was told to the public through various media. But first, in the next chapter, I will discuss how Moynihan's "matriarch" became Reagan's "queen."

Chapter 2 Notes

[15] The report was issued by the U.S. Department of Labor.

[16] similar to those that slave traders peddled in the 1600s

[17] Lewontin, et al say "The use of the double legitimation of science and god is a bizarre but not uncommon feature of New Right ideology" (6); Religion in Reagan's New Right rhetoric will be discussed further in Chapter 3.

[18] The impact of media portrayals of black women on welfare will be discussed in chapter four.

[19] The argument was that at Creation, God created more than one set of human beings.

[20] Biological determinism

[21] Historically, blacks have compared their struggle for freedom from slavery and discrimination to the Jewish people who were enslaved by the Egyptians. (See Chapter 4 for more on this) Likewise, the Israelite journey from captivity to freedom then, ultimately, to the "Promised Land" parallels the black experience in America—from slavery to the Promised Land of full equality. This allusion to the name of the stone raised by the Jewish prophet, Samuel, to commemorate a victory over the Philistines at Mizpeh is appropriate for its etymology: from ebhen "stone" + ezer "help". As the Israelites had reached a lull in the battle with their enemies, the prophet declared "Hitherto hath the LORD helped us." The Israelite journey to the Promised Land—like the blacks' struggle for equality in 1965—was not complete, but the Lord had brought them to that point. The stone that signified God's help (Ebenezer) was a reminder that the Lord, having brought them thus far, would take them the rest of the way.

[22] In this section I will discuss Moynihan's report specifically; however, I view this report as representative of the Johnson administration's political philosophy as is demonstrated in Johnson's Howard speech. Although Johnson later distanced himself from Moynihan because of the negative publicity that the report incurred, I still see the report as an integral part of Johnson's initiatives for the poor and for poor blacks especially during the time period: June-September of 1965. In Chapter 3, I will compare Johnson's rhetoric on poverty and welfare with Reagan's rhetoric on poverty and welfare and I will consider this report as representative of Johnson's ideology.

[23] Moynihan's argument aligns with "culture of poverty" theorists, see *2.3.4 Victims of Culture.*

[24] I am aware that this report has been analyzed extensively by those in other scholarly fields and I admit that my analysis is narrow as I am merely focusing on the function of whiteness. It should be understood that this is not meant to be a comprehensive analysis

of the entire report, but a representative sample of its premise. The goal here is to show that the report was constructed with a particular point of view that laid the groundwork for subsequent images of black women that circulated within political discourse and fueled Reagan's campaign against welfare.

[25]I discuss this savior/judge dichotomy in Chapter 1. The problematic relationship between poor black women and the State is that while the State helps her survive it also controls her and holds her in contempt. Another example of this is seen in the story of "Rosa" at the end of this chapter.

[26] Another aspect of whiteness ideology is the need to examine people and cultures in an eternal present tense. Moynihan admits that "the statistics on the Negro family and most other subjects treated in this paper refer only to a specific point in time. They are a vertical measure of the situation at a given moment. They do not measure the experiences of individuals over time" (52). Isolating objects in a temporal vacuum enables one to ignore history and impose desired meaning and significance to the object under study and in spite of his admittance, the results of his findings did travel through time.

[27] The assumption, again, is that there is only one.

[28] In chapter 3 I will discuss the emphasis on individualism that is central to whiteness ideology. Moynihan's reference to this black middle class that "escaped" poverty hints at this underlying individualism which is less concerned with the well-being of the community than it is with the success of the individual. Here Moynihan indirectly praises this group that has "achieved" middle-class which further supports the capitalistic patriarchal structure that, in my opinion, is detrimental to true democracy.

[29] "Culture of poverty" theories began with anthropologist Oscar Lewis and his 1961 publication of *The Children of Sanchez*.

[30] Moynihan places emphasis on this word, *danger*, in the report.

[31] "The *sub rosa* truth, the skeleton in the South's closet, was that the black family and the white family were often the *same* family..."family" refers etymologically to ownership, not kinship; Southern planters spoke of wives, children, land and slaves as their "family" or "household" (Robert 23).

[32] According to Rainwater and Yancey: "As an assistant secretary his constituency involved...the higher level members of the Department of Labor and the White House staff. Cabinet officers and their assistants stand between the Presidential Government of each administration and the Permanent Government of civil servants and appointed officials who serve for longer periods of time than the elected administration. Moynihan's political experience and personal conception of public service point him very strongly in the direction of the Presidential Government. He clearly defined himself over the years of his service in Washington as a member of the "Presidential party." In addition to the normal privileges of his office, Moynihan had close personal relationships

with the White House staff…that grew out of the Kennedy period and antedated his appointment as Assistant Secretary (18). Thus, "only a person in [his] position would have been able to write a report relatively free of the long review process typical of government reports or to ensure that it received high-level distribution (19).

[33] And I would argue these would more than likely be black—not white—women's jobs.

[34] This scientific turn peaked during LBJ administration and greatly influenced the reception of "The Moynihan Report."

CHAPTER 3
FROM THE WAR ON POVERTY TO THE WAR ON WELFARE.
NARRATIVE, RHETORIC & RACE IN REAGAN'S "NEW RIGHT"

Introduction

In a study conducted by Benjamin Page and Robert Shapiro, it was found that

"when [a] policy changed...it changed in the same direction as public opinion 66 percent

of the time [and] when public attitudes changed by 20 percentage points or more on a

particular issue, government policy changed in the same direction over 90 percent of the

time" (Gilens 24-24). By the late 1960s and early 1970s, public attitudes had, indeed,

changed from that of a decade before, and for Ronald Reagan that meant a prime

opportunity to introduce a new style of leadership. Appealing to the mood of discontent

and disillusionment with the current administration, Reagan persuaded many Americans

that a smaller and Republican government was the solution to many of their problems.

Central to that smaller government was doing away with social programs that benefitted

the poor. Characterizing the poor as Cadillac-driving "welfare queens" provided a way

for Reagan to separate the deserving from the undeserving poor and justify slashing

welfare funds. After all, according to Reagan's narratives, most of the people receiving

welfare were not really in need.[35]

Examining the public sentiment and government rhetoric about welfare, welfare

reform and welfare recipients circulating in the public sphere during the 1970s and 1980s

is a way to witness the convergence of history and politics at a particular moment and to

see the manifestation of a particular image that emerged during that time, but endures even today. This convergence is significant because it is through language—rhetoric and narrative—that the image gains currency. Of course, a politically persuasive public figure factors into this, as Ronald Reagan and his consultants well knew. As a likable alternative to the dour Republican candidates that had come before,[36] Reagan used narrative as a rhetorical device—casting the civil unrest of the 1960s as the consequence of "big government."

In Chapter 2, I discussed how this image of the welfare queen began as the "matriarch" of the *Negro Family*—particularly through Daniel Patrick Moynihan's 1965 report on the alarming economic condition of urban black families. His study entitled *The Negro Family: A Case for National Action* sparked debate and controversy in political and public discourse as the Johnson administration sought to launch a War on Poverty at the same time that tensions with Vietnam were escalating. The socially and politically volatile moment that was 1965 complicated the reception of Moynihan's report, especially when it was made public shortly after the Watts riots in August of that year. Yet, the report was problematic not only because of its context, but also because of its content. As I argued, the report was tainted by an apparent reliance on a whiteness ideology which pits black culture against an inappropriate standard—middle-class white culture—and which, inevitably, places black culture(s) at a distinct disadvantage (Keating, Barnett, Roberts). A whiteness ideology ignores the historical experiences of black people, the interaction between black and white communities, and the adaptive and alternative characteristics of black families that influence the differences between the black and white communities that Moynihan observed.

In this chapter, I examine the political discourse nearly a decade after the release of "The Moynihan Report" when civil unrest, economic decline, and defeat in Vietnam turned public confidence away from government authority. Plagued as they were by Watergate, recession, inflation and crises in foreign affairs, the subsequent Nixon, Ford and Carter administrations were unable to restore that confidence. Yet, just as Johnson had hoped to seize the political moment by launching his official War on Poverty, so, too, did Reagan as he launched his unofficial War on Welfare. In his effort to restore national confidence, Reagan increased military spending and decreased welfare spending. He cut taxes, but also cut benefits; yet, his charisma and optimism won him great popularity. According to biographers *Michael Beschloss and Hugh Sidey, "[a]*t the end of his administration, the Nation was enjoying its longest recorded period of peacetime prosperity without recession or depression" (qtd in "Ronald Reagan").

This chapter focuses on the rhetorical devices and narrative strategies that contributed to Reagan's political successes and is divided into four major sections: (1) Reagan Stories, (2) Foundational Tales, (3) New Right Ideology & The God of Materialism, and (4) The Welfare Queen and Political Exigencies of Reagan's "New Right." In particular, I'll be looking at the way narrative precedes, propels and perpetuates Reagan's rhetoric. In Chapter 1, I indicated that narrative is critical to any discussion of identity—whether it be that of a nation or an individual—as it is through narrative that we explain reality, make sense of our world and construct our selves (or our "identities") within it (Bruner, Gergen, Hinchman, Kerby, Novitz, Schafer). Historian, Hayden White, says "to raise the question of the nature of narrative is to invite reflection on the very nature of culture and, possibly on the nature of humanity itself" (1). Thus,

considering how important narrative is to culture and how integral narrative was to Reagan's political success, it seems only natural that we should look at the way in which narrative is operating within Reagan's rhetoric.

In section 1, "Reagan's Stories," I piece together my own narrative of Ronald Reagan from the biographies that have been written about him. I acknowledge that the story that I tell is intentionally limited in scope as I am only pulling out the threads in his story that connect in meaningful ways to his later action in regard to welfare. First, in "The Early Years," I look at aspects of his life that provide context for his later political stances and allowed him to craft a particular kind of ethos. Next in "Prime Time," I look at how Reagan and his campaign advisors purposefully use narrative to craft the image of a man who would turn the political tide and restore America to its rightful place of prominence on the world stage. Narrative, that is, forms a fundamental part of the sales pitch that his campaign team makes to America that Ronald Reagan is qualified to be their next leader. Part of Reagan's appeal was his own life story. He was a man who lived through the Great Depression, but who still held out hope for the American Dream. He was also a Hollywood star who was just a "regular" guy—a "citizen politician"—and these characteristics bolstered his ethical appeal. Then there is narrative as the rhetorical tool which Reagan uses to persuade voters of the problems of the kind of "liberalism" that condones immorality and produces the likes of The Welfare Queen. Here, I note that Reagan, as "The Great Communicator," knew which stories to tell in order to persuade his audience to accept his political philosophies. Drawing on the "master code" of America's national identity, Reagan relied on historical narratives and myths that appealed to his listeners' patriotism, loyalty and desire to align themselves with

American exceptionalism. Yet, Reagan's reliance on narratives to support his political theory proves problematic, for, as narrative theorist Phillip Abbott finds, there is always an uneasy alliance between narrative and political theory. One reason for this disalliance, which will be discussed in this section, is that "no matter how directly a story is related to a theory or part of a theory, its impact can be challenged by the offering of another story" (281). This *other* story, then, undermines the stability of both the theory and the narrative.

This type of vulnerability in Reagan's narratives is discussed in section 2, "Foundational Tales." Here, I explore three significant themes that rise to the surface: *patriotism, law and order, and religion,* and argue that with each of these there is a tension between (at least) two realities, two narratives and two ideologies that problematizes Reagan's articulations. In his "City on a Hill" speech, Reagan re-asserts this nation's founding principles, echoing John Winthrop's famous speech, "A Model of Christian Charity;" yet, there is an uneasy alliance between Reagan's narrative and his political theory. While narrative itself may be a universal tool (White), narratives themselves are quite particular; thus, the function of America's history is complicated by the contending forces embedded in American *histories.*

Reagan's rise to political prominence occurred at the same time as the "religious right," and religion and politics have been particularly relevant to the experience of blacks in America. Although religion and race may not immediately come to mind when one thinks of Ronald Reagan, I will show how America's "Christian" identity directly impacts the issue of race in this country. Religion was a measuring rod for the validity of slavery, and politics the guiding tool for the necessity of that peculiar institution.

Together—religion and politics—work against America's identity as a Christian nation and infiltrate racial and poverty discourse. Navigating around the troubled waters of the Middle Passage, figuratively speaking, Reagan argues for equality among American citizens in language very similar to that of civil rights activists, while, nonetheless, arguing against catering to any one group; thus, he cleverly side-steps race even as he reinstates racial inequality.

The materialistic goals of New Right ideology, then, are discussed in section 3— "New Right Ideology & The God of Materialism"—as a way to move us from the foundational tales that inform Reagan's rhetoric, to examples of his political philosophies enacted within the poverty discourse of the 1970s and 1980s. Here, the absent presence of race that operates throughout Reagan's rhetoric is discussed in conjunction with the more apparent presence of gender in the final section (section 4), "The Welfare Queen and Political Exigencies of Reagan's New Right." Here, I argue that the significance of Reagan's use of The Welfare Queen has everything to do with his reliance on an inherently racist ideology. Although he avoids racial issues whenever possible, he is unable to avoid the presence of race in his messages. Americans' identity resides in a patriarchal capitalist structure and, although Reagan exalts the American Dream, the reality of racism, sexism and classism in this country threatens to expose the incongruity of that American tale.

3.1 Reagan Stories

3.1.1 The Early Years

In his book *The Right Moment*, historian Matthew Dallek chronicles Reagan's rise from an aspiring actor in the 1940s, to political icon with his surprising win over

incumbent Pat Brown in the California gubernatorial race in 1966. This transition from

actor to governor accompanied another major shift in Reagan's life. Up until the 1950s

Reagan had been a registered Democrat. Yet, according to Dallek, coming of age during

the Great Depression, Reagan's "devotion to the New Deal had as much to do with

family ties as with any heartfelt set of liberal political beliefs" (29). He was raised in a

Democratic home and admired Franklin Roosevelt. His brothers found jobs with several

"New Deal relief organizations," and Reagan gives credit to Roosevelt for helping his

family through the hard times (29). Yet, Reagan's acting career propelled him into the

world of Hollywood glitz and glamour and into the company of people with varied

political views. On the fast track to superstardom, Reagan starred in several B movies as

well as a "string of successful blockbusters" in the late 1930s and into the early 1940s

(31). When World War II began, Dallek says "Reagan felt a patriotic duty to give

something back to the nation" (31). Since poor eyesight prevented him from fighting in

the war, Reagan acted in several propaganda films and "became a regular at troop send-

offs" (31). However, the war ultimately derailed Reagan's upward trajectory in the movie

business. He continued to use his voice and acting talent for "political candidates and

causes" but, by the late 1940s, movie executives seemed to think his time had passed

(32).

Nonetheless, as his acting career began to decline, his political involvement

continued to increase and the consistent pattern in both his acting roles and Hollywood

affiliations was his philosophical support of the established order. In his propaganda

films the theme was always "young martyrs serving a perfect cause" and as active

member and one-time president of the conservative Screen Actors Guild (SAG), Reagan

consistently sided with the power structure while deriding picketing "movie technicians

and skilled workers" as mere troublemakers (Dallek 33). Then, in 1947, Reagan's zeal for

the American status quo led to his alarm over what he saw as a communist infiltration of

the motion picture business. A woman on the board of the Hollywood Independent

Citizens Committee of the Arts, Sciences and Professions (HICCASP), an organization in

which Reagan was also a member, began winning seats on the board for her "friends and

allies," which seemed suspicious to him (33). Convinced of the prevalence and

seriousness of Communist efforts in the movie business, Reagan became an informant for

the FBI and witness for The House UnAmerican Activities Committee (HUAC), turning

over names of "left-wing producers, directors, and screenwriters [whom] he considered

part of the conspiracy" (35). Reagan's politics made him less popular in Hollywood, but

his rhetorical skills were a perfect fit in certain political circles. Dallek says as a

"charming celebrity and compelling public orator, Reagan was a natural...[t]all, trim,

dashing, he had the added advantage of being a movie star without acting like one" (37).

Reagan's story, then, is of a Hollywood actor-turned-politician who has charm, good

looks and a fierce commitment to American capitalist ideology. For the supporters of

Ronald Reagan, this narrative made for the perfect package to deliver first to California

citizens then, eventually, the nation.

3.1.2 Prime Time

　　Barry Goldwater lost to Lyndon Johnson his bid for president in November of

1964 and Dallek says "[p]ro-Reagan rumblings...began just hours after Goldwater's

defeat" (71). Reagan had been an active spokesperson on behalf of the Goldwater

campaign and delivered a rousing, last-ditch effort speech, "A Time for Choosing," to a

national television audience a week before the election. The speech was not enough to salvage the doomed campaign, but it was successful in stirring up support for Reagan from a particularly noteworthy group of businessmen—Henry Salvatori, Homes Tuttle, Ed Mills and Cy Rubel. These men who had lived out the "rags to riches dream," "despised the New Deal and abhorred political philosophies…that promoted strong centralized government as the solution to the problems of mankind" (73). Instead, they "believed in the virtues of big business and the American free enterprise system," which was a form of conservative philosophy that was not as focused on eradicating communism as it was on creating wealth (73).

In the 1960s, Democrats governed in California and in Washington, DC, but the Republican party had a reputation for being out of touch with the political mainstream (Dallek 25). For Democrats, the Great Depression was proof that the American economic structure was not indomitable and that the "market" was not able to maintain order and peace between workers and owners. Many believed that a governing body was needed to protect the interests of both the business class and the working class, "taking responsibility for the American masses [and] doing for the man on the street what the uncaring and callous GOP would not" because they were more concerned with defending the wealth of "business tycoons and corporate behemoths" (Dallek 2).[37] Following WWII, however, Republicans' focus had turned to the threat of Communist infiltration. Suspicious of any group or individual who was critical of America and certain that evil Communists were launching covert operations that would ultimately take over the nation, many Republicans believed defending American capitalist ideology to be top priority. These two distinctly different perspectives—government's role in protecting

citizens from the worst effects of capitalism, versus government's role in protecting

capitalism from the worst effects of communism—informed the two distinctly different

political ideologies in 1964. Goldwater's defeat, however, seemed to confirm "the

presumptive right of moderate liberals to rule America" (Hayward 3).

Reagan's financial backers hoped he could make the Republican platform more

palatable to California citizens by toning down his anticommunist rhetoric, which was so

easily dismissed as fanatical. In addition, Stu Spencer and Bill Roberts—political

strategists and self-described "moderates" who "owed less to ideology than to political

calculation"—were in the political game to win (Dallek 120). They, too, were convinced

that Reagan was not like other "radical" Republicans, but was "a fresh political face, a

skilled communicator, a terrific storyteller, and a generally genial candidate" (122).

Thus, in 1965 the Spencer-Roberts duo became Reagan's campaign advisors. Intent on

capitalizing on these characteristics to unite the Republican party and attract conservative

Democrats, Spencer-Roberts told a *Newsweek* reporter that their candidate would be more

"moderate-sounding," but still a "reasonable guy who leans to the right" (123).

The challenge, however, was how to sell this version of Reagan to the public. Not

only was he a political novice, but he also had a reputation for being a right-wing

extremist. According to Dallek, although "Reagan did not embrace the bigoted opinions

and platforms of his southern friends, [he]...was more than willing to associate himself

with racists and conspiracy theorists" (39). One such controversial affiliation which

Reagan's handlers had to immediately address was with the John Birch Society, a radical

political organization whose members were conspiracy theorists intent on rooting out

communism wherever it might be found. They sought to impeach Chief Justice Earl

Warren, published pamphlets detailing connections between communists and civil rights

organizations, and accused former president Eisenhower of having communist ties (104).

