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The Issue of Welfare in Ronald Reagan's 1966 Gubernatorial Campaign

A Dissertation Submitted for the MA American Studies (with European Study)

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September 2012

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Word Count: 19,959 (excluding cover page, table of contents, list of abbreviations, and bibliography)

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List of Abbreviations

ADC	– Aid to Dependent Children
AFDC	– Aid to Families with Dependent Children
ANC	– Aid for Needy Children
BASICO	- Behavioural Science Corporation of Van Nuys
CFP	– California Field Poll
CRA	– Californian Republican Assembly
GE	– General Electric
GOP	– Grand Old Party (Republican Party)
JBS	– John Birch Society
JOB	– Job Opportunities Board
LAPD	– Los Angeles Police Department
OBRA	- Omnibus Budget and Reconciliation Act of 1981
RRGCF	– Ronald Reagan Gubernatorial Campaign Files, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library
RRGES-OH	– Ronald Reagan Gubernatorial Era Series, Regional Oral History Office, Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley
SWH-OH	- Social Welfare History Oral Histories, Regional Oral History Office, Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley
UCLA	– University of California at Los Angeles

Introduction

In August 1960, the Democratic Governor of California, Edmund ‘Pat’ Brown, was advised by the state’s Attorney-General to arrange a conference focusing on California’s ‘Aid to Needy Children’ (ANC)¹ welfare program, lest it be “jeopardized by constant charges of fraud and immorality and...the sensationalist headlines [which] may well disgust and aggravate the taxpayers...”² Brown heeded the warning, yet it would not be until the state’s 1966 gubernatorial election, in which he was comprehensively defeated by Republican challenger and future president Ronald Reagan, who emphasized the issue of welfare, that he would realise the full prescience of his Attorney General’s words.

This dissertation seeks to explore the ways in which the Reagan campaign discussed and treated the welfare issue in the 1966 election. It will discuss the ways in which Reagan portrayed welfare recipients, and demonstrate how these portrayals informed his strong criticism of liberal welfare policies and his broader condemnation of the philosophy of liberalism. ‘Welfare’, in this context, will be used to refer to those public assistance programs—ANC, along with aid to the disabled, elderly, and blind—which were established as part of President Roosevelt’s ‘New Deal’ in 1935, as well as the 1960s efforts of Presidents Kennedy and Johnson to eradicate poverty. Whilst public assistance and anti-poverty efforts were distinct, the two were often

¹ ANC was the name in California of the program known nationally as Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) or, from 1962 onwards, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). To avoid confusion, AFDC will be used throughout to refer to both the Californian and federal programs.

² ‘Brown Agrees to Conference on Needy Children Aid’, Los Angeles Times (hereafter LAT), 13 August 1960, accessed online at [<http://search.proquest.com/hnplatimes?accountid=8018>], January-June 2012.

conflated by conservatives such as Reagan, and this dissertation therefore does so also.³

Welfare, it will be suggested, was a major issue of Reagan's campaign, and reflected concerns about the size and effectiveness of welfare programs that pre-dated his gubernatorial bid. Indeed, as he himself noted, "I travelled up and down the state and after every speech the audience asked questions. Always one of the first two or three questions was: 'if you are elected governor, what