With thousands of members who stuffed envelops and walked precincts in order to get

"like-minded candidates [elected] to a spate of offices and [into] leadership posts

in...GOP organizations," The John Birch Society was not easy to ignore (104). Reagan

admired "Birchers'" tenacity and patriotism and had said so publicly on a number of

occasions. However, although his campaign could benefit from their efforts, Reagan's

strategists knew that any associations with such an organization could also destroy his

chances in the gubernatorial race.

It was necessary, then, to carefully craft Reagan's image as a moderate

Republican who was not too moderate—so that the more radical elements of the

Republican party would not turn against him—and as a conservative Republican who was

not too extreme—so that the more moderate Republicans and conservative Democrats

would not dismiss him. The first test for Reagan's new, more moderate/less radical image

would be his handling of the "extremist" label in general and his association with the

John Birch Society in particular. Reagan navigated this delicate rhetorical balancing act

at a press conference on September 24, 1965. Reasserting that he was not a member of

the John Birch Society and repudiating the inflammatory actions of its leader, Reagan

distanced himself from the organizations' most extreme members and claims and invited

individuals rather than "blocs or groups" to support him. He then told reporters that he

would solicit people's support "by persuading them to accept my philosophy, not by my

accepting theirs'" (125). This proved to be a deft rhetorical move—demonstrated here,

but also repeated throughout his political career—which allowed him to pick and

choose—a la carte—those ideologies that fit his without having to accept entirely the tenets of any one organization.[38] He set himself apart without setting himself against controversial groups such as the John Birch Society, or even individuals such as Barry Goldwater or Los Angeles police Chief Willie Parker.[39] Throughout his campaign for governor, Reagan affiliated himself with those who shared his philosophical stance while continually justifying his choice to ignore any of his associates' beliefs that fell outside of the realm of political correctness. What worked about this strategy is that it made Reagan a likable character, one who was able to bridge gaps within his own party and reach across the gulf to conservative Democrats.[40]

As Reagan exited the Hollywood stage, he stepped onto his political platform at just the right moment. Anyone who was dissatisfied with the social upheavals of the time was an ideal audience for Reagan's appeal. In these early years of his political career, he established a platform of law and order, patriotism and individual freedom at a time when riots rocked major cities, protestors decried the failures of American government, and civil rights and freedoms demanded by protestors defied traditional standards and norms. The instability of social upheaval made many—even Democrats who would not have supported a radical Republican ideology—nostalgic for the predictability of the past. By heralding his hope for law and order and tempering his conspiracy-theory rhetoric, Reagan positioned himself within the political discourse in a way that was appealing to the majority and used narrative as a tool for persuading voters of the problems caused by "liberalism."

There are many things for which Ronald Reagan is known, not the least of which are his stories. Dallek says Reagan impressed people on Goldwater's campaign trail with

"'good stories about real people, amusing stories pertinent to our campaign, revealing vignettes of the hard-working men and women waging a tough, so often disappointing battle against...Lyndon Johnson" (66). His charming, easy manner was accentuated with anecdotes that gave listeners something to latch onto, putting a face on the issues that he wanted people to care about. Yet, Reagan's rhetorical appeal was not only about words and images; it was also about *kairos*. Hayward argues that "Reagan's rise depended more on circumstances [than] most other presidents" as he capitalized on the "ideological polarization" of the 1960s (xxiii). Dallek agrees that "the Reagan revolution began in 1966...[when] Reagan's stunning, out-of-nowhere victory in the California governor's race against two-term incumbent and Democratic giant Pat Brown marked the arrival of the Right in postwar American politics" (Introduction). Then, after nearly eight years as governor of California, Reagan began to set his sights on the nation's highest office.

However, Reagan's first run for the White House was a long-shot by most accounts. For one, many of his "most prominent backers during his years as governor," such as Henry Salvatori and Barry Goldwater, were supporting Ford (Hayward 448). Additionally, in a 1975 *National Review* article, journalist James Kilpatrick said that "at the outset of his campaign, [Reagan's] image is largely that of the role-playing actor— pleasant on stage, but ill-equipped for the real world beyond the footlights" (1467). Although the naysayers were correct—Reagan did not beat incumbent president Gerald Ford in 1976—they were incorrect in assuming that Reagan would not be a formidable candidate. As history affirms, his 1975 campaign succeeded enough to ultimately propel him into the presidency, albeit four years later.

3.1.3 The Great Communicator

Much of Reagan's visibility and influence on the minds and hearts of American

voters can be attributed to his strategists' launch of a pre-election season rhetorical

campaign that took advantage of "Reagan's ability as 'the great communicator'" (388).

Hayward says, "Reagan's newspaper column ran in 175 papers, reaching an

audience...estimated at more than 15 million readers. Seventy-one radio stations had

signed up for Reagan's commentaries by Christmas of 1974 [and] eventually 200 stations

took Reagan's broadcasts, exceeding the initial projections" (389). Reagan's 1966

campaign for governor, in many ways, paralleled his 1975 and 1979 runs for president.

Each campaign emphasized party unity as well as optimism in the face of rampant

pessimism about America's future (615). The "crisis of confidence theme" in Nixon's

and Carter's speeches in 1971 and 1979 were appropriate "bookends" on a troublesome

decade (Hayward xiv). Yet, Reagan's response to the crisis in his 1964 speech for the

Goldwater campaign is also echoed in his inaugural address in 1981: "These United

States are confronted with an economic affliction of great proportions...[but] we are too

great a nation to limit ourselves to small dreams. We are not, as some would have us

believe, doomed to an inevitable decline" (Reagan "Inaugural Address" 1 of 5; 3 of 5).

Here he demonstrates his consistent platform of positive thinking, an attitude that

appealed to many Americans.

Part of Reagan's image-making team as he prepared for his first political

campaign were behavioral psychologists, Kenneth Holden and Stanley Plog who "made

certain that Reagan came across as a reasonable guy," said Holden, "not as a fanatic who

wanted to tear down all government.... You had to be for things, and everything we

worked on for him was focused on developing a positive program, with conservative

underpinnings...This was a positive candidate speaking out positively on conservative

issues, and that's not an easy thing" (qtd in Dallek 196 &197).

While Johnson's administration had set out and failed to unify civil rights and

government leaders around a common cause and win the "war" on poverty, Reagan was

able to rally support for his conservative views by bringing a sense of hope and

possibility for America's future with narratives of his "government-by-the-people"

programs that eliminated wasteful government spending. He juxtaposed narratives of

failed government programs that enabled cheaters to get more than one check with

narratives of success as he "reduced the rolls by more than 300,000 people" ("To Restore

America" 6 of 11).[41] Although Johnson and Moynihan had focused primarily on

bolstering the Negro family, Reagan asserted that "abrasive experiments of two liberal

decades...[had, instead,] frayed the fabric of family life" (Abramovitz 350). A *US News*

and World Report survey in 1975 found a mood of discontent just before Reagan's

entrance onto the national political stage: "People everywhere are forcing themselves to

cope with the twin burdens of inflation and recession," the article says. "They wonder,

increasingly, what has happened to national leadership. They yearn for clear-cut values

that many feel are their lost heritage" ("Things"). Throughout his two presidential

campaigns, Reagan repeatedly relied on narratives that pandered to this kind of public

discontent and contributed significantly to "the political backlash that gave rise to an

ascendant 'New Right' of fiscal and social [conservatism]" (Quadagno vi). In 1977, he

declared that "The Great Society is great only in power, in size, and in cost. And so are

the problems it set out to solve. Freedom has been diminished and we stand on the brink

of economic ruin" ("A New Republican Party," 11 of 11). For this New Right, "rolling

back the welfare state" was equivalent to "restoring traditional values" (vi), an equivalent

that is the basis of every conservative argument. According to New Right ideology,

federal welfare contributes to rampant immorality but "traditional values" are preserved

by state and local administration.

Heather Bruce argues that

> Every political issue is contested in a symbolic arena…Every issue has its
> own special language and phrases, buzzwords, slogans, images, its
> characteristic arguments and metaphors. Public commentary and
> ultimately private meaning draw on culturally and rhetorically available
> idea elements and symbols. (114)

Certainly, as the "Great Communicator" and patriarch of the "New Right" movement,

Reagan was also king of the sound bite, notorious for memorable one-liners that

condensed his overall argument into an easy-to-remember-and-repeat phrase. However,

"public commentary reduced to buzzwords, slogans, and sound bites…[may also]

occlude the complexity of the issues" (Bruce 114). The movements and legislation of the

1960s brought many changes in the social structure—in the distribution of resources and

the expansion of government's power to regulate social behaviors. While opening

opportunities for previously disenfranchised people, however, it also created new

challenges for those who felt their freedoms were compromised as a result.

Whenever change occurs there will, inevitably, be resistance to that change and

nostalgia for the past. From the very start of his political career Ronald Reagan

represented that resistance to change; he was the hegemonic order. However, his

language had to be appropriate for the time. In a 1977 speech for the Conservative

Political Action Conference (CPAC), Reagan rejects the view of his "political and media

friends who have been perpetuating the myth of conservatism as a narrow ideology" ("A New Republican Party" 4 of 11). Instead, Reagan insists that "conservatism means principles evolving from experience and a belief in change when necessary, but not just for the sake of change" (4 of 11). Economic, rather than social, change was on his agenda in the 1970s and 1980s; thus, he had to strike a balance between his desire to go back to "the good 'ol days" and his awareness that popular discourse favored many of the social changes in American society. It is a careful crafting of rhetoric into a narrative of nostalgia that I find exhibited in Reagan's speeches and that I discuss below. His stories look past the dark shadows and speak only of light, lulling listeners into a state of "benign neglect,"[42] rather than stirring them to action as Moynihan's 1965 report had attempted to do.

In Chapter 1, I explained my contention that whiteness is often the framework within which such terms as "American values" are used. Added to this is a reverence for the Constitution. Reagan consistently exhibits this homage as when he says to the 1974 CPAC attendees that "[t]he culmination of men's dreams for 6,000 years were formalized with the Constitution, probably the most unique document ever drawn in the long history of man's relation to man" ("City" 3 of 7). This steadfast narrative of American democracy undergirds every aspect of his political rhetoric and is the banner under which he finds shelter from all criticism. Yet, his patriotism is founded upon the notion that this country was divinely destined for greatness, echoing "American exceptionalism"—an ideology that also justified imperialism and slavery. To study "whiteness" is to identify the function of racist ideologies that are obscured by language that appears to be nonracial, and in spite of Reagan's apparent transcendence of race, it hung over him like

a cloud. Although careful not to directly offend any group, he, nonetheless, allowed

subtle associations and scripted appearances to speak for him. His rhetoric of

individualism is racism in disguise in that it merely serves to reaffirm whiteness ideology.

In the speeches that I discuss in the following section, I find that Reagan's devotion to

"American" ideology is troublesome as he implies that capitalistic pursuits are noble and

righteous while human casualties of capitalist enterprise are either incidental or self-

imposed.

The narrative I have just recounted of Reagan's life remains a central foundation

for his successes as a politician. In remarkable ways, Reagan embodied the claim that

"the personal is political" (Kent and Couture, Drew). His successful recasting of the

story of his own life as the canonical narrative of individual success became a powerful

warrant for the comparable stories which he used to underscore his ideology of individual

responsibility. All politicians, of course, narrate their own life stories. But Reagan's

exceptional story—from Depression hardship to Hollywood star to governor—seems to

mirror the same stories of American exceptionalism that were so important to his political

rhetoric.

What follows is not a chronological history of Reagan's utterances, but rather a

thematic presentation—a sort of narrative of his political views in narrative time.[43] Here,

I traverse between the beginning of his political career and the beginning of his

presidency in order to demonstrate what was a basic consistency in his rhetoric. In 1966,

Reagan as candidate for governor is much the same as the 1976 Reagan as candidate for

president and Reagan as president in 1981—at the very least, insofar as his stance on

welfare is concerned. Bruce describes "an issue platform" such as Reagan's as having

"signature elements that imply a central organizing idea or story line" (114). This is true of Reagan's rhetoric from 1966-1981, which he often conveyed through narrative. Yet, as Abbott argues, to attempt to use narrative in the service of political theory is problematic. While Reagan relies on one version of America's historical narrative, another narrative inevitably lies just beneath the surface, ever threatening to destroy his political platform. Reagan merges the Protestant work ethic with capitalist drive and Divine Providence and destiny with American individualism. Attracting both the enterprising business owners and the Bible-thumping working class, his rhetoric is a two-edged sword in that it ignores and elides the issue of race while, nonetheless, emphasizing religious, conservative values. The irony is that narrative imposes meaning and constructs identity; yet, social contexts dictate which meaning, for whom and for what purpose.

In the following section, I look at three issues that surface in Reagan's stories and speeches: "Patriotism," "Law and Order," and "Religion." Within Reagan's narratives these topics "provide meaning to an unfolding strip of events," which I discuss in light of narrative theory (Bruce 114).

3.2 Foundational Tales

3.2.1 American Patriotism, a Contested Identity

Narrative theorist, Alasdair Macintyre contends that words and actions are only meaningful within a narrative context and that "there is no way to give us an understanding of any society [...] except through the stock of stories which constitute its initial dramatic resources" (254). Assuming, then, that narrative histories are the resources from which present and future stories derive meaning, the story Reagan tells in

a speech given at the first annual CPAC in January 1974 is particularly revelatory. He

begins with an assertion that "some divine plan…placed this great continent between two

oceans to be sought out by those who were possessed of an abiding love of freedom and a

special kind of courage" ("City Upon a Hill" 1 of 7). In his characteristic style, he

evokes a sense of pride in this country's history by heralding the courage of those who

pioneered "the great wilderness" in order to establish a new life. In doing so, he also

conjures the Puritan tradition as he alludes to John Winthrop's famous sermon, "A Model

of Christian Charity," delivered at the founding of the Massachusetts Bay colony in 1630.

It is important to note the connection between these two stories—Winthrop at the

founding of the new colony and Reagan at the founding of a new, conservative, political

organization—because in both texts and contexts, the speaker is establishing a political

philosophy on the basis of an earlier narrative. Yet, although the narrative and the

philosophy are significantly connected, for Winthrop and for Reagan, the political

application leaves gaps that are susceptible to revisions by subsequent narratives.

In Winthrop's treatise on the proper comportment of Christian citizenry he

outlines the duties of mankind according to God's word, which include "showing mercy,"

giving to the poor and treating fellow citizens with love. In the closing passage,

Winthrop says: "For we must consider that we shall be as a city on a hill. The eyes of all

people are upon us. So that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have

undertaken, and so cause Him to withdraw His present help from us, we shall be made a

story and a by-word through the world" ("Model"). Here Winthrop conveys the message

that God's people have an awesome responsibility not only to obey God, but also to be an

example to others. While their obedience to God's commands could potentially bring

them glory, disobedience would certainly bring them shame. Thus, Winthrop's emphasis is on obedience to God first in order to enjoy earthly benefits thereafter. In his "City on a Hill" speech, Reagan begins by establishing the veritable holiness of the founding fathers, as well as a parallel between their cause and that of 20th century Republicans'.

However, in Reagan's narrative, the founders' honor had nothing to do with their spirituality, and everything to do with their political bravery in standing up to the "dishonorable king," who, for Reagan, is a metaphor for "big government." Reagan says the founders debated for hours whether or not to declare an act of treason against their king until a figure—a sort of mystical prophet—rose up in their midst and declared that the "parchment" should be signed because it would become "the textbook of freedom, the bible of the rights of man forever" ("City" 2 of 7). The words of that document, cried the eloquent stranger, would be "words of hope" for the "mechanic in his workshop" as for "the slave in the mines" ("City" 2 of 7). In Winthrop's speech, the Bible is the sacred text. In Reagan's speech, the colonists' words become sacred text as the men are so moved by this unexpected revelation that they all "signed the Declaration of Independence, a document destined to be as immortal as any work of man can be" ("City"2 of 7). And, when the company turned to thank the mysterious orator who had so compelled them, he could not be found.

The implication that a messenger from God compelled the men to begin a new nation that would become America claims a divine stamp of approval. Yet, religion scholar, Albert Raboteau, points out that, Winthrop's assertion that the colony should be a "city on a hill," was not meant to say that the colony (and later this country) occupied a position of privilege. Instead, Winthrop's charge to the colonists echoed Moses' charge

to the Israelites at Sinai. In that Biblical narrative, God entered into a contractual agreement with the Israelites that *if* they would "keep his Commandments" he would bless the land that they were possessing (81). The conditional nature of the agreement is what makes all of the difference in its interpretation. Although Winthrop emphasized that God desired "justice, mercy, affection, meekness, gentleness, patience, generosity, and unity," his adaptation of the Sinai story to motivate virtue in the citizens of Massachusetts led many to view America as the modern Israel (Raboteau 82). During the early days of the colonies' existence, this concept was used by Puritan preachers as a way to remind them that God's blessings would only come if His people kept up their end of the bargain. However, in time, "[a]s the actual experience of migration with all its fear and tenuousness receded, Americans tended to lose sight of their radical dependence upon God and to celebrate their own achievements as a nation" (Raboteau 82).

The tenuous relationship of the Biblical narrative to Winthrop's political agenda is similar, then, to the fragile connection between Reagan's political agenda and the historical narrative of which Winthrop's speech is an important part. Despite the fact that in the Biblical narrative "God's Will was the measure of the Israelites deeds, not vice versa," in Reagan's allusion to "city on a hill," it is evident that this has been reversed (Raboteau 82). Now, America occupies an elevated position, and America is the light that shines for all the world to see. Narrative worked for Winthrop in 1630. Alluding to the familiar Biblical narrative made plain the magnitude of the colonists' undertaking. Indeed, they were like the Israelites preparing to enter The Promised Land—except that they weren't the Israelites, and whether or not this land was theirs for the taking is still in dispute. Reagan's allusion to the founders' signing of the declaration also worked in

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1974. Indeed, conservative Americans were preparing to take back control of their "Promised Land"—except that they weren't the founders, and whether or not the government of this land was theirs for the taking was also still in dispute. As Winthrop's speech was intended to establish a model for citizenship, Reagan's "City on a Hill" speech draws on that model to re-establish that model citizenry. Absent, of course, from the historical narrative and from Reagan's nostalgia is any mention of native inhabitants of the possessed land. Thus, as Novitz says, "it is the social acceptability of a narrative identity, and not the truth of the narrative that constitutes it, that determines what we regard as natural, worthy, or excellent in human behavior" (156).

The "stock of stories" from which Reagan draws his rhetoric both conceals and reveals the message he conveys. In one sense, by aligning his narrative with history he demonstrates a desire for a noble cause. On the other hand, by aligning his narrative with history, he also demonstrates a desire to perpetuate an ignoble cause. The relationship between the founders and their slaves is not often recounted; yet it is through stories that every citizens' place is established. Historian Barbara Fields says

> race took on a new significance when questions arose about the entitlement of non-enslaved blacks to partake of the fruits of Western liberty and citizenship. In North America, EuroAmericans had to resolve the contradictions between their won struggle for political freedom and that of the black men and women they still enslaved. This contradiction was resolved (by pro-and antislavery whites) by racialism: ascribing certain inherited characteristics to blacks...that made them unworthy of the benefits of first-class citizenship. (qtd. in Giddings "The Last Taboo" 445)

For Reagan to invite hearers to believe in the nobility of the cause for which the founding fathers so diligently fought and to ignore other parts of the story is disingenuous at best. Making visible the racist and sexist attitudes that were—not peripheral—but absolutely

integral to this nation's founding is necessary in order to sift through political rhetoric that relies too heavily on abstracts and that grounds its theory in half-true narratives. If the freedom and justice for which the founders fought were not freedom and justice for *all*, then neither is the freedom and justice that Reagan so ardently defends.

3.2.2 Law & Order—Contending Forces

It is significant that Reagan's first speech at the first annual gathering of the ultra-conservative organization, CPAC, would set a tone for the "new" Republican party by returning to this story of the first civil rights "activists" to march against "tyranny." Reagan, nonetheless, disregards the irony in the founders' cause—that they would declare their own freedom while denying the freedom of others. The further irony is that while connecting his present political cause with that of the founding fathers, he is yet unsympathetic towards *other* freedom movements—i.e. those that seek to secure social and civil rights and that are critical of the established order—finding them potentially threatening to the freedoms fought for by those noble ("white") men.

Ending his speech the way he began, Reagan asserts that the men of his day who had "set foot on the moon" and survived Vietnam were "typical of this land as the Founding Fathers were typical. We found them in our streets, in the offices, the shops and the working places of our country and on the farms" he says ("City" 7 of 7). In this analogy, he attempts to collapse all differences in history and experience between the "Founding Fathers" and those whom he calls Americans he calls "typical," even though there have been few "typical" or common experiences or opportunities for all Americans. Underneath his claim that these Americans are "typical…as the Founding Fathers were typical" is the concomitant assumption that those who were most like the "Fathers" are

like them in ethnicity, gender and social class. But, most importantly, what Reagan is really calling for are people whose lives reflect Puritan values which he defines as both religious and political. He stresses a kind of self-governance or behavior that makes government unnecessary, and he insists upon a vision of human beings (or certain races or religious groups) that can best operate away from the purview of government. To Reagan, "the most vulnerable" citizens are not the illiterate or unemployed, but the business owners who most represent the ideology of American capitalism.

Reagan's rhetoric is characteristic of whiteness in that it pretends that race, class and color are irrelevant and that only individuals matter (Keating, Ratcliff, Barnett, Roberts, Frankenburg, Kovel, Fanon). What follows from this rationale is that government is not responsible for the success or failure of individuals, and as long as individuals are responsible for themselves, neither race nor power is an issue. However, Reagan never mentions what should be done when individuals are unable to control their own lives and destinies. The assumption is that there is a level playing field and everyone has the same power and "freedom" as everyone else.

Early in Reagan's political career—in fact, before he had officially declared his intentions to run for governor of California— the Watts riots broke out. It was then that Reagan's law and order rhetoric began to take shape. The clash of contending forces— both physical and rhetorical—threw into sharp relief the distance and difference between the law and the social order. Patterson characterizes that historical moment as transformative of "the national conversation concerning civil rights legislation," which would now be "focused on racial confrontations" (69). On August 11, 1965, Marquette Frye, a young black motorist, was pulled over by police for drunk driving. Frye resisted

arrest as residents and police gathered at the scene. A woman in the crowd spat on one of the officers who responded by placing her under arrest also. This sparked an emotional response from the crowd who "began throwing rocks at police cruisers that were now leaving the area" (Dallek 129). The Los Angeles Human Relations Commission held a community meeting the next afternoon in order to "defuse the racial tensions," but anger was still high and when a youth ran to the microphone declaring that it was time to go after "the real enemy," which was "the white man," it was clear that the anger had reached a dangerous peak (Dallek 129). Malice was further incited by the local media who were on hand to capture images of angry black residents which soon aired on network television (129). As a result, "'many normally sober-minded fathers and husbands' flocked to sporting goods and hardware stores…buying guns, bows, arrows, knives, slingshots, and…other weapons. While whites hunkered down in homes…thousands of angry blacks took to the streets" (129). The riots lasted for five days, only ending after the National Guard was called out. When the dust settled, thirty-four people were killed—all but five were black—over 1,000 people were injured and 4,000 arrested. "Property damage was estimated at $200 million in the 46.5-square mile zone (larger than Manhattan or San Francisco)" (Horne 1).

While the riots provoked the angst of the Johnson administration in Washington, DC, and the Brown administration in California, the civil unrest was a veritable launching pad for Reagan's "law and order" rhetoric that propelled his political fame. Reagan effectively played on the fears of the white middle-class whose isolation from the black ghettos made it difficult to understand the logic of the Watts uprising. He reasoned that civil unrest came about because "arrivals from the Deep South" had come to

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California expecting "streets 'paved with gold'" (Dallek 187). By implying that blacks' disappointment was a result of their own unrealistic expectations and that it was the failure of "government programs" to eliminate poverty that lead to "lawlessness" (187), Reagan avoided explicitly racist language. However, his proposed solutions would merely preserve the status quo. He "cautioned that the problem of race was 'most difficult' and that it 'would not be solved overnight' [then] asked aides to look at volunteer programs in inner cities around the country" because he believed "that the answers lay with individuals, not with more programs and bills" (188). Reagan ignores the racial and socioeconomic problems that sparked the Watts riot and sets himself as one who views the problem from a distance, both rationally and objectively. Indeed, as a political candidate he was able to articulate his position without having to actually deal with the issues at hand. Thus, Reagan's literal distance from the experiences of Watts residents, coupled with his political distance from responsibility, allowed him to create a rhetorical distance that worked in his favor. Although his "ideas struck many liberals as ludicrous," says Dallek, "they served to blunt accusations that Reagan was simply another nay-saying conservative" (188).

However, if "the law" preserves and protects racial and/or social injustice, can a disregard for that law be fairly characterized as lawlessness? Barnett notes that whiteness presents an "invisible, objective" neutrality by its "reliance on coded discourses of race" (2 of 25)—where "white is coded as orderliness, rationality and control, while 'black' is coded as chaos, irrational violence, and total loss of control'" (Barnett 3 of 25). The Watts riots appeared to be unreasonable, and the people participating in them were characterized as degenerate hoodlums, ignorant and animal-like. The media publicized

the violence, while Republican politicians pointed to the ineffectiveness of government

programs and recent legislation intended to provide poor black citizens with social

equality. Yet, politicians and whites outside of the city were disconnected from the

reality of life in Watts. Horne argues that civil rights legislation was not immediately

enacted on the ground and many residents had not yet experienced any relief from racism

or received federal funds. Horne also notes that "[f]ew homes, churches, or libraries

were damaged, a fact that supports the contention that the Watts Uprising was no

mindless riot but rather a conscious, though inchoate, insurrection" (3).

Reagan believed the 1964 Civil Rights Act was unconstitutional and opposed the

1965 Voting Rights Act, arguing that "[t]here is a limit as to how far you can go through

the law. You cannot benefit one person by taking away the freedom of others'" (qtd in

Dallek 188). Yet, rather than looking for ways to eradicate poverty when urban riots

erupted, he instead "vowed zero tolerance for criminals" (Dallek x). Unsympathetic

towards the complaints of the disenfranchised, yet careful not to be as incendiary as

LAPD Chief Parker, Reagan, nonetheless, criticized California governor Brown's

handling of the Watts riots and agreed with Parker that the role of government is to

protect the rules of law. Reagan's stand was not just about re-taking control of chaos but,

more importantly, was about preserving power and privilege for some, while ignoring or

disregarding the powerlessness of others. Believing that the presiding liberal government

in 1965 "had failed to solve society's most pressing problems," Reagan announced that it

was time for "a government more in line with the ideas of the founding fathers—that

individuals had the capacity for self-government, the dignity and the ability and the God-

given freedom to make our own decisions, to plan our own lives and to control our own

destiny" (Dallek 228). Ironically, however, at the same time that he set aside this elite

group who should be allowed to govern themselves, he also supported increased

government regulation of socially-unacceptable behaviors performed by all the "Others."

As Cornel West asserts, in

> all conservatisms rooted in a quest for order, the pervasive disorder in white and, especially, black America fans and fuels the channeling of rage toward the most vulnerable and degraded members of the community. For white America, this means primarily scapegoating black people, women, gay men and lesbians (42).

In his first inaugural speech in 1980, Reagan reconstructs the narrative of an

imaginary homogenous nation and implicitly derides the efforts of Johnson's

administration on behalf of the Negro community. He contends that rather than concern

for "special interest groups," America's "concern must be for *a special interest group*

that has been too long neglected. It knows no sectional boundaries or ethnic and racial

divisions and it crosses political party lines...They are, in short, 'We the people,' this

breed called Americans" (my emphasis Reagan "Inaugural Address" 2 of 5). It is unclear

when America as a whole was "long neglected," but there are volumes of historical and

personal narratives of oppressed minorities who were. Nonetheless, ignoring well-

documented and historically confirmed relations of uneven power between citizens of

European descent and those of Asian, Latin and African ancestry, Reagan's narrative

acknowledges no dividing lines and defends the needs of this supposedly-forgotten

group. His brand of individualism ignores the relational nature of race and class, and

denies the way differences are maintained by individualistic rhetoric. Yet, in an article

entitled "On the State of Race Theory: A Conversation with David Theo Goldberg,"

Susan Giroux says "[e]xcising encounters with otherness from our daily repertoire of

human interaction...only renders us less capable of negotiating differences and more invested in the supposed safety of sameness (25).

3.2.3 Religious Allegory, What Lies Beneath?

Reagan's rise to political power was concurrent with a rise in the "religious right," a coalition of Christian individuals and groups who believe in active political involvement. Those who identify as part of the "religious right," work to impose their religious beliefs and principles upon public policies. Thus, Reagan solicits the support of this group by appealing to their commitment to Protestant values that are both religious and political. The "City on a Hill" speech struck the appropriate note of religion and patriotism that his conservative hearers would appreciate. Yet, Henry Giroux asserts in his article, "Beyond Neoliberal Common Sense: Cultural Politics and Public Pedagogy in Dark Times" that

> [o]ne of the most distinctive features of politics in the United States in the last thirty years is the inexorable move away from the social state and the promise of equality, human dignity, racial justice, and freedom—upon which the conception of democracy rests—to the narrow and stripped down assumption that equates democracy with market identities, values, and relations. Hollowed out under a regime of politics that celebrates the trinity of privatization, deregulation, and financialization, democracy has turned dystopian. Consumption has become the authentic mark of citizenship, while individual competition and personal responsibility are elevated to the new gospel of wealth and material salvation." (18)

Although Reagan and "The New Right" are purportedly about Christian morals and family values, how these terms are defined is determined by their political manifestation. In action, Christian morals and values are demonstrated less in kindness, mercy and love for one another, and more in judgment, distancing and condemnation of those who are not like the self-identified "religious right." As theologian, Craig Prentiss says, "a religious myth has been absolutely central to the construction of America's national

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identity. We tend to understand ourselves in religious terms despite the...secular nature of our social and political organization" (Prentiss).

This sacred secularism also plays out in the relationship between white Americans and black Americans. Indeed, there is a troublesome relationship between American "grand narratives" and African Americans' "little narratives" of cultural identity (Daniell).[44] While Reagan uses narrative in support of his political ideology, the very stories to which he alludes can just as easily be used to counter his point of view. Macintyre says, while we are the "main characters" in our own drama, we are also, by virtue of community, compelled to play "subordinate parts in the dramas of others, and each drama constrains the others" (251).

Raboteau further describes the way this has played out between blacks and whites in this country as they have each played a role in the others' dramas. First of all, before Americans identified themselves as *Americans*, they identified as Christians—"religion, like language and skin color, constituted the colonists' identity" (76). This religious identification, however, posed problems when it came to determining whether or not to evangelize slaves. To do so would make blacks Christians too, so how could one Christian justify enslavement of another? Yet, by using the passage in Ephesians that says "[s]laves be obedient to your masters," southern slave owners were able to bypass that conflict. However, as the two sets of Christian Americans co-existed—one enslaved, the other free—so too did their dual narratives of identity. Both whites and blacks identified closely with the Exodus story:

> From the earliest days of colonization, white Christians had represented their journey across the Atlantic to America as the exodus of a New Israel from the bondage of Egypt into the Promised Land of milk and honey. For black Christians, the imagery was reversed: the Middle Passage had

brought them to Egypt land, where they suffered bondage under a new
Pharaoh. (81)

As a result, southern ministers overseeing their black congregations appeased their

consciences with the knowledge that those "heathen" people were embracing the white

man's religion, oblivious to the fact that their cherished religious texts were allegories to

the black congregation (Raboteau 81). While whites identified with Israel, assuming their

lives in America to be the fulfillment of their earthly destiny, enslaved blacks, too,

identified with Israel, assuming their destiny would be fulfilled at any time. The

significance of these parallel stories is the way Americans—black and white—had such

similar, yet different, narratives of identity based on their particular life experiences, on

the way the two groups were both connected and disconnected—related and yet, *not*—to

one another. The disconnect, however, was not by accident, but by design. As Raboteau

says: "For three centuries, white and black Americans have dwelt in the same land. For at

least two of those centuries, they have shared the same religion. And yet, during all those

years, their national and religious identities have been radically opposed. It need not have

been so" (85).

  While Reagan aligns his rhetoric (and identity) with the Puritan tradition, he does

so only partially, bypassing the complexity of early American Christianity. The slave

narratives that lie beneath the surface of the American tale are also aligned with that

Puritan tradition. Blacks, too, have identified as Christian and American. Although the

narratives that construct black American identities are not the same as those that

construct white Americans, the simultaneous similarities and differences are instructive.

They demonstrate the necessity to consider narratives together, allowing each one to

speak back to the other. In order to consider the significance of one story, we must place

it in dialogic conversation with the *other* story with which it is connected. By doing so,

we may see, not just the tensions between them, but, possibly also, their compatibility—

the places where the values of one align with the values of the other. I would argue that it

is in the push and pull of such contending narratives that we discover who "we"—as

Americans—really are.

This identity construction will be explored more fully in the next chapter, but I

move now to how Reagan's New Right ideology works to constrain poverty discourse.

3.3 "New Right" Ideology & The God of Materialism

In his book *The Racial Order of Things,* Mukherjee Roopali traces the shift in

discursive patterns "from the civil rights era of the sixties" to what he calls the "'post-

soul epoch' of the nineties," recognizing the way "state and cultural authority...carry a

special potency to say what counts as 'true'"(6). Reagan-era ideology is characterized by

"Ideals of individual self-fulfillment and proper standards of work, thrift, and merit" and

"[w]ithin this larger discursive context, welfare and social justice [emerge] as

unproductive racial entitlements that created no wealth at the expense of the 'productive'

private sector in which all national wealth was actually produced" (14). It is this

patriarchal, capitalist ideology that circumscribes welfare discourse in general and

Reagan's welfare rhetoric in particular. As long as emphasis is on wealth and the

prosperous "individual," and the "Horatio Alger myths [of] self-empowerment and thrift"

are revived, those who are not wealthy, white or male are easily cast as personally

responsible for their own plight (14).

The either/or dichotomy simplifies the "problem" of welfare as is evident in

Reagan's 1971 *New York Times* article "Welfare is a Cancer," in which he distinguishes

between those who deserve help and those who do not; between the able-bodied and the elderly or disabled; between the honest, tax-paying Americans and the "cheats" and "frauds." By doing so, he invites the reader to believe that the problem with welfare is a simple one, a matter of weeding out the bad and protecting the good. He says: "The only way to measure the success of any welfare program is not by how many people have been added to the rolls, but how many have been removed and made productive citizens" ("Welfare is a Cancer" 41). There's no middle ground. Either people are lazy, unproductive and on welfare or they're hard-working and productive citizens who are not. Only the "aged, disabled and blind" have reason to be supported indefinitely by the government because, "through no fault of their own," they are unable to go to work.

Yet, Reagan's clean-cut approach completely ignores the position of women with children, those who are physically able-bodied, but still tied to the duties of the home. What is at work in Reagan's rhetoric is what Eve Wiederhold calls "'the quiet elision'— that space in which the aim to represent simultaneously omits component parts within any representational scene" (127). Wiederhold borrows Kenneth Burke's "terministic screens" which are "ways of seeing" that are also "ways of not seeing" (127). Reagan presents his audience with the idea that the only reason a person—who is not elderly or disabled—would have for being on welfare is that either they are addicted to handouts the way an addict is addicted to cocaine, or they have taken a short-cut to collect unearned cash, like a gun-wielding thief from an unsuspecting bank teller. Yet, such assumptions ignore other possibilities and attempt to persuade us that none exist. As bell hooks points out, low-paying or unpaid service work or 'woman's work' is not valued or valuable in the public sphere (102). Therefore, women who "only" stay home with their children and

collect welfare to meet their most basic needs or who receive welfare to supplement low-paying, service-sector jobs outside of the home do not fall into the category of "hard-working American citizens," but rather into that vast body of individuals who merely exist on "the dole." The strength of Reagan's arguments flows from the belief that language is representational without consideration for "*how* omissions enable an utterance to make sense" (Wiederhold). The omissions "make sense" not only if there are commonly-held assumptions about women and minorities, but also if the marketplace (or the larger society in which the marketplace operates) is absolved from social responsibilities. While Reagan would have the audience believe that "professional welfarists" are merely avoiding work and responsibility, he also deflects from the responsibility of business owners to provide adequate wages for workers.

In a 1975 speech entitled "Let Them Go Their Way," Reagan says

> Let our banner proclaim our belief in a free market as the greatest provider for the people. Let us also call for an end to the nit-picking, the harassment and over-regulation of business and industry which restricts expansion and our ability to compete in world markets.

There is apparently no pressure on market industries to provide better wages and/or benefits for its employees, and certainly Reagan detests any government measures that guarantee businesses pay a basic minimum living wage. Rather than defending poor people, Reagan argues that it is business owners who deserve pity:

> What does it mean whether you hold the deed or the title to your business or property if the government holds the power of life and death over that business or property? The government can find some charge to bring against any concern it chooses to prosecute. Every businessman has his own tale of harassment…Our natural, inalienable rights are now considered to be a dispensation of government, and freedom has never been so fragile. ("A Time")

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With words like "life and death," "harassment," and "freedom" that is "so fragile" it

sounds as though Reagan is championing the cause of the needy; with metaphors

common in welfare discourse he requests sympathy for business owners and intolerance

for "[t]hose who would trade our freedom for the soup kitchen of the welfare state ("A

Time"). Yet, according to Abramovitz, the 1987 Congressional Budget Office, Work

Related Programs for Welfare Recipients reports that "OBRA [1981 Omnibus Budget

Reconciliation Act] sent thousands of women into [literal] soup kitchens as well as into

dangerous welfare hotels, drug-plagued streets, and unsafe personal relationships" (356).

Substituting the needs of the business classes for those of the under-classes, and co-

opting the language of welfare for the purpose of his "New Right," Reagan cleverly shifts

attention away from Johnson's War on Poverty towards his own War on Welfare.

Welfare is now the enemy, posing a direct threat to capitalist enterprise. Thus, in place of

the suffering single mother, he shows a conniving and lazy thief. In place of the dog-eat-

dog corporate executive he shows a harassed and nit-picked business owner handicapped

by government regulation.

Rhetorically the argument was effective enough to earn Reagan a seat in the Oval

Office, but when he was finally able to implement his proposed legislation that slashed

welfare and deregulated the market, the results were less than stellar: Katz says "by every

measure poverty increased dramatically during the Reagan era" (4). Although Reagan's

argument is that there are only two kinds of people—those who work and earn sufficient

wages upon which to live and those who don't work at all—Katz finds that five years

after Reagan took office and implemented the economic policies for which he had so long

campaigned, the population of *working* poor people reached two million—an increase of

52% since 1975 (70). The fact that so many people working in full-time positions were still unable to pull themselves out of poverty flies in the face of Reagan's rhetoric which pretends any work will open the door to the American Dream. It also calls into question the legitimacy of "New Right" ideology which urges Americans to accept that welfare, not capitalism, undermines people's responsibility and jeopardizes the nation's wealth. Piven and Cloward argue that AFDC "does not account for very much of social welfare expenditures or for very many adult beneficiaries. Before the Reagan cuts, about $14billion...was spent to provide for slightly more than 11 million AFDC recipients, of whom more than 7 million were children" (3). This means that, despite the rhetoric, the motivation for cutting welfare and demonizing welfare recipients goes beyond the so-called bottom line.

In fact, according to Gilens, most of what is considered "welfare" is actually not money in the hands of single mothers, but rather "old-age pensions and education"— programs that help everyone. The small portion of welfare funds that actually provide food stamps and housing accounts for "2.6% of government social spending and 1.7% of all government spending" (16). In light of these numbers, the overwhelming burden on the national economy that Reagan would have his audience believe is the result of welfare cheats and criminals is exposed as a facade. Nonetheless, although liberal policy-makers such as Johnson's administration set up programs intended to abolish poverty, Gilens says welfare benefits have actually never been sufficient enough to do so. They merely help people to be "less poor" than they would be without them (21). This fact also calls into question the limited discourse on poverty and welfare which rarely deals fully with the issues because the issues are conceived within the parameters of

stereotypes and preconceived ideas about people and their place within the social hierarchy.

Welfare is the "centerpiece of [Reagan's] explanation for economic stagnation and moral decay;" his basic argument is that welfare demoralizes people, and the solution is to cut benefits, create jobs and force people to be independent (Katz 139). However, the simplicity of this argument obscures the complexity of poverty issues. David Ellwood contends that there are "three groups among the poor: families in which the adults are 'already doing a great deal for themselves;' those individuals who are 'suffering temporary difficulties because of a job loss, a change in their family's circumstances, or some personal problem;" and 'the few who are healthy but who seem unable to find work on their own and need some form of long-term support" (qtd in Katz 232). Thus, as Daniel Weinberg argues, "there is no single program or policy that can eliminate poverty, but rather a "targeted" approach which focuses more specifically on the real-world causes of people's disadvantage (qtd. in Katz 233). The causes of poverty don't make headlines as often as poor people do. It is easier to point to the symptoms of the problem and assume to know its source. Yet, too often, political rhetoric has merely dulled our understanding of poverty and has perpetuated narrowly conceived and unproductive approaches to its elimination.

Although in "Welfare is a Cancer" Reagan insists that "welfare is a human problem—one of individuals, each with his own personal reason for dependency"—the principles guiding his efforts to reform welfare are informed by a patriarchal, capitalist epistemology that characterizes those individuals with broad strokes. Roopali says that during the Reagan era "emergent ethics of reactionary individualisms placed

responsibility for an individual's economic viability entirely on his/her shoulders,

creating hated figures of the 'welfare queen,' the 'quota queen,' [and] the black/Latina

teenage mother as unsavory 'baby factory' (14). In the next section, I will discuss the

significance of this raced and gendered image of welfare that has more to do with

whiteness ideology than political agendas in spite of what politicians may say.

3.4 The Welfare Queen and Political Exigencies of Reagan's "New Right"

"Increases in nonmarital childbearing among the poor...stemmed not from the lure of welfare but primarily from poverty, poor education, and (among blacks) the miseries of inner-city existence. The majority of impoverished single mothers who turned to welfare for help...did so because their social and economic circumstances had left them little choice. (Patterson 141 "Unproductive Dialogue")

In particular, women with young children often fall into the category of able-

bodied, but non-working poor which has led many feminist writers to argue that welfare

and poverty discourse has been so male-dominated that the punitive effects of welfare

"reform" directly impacts women and children (Katz 71). Patterson argues that "the real

value of AFDC benefits was declining during the highly inflationary years of the late

1970s and early 1980s" which problematizes the assumption that women were having

more babies in order to get more welfare money (141). According to a *Harvard Law*

Review article entitled "Dethroning the Welfare Queen: The Rhetoric of Reform," "one

Georgia welfare director" scoffed at this idea saying "[a]nyone who thinks that a woman

goes through nine months of pregnancy, the pain of childbirth and 18 years of rearing a

child for $45 more a month...has got to be a man" (2026). Abramovitz agrees, asserting

that "normal population growth, changing family structures, and labor market

dislocations, not the behavior of mothers on ADC" are what causes changes in the ADC

program (Abramovitz 320). Nonetheless, in his 1964 speech, "A Time for Choosing,"

Reagan tells the story of a "young woman" with "six children" who was "pregnant with

her seventh" who wanted to divorce her husband—"a laborer earning $250 a month"—so

that she could obtain ADC funds which provided more money ($330/month). "She got

the idea from two women in her neighborhood," he says, "who had done the same thing"

("Time"4 of 8). In this speech there is an unspoken yet apparent racial narrative. Reagan

emphasizes the number of children the woman has, the fact that her husband is a laborer

and the way she is imitating the behavior of others in her "neighborhood"—all of which

allude to stereotypical images of black people—or at least people of color. Although the

fact that this woman's husband is a laborer does not necessarily indicate that this story is

about African Americans, Abramavoitz points out that "[t]he displacement of blacks from

southern agriculture and their segregation in the lowest paying jobs created a pool of

workers vulnerable to low wages, high unemployment, and isolation from the white

working class" (320). [45] This further supports the likelihood that this is the image his

story is meant to conjure up. By saying that "she got the idea" from her friends, Reagan

also implies that hers is a devious plan cooked up with nefarious intent. It also indicates

that this is a pattern of behavior with this group of people—or at least with the people in

this community. Racial stereotypes prevail that emphasize the bodily functions of

racialized people, and the fact that she has six children draws attention to her

hypersexuality, in spite of the fact that she is married. We are to assume this woman had

no moral impetus for control of any kind, but merely a penchant for taking advantage of

the system.

The irony in this story, which is meant to repel hearers, is the fact that the woman

is attempting to obtain better support for her family, which her husband's work is unable

to provide. There is also no consideration of the fact that she seeks a divorce, not because

she's fallen out of love with her husband, nor because he or she is having an extra-marital affair, but because his attempt to support his family has fallen short and their desperate circumstances necessitate desperate measures. Furthermore, the argument which Reagan himself makes elsewhere, that people should work rather than receive welfare, is null and void in this scenario, since the husband *is* working, but his wages are insufficient.

Abramovitz says that

> in the mid-70s, corporate downsizing and increased competition for low-wage work meant AFDC payments became greater than work salaries, plus it included benefits; yet, rather than recognize the change in the market as cause of people choosing welfare over work, critics argued that AFDC—not low wages—undercut the work ethic (353).

While the volatile market placed low-wage workers in a precarious economic position, AFDC inadvertently created a means for single mothers to support themselves (354). Yet, it also creates an impossible choice for someone like the woman in Reagan's story. The choice for her is not whether to work or go on welfare, but whether to work, receive no benefits and inadequate wages (not to mention contending with childcare), or to obtain welfare and receive benefits and more money with which to feed her family. Yet, this story is not really about her. As cultural-rhetorical theorists, Brummet and Bowers say, "[a] text that creates a subject position will provide for the subject a fully realized narration. Images generating a subject position will be of people situated within a complete story…fully realized characters situated in meaningful connection with others" (131). We know very little of her story (or whether it's even true)—why she has so many children, why her husband works as a laborer or why she has no other resources besides welfare. But, we are to despise rather than pity her. She is "an object…with no story to

tell. Stories are told about [her], but [she] has no story of [her] own" (132). Thus, the reality of this woman's story is not as important as the purpose for which it is used.

In "Impact of Race and Welfare Reform on African American Single Mothers' Access to Higher Education," Vanessa Johnson argues that it is Reagan's knack for narrative that "crystallized" the connection between race and welfare as a political issue: "'There were many years of anecdotes about 'welfare queens' driving fancy cars, buying steaks with their food stamps, and teaching their children that welfare made working unnecessary. These anecdotes were part of President Reagan's standard speech on the topic'" (qtd in Johnson 1046). His use of stories about the "welfare queen" in his pre-presidential campaign gave a name to the Negro matriarch whom Moynihan made familiar a decade before. She already existed in the social consciousness; he merely gave her a name. Then journalists went looking for "her," that is, the actual person to whom Reagan referred. In doing so, they learned of a Chicago woman named Linda Taylor and followed her saga for a short time (Douglas 185).[46] The Chicago papers called her the "Welfare Queen," and a 1976 *New York Times* article entitled "'Welfare Queen' Becomes Issue in Reagan Campaign" tells how Reagan picked up the story of Ms. Taylor and carried it with him on his campaign tour through New Hampshire. The article says Reagan "struck a nerve" with the citizens of that state as he shocked them with the details of this woman who "has 80 names, 30 addresses, 12 Social Security cards and is collecting veterans' benefits on four nonexisting husbands" (51). Reagan further sensationalizes the story by adding that "she's got Medicaid, getting food stamps and ...is collecting welfare under each of her names. Her tax-free cash income alone is over $150,000" (51).

The story is allegorical, however, as Taylor, who has supposedly defrauded the government of every social benefit that is available, embodies the evil that Reagan and his audience despise. Yet, Susan Douglas says journalists found only a handful of actual welfare queens and, according to the *Times*, Reagan's version of Linda Taylor's crimes was quite exaggerated. According to James Piper, the assistant state's attorney prosecuting Taylor, they were only able to prove that she had used four aliases and the total amount that she had defrauded the state was $8,000 not $150,000 as Reagan's story alleges. (51) It is clear, then, that the validity of the details is less important than the effect that this story has on Reagan's audience. The story was told, the article says, during Reagan's "citizens' press conference" where news journalists were not allowed to ask questions. With this format, Reagan, the "citizen politician" speaks to his fellow citizens about the concerns they share; the tall tales serve to build camaraderie and a common foe against whom the fellow-citizens can rail.

Indeed, audience members were angered by Reagan's stories. Building his own community of "hard-working people who pay their bills and put up with high taxes" he alienates those whom he assumes do not work hard and do not pay bills or taxes (51).[47] They are the "others," those people whom Reagan says are either like Linda Taylor—who happens to be black—or like the "slum dwellers" who live in "Taino Towers, a four-building subsidized housing project in New York City" which Reagan claims has "11-foot ceilings, with a 20-foot balcony, a swimming pool and gymnasium, laundry room and play room and the rent begins at $113.20" (51). The implication is that taxpayers are footing the bill for the poor to live in luxury. However, Robert Nichol, the project coordinator, says all of the amenities Reagan describes are hardly luxurious. The 11-foot

ceilings are in a few of the larger units occupied by larger families and "are only over the kitchen and living room" as a space-saving configuration (51). In addition, says Nichol, the pool and gym are shared by the mostly black and Puerto Rican community which comprises approximately 200,000 people. It is no coincidence that these two stories upon which Reagan relied for dramatic effect were about poor women and minorities. The collective agreement that those people were not part of their hard-working community fueled animosity in the audience when the stories were told, and Reagan's elaborate exaggerations also demonstrated how narrative is effective in persuading people to believe welfare queens and chiselers are everywhere, even when they're not.

Race is something else that is everywhere and nowhere in Reagan's "New Right." Yet, part of the difficulty that arises when racism is discussed has as much to do with one's definition of that term as its social implications. To avoid this difficulty here, let me explain that white racism, as I define it, is the conscious or unconscious (1) belief in the superiority of socially identified "white" people, "white" culture, "white" norms and "white" beauty; (2) pursuit of wealth at the expense of those who are socially identified as members of a non-white group and/or (3) denigration of socially identified people of color and any cultural or physical characteristics associated with them. In Chapter 1, I discuss "whiteness" which is related to white racism. Racism, however, has more to do with the manifestation of a whiteness ideology. Although there is some overlap, a person who subscribes to a "whiteness ideology" may never act upon it, may not realize they have it and when they come to realize it may consciously alter their perspective. A white racist, on the other hand, may or may not realize they have a "whiteness" perspective, or would likely characterize it in another way, resisting the "racist" label. He or she also

acts upon their belief system—intentionally denigrating, disrespecting, distancing

themselves from Others—yet also defends those actions and is less willing or likely to

ever change them. Aligned with this is the underlying assumption that 'race' is a

biological, rather than social, construct; thus, certain groups of people are inherently

incapable of possessing or ever attaining the physiological or social superiority of white

people. With this understanding of racism as both the overtly racist acts and the less

obvious frame of mind that precedes—yet may never even result in—acts of violence or

overt injustice against social others, one can see racism in operation, albeit subtly in

Reagan's rhetoric.

New York Times blogger and Nobel Laureate, Paul Krugman, identifies an

example of this when Reagan, "in 1976...talked about working people angry about the

'strapping young buck' using food stamps to buy T-bone steaks at the grocery store." His

use of the term "young buck" to describe the welfare cheat was reserved for his Southern

audiences, who Krugman says recognize the term to mean "a large black man." Likewise,

historian Joseph Crespino finds that

> Throughout his career, Reagan benefited from subtly divisive appeals to
> whites who resented efforts in the 1960s and 70s to reverse historic
> patterns of racial discrimination. He did it in 1966 when he campaigned
> for the California governorship by denouncing open housing and civil
> rights laws. He did it in 1976 when he tried to beat out Gerald Ford for
> the Republican nomination by attacking welfare in subtly racist terms.
> And he did it in Neshoba County in 1980.

Neshoba County was the small Mississippi town where Reagan spoke of "states rights"

which appealed to the old racist sentiments of white southerners. Thus, Reagan's subtly

racist speech acts include more than just his speech. They also include the frame and

background of his words. The fact that he chose to use a familiar racist term with a

Southern audience and to speak of state's rights which, during the Civil War, included the

right to own slaves, should not be assumed innocent coincidence considering the extent to

which Reagan and his campaign team prepared for each appearance.

In 1965, Reagan suggests that the business class may hold the solution for social

reforms: "Why not turn to the business community and ask how can we remove the

shackles, how can we improve the business climate in this state?...This is the name of the

game. We can't win if we continue to remember past bitterness, past divisions, and make

them more important than the responsibility we have to the people of this state" (qtd in

Dallek 181). Notice how he shifts the language of slavery (i.e. "shackles") from poor

blacks to the business class. In this statement, Reagan effectively discredits demands for

social freedoms by brushing aside the negative past, a move which decontextualizes the

actions of disgruntled citizens and proposes a mass-produced, one-size fits all ideology

that erases differences and shrink-wraps social relations into marketable products.

Once race is relegated to the fine print, Reagan can sell his white-washed policies

that increase capital and secure his version of the American Dream. David Goldberg says

conservative backlash against civil rights advances of the 1960s opened up a "'new

racism'" by the late 70s "that would come to define the Reagan/Bush/Clinton eras. [It is]

a more fluid, less obvious, deregulated and privatized rearticulation of racist discourse,

the new colorblind, or 'raceless racism'" (qtd in Giroux, Susan 13). The goal of this

private racism is "to reshape government and refashion public culture in the interests,

largely, of wealth and whiteness" (Giroux, Susan 14). Additionally, Roopali notes that

once "white racisms" are conflated with "supremacist hate," it becomes relatively easy to

dismiss racism as a thing of the past (3). Reagan would not sully his positive image with

any overtly racist statements. Thus, by using, instead, the language of civil-rights

activists themselves—justice and equality—he avoids the appearance of evil even when

his definitions of these terms are equivocal. Yet, Giroux says, "[a]bsent a unified

grammar of racially significant expression, skeptics can and do assert that past racisms

have been delegitimated and have disappeared from public expression, if not

consciousness, rendering new articulations invisible and thus the potential for critical

response and redress nearly impossible" (17).

In an attempt to appeal to black voters and undercut accusations that the

Republican party is disconnected from minorities, Reagan declares to his 1977 CPAC

audience that "[t]he time has come for Republicans to say to black voters: 'Look, we

offer principles that black Americans can...support.' We believe in jobs...we believe in

education...we believe in *treating all Americans as individuals* and not as stereotypes or

voting blocs..." (my emphasis "A New Republican Party" 5 of 11). Although it is

cleverly disguised, there is still a racist undercurrent here. Indeed, as he asserts, people

are individuals and possess unique qualities and capabilities. However, individuals are

also social and exist within a context of historical relationships with other individuals.

While on one hand he asserts that we should not re-hash past hurts and injustices

(Dallek), he, nonetheless, repeatedly aligns his political philosophy with that of slave-

holding nation builders. Thus, it is ironic that here, as he declares the relevance of

Republican principles to the concerns of black citizens, he also positions blacks as

ahistorical. They are merely "individuals" who are concerned about education and jobs;

but the basis of their concerns—the history of segregation and disparities in hiring—is,

apparently, inconsequential. In spite of the fact that it is black communities ("groups")

who have suffered from discriminatory practices, Reagan urges black *individuals* to join the Republican party and ignore that history.

I would argue, however, that rather than ignoring historical American narratives, we should acknowledge them—the proud ones and the shameful ones. For, by identifying the origin of racial discourses and tracing their use, we can begin to "revise...the power racial discourses have in our lives" (Barnett 5 of 25). Although Reagan's rhetoric often focuses on universality, it is actually quite particular as his proposed solutions do nothing to address the causes of racial unrest or disparities, but rather place that responsibility on the shoulders of those who are most affected by them. This distance from the problem of race is classic whiteness, which assumes the role of background, norm and standard that is unaffected and unconcerned by issues of identity. Yet, it is imperative to recognize that white, middle-class people are not the norm any more than black, lower-class people. Because identities are socially constructed, they cannot exist outside of their interaction. The norm, then, is in actuality, not the existence of racial or social identities, but the function of those identities in society. The complex relationship between and among individuals, their power and powerlessness in relation to one another, their ignorance and understanding of one another are all dependent on the extent to which communities act upon and interact with one another. These kinds of relationships are the subject of history, the stories upon which each community—and individuals within those communities—determine(s) its/their place in the world. Reagan's political rhetoric articulates whiteness ideology, but an *otherness* ideology disrupts this simplistic "us" versus "them" that attempts to reify "white" and "black" even without explicitly calling them by name.

Conclusion

According to Katz, "[t]he years that span the presidencies of John Fitzgerald Kennedy and Ronald Reagan...constitute one episode in the recurring dialectic of [welfare] reform" (Katz 5). Central to this dialectic is who better to address the needs of the nation's poor—the market or the state? Thus, although Johnson's and Reagan's political rhetoric spans many years and several presidents, they could also be seen as the beginning and end of a thread in the political discourse of welfare reform. As historian George Nash said in 1981, "one might say the 1964 election created a thesis, the Great Society, and an antithesis, Ronald Reagan, who now, as President, is attempting to curb the excesses which the Great Society has wrought' (qtd in Hayward xxv). In this chapter, I have attempted to show how the image of poor black women introduced into political discourse by "The Moynihan Report," and reinforced by the civil unrest that followed became an effective political tool in Ronald Reagan's rhetoric as it appealed to old racisms, sexisms and classisms in this country. However, these "isms" were carefully disguised in the attractive and charming personage of "The Great Communicator," whose patriotic, "New Right" ideology was an appropriately fresh and positive image that contrasted with the dark social and economic times.

Using coded racial narratives, Reagan walked a thin line between social and political issues, choosing always to take the side of American capitalism in spite of real-world consequences for poor women and minorities. I have argued that aligning his narratives with historic tales and co-opting the activist rhetoric of the 1960s in his defense of capitalist "freedom" and individualism, allowed Reagan to mask a racist ideology that reasserts white privilege and power in this country. His use of Linda Taylor, the "welfare

queen," as exemplar of the welfare state to stir up anger in his mostly white audiences, indicates the lingering effects of centuries-old attitudes about race and place. For, despite the fact that the national economy is not critically impacted by welfare expenditures, Reagan's subtle yet consistently racial rhetoric was effective in promoting his political popularity.

Thus far we have seen how public perceptions factor into political discourse and how public figures effectively tap into prevailing sentiments in order to promote their own agendas. In Chapter 4, I will look at the impact of discourses that are circumscribed by foundational tales and introduce counternarratives as a way to unname and re-name The Welfare Queen.

Chapter 3 Notes

[35] Reagan's frequent mention of "a woman in Chicago" during his 1974 campaign speech launched the image of the welfare queen that had such far-reaching effects that twenty-two years after the term was first used the images it conjures were potent enough to influence the legislation to "end welfare as we know it" in 1996. "For sixty years, AFDC provided cash assistance to poor families. But President Clinton and the 104th Congress eliminated the AFDC program in 1996" (Gilens 21).

[36] i.e. Barry Goldwater and Richard Nixon

[37] For more on Americans shifting perceptions of economics and culture see *Our Country* by Michael Barone. p. xii.

[38] Another example of Reagan's questionable affiliations came on July 31 1980: "the *New York Times* reported that the Ku Klux Klan had endorsed Reagan. In its newspaper, the Klan said that the Republican platform 'reads as if it were written by a Klansman.' Reagan rejected the endorsement, but only after a Carter cabinet official brought it up in a campaign speech. The dubious connection did not stop Reagan from using segregationist language in Neshoba County" Mississippi. (Crespino)

[39] Willie Parker was the police chief who handled the Watts riots by calling for the National Guard, then enacting a sort of martial law in the city's ghettos in an effort to regain control. Parker was notorious for his racist remarks and was accused of frequently treating poor black citizens unfairly.

[40] What doesn't work about Reagan's strategy is that his affiliation with racists, nonetheless, taints his attempt at racial neutrality. Later in this chapter I will discuss the way this unspoken undercurrent of racism informed Reagan's ideology.

[41] In a 1976 CPAC speech, Reagan describes how his "government-by-the-people" worked when he was governor of California: "We didn't stop just with getting our administration from the ranks of the people. We also asked for help from expert people in a great many fields, and more than 250 of our citizens volunteered to form into task forces…[going] into every department and agency of state government to see how modern business practices could make government more efficient" ("To Restore America" 5 of 11).

[42] This is a term that Moynihan used years after his infamous report. In a memo to President Nixon he urged that the contentious racial issues of the past had done more harm than good: The time may have come" he told Nixon, "when the issue of race could benefit from a period of 'benign neglect'. The subject has been too much talked about. The forum has been too much taken over to hysterics, paranoids, and boodlers on all sides. We may need a period in which Negro progress continues and racial rhetoric fades" (qtd in Wallace "Benign Neglect and Planned Shrinkage").

[43] As Debra Journet explains, this is a narrative of Reagan's narratives. His particular utterances will form what Ricoeur calls the "episodic dimension." My interpretation of them as inherently racist will form the "configurational dimension" in which I bring the utterances together into a comprehensible whole."

[44] In "Narratives of Literacy: Connecting Composition to Culture," Beth Daniell compares Jean-Francois Lyotard's concept of "grand narratives of modernism" to the "little narratives of postmodernism" (1 0f 15). In The Postmodern Condition, Lyotard says "'the legitimacy of an idea...depends on its contribution to one of two grand narratives," one which places the subject as "cognitive or practical, as a hero of knowledge or a hero of liberty" (1 of 15); yet, the "little narratives of postmodernism," those written by minorities and the oppressed, are skeptical of the "'totalizing'" metanarratives" and therefore disrupt or deconstruct them with a "proliferation of little narratives" (1 of 15).

[45] The black unemployment rate has been twice that of whites since 1955 (Abramovitz 320).

[46] Douglas says "[s]uch apochryphal stories gained credence when real-life 'welfare queens' got busted." Yet, in addition to Linda Taylor only two other women—Barbara Jan Thompson and Dorothy Woods set "records" for welfare fraud. However, their stories were "played to the hilt," says Douglas on NBC and CBS from the late 1970s to the early 1980s (*The Mommy Myth,* 185-186).

[47] This sounds very much like the "47%" of Americans whom 2012 Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney laments will never vote for him because they don't pay taxes and rely on government support.

CHAPTER 4
A WAR OF WORDS: THE LIMITATIONS OF RACE, GENDER AND CLASS IN POPULAR & POLITICAL DISCOURSE

Introduction

The War on Poverty was an attempt to use social science to remedy social and

economic problems of low-income communities. The War on Welfare was a reaction to

and criticism of this effort. Yet neither war—the War on Poverty nor the War on

Welfare—was entirely effective in addressing the needs of the nation's poor. Perhaps,

because the needs of the poor were, in fact, peripheral to the primary focus of both

Johnson and Reagan. I would argue that, to some degree, this is really a story about The

War of *Words*. It is about rhetoric and ideology: winning political power and prestige,

establishing a legacy and persuading the populace. Whether or not Johnson and Reagan

were sincere in their concern for the citizens of this nation, the desire to project a

particular image compelled them to mobilize discursive tropes that would achieve their

political purposes, and it is these discursive resources that have interested me. What is

compelling in their uses of rhetoric and narrative is the way in which a reliance on

familiar assumptions about race, gender and class work consistently. As diametrically

opposed as Democratic and Republican views are, there are also at least three

characteristics that both possess: (1) a limited and limiting approach to the problems of

poverty; (2) a blindness towards the experiences of women in general and black women

in particular within a patriarchal structure, and (3) a vulnerability to ubiquitous

"whiteness" ideology which constrains identity construction and stagnates social and political objectives.

In this chapter, I begin by discussing "Limitations of Political Discourse," including discourses of poverty, gender, and whiteness that run from the Johnson administration to the Reagan era. In politics, accepted ideologies are not challenged, but are either supported or accommodated. When it comes to welfare, an ideology of capitalist individualism leads to divisions and classifications that establish the parameters of worthiness, so that the focus is more on protecting resources than on providing them to people in need. Therefore, to alter the business-as-usual of American politics would require a completely new way of thinking that shatters boundaries and disrupts familiar ideologies. I argue that, as an ideological and cultural "text," The Welfare Queen is what cultural-rhetorical theorists Brummet and Bowers would call a "site of political struggle." As identities are created and maintained in relationship to social contexts, how The Welfare Queen is discussed has as much to do with who she is, as who "we" are.

Next, in "Limitations of Race & Gender Discourse," I discuss the triple-bind of poor black women who, by virtue of their race, class and gender, bear the brunt of social stigmatization. For Johnson, the downfall of the black community is the dominant mothers and grandmothers. For Reagan, the (black) woman with no husband is taking money out of (white) taxpayers' pockets and the only valuable work for able-bodied "welfarists" is work outside the home. In either case, it is women—either working too much or too little, mothering inadequately or not at all—who suffer. However, a reconsideration of The Welfare Queen in light of her position at the intersection of race,

gender and class, turns attention from pathology to proximity, and challenges us to focus less on the image and more on the image-makers.

Additionally, in the rhetoric of both Johnson and Reagan is a "whiteness" that casts a shadow on "blackness." While the broken black community needed to be rescued by "the great white hope" in "The Moynihan Report," Reagan *was* the Republicans' "great white hope" as he ignored racial difference even though his rhetoric implied that differences should be maintained. As discussed in the previous chapter, Reagan strips The Welfare Queen of history and context so that she is an object upon which others impose social meaning. As Karen McCormack asserts in her article, "Stratified Reproductions and Poor Women's Resistance," the Welfare Queen is

> a powerful material and symbolic category: material in that public
> policies and everyday treatment of poor women both reflect and construct
> the notion of the welfare mother…and symbolic in the way that these
> categories shape our imaginings of the world and of ourselves. (663)

The Welfare Queen epitomizes everyone on welfare—whether or not they are women and whether or not they are black. Her image casts a long shadow over every individual who is unable to obtain an adequate income to support herself or her family. Yet, lost under this shadow are all of the other reasons for "her" shortcomings and all of the individual stories of people's lives. I argue that "readers" of popular and political texts, such as The Welfare Queen, should take what Brummet and Bowers call a "subversive subjective position" which is one that is "at odds with, and often directly opposed to the call of the text" (119). Rather than viewing poor black women through the lens of dominant discourses, we should consider them within their social and political contexts so as Patricia Hill Collins urges in "The Social Construction of Black Feminist Thought,"

we may "[encourage]...Black women to create new self-definitions that validate" their particular standpoints (750).

From the discursive framework, then, I move to the literal lens in the final section, "Representations and Media Images." Here we can see clearly poverty discourse—that is so circumscribed by race, class and gender—at work. News sources that are trusted by the general population as being unbiased purveyors of "truth," nonetheless, convey images that further ascribe racial and gendered stereotypes. With the authority to construct reality for viewers, media outlets—often controlled by white men—"legitimate the inequalities in class and race relations" (Brummet and Bowers 122). In public and political discourse, the media contributes to "elements that define the ethnic situation and that develop or change the ideological framework used by white people to understand and control ethnic events and relations" (122); thus, news stories help viewers to situate their individual and group identities in relation to those of other groups whose identities are conveyed through pervasive texts and images. However, "texts should be seen as resources for, rather than simple determinants of, either subjectification or objectification;" (Brummet and Bowers 123) thus, we will turn, in the following chapter, to the point that undergirds this entire project, and that is the rhetoric of naming, and more specifically, *unnaming*.

4.1 Limitations of Poverty Discourse

As discussed earlier in this project, poverty discourse is limited by systematic delineations of difference—the hierarchical sorting of bodies that takes place within a capitalist economy so that people, not just products, are commodified. Aid to the poor, then, becomes merely one of many economic transactions and the poor are merely

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bothersome line items on the national budget. Throughout history the power of language

to orchestrate reality is evident in the perpetuation of these ideologies that separate

worthy from unworthy. In fact, Audre Lorde says

> we have all been programmed to respond to the human differences
> between us with fear and loathing and to handle that difference in one of
> three ways...ignore it...copy it if we think it is dominant, or destroy it if
> we think it is subordinate. But we have no patterns for relating across our
> human differences as equals. As a result, those differences have been
> misnamed and misused in the service of separation and confusion. (115)

By "misnaming" difference, poor people, in particular, have been labeled and cast aside.

As the dominant "norm," the *white* habitus in America has set the standard and assigned

what is not normal to the realm of pathology. This "politics of narrative identity [which]

advances a particular view of ourselves...by undermining the views that others advance

of themselves" is possible because "those who have the last word also have considerable

power over those who do not" (Novitz 146). The power to name and define is on the side

of socially-identified "white" people and as long as the dominant view of the Other is

through the small window of whiteness, "we"[48] will continue to assume that "they"—the

welfare queen, the beggar, the addict—are nothing like "us."

However, if, as narrative theorist, David Novitz argues, our identities are merely

narrative constructions that are always either supported or contested by others, then, the

way to subvert destructive narratives is to create other narratives that undermine the

dominant ones and "try to ensure that...[these stories] become part of the canon of

stories" within a particular society (155). Limited as it is by discourses of poverty,

gender, and whiteness, welfare discourse can only be altered by the insertion of

alternative narratives. Indeed, however, as Novitz says, "narratives (or narrative

structures) acquire their legitimacy and normative role [only] from the society that

accepts them" (155). Yet, as Collins argues, "the master narratives of the social order do not invite the creation of counter-ideologies that would by their very existence have the potential to subvert prevailing authority or to resist domination" (qtd in Royster 273). Nonetheless, what is accepted and acceptable is always in process. It matters less what has been acceptable in the past than what is possible in the future. Naming is an aspect of narrative as it is the naming of characters (or players) within narratives that makes them *real* (or meaningful). In Chapter 5, I will discuss the importance of unnaming The Welfare Queen in dominant political discourses in order to create new names and a new "canon of stories" about poverty in America. My goal is to resist the image of The Welfare Queen as presented by Reagan and Moynihan. What is lacking in the dominant conception of poverty and womanhood is a sensitivity to the experiences and knowledge structures of both women (in general) and the poor (in general), and (more specifically) of poor black women. Too often such women have been the objects rather than the subjects of study. Others have attempted to speak for—rather than to—them. And even those that have spoken to them have done so from the perspective of a dominant framework, assessing the extent to which the discourse and ideology of the poor compares to the discourse and ideology of the mainstream. While instructive in some respects, this type of study reinforces the limitations of poor people more than the limitations of poverty discourse.

In her compelling study of 19th century African American women's literacy practices, Jacqueline Jones Royster argues for an "afrafeminist" ideology which is an adaptation of sociologist Patricia Hill Collins' black feminist consciousness. It is an epistemology that merges the experiential knowledge of black women with the critical

knowledge of black women scholars who are located both inside and outside of black communities. Scholarly afrafeminist work need not be conducted only by black women, but rather anyone who is willing to not just acknowledge, but also engage the differences and similarities between the researcher and the subjects under study. Royster and Collins stress the importance of making a connection between "the everyday understanding of African American women as they live their lives by whatever means, and the specialized understanding that an African American intellectual might bring as she contextualizes these lives within meaningful frameworks" (273). These "meaningful frameworks" extend beyond the academic context so that they include what may also be meaningful to the women who are being studied as well: "In intellectual pursuits, the effort is to assume a viewpoint that permits African American women to be imagined as embodied by our own values and beliefs [and] to root that viewpoint in...community knowledge (recognizing and valuing the specificity of the material context of African American women)" (273). By elevating the experiential knowledge of research "subjects" (or rather "objects") such as poor African American women, critical perspectives are placed on an equal plane with "street" knowledge.

Such a critical shift would make all of the difference in how the lifestyles and behaviors of the poor are studied and discussed. In "The Moynihan Report" and Reagan's *New Right* rhetoric, political powers attempt to define the issue of poverty from a distance and from the perspective of individuals who already possess power, prestige and economic value. Thus, in all the political negotiations, state dinners and closed-door meetings, it is the perspectives of those about whom politicians have so much to say that are *lost*. It is the value of those individuals without economic means or labor market

prestige that is obscured. Those individuals are assumed to be worthless, but their value

may simply be calculated differently on the streets, in the projects and at the homeless

shelters. Their net worth may not register on the Dow, but who says that is the only

measure that matters? In what ways would poverty discourse be different if the voices of

the poor were audible? What would happen if journalists asked janitors to sit on panels to

discuss poverty in America? What if radio pundits invited welfare mothers to call in and

offer their advice on simplifying welfare bureaucracy? Imagine the tenor of

congressional committee meetings if the homeless were asked their perspective on

welfare legislation? These suggestions seem ridiculous because the assumption is that by

virtue of their poverty, race, class, gender—or all of the above—such people would have

nothing of value to offer.

Taking my cue, then, from Royster, I believe that any assessment of poor black

women should not only take into account their own views and interests, but also invite

opportunities for them to participate and respond to their characterization (274). In order

to upset the ideological applecart of American political discourse, I advocate for not

necessarily tearing down dominant conceptions of poverty, but rather building bridges

between those conceptions and "the visions and experiences of others. The object of such

bridge-building," says Royster, "is to maximize the interpretive power of various

standpoints, by bringing all that we know together kaleidoscopically. The assumption is

that the whole of a kaleidoscopic view has greater interpretive power than a singularly

defined view would have" (277).

This disruption of dominant ideologies is not so much about destruction as it is

contestation. If we view The Welfare Queen as an ideological text, then those of us who

"read" that text will have to determine our subject position—that is—our "stance, role or perspective...in relationship to [it] (Brummet and Bowers 118). In their article "Subject Positions as a Site of Rhetorical Struggle; Representing African Americans," Brummet and Bowers adapt cultural theorist Stuart Hall's conception of subject positions arguing that "the reader's relationship to a text has an effect on power structures [because] socially created subjects are defined by their group identities, and...distribution of power among groups makes subject creation a matter of political struggle" (119). By identifying with a dominant or subordinate group, we stake a claim in social and political power or accept social/political powerlessness. For my purposes, this means that the naming of The Welfare Queen has been part of a dominant narrative about the supposedly natural social order in which certain people are—by virtue of certain characteristics—naturally inferior to others. This narrative, accepted and repeated for decades, creates subject positions for those who either identify themselves with or against The Welfare Queen image. There are those who imagine themselves to be *her* (*identified subject*); those who see her as an image with whom we, as black women are *expected* to identify, or whom others are *expected* to believe is real even if we—or they—don't (*implied subject*[49]); and those who actively resist such identification by rejecting the validity of the image all together (*subversive subject*). An ideological text, then, such as The Welfare Queen, becomes a "[site] of struggle that generate[s] meanings and positions present in society" (119). Our own identities, then, not just hers, are at stake as we either identify with or position ourselves in opposition to her. This type of discursive shift changes the game. Juxtaposing the views of these contending subject positions

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transforms poverty discourse from a limited, one-sided power play to an expansive and stimulating dialectic.

4.2 Limitations of Race & Gender Discourse

Without such a discursive shift, however, poverty discourse languishes in the valley of demographic death. In spite of the fact that the majority of welfare recipients are actually not adults, but children, who must be cared for by someone—usually a mother or grandmother—the image of the undeserving welfare recipient ignores her role as caregiver and, instead, demonizes her role as mother. (Gilens, Abramovitz, Piven & Cloward). According to one study conducted by Karen Secombe, Delores James and Kimberly Walters and another by Karen McCormack, welfare women are aware of their reputation. They know the names that are used to describe them and the arguments that are made to justify their verbal punishments. They understand that "[t]he phrase 'welfare mother' is one in which the adjective, 'welfare,' modifies the noun [so] that it turns its meaning upside down" (McCormack 660). Yet, one welfare mother in the Secombe et al. study turned its meaning right-side up again. Refusing to allow that term to define her, she declared "I'm not on welfare." In her mind, welfare was for lazy cheaters, which she was not. "I don't even know exactly what welfare is" she said. "I'm just receiving AFDC" (861). Unwilling to accept the name given her, this welfare mother re-names herself. The assistance she requires does not constitute the core of her being.

Nonetheless, this welfare mom positions herself as an *implied subject* in that she does not deny that others are Welfare Queens, but merely excuses herself from that category. Furthermore, within poverty discourse, the term does, indeed, have the power to define. As McCormack explains, the term "welfare mother"

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is different from 'working mother,' stay-at-home mother,' or 'soccer mom,' all phrases that specify **ways of doing motherhood** and that suggest certain lifestyles, challenges, and benefits but do not fundamentally alter the meaning of the term 'mother.' **'Welfare mother,' as the term is currently used, obscures the mothering work involved.** The stereotypical welfare mother is a symbol of the supposed irresponsible, sexually promiscuous, and immoral behavior of the poor. Embedded in the notion of the welfare mother are powerful ideologies of race, class, and gender that blame the poor for their own poverty. (emphasis added McCormack 660)

How interesting that the term "welfare mother" negates the "challenges and benefits" that are inherent to mothering, but instead focuses on the failures and shortcomings of the mothers themselves who attempt to navigate their life's course. The impact of dominant ideologies on the role of women and mothers within a family is difficult to ignore as many welfare mothers absorb the rhetoric, accepting it either fully or partially before dispelling it through their own discourses. Secombe, et al. identify four schools of thought—*individualist, structuralist, culture of poverty* or *fatalist*—which inform common perspectives on poverty. An *individualist* ideology—to which Reagan and most conservative Republicans subscribe—assumes that individuals are the masters of their own fate and should not rely on anyone to be successful (Feagin, Hunt, Kluegel & Smith). A social *structuralist* perspective attributes poverty to inequities in the economic structure and suggests changes in that structure to address people's social and economic needs (Marx & Engels). However, this theory has also been used to support the contention that the structure of the welfare system itself contributes to the pathology of welfare recipients (Rank, Schiller, Anderson, Murray). As I discussed in Chapter 2, *culture of poverty theorists*—like Moynihan—combine the structuralist and individualist views. The social structure is viewed as the cause of economic disparities, but it is believed that individuals within it become so damaged from their depravity that they are

unable to free themselves from cycles of poverty and dependence (Gilder, Lewis, Mead, Moynihan, Valentine, Wilson). The *fatalist* view dispenses with all of these explanations and merely attributes poverty to uncontrollable and unpredictable circumstances— "quirks of birth, chance, luck, human nature or other forces over which people have no control" (852). While this point of view appears to blame no one for the predicaments of the poor it, nonetheless, assumes that certain people's fate is sealed by inherited characteristics such as a low IQ (Hernstein, Murray).

Secombe et al. found that the *individualist* and *culture of poverty* theories are most often used by welfare recipients to explain the reason other women are on welfare. However, the *fatalist* and *social structural* views are used to explain their own welfare dependency. The distinct difference attributed to their own, versus other women's, use of welfare is particularly telling of the way in which dominant discourses influence individual perspectives. Kerby and other narrative theorists (Novitz, Gergen), argue that one's identity is determined by the way individuals both interpret experiences and align themselves with others as they articulate those experiences. Identity, then, is not nominal but narrative as it is the "who" and the "what" we are in relation to particular rhetorical moments in time and place, in relation to others at those particular times and places. These "narratives of the self" (Gergen) have the potential to either "sustain, enhance, or impede various actions" (Novitz 163). The women in these studies seem to take the position of the *implied subject* discussed in the previous section, in that they recognize that they are expected to identify with The Welfare Queen image, but don't. However, rather than actively resisting The Welfare Queen image, such as a *subversive subject* would, they confirm the stereotype by accepting its reality. Even as their own

experiences on welfare and living in poor communities attested to the misconception, these welfare mothers, nonetheless, place more stock in the prevailing sentiment than in their own narratives (Secombe et al. 855). Within poverty discourse, this has the same effect as if they had taken the position of the *identified subject* because their assertion that they are the exception to the rule merely affirms that the rule is legitimate.

In her examination of the discursive strategies of welfare women, McCormack recognizes their attempts to resist mischaracterizations and legitimize their own experiences. Yet, the women do so by utilizing discursive tropes that align with dominant conceptions of motherhood: e.g. a "good" mother will "(1) put children first, (2) spend time with children, (3) provide for children, (4) keep children out of trouble, and (5) keep children safe" (666). In the abstract, these expectations seem reasonable, but in everyday life, mothers face many value conflicts that complicate their ability to attain the ideal. Nonetheless, what McCormack calls "intensive mothering,"[50] Douglas and Michaels have dubbed "the 'new momism" and it permeates popular and political discourse. It is the idea that a mother must "devote her entire physical, psychological, emotional, and intellectual being, 24/7, to her children" (4). With or without the constraints of poverty, this is a tall order to fill. Yet, Douglas and Michaels find that a political and social onslaught of this "new momism" began during the years when Republicans controlled the White House between 1980 and 1992. They argue that although Ronald Reagan never explicitly blamed mothers for "failing to raise physically and psychologically fit future citizens," he, nonetheless, meant that "[b]ecause not only are mothers supposed to reproduce the nation biologically, we're also supposed to regenerate it culturally and morally" (10).[51] hooks agrees: "politically, the white supremacist, patriarchal state relies

on the family to indoctrinate its members with values supportive of hierarchical control and coercive authority" (38).

Infused with such cultural and social significance, motherhood becomes a high-pressured job. However, in the study conducted by Secombe et al., many respondents became welfare dependent because of traumatic experiences—rape, domestic abuse, and divorce. Others suffered from physical and or mental illness or had children with disabilities that required extra care. Ironically, within a framework that assumes single mothers are lascivious and lazy, such troubles—which are common to people of every class—are rendered invisible and/or inconsequential. As Brummet and Bowers say "ideology uses the fabrication of images and the processes of representation to persuade us that how things are is how they ought to be and that the place provided for us is the place we ought to have" (120). Consequently, the very standards that the women in these studies attempt to affirm in their discourse and behavior create impossible conflicts and inevitable failure in light of dominant ideologies. McCormack says "Tricia Shephard, a Black woman in her 40s with two children and one grandson, sent her eight-year-old daughter to live with her godmother during the week" so that she could attend a better school (667). Although it meant sacrificing time with her child, Shephard believed she was doing the right thing by providing a better education for her instead. However, spending time with her children was more important to Annette Johnson who turned down a factory job because the hours were from 3:00 pm to 11:00 pm each day. "Now, I wanted to work," says Johnson, "but what happens when my daughter starts school?...When I go to school in the morning, my daughter ain't gonna see me, and then when she get home from school she still not gonna see me. By the time I get home, she

gonna be asleep" (668). How can a single mother spend more time with her children if her low-wage labor requires work at random hours of the day and night? Yet, how also can she provide for and protect her children if she doesn't find a job? Or, if the job for which she is qualified provides no medical benefits and pays less than minimum wage?

Rather than attempting to align their narratives with dominant conceptions of motherhood, these women would benefit from establishing their own standards of "good" mothering. Yet the role of a single mother on welfare is further complicated by race. Blackness[52] is the very opposite of Americanness in culture, behavior and attitude. It is also the qualifying adjective that describes a welfare recipient and that undergirds discussions of poverty, altering the perspectives people have of poor women.[53] One welfare recipient heard someone refer to people like her as "'White and Black niggers sucking off the system," demonstrating the burden of race that every black woman on welfare carries (Secombe, et al. 854). While both poor black and white women are ostracized or name-called, the mark imposed on poor white women is racialized. It is assumed that they have fallen from grace and descended to the level of blackness. White women have more opportunity, however, to avoid this stigmatization, unlike black women who are unable to shake off the shackles of skin color.[54] Beth, a 27 year-old White woman on welfare admitted that she had heard people say that "The Black people are getting [welfare], so we might as well" (Secombe 854). Although she is a welfare mom, she earns some sympathy and support for her circumstance by virtue of her skin color. She can more easily "pass" for middle class because of this skin privilege, and her socioeconomic status is less likely to be considered an inherited condition (McCormack, Thornton Dill, BacaZinn, and Patton).

At the intersection of race, class and gender, then, single black undereducated women are confronted with unique challenges. Brewer argues that the intersection of macro and micro processes are at work in American society influencing family formation ("Gender"). By "macro processes" Brewer means the operation of government and private corporations which are dominated by white males. She argues that economic and state restructuring result in "severe cuts in the social wage and redistribution of income upward" ("Gender"). Likewise, "private corporate economic decisions [such as] plant closures, discriminatory hiring practices and labor market segmentation along racial/gender lines" disproportionately impact working-class African Americans, especially those who live in "declining cities" or "deindustrialized areas" (170). By "micro processes" Brewer refers to the adjustments made within individual families in order to survive the "trickle down" effects of unfavorable market conditions. The result is often blended families which may include more than one generation living in a household. Yet, family is still important to African Americans, Brewer argues, and even if a family consists of a grandmother, mother and children rather than a father, mother and children, it should still be acknowledged as such. Even without the patriarchal structure, the emotional and economic support that a family provides can still exist in female-headed households; thus, Brewer says, "poor African American female-led families must be understood historically, comparatively and on their own terms ("Gender" 164). In addition, Karen Christopher has found that "[w]omen's increased educational attainment and employment had far greater impacts on women's poverty over time" than their status as single mothers (17). She says this is "particularly true for Black women, among whom increases in single motherhood from the mid 1970s to early 1990s

only slightly affected their poverty rates over time" (17). Her findings suggest that,

rather than assuming the increase in single motherhood is the greatest cause for alarm,

political punditry should focus on the need for improved educational opportunities—

which would include a childcare component—for single mothers.

The power to define the ideals of family, motherhood and citizenship are often in

the hands of political leaders such as Johnson and Reagan whose rhetoric both reflects

and influences the views of everyday citizens. As wealthy white men, political leaders

such as these represent the dominant class and have the privilege of power to make their

perspectives the norm; however, the power to name one reality does not preclude the

existence of other realities, nor should it be assumed that dominant is equivalent to *real*

or *only*. If dominant ideologies are socially constructed, they can also be deconstructed.

The quagmire—poor women's desire to be acknowledged as "good" mothers, their

adaptation of dominant conceptions of "good" mothering and their inevitable

shortcoming by virtue of their gender, race and class—necessitates a re-evaluation of the

ideologies that dictate their lives and their placement in the social hierarchy. As hooks

says, "[c]oming to critical consciousness...demands that we give up set ways of thinking

and being, that we shift our paradigms" (25). In light of the prevailing, derogatory

images of black women in politics and media, black women writers in the 1980s

rediscovered the brilliance of such legends as Sojourner Truth, whose discursive

disruption of limiting paradigms in her speech "ain't I a woman?"are powerfully

highlighted in Patricia Hill Collins' book *Fighting Words: Black Women and the Search*

for Justice:

> Rather than accepting the existing assumptions about what a woman is and
> then trying to prove that she fit the standards, Truth challenged the very

standards themselves. Her actions demonstrate the process of deconstruction—namely, exposing a concept as ideological or culturally constructed rather than as natural or a simple reflection of reality. (137-45)

Such deconstruction of the dominant discourses of motherhood—in particular as it relates to poor black woman on welfare—is also necessary. As Collins insists, "African-American women [must] value their own subjective knowledge" (750) that comes from their own experiences in the world. These experiences are often informed by hardships and trials within racist and sexist social and political structures, but the necessary adaptations to those constraints imbue them with a unique knowledge and perspective that is valuable and significant. As Royster and other feminist scholars will attest, "knowledge is produced by someone and…its producers are not formless and invisible" (280). Recognizing the constructedness of knowledge, destabilizes the taken-for-granted truth that dominant discourses pretend to possess in regard to the poor—and to poor black women, in particular. By asserting an *other* knowledge on the basis of an *other* perspective, then, black women and black women intellectuals alike can begin to assert themselves as *subversive subjects* in relation to The Welfare Queen. In the following section, I discuss how the media helped to normalize this raced and gendered image before deconstructing that image in the final chapter.

4.3 Representations & the Media

"Since the media traffic in extremes, in anomalies—the rich, the deviant, the exemplary, the criminal, the gorgeous—they emphasize fear and dread on the one hand and promote impossible ideals on the other" (Douglas and Michaels 7).

Visual and textual images are powerful in their ability to make *reality* and both visual and textual images are used to portray recipients of welfare in such a way as to communicate certain "truths." J. Soss, found that in "media coverage of poverty from

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1950-1992, the emphasis on Black images increased in periods when welfare was under

greater criticism…[and] [p]oliticians began to build their careers on…images of

undeserving Black mothers receiving undeserved welfare benefits" (qtd in Johnson

1045). Likewise, in his comprehensive study that measured the extent to which African

Americans are portrayed in news media stories about poverty, Gilens finds a distinct

difference in the tone of welfare stories that hint at the underlying narratives that inform

them: "stories on new policy initiatives tended to be both neutral in tone and dominated

by images of whites" says Gilens, while "the more critical stories about existing

programs, such as the Byrd committee's investigation of welfare abuse,[55] were more

likely to contain pictures of blacks (115).

Statistics show that between 1936 and 1973 there was a steady rise in the number

of blacks on welfare, from 14% of ADC rolls to 46% (106); yet, Gilens attributes this to a

gradual demographic shift that occurred as blacks migrated to the North, as federal

matching funds increased, and as changes in "Social Security survivors' benefits," that

provided funds for more white widows than black, allowed many white women to be

removed from welfare rolls (106). This is significant for two reasons: first, it shows

that—despite the media hype—the increased number of blacks accessing welfare benefits

did not spike suddenly during the 1960s and 1970s. In fact, Gilens says "the proportion of

blacks among welfare recipients was almost as high in 1960 as it was in 1967, [but]

public concern in 1960 was still focused on poor whites" (107). Second, it demonstrates

how preconceived notions inform what is presented and accepted as "truth." Although

demographics and economics influenced the changes, rhetoric and narrative influenced

people's attitudes about those changes so that what might have been a benign statistical phenomenon became a massive social and political event.

News stories of welfare fraud and waste began to emerge in the early 1960s, then Moynihan's report was released in 1964, expanding the discussion.[56] A proliferation of racial stereotypes provided reason for suspicion of welfare recipients which Reagan further utilized in his campaign. "[A]s media obsession about the status of the family and the state of motherhood dominated the national stage in the 1980s and '90s," say Douglas and Michaels, visual images did as much ideological work as political leaders, undergirded by the implicit presence of race" (176). Media coverage of poverty and welfare is particularly indicative of the role that narrative plays in both influencing and articulating people's perceptions. Lubiano says, "photographs...are...the surface manifestation of narrative" ideology and, certainly, still and moving pictures make realities seem indisputable (330). News writers and journalists are the storytellers. They have the power to tell us what is important to know and what is not. Whatever their lens focuses on is what we will see and will determine how we interpret it. Thus, in the 1980s, "[a]s the network news [...] became flashier, and deployed a growing array of images and graphics in their newscasts, they used personification, more and more, to symbolize events and trends. Welfare—a vast, complicated bureaucracy—became personified through the welfare mother" (Douglas and Michaels 176). It is no wonder, then, that Reagan's story about a woman in Chicago carried a great deal of weight on his campaign stops as his audience, with the help of media images, was able to visualize this woman and ascribe to her many of the nation's problems.

In addition to the powerful impact of pictures, people are also "more likely to form impressions based on examples of specific individuals than on abstract statistical information" (Gilens 112). That means articles or reports that tell stories of people who have cheated the system will overshadow any numbers that show the actual percentage of people who do so. A 1969 *U.S. News and World Report* article entitled "How the Relief System Works Now," published after Moynihan's report and during Reagan's tenure as governor of California, presumably provides a definitive look at exactly who was getting money from the government during that particular time. Growing concerns about welfare reform were wafting through the political discourse warranting a closer look; yet as this report attempts to provide a cross-section of America's poor from different cities throughout the country, it is interesting to note the way in which each welfare story is framed and the way race and gender are handled in each description.

Each story begins with the person's name, ethnicity and present circumstances. "Nancy...black...four illegitimate children." Then there's "George...white...toolmaker by trade" (76). The stories are organized in such a way that particular aspects of each narrative are highlighted. Although in the third paragraph of Nancy's story we learn that she is "unusual" because she is among the 20 percent of welfare recipients who work, this is not the first thing that we learn about her. First, we are told that she is the "mother of four" and has "no husband". This is, apparently, what is most important about her circumstances. Nancy's story ends with the report that she is racking up considerable medical expenses because of the baby she recently had; she tells the journalist that she is "embarrassed" to be "on welfare," but will likely have to remain on it until her children are grown, "at least 16 years" (76). Nancy is the stereotypical welfare mother that most

people expect to see and the aspects of her story that align with that expectation are highlighted at the beginning and end of her narrative.

George also has four children, yet this is not the first thing that we learn about him. Instead, we're told of his trade and that a heart attack ended his career. The implication in juxtaposing these two stories is that Nancy's circumstances are the result of her own poor choices, while George's circumstances are the result of bad luck. While the emphasis in Nancy's story is that she is costing the welfare department a great deal of money with all of her medical expenses, in George's story we're simply told that "[f]ood stamps give the family some extra leverage" and that "Medicaid pays for doctors' bills and prescription drugs" (76). The tone of these two similar welfare narratives is as different as black and white.

The story of "Mrs. B," who is black and has had to go on and off of welfare because of marital breakdown, loss of work and medical difficulties is said to be an example of "the 'hard-core' welfare family" (77) in spite of the fact that she "managed to find jobs" as waitress, domestic and scrubwoman. Mrs. B's story is then followed by the story of "Fred P," the white contractor whose troubles came when he injured his back, then later suffered a heart attack. According to the writer, "the P.'s had no recourse but welfare" (77), while "Mrs. B" has, inexplicably, gone on and off of welfare. This pattern continues throughout the article. The "chronic case" of the uneducated black mother of 5 whose husband abandoned her is followed by the success story of the white family who went on welfare, but pulled themselves off of it. Just as it was in "The Moynihan Report," the contrast between white and black is palpable. Whites may have bad luck, but blacks are irreparably broken—their bad luck is connected to their own poor choices,

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their own poor physical or mental condition and their own inabilities. They are not

victims, but perpetrators. Although the assumption about an article such as this, in a

publication as credible as *U.S. News and World Report*, is that these stories are "true," the

real question is upon what assumptions is this truth based?

Furthermore, the particular language used to characterize black women on welfare

belies a reliance on earlier narratives in allusions to deviancy or to the body which is

sexualized, dirty or "undifferentiated."[57] Spillers says there is "a class of symbolic

paradigms that (1) inscribe 'ethnicity' as a scene of negation and (2) confirm the human

body as a metonymic figure for an entire repertoire of human and social arrangements"

(66). The body has always been central to discussions of women and gender and, as

Roberts says, "western culture has...been obsessed with controlling women's bodies,"

but a black woman's body is particularly "grotesque" (3). Using Bakhtin's model of the

classical body versus the grotesque body, Roberts discusses how the grotesque body with

its "multiple, bulging, over-or-under–sized" parts characterizes the racist view of black

women's bodies (3).[58]

Like "Sara Bartman, aka the 'Hottentot Venus'" the black female is the

embodiment of all racist/sexist paradigms. Bartman was a South African woman placed

on display in 1810 in London, England. A science experiment, of sorts, observers were

fascinated by the "extraordinary size and shape of her buttocks" (Giddings 445). After

her death "her organs were studied and reported upon by Dr. George Cuvier in 1817,"

who "coolly" compared "Ms. Bartmann's genitalia with that of orangutans" (445). In her

article, "The Last Taboo," Paula Giddings traces the historical narratives about black

women that placed the blame for all black immorality squarely on their backs: "Black

men raped, it was widely believed, because black men's mothers, wives, sisters, and daughters were seen as 'morally obtuse,' 'openly licentious,' and had 'no immorality in doing what nature prompts" (443, 44). Giddings sees Bartman, then, as a symbol of the black female body that is marked (or should I say marred?) by dominant narratives and put on display to be examined by a public that has already decided on who and what she is.

Reagan did not need to specify the ethnicity of the woman with six children who filed for a divorce in order to get more welfare. His very telling of the story was to exemplify the abnormality and the deviancy of people who relied on government assistance to live. The historical establishment of race predetermined that anyone who is not the norm is, by default, a "scene of negation" and the predetermined deviancy of a black woman made her ethnicity obvious even if not articulated. Likewise, her six children draw attention, indirectly, to her sexuality. Filling in the details of Reagan's narratives with color and pictures, a 1975 *New Yorker* article features "Carmen," the "typical" welfare mother, described as having a "'wide nose, mulatto complexion, curly black hair [and] thick lips'" (Douglas 174). She also has a "broad back," "big breasts," "big belly," and "enormous thighs'" (174). Although Carmen was not African American, she was a woman of color (Puerto Rican) and the description of her physical body emphasized those features that are most often associated with "blackness."[59]

The bottom line, according to Douglas and Michaels, is that the unforgivable characteristic from which Carmen suffers most is that she is "not white" (174). The color of her skin, the shape and size of her body are physical evidence of her unworthiness, something National Welfare Rights activist, Johnnie Tillmon knew all too well: "I'm a

woman. I'm a black woman. I'm a poor woman. I'm a fat woman. I'm a middle-aged woman. And I'm on welfare. In this country, if you're any one of those things—poor, black, fat, female, middle-aged, on welfare—you count less as a human being" (175); or, as another welfare woman says, "[t]hey think you ain't much of nothing" (Secombe 854).

Conclusion

In a 1952 commencement address, Reagan told a group of Missouri students that America is "less a 'place than an idea'" (qtd in Dallek 36), and I would argue that names are the vehicles upon which ideologies travel. A name carries the weight of social discourses and, as a result, can trigger negative sentiments towards certain people. The stigmatization of welfare recipients is an example of this, but there may be other names that circulate within popular discourse that also carry this sort of rhetorical impact. While there is little dispute over what or who The Welfare Queen is, defining some names can be more complex, e.g. "American." Aside from being a person who resides on American soil, historically, this name has been ascribed to the rustic and rugged individual, the strong European male conqueror of evil and defender of good. Yet, through the years this characterization has been challenged and this image broadened by those who believe themselves to be no less American although they are far from the traditional image. Although The Welfare Queen may be less a *person* than an idea, her function within political discourse was and still is very real, and in the following chapter, I will conclude this dissertation with a discussion about the rhetoric of naming which I consider to be significant not only to the political discourse of poverty and welfare reform, but also to our work in rhetoric and composition.

Chapter 4 Notes

[48] Here I am intentionally using the ambiguous "we" to indicate the power of language. We—humans—all use language in this way, to isolate ourselves from others, to differentiate between "us" and "them" however those terms are defined. Although in this project I'm looking at the way language use affects our perception of welfare recipients, I'm also inviting us to consider the way language might be used in our daily lives to do the same work of distancing and judging that I accuse Republicans and Democrats of. Here, I challenge us--compositionists, professors, students, citizens, mothers, Americans—to be mindful of the use to which we put our language.

[49] As Brummet and Bowers explain, the subject recognizes the image to be ironic. Although it is familiar, it is also recognized as an exaggeration or fabrication. The implied subject, then, simultaneously accepts and rejects his or her association with the image.

[50] McCormack borrows this term from Sharon Hays. *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood.* New Haven CT: Yale UP, 2003.

[51] Ladd-Taylor and Umansky say "historical sea changes continue to inform mothering today: in the beliefs that children are innocent, that good mothering and good government are intertwined, and that nurturing represents woman's essential nature" (6).

[52] That is, in the view of dominant culture, or from the perspective of *whiteness*. Within black communities, "blackness," is glorified as the encapsulation of African Americans' vivacity, passion and beauty. An example of this ideology is exemplified in the ad campaign for *Dark & Lovely* hair products. Their slogan is "My Black is Beautiful". It is interesting to note, however, that this assertion of blackness is in direct response to the negative perception of blackness imposed by the dominant culture. It is also an act of unnaming, as the assertion is that "My Black"—as I (the African American collective identity)—define it, is opposed to "your" (the European American collective identity) black as it has, historically, been defined.

[53] "[G]ender as a category of analysis cannot be understood decontextualized from race and class in Black feminist theorizing" Rose Brewer. "Theorizing Race, Class, and Gender: The new scholarship of Black feminist Intellectuals and Black Women's Labor" (17).

[54] McCormack says "For Black women, race may be their master status, a designation far more powerful than welfare receipt" (665).

[55] "Senator Robert Byrd's 1962 investigation into welfare fraud in Washing ton D.C....uncovered welfare recipients who spent their benefits on alcohol or who were

secretly living with boyfriends that welfare investigators found hiding in closets or bathrooms" (Gilens 115).

[56] Patterson says Moynihan's report unleashed "an avalanche of scholarship as well as a torrent of public acrimony" as "more than fifty books and five hundred journals articles" addressing the effects of poverty were written between 1965 and 1980 (71).

[57] "One Georgia legislator…[views] recipients [of welfare] as one *undifferentiated, bureaucratic mass*" ("Dethroning the Welfare Queen" emphasis added 2018).

[58] "The black female body often stands for sexuality, based on old understandings of African 'lust' and eighteenth-and-nineteenth-century racialist physiognomy which held, among other things, that black women were lascivious because they had more highly developed sexual organs than whites (Roberts 5).

[59] In this case, by blackness, I mean physically moreso than ideologically

CHAPTER 5
CHANGING THE GAME: THE RHETORIC OF NAMING

"The poor you will always have with you." Matthew 26:11

Introduction

How ironic that here we are, forty years later, still talking about The Welfare

Queen. Yet, as this project has developed in the midst of the 2012 presidential campaign

season, I have been amazed by how much our past is still with us. In nearly every

political debate, Republicans evoke the philosophies of Ronald Reagan to support smaller

government and fewer social programs; inevitably this includes welfare. Race is far less

explicit in the text of welfare discussions, but it is, nevertheless, present in phrases such

as "the food stamp president," or the "47% who don't want the American Dream."

Though we may hope to ignore or diminish the relevance of race in public discourse, the

subject persists nonetheless.

I began this dissertation by asserting that the image of The Welfare Queen has

been important to a patriarchal capitalist agenda. Through this image, certain realities

have been emphasized—deflecting attention from other realities, and working to

perpetuate the cycle of oppression. In Chapter 4, I outlined the limitations of frameworks

constrained by narrow perspectives on poverty, race and gender. I have argued, instead,

for a broadening of perspectives and advocated for new ways of thinking about

demographic differences that shatter boundaries and disrupt familiar ideologies. In this

concluding chapter, I explain how naming as a "trickster" allows us to do this. First, in

"Changing the Name Game," I discuss the power of naming as a rhetorical act. Next, in

"Busting Binaries—The Narrative of Unnaming," I argue that, by unnaming, new

meanings can be inserted into popular discourses. Finally, in "A Call to Action—

Enacting Otherness Ideology," I contend that, considering The Welfare Queen as a "site

of political struggle," provides rhetoric and composition scholars an opportunity to enact

an *otherness* ideology which involves an intentional shift in perspective and behavior.

5.1.1 Changing the Name Game

"Let's face it. I am a marked woman, but not everybody knows my name. "Peaches" and "Brown Sugar," "Sapphire" and "Earth Mother," "Aunty," "Granny"...: I describe a locus of confounded identities, a meeting ground of investments and privations in the national treasury of rhetorical wealth. My country needs me, and if I were not here, I would have to be invented." (Hortense Spillers "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book")

If we consider that a name is a signifier—a semiotic resource that signifies or

represents a particular referent—we may see how a name functions rhetorically. By

"names," I do not, for the most part, mean proper names, like Mary or John,[60] but rather

words that are used to describe, define, characterize, categorize or circumscribe

something or someone. By "naming," I mean the act of choosing a specific word to

describe, define, characterize, categorize and circumscribe someone or something.

Names are intentionally-placed[61] devices with very specific purposes: to bring attention

to something or someone that might otherwise go unnoticed. Spillers links the naming

(and unnaming[62]) of black people upon their enslavement in the United States, to the

negative identities imposed on them in this country decades and centuries later, even as

they moved from slavery to so-called freedom. She sees the physical enslavement of

black bodies in the 17th century as a precursor to a metaphorical enslavement of black

bodies in contemporary times as official documents such as "The Moyhnihan Report" use

language to categorize and circumscribe blacks as deficient (67). Indeed, Diane Roberts

argues that "[r]epresentations of blackness still govern responses to blackness" (22).

Roberts finds many images and characters (or perhaps caricatures) that inform

Americans' conception of reality in American literature and says "America lives still with

its martyred Oroonokos and Uncle Toms, its Imoindas, its Jezebels, its Aunt Jemimas.

They are the ghosts of a crippling past, and only by naming them can we exorcize them"

(22).

Certainly, Wahneema Lubiano does name these narrative ghosts in her analysis of

the rhetoric surrounding the Clarence Thomas hearings. She identifies familiar narratives

undergirding popular and political discourse, fixing certain images of black women—in

this case the "welfare queen"—in America's collective unconscious. Lubiano also

recognizes the image of The Welfare Queen as a scapegoat, one that allows the problems

of society to be placed squarely on the backs of certain people (331). However, as she

points out, accepted narratives about unseemly characters become a means of distraction

from other realities, an assertion made also by Kimberly Crenshaw who argues that the

embeddedness of canonical narratives make it difficult if not impossible for experiences

that fall outside of traditional frameworks to be recognized or understood. African

American women past and present exist, she says, "within the overlapping margins of

race and gender discourse [...] in the empty spaces between [...]—a location whose very

nature resists telling" (403). This positionality proves problematic as African American

women's identities are subsumed by dominant narratives that ignore or exploit them and that limit the extent to which they are able to speak for themselves.

Certainly, most welfare recipients have a limited or non-existent voice within the public sphere, but those of us who are able to speak on their behalf may be able to enact a trickster rhetoric to "expose the world's duplicity" (Benson 7). Malea Powell and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. each use the trickster figure in their work, drawing upon the historical trickster figure common to American Indian and African American folktales. A slippery figure, the trickster resists definitions and embodies the rhetorical nature of language. Powell says "tricks reveal the deep irony that is always present in whatever way we choose to construct reality" (9). The trickster is not outside of the narrative he/she challenges, but is an integral part of it. In his groundbreaking work, *The Signifyin(g) Monkey*, Gates explains the interrelatedness of trickster rhetoric which he calls "signifyin(g)," a creative word play that enlarges the definition of "signifying" for its own meaning and effect. The trickster signifies to draw attention to a deeper and more complex meaning of the signifier. Gates says "[s]ome black genius or a community of witty and sensitive speakers emptied the signifier "signification" of its received concepts and filled this empty signifier with their own concepts. By...supplanting the received, standard English concept associated by (white) convention with this particular signifier, they (un)wittingly disrupted the nature of the sign=signified/signifier equation" (1553). So if the signifier or name, America, usually signifies European male, the trickster disrupts this familiar connection, not by removing any variables, but by adding to it and still maintaining the integrity of the equation (i.e. America signifies European male, female, African American male/female, etc). Gates says "a simultaneous , but negated,

parallel discursive (ontological, political) universe exists within the larger white

discursive universe...[and] retaining the identical signifier argues strongly that the most

poignant level of black-white differences is that of meaning" (1555).

Gates makes a strong statement here as he distinguishes between the difference so

often inserted between these two groups in America: those of European descent and those

of African descent.[63] As their social status and positions in this country have historically

been asymmetrical, each group's perspective on lived experiences and material reality

has been different primarily because of the meaning that lived reality has for each. By

articulating this difference, however, we may begin to disrupt the assumptions that the

meanings of words, or names, can stand unambiguous and uncomplicated. The practice

of signifyin(g) inserts "a new semantic orientation into a word which already has—and

retains—its own orientation (1555). Benson further argues that the power of the trickster

is in "its lack of correspondence to a simple referent, its ability to name two things at

once which amounts to an inability to name any one thing conclusively...[and the] 'trick

of constant normative reversals is the very dialectic of unnaming" (7).

I find an example of this trickster rhetoric in Ralph Ellison's "What America

Would Be Like Without Blacks." Here he unsettles the American identity by asserting a

revised definition of the term "American":

> Despite his racial difference and social status, something indisputably
> American about Negroes not only raised doubts about the white man's
> value system but aroused the troubling suspicion that whatever else the
> true American is, he is also somehow black. (qtd in West 3)

Ellison's statement that "the true American is also somehow black" is both ironic and

true, and the reality of that statement dismantles a commonly accepted American

ideology of whiteness. How does one reconcile the rhetoric of equality and justice

alongside the unequal and unjust treatment of certain *Americans*? While the narratives of indigenous peoples and those who were brought to America as slaves are quite different from those well-known histories of valor and patriotism, they are not separate and apart from them. Toni Morrison says, lurking in the shadows of every American tale has been the African.[64] Nevertheless, as much of the scholarship on "whiteness" attests, there is a tendency to focus on minorities in a way that leaves undisturbed the participation of whiteness in the construction of American culture. Discussions of racial issues, therefore, focus on the "problems of black people," implying that "only certain Americans can define what it means to be American" (West 7). Yet, as West argues, "the predicaments of black people are neither additions to nor deflections from American life, but rather *constitutive elements of that life*" (6).

By circling back and looking at the namer, not just the name, the trickster reveals the purpose that naming serves, which is often to obscure the complicity of the oppressor in the condition of the oppressed. Yet, once the basis for a name is negated, one of two things may occur: (1) a new name can be inserted that encompasses multiple meanings or (2) the old name may remain, but with new meanings inserted and made visible. By replacing one name (or meaning of that name) with another, the trickster articulates a new identity that is connected to the moment of a symbolic new birth. As Benson says, unnaming and renaming are "a means of passing from one mode of representation to another, of breaking the rhetoric and 'plot' of influence, of distinguishing the self from all else" (4). The Welfare Queen acquired her name because of selfish, sexist, capitalist motives, but welfare recipients who happen to be women should reject this misnomer and

claim a new name (or meaning) in its place. It is, after all, with a name that new life begins.[65]

5.1.2 Busting Binaries—The Narrative of Unnaming

The Welfare Queen is really an "ideological code" or device similar to "affirmative action," a term which, as Bruce explains, is "part of the master trope that is used to dehistoricize and decontextualize issues, undermine democratic critique and constrain the bounds of debate" (124). Because these codes are condensing symbols, "buzzwords, images, slogans" that can be infused with various meanings, they become central to backlash rhetorics that oppose resistance by co-opting activist language. Thus, in order to discern "the scope and strength of conservative hegemony" one must be aware of how ideological codes work (124). Like "affirmative action," The Welfare Queen is a decontextualized and exaggerated image intended to represent the worst effects of the welfare state. By drawing attention to this image, the actual problems with welfare bureaucracy and labor market trends are obscured by alarmist rhetoric about the high cost of Food Stamps and Medicaid.

Yet, ideological codes cannot be considered outside of the context within which they are used and should not be acknowledged without giving equal treatment to those who assigned them. The political exigencies of Reagan's *New Right* necessitated a reassertion of capitalist ideology. His frequent appeals to the shared patriotism of his listeners make clear the boundaries of his community and the use to which he put the ideological code of the black welfare woman image. By naming The Welfare Queen, he distinguishes between her and them, counting on the familiarity of the hated black "Jezebel" to turn people away from her story. But, as I have argued throughout this

dissertation, names (like The Welfare Queen) are always inadequate. In a similar way,

Krista Ratcliffe suggests that "all language is figurative...because [it] always signifies

something other than the term itself" (96); thus, any term that attempts to describe

something (or someone) fully will inevitably fail. The object will always possess

characteristics that fall outside of the accepted definition of the term or name.

This discussion of names, then, is not only about The Welfare Queen, but is also

about the one(s) who named her: a Chicago journalist coined the term and Reagan

mobilized it. But, those who were present during his speeches and those who heard or

read about them later were no less a part of the naming process as they repeated and

affirmed the trope in the popular discourse. Those who are responsible for assigning that

notorious linguistic symbol of poverty are not often considered in discussions of welfare.

Yet, precisely because those responsible for the act of naming The Welfare Queen are so

quickly forgotten or rendered invisible, we must take a closer look at that moment that

has passed—another look at history as it is written. As Ratcliffe argues, we need to look

at history not to focus on origins, but on usage (93). That is, what use is made of names,

what effects do they create, and what purposes do they serve? Like Ratcliffe, I am

interested in the convergence of "bodies, tropes, and cultures" which I take to mean the

way bodies are inscribed by tropes that function in cultures.

While a naming may or may not be accompanied by a long speech or formal

ceremony, the erection of a linguistic symbol, the designation of a new life, a new

country or new ideals is rhetorically significant. Both Moynihan and Reagan named poor

black women, establishing a clear binary between two groups: blacks and Americans. In

particular, the poor, black woman represented the opposition to all that America

symbolized. Yet, when the two are juxtaposed—Americans and The Welfare Queen(s)—

one can see an interesting contrast/complementarity. As Toni Morrison attests, "while

American has been presented as an inclusive term it has often played out as a code for

white male" (qtd in Ratcliffe 106).The Welfare Queen is just the opposite. Rather than an

individual, she is one of many. She is the matriarch of a broken culture. She is amoral,

lazy, dependent. Yet, "Americans"[66] have been like the voyeurs who gawked at the

Hottentot Venus. Those who ascribe to a whiteness ideology need The Welfare Queen to

be an example of the "bad" mother because she helps "good" mothers measure their

goodness. They need her to be an example of the "hard core" welfare case in order to

build a case against poverty programs. At the same time that the "ideal American" was

born there was, in the background, the slave woman—the mammy, the conjure woman,

the Jezebel (who is "not mother but prostitute") (Roberts 2). She is the harlot to whom

"faithful" husbands go under the cover of darkness; her body disgusts, yet entices

onlookers. Her opportunist schemes imitate ruthless capitalism, yet her freedom to be

unconventional earns her disdain and envy. In colonial times, Roberts says

"[c]onservative whites insisted that blackness was low and therefore antithetical to the

'civilization,' morality and elevation represented by whiteness, yet the fascination

betrayed with every nuance associated with 'the African' and the many ways to slip

'down,' speaks to the instability of the hierarchy" (6).

As American scholars (and here I mean American in terms of place not ideology),

"[w]e cannot separate scholarship in the United States from the 'American tale'" (Powell

4). Thus, as Malea Powell urges, we must, instead, "consciously and explicitly [position]

our work within this distasteful collection of narratives, to open space for the existing

stories that might run counter to the imperial desires of traditional scholarship" (4). Yet,

how might one begin the process of unaming The Welfare Queen when the power of

names and naming has proven so strong that those who are so-named have difficulty

pulling themselves out from under the labels that constrain them?

To answer this, I will turn to a classic narrative of American literature,

Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* and the character of another marked woman, Hester

Prynn, whose story it tells. Like the mark of Cain, the letter she bears is intended to seal

her fate. It is assumed to be the end of her narrative, the conclusion to her life. Yet, as

Kimberle Benson so brilliantly reveals, the name—"A"— is, instead, transformed from a

period to semicolon as it marks Hester's introduction rather than her conclusion. Hester,

in fact, becomes a mirror that reflects back on the community itself, challenging its

members to reassess their own characters in relation to hers:

> to the Puritans who brand Hester, personality is a positivistic datum, an
> entity entirely determined by requirements of milieu: They are strictly
> named as the heroine, their identities as profoundly limited by the
> prescribed need to adhere rigidly to mutually exclusive conventions...But
> Hester is herself the master of "A" as an instrument of unnaming: By
> embracing the ambiguous richness of the letter, she undermines its social
> function of self-denial and utilizes it instead as a mechanism of self-
> mystification. (Benston 4-5)

The narrator says "[t]he scarlet letter was her passport into regions where other women

dared not to tread. Shame, Despair, Solitude! These had been her teachers—stern and

wild ones—and they had made her strong [...]" (Hawthorne). Like The Welfare Queen,

Hester has been labeled by the community as an outcast. She is a sinful woman, an

unwed mother and a disgrace to society; yet because she is now assumed to be incapable

of fulfilling the rigid expectations of the community, the mark has suddenly freed her to

go beyond man-made boundaries, to map her own territory, and to venture into the "wild"

uninhibited and free. With nothing to lose, Hester can unname and rename herself. The "A," once a symbol of shame, is now imbued with new meaning and a greater significance than had been communally imposed. All because Hester, herself, has determined its meaning rather than allowing her naming to remain in the hands (or mouths, or minds) of others. In the process, the "A" also becomes a mirror reflecting back on of the weaknesses and strengths of the townspeople. Benson says "[e]ach reader of Hester's letter sees in it something of his/her own, some trace of an unspeakable mark of difference" (4). Although her "sin" was more public than most, it was not an anomaly. And although her circumstances were not ideal, she managed to survive in spite of them. Her adversity, in fact, became her attribute. Hester transforms naming into unnaming and saves "herself from absorption into the confinements of social stigma" (5).

I suggest that, like Hester, The Welfare Queen is also a mirror before the American capitalist society. That is, even as she is said to represent the very opposite of American ideals, she also embodies Americans' unspoken desires. Thus, to begin the work of unnaming, we must begin by re-assessing the basis of naming. As Julie Drew argues in "The Personal is Rhetorical in Ethos, Politics and Narrative,"

> [t]he political usefulness and ideological worth of the universal categories of motherhood and unmotherhood are shaken by the particularities of [the welfare mother and illegal immigrant mothers'] lives; at the same time, individual experience or the particularities of minority groups are less likely to be heard and even less likely to have any political leverage without an affiliation with some universal, some shared social value (human rights, freedom, choice, dignity, for example). As Ernesto Laclau argues, in order to extend rights to others, we must extend the logic of the universal value behind those rights. (402)

Unnaming begins with calling into question the rules of the naming-game—what Drew calls, the "logic of universal values." On what evidence do we accept the reality of The

Welfare Queen? What narratives do we believe in order to "know" her when we see her? Wiederhold argues that

> an interpretive methodology built around the idea of [...] shared identifications does not necessarily attend to *how* omissions enable an utterance to make sense. Emphasis instead gets placed on the shared premise that results from interpretive interactions, leaving intact normative conceptions of language's representational properties. (127)

In other words, when we take identity to be an essential quality, and adapt a worldview around the belief system of those who share a similar identity, we fall prey to the rhetorical trap of persuasion on the basis of shared ideals that are, nonetheless, vaguely defined. We may both believe in "freedom," but if neither of us defines what we mean by that term, nor questions whose freedom is sacrificed for ours, we may assume that "freedom" is a universal term that is experienced the same by everyone. We may also be suspicious of those who question our definition of "freedom," especially when their identity—racial, social, political—is different from ours. Yet, Wiederhold says "[i]t is important to question how [...] responses are informed by unspoken assumptions about who looks and who gets seen, whose views are privileged. Whose displays of discursive virtue are fed by which textually and physically embodied images?" she asks. "And which elisions remain invisible to enable such perspectives to take shape?" (141).

We may not be able to separate scholarship in the U.S. from the "American" tale, but we can circle back through our history as Ratcliffe admonishes, and unsettle the settled lands, stripping off the painted on names, the degrading tropes, and the over-worn symbols. We can talk differently about The Welfare Queen, or not talk about her at all, but instead turn our attention to the social and political economy that created her.

5.1.3 A Call to Action—Enacting Otherness Ideology

"Critical rhetorical theorists need to act as activists—as agents of social change outside the university as well as in it... Who better than rhetoric scholars and teachers to think about linguistic ways to fight back and then to act upon them?" (Bruce 127)

In order to "bust binaries" and unsettle taken-for-granted meanings, we must abandon the notion that names are identities and, instead, recognize them as rhetorical so that we can mobilize names as *action*. We must consider how they function and must put into play competitive names that can counter those that demean or degrade. Cornel West says "[t]o be a serious black leader is to be a race-transcending prophet who critiques the powers that be (including the black component of the Establishment) and who puts forward a vision of fundamental social change for all who suffer from socially induced misery" (70). Likewise, to be an activist rhetorician, one must transcend social identities and transform words into works. As rhetorical activists, we might take a stance similar to that of bell hooks who argues that feminism should be a political commitment rather than a social identity or lifestyle. Speaking as an activist, one would say "I advocate feminism"[67] rather than "I am a feminist." The difference in the two statements is the emphasis on praxis rather than ideology. In the second statement, the burden is on state of being and acceptance of status quo.

One lesson learned from the historic use of The Welfare Queen trope is that in order to truly advocate for the empowerment of poor Americans, one must begin by empowering the nation with a new vocabulary for poverty that is centered not on the ideals of white Americans, but rather is focused on America as a diverse-yet-united community. What is needed is a "reconstruction of discourse about poverty and welfare" that includes "finding ways to talk about poor people as 'us,' that expand[s] ideas of

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citizenship and [that] transcend[s] the stale historic preoccupations that have constricted ideas, research, and policy during the last two centuries" (Katz 239). I also agree that "[t]he faces of poverty are many and varied, [but] [a]t the most essential level we are talking about people" (Carballo xviii). Therefore, we should re-think the ideologies that dominate welfare discourse and re-name the caricatures that serve as distractions from the real-world challenges faced by the segment of America's population who possess the fewest material and financial assets.

The extent to which racialized ideologies have informed welfare discourse necessitates consideration of how these perspectives often preclude meaningful and productive dialogue on various social issues of which poverty is just one. I agree with West that there should be a "mature black identity" which acknowledges "the specific black responses to white supremacist abuses and [takes] a moral assessment of these responses such that the humanity of black people does not rest on deifying or demonizing others" (44). I also believe there should be a "mature" white identity which acknowledges the active or passive participation in a "centuries-old system of racialized subordination and discrimination designed…to exclude [Blacks or other minorities] from full participation in the rights, privileges, and benefits of this society" (Feagin x), understanding, too, that the humanity of white people does not rest on deifying nor demonizing the *self*. Yet, too often whiteness ideology separates and blackness ideology retaliates; thus, I am calling for an *otherness* ideology that communicates.

What I suggest here is what Krista Ratcliffe calls "rhetorical listening," the prospect that social and political relationships and dialogue could benefit from an intentional listening that promotes understanding and proceeds from responsibility (not

blame). Perhaps, though, the most important aspect of rhetorical listening is that it locates and accentuates commonalities *and* differences in both the "claims" of an individual and the "cultural logics"—or the rules or values of a group—that inform those claims (209). By considering both together, interlocutors can accept and seek to understand the other:

> [i]f we recognize not just the claims but the historically-grounded cultural logics enveloping other people's claims, we may still disagree with the claims, but we may better understand the personal and cultural assumptions (dare I say, values and beliefs) that guide other people's logics. And if we also recognize how claims and cultural logics are rhetorically constructed, we may better appreciate the reasoning powers of others even when we disagree with them. (Ratcliffe 209)

Cultural and historical awareness facilitates communication and helps to resist "us versus them" dichotomies. Differences and commonalities between and among people from different places and stations in life may then be mined for their potential benefits to all rather than used as barriers that only benefit some.

The Welfare Queen was a character created to maintain distance and difference, but transforming this term for women on welfare from an epithet to a title would be enacting a trickster rhetoric of unnaming. Perhaps women who receive AFDC *are* Welfare Queens—that is, rulers of their individual abodes, masters of their domestic kingdoms and citizens of a welfare state that cares for the needs of its members. Fully-vested members of a welfare state would not only be those who contribute to the market economy, but also those who function within the domestic economy. Mothering would be as valuable a contribution to society as doctoring or lawyering. When one is able to stand under the experiences of another, it is more difficult to stand apart from them. Turning towards rather than turning away, we shift our perspectives and therefore our

speech. The Other becomes an *other*—one who has had different and similar experiences, one who has taken different and similar paths, but one whose value is no more or less than ours. *Otherness* is, thus, an intentional attitude that sees others as comrades not competitors.

Stripped of the advantages of power, individuals could interact on a level playing field; yet, where in this world might people of various classes, races and genders convene that would be removed from the inevitability of unequal power relations? Where might one find this utopian space that would facilitate true equality? Perhaps Reagan was right when he said "America is less a place than an idea," as it is ideas that inform discourses and discourses which construct material realities. If, indeed, language has the power to shape reality, then perhaps the utopia, too, is less a place than an idea. Considering the foundation of this country and the ideals and motives upon which it was established, Feagin and Vera have called for "a new constitutional convention, this time one where all Americans—not just European males with property—can debate and hammer out a new way of living together in a truly just, democratic, and egalitarian society" (xiv). However, while I agree with the sentiment of this proposal, I am less optimistic about the likelihood of accomplishing such an ambitious goal. Perhaps a more feasible approach would be one that begins with smaller steps—or should I say words? As rhetoric and composition scholars we know the power of language and should know how to harness that power. Can we not, then, begin by taking steps towards moving political discourses away from objects of scorn, away from "us versus them" dichotomies and away from assumptions of insurmountable differences among citizens of this diverse nation—or among students in our diverse institutions? As Steve Lamos suggests, "let us

acknowledge the "institutional 'economies, architectures, bureaucracies, interorganizational relations, and physical locations' of power...in institutional space" so that we can "'expose and interrogate possibilities for institutional change'" (50). In our scholarship, in our conferences, in our conversations, in our thinking and engaging in the world around us, can we not interrogate the constructions and consequences of naming—not just the naming of individuals, but also of cultural phenomena, groups, social systems and structures? Names and naming are both rhetoric and rhetorical process; yet, processes can be interrupted by intentional acts of unnaming and renaming. Our work may just begin with the deconstruction of personal and political identities so that we make visible the contexts within which names function and insist on new ways to frame political discourses so that they extend beyond well-worn stereotypes and symbols such as The Welfare Queen.

Chapter 5 Notes

[60] However, elsewhere, I discuss the way proper names can sometimes function rhetorically also.

[61] In the passive construction of this sentence the agent is concealed, but the power that determines the creation and placement of these signs is also an appropriate metaphor for the power that creates and determines the function and purpose of a name.

[62] Anthropologist Susan Benson says that before the arrival of the British in 1901, when a child was born in the West African Hausaland, the first of many names given was whispered in the child's ear by one of its parents. This name which was "hidden" and never spoken aloud was believed to be "indissolubly linked to the corporeal essence of the new human being" (Benson 182). For the pre-Enlightenment people of Africa, names and naming were situated in the realm of magic. However, once Africans arrived in America, their connection to the supernatural was replaced by their connection to the new god of capitalism incarnated in the slave master. Africans who survived the middle passage were stripped of their tribal names, myths and identities; the color of their skin now branded them not as individuals, but collectively as "Other". Once again language was the vehicle of power and the name a system by which reality was represented.

[63] Of course, this is further complicated by the fact that many Americans are of neither descent.

[64] And, if not, I would say, certainly, person of color—or the "Other" however it is defined).

[65] Glazer and Moynihan argue that "[e]thnic groups...are continually recreated by new experiences in America. The mere existence of a name itself is perhaps sufficient to form group character in new situations, for the name associates an individual, who actually can be anything" (qtd in "On the Rhetoric and Precedents of Racism" Villanueva, Victor. *CCC* 50.4 (1999): 649.

[66] Here I mean those who ascribe to "whiteness" ideology. That is, those whose identity as "Americans" is aligned with the notion that Americans can do no wrong, that patriotism is unproblematic and that anyone who is not like "us" is abnormal.

[67] Here, one might insert other identity markers—rather than "I am a Democrat", "I advocate democracy"

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    Journal of Social Issues. 56 (2000): 587-600. Print.

CURRICULUM VITAE

Kem Roper
P.O. Box 22271
Huntsville, Alabama 35814
kem.roper@gmail.com

EDUCATION

PhD Rhetoric and Composition, University of Louisville, December 2012

Dissertation Topic: From the "War on Poverty" to Reagan's "New Right," What's in a Name? The Symbolic Significance of the "Welfare Queen" in Politics and Public Discourse.

> My dissertation is a rhetorical analysis of the political discourse surrounding the role of poor African American women within the American social and political economy beginning in 1965 with Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty initiatives and extending to the early 1980s with Ronald Reagan and the "religious right." I argue that an ideology of whiteness permeates both the Johnson and Reagan administrations even though each worked towards different ends. I outline the three theoretical frameworks within which I position the public and political discourse surrounding welfare, welfare reform and welfare recipients: (1) Narrative and Rhetoric, (2) Feminism, and (3) Whiteness. I analyze Daniel Patrick Moynihan's 1965 report, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* which was intended to rally government officials to approve programs specifically targeting black communities. However, because of the pervasiveness of a whiteness ideology, the report sparked controversy and political backlash instead. I also focus on the rhetorical devices and narrative strategies that contributed to Reagan's political successes from the beginning of his political career in the 1960s until the beginning of his own presidential term in 1980, arguing that the significance of Reagan's use of The Welfare Queen trope is his reliance on an inherently racist ideology. I further argue that The Welfare Queen is a "site of political struggle," in that she represents a convergence of the contending forces of race, gender and class. I propose that rhetoric and composition scholars enact a "trickster" rhetoric that exposes the multiplicity of a name such as The Welfare Queen. By inserting new meanings into such names, I argue that scholars have an opportunity to shift popular discourse from dominating whiteness ideologies to a more empowering *otherness* ideology which is a distinct departure from historically-grounded and stagnant points of view.

Committee: Debra Journet (Chair), Karen Kopelson, David Anderson, J. Carol
Mattingly Nancy Theriot

M.A. English, University of Alabama Huntsville, December 2002

B.A. Communications, Double Minor - English and Office Systems Management,
Oakwood College, Huntsville, AL, May 1995

CONFERENCE PARTICIPATION

- **Watson Conference** University of Louisville, October 2008—chaired a panel
-
- **American Name Society** San Francisco, CA, January 2009—presented paper:
  "An Analysis of African American
  Naming Practices

- **20th Century Literature Conference** University of Louisville, February 2009—
  presented paper: "Selves, Stories and Narrative Reconstruction in Eli Wiesel's
  Night"

- **National Association of African American Studies** Baton Rouge, LA, February
  2009—presented paper: "Freakonomics or Eke-onomics? Disruption and Identity
  Construction in African-American Names and Naming

- **CCCC, (Conference on College Composition and Communication),**Louisville,
  KY, Spring 2010—presented paper: "Name-Signs and Trickster Rhetoric: An
  Investigation into the Power of Names and Naming"

- **Feminisms and Rhetorics: Feminist Challenges or Feminist Rhetorics?:
  Locations, Scholarship and Discourse**, presenting paper: "The Symbolic
  Significance of the 'Welfare Queen' in Politics and Public Discourse"
  October 12-15, 2011, Mankato, MN

- **CCCC (Conference on College Composition and Communication)**, St. Louis,
  MO, presenting paper: "Erasing Race Engendering Rhetoric" March 21-24, 2011

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

8/02-5/03, Oakwood College, Part-time Faculty

8/03-5/07, UAHuntsville, Full-time Lecturer

8/07-present, University of Louisville, Graduate Student/SREB scholar/Phd Candidate

06/08 – 08/08, UAHuntsville, Writing Center consultant

06/09 – 09/09, UAHuntsville, Adjunct professor

08/10 – 12/10, University of Louisville, Adjunct professor

01/11 – 05/11, UAHuntsville, Adjunct professor

Duties:

- planning daily presentations of course materials including discussions and in-class cognitive activities
- promoting and developing students' critical thinking skills
- consulting with 25-75 students per semester; assisting them in development of writing skills
- grading and editing 75-100 student essays and written assignments per semester
- managing student activities and projects

Interim Director of Writing Center
University of Alabama Huntsville Writing Center
Huntsville, Alabama
Spring 2007

Duties:

- assisting students with writing assignments
- supervising consultants and coordinating day-to-day operations
- planning and implementing consultant training
- generating Reports of Writing Center Activities for senior administrators
- tracking consultant hours, collecting timesheets, ordering materials and managing budget

Graduate Teaching Assistant
University of Alabama Huntsville Writing Center/Alliance for Minority Participation (AMP)
Huntsville, Alabama
05/00 – 02/02

Duties:

- supervising, advising and training 5-10 writing consultants
- advising and tutoring 5-10 undergraduate and graduate students
- preparing and implementing training sessions for apx 10 Writing Center employees
- writing and editing training manual (handbook) for Writing Center consultants
- tutoring 15-20 undergraduate students per week
- planning, preparing and implementing monthly training workshops and programs for students

PUBLIC AFFAIRS, COMMUNICATIONS & WRITING EXPERIENCE
Assistant Director, Public Affairs / Promotions

FOX Television (WZDX-TV)
Huntsville, Alabama
08/95 – 03/99

Duties:

- planning and implementing public service rotation and media relations communiqué.
- writing media press releases and weekly voice-over scripts for organizational promotions and events.
- designing monthly layouts for promotional ads in *Totally Kids Magazine*, *Huntsville Times* and *TV Guide*.
- assisting in planning and implementation of FOX's promotional contests and events.
- providing public service and education through organized tours of station facilities for school children.
- planning and assisting in development and communication of informational programs to maintain favorable public perceptions of organization's accomplishments and agenda.
- conferring with production, promotions and sales personnel to produce or coordinate production of advertisements and promotions.
- arranging public appearances, contests and exhibits to increase product and service awareness and to promote goodwill.
- collaborating with senior leadership to develop communications strategies that broadened programmatic reach and deepen impact
- developing and refining Fox's "core" messages to ensure organizational consistency

Owner/Founder/Editor-in-Chief
FACES Magazine
Huntsville, AL
03/99 – 05/00

FACES Magazine was established to be a local publication for progressive young adults. Articles covered such topics as "getting into college," "establishing a solid career," and "money management," in addition to beauty, health, entertainment and travel.

Duties:

- managing and supervising staff of 4—assigning work, establishing priorities, and evaluating performance
- organizing and chairing editorial meetings
- generating ideas for articles and features
- commissioning features and stories from in-house writers or freelancers
- reading, writing and researching features and articles

- selecting articles for issues and planning publication contents
- rewriting, editing, proofreading and subbing copy
- conferring with promotions and sales personnel to produce or coordinate production of advertisements and promotions.
- writing press releases and making public appearances to promote publication
- attending relevant events, fairs and conferences
- planning and directing development and communication about publication to maintain favorable public perceptions of FACES's agenda and potential
- establishing and maintaining cooperative relationships with representatives of community, consumers, employees and local businesses.
- negotiating partnerships with local businesses to increase FACES's visibility and impact in the community
- meeting and negotiating with local business for advertising and sales

ADDITIONAL WRITING & COMMUNICATIONS EXPERIENCE

- *Free-lance Writer*
  Women of Spirit, Message Magazine, Upscale Magazine, The Regional Voice, Oakwood Magazine, Oakwood College Church newsletter, Oakwood University Church website (www.oucsda.org)
  1996-present

- *Part-time staff Writer*
  Speakin' Out News
  Huntsville, Alabama
  11/96 to 11/98

QUALIFICATIONS
- significant communications experience that includes a blend of advocacy and media relations
- strong track record of positioning an organization to achieve tangible outcomes in a competitive communications environment
- strong commitment to education
- strong motivational skills
- ability to coach and support senior leaders as spokespersons
- good general and current affairs knowledge
- excellent oral and written communication skills
- interpersonal skills
- good critical thinking and problem-solving skills
- creativity
- confidence
- organization
- determination
- resilience

HONORS, ORGANIZATIONS AND ACTIVITIES

- Summa Cum Laude (undergraduate)
- Dean's List (undergraduate and graduate)
- Southern Region Educational Board Doctoral (SREB) Scholarship, 2007-2010
- Celeste Nichols Award (University of Louisville), 2008
- Who's Who of American High School and College Students
- Communications Club – President
- Alpha Chi—National College Honor Scholarship Society
- Sigma Tau Delta--English Honor Society
- Helpline volunteer
- Young Adult Ministries Leader, Oakwood University Church
- Children's Ministries assistant
- 4MWO (For Married Women Only) marriage enrichment group leader
- Parent Coordinator, Oakwood Elementary School Parent Teacher Association
- President, Voices of Inspiration, OU Church choir

PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL REFERENCES

Dr. Debra Journet, Professor, 502-852-3056

Dr. Diana C. Bell, Professor, 256-824-2381

Dr. Derek Bowe, Professor, 256-726-7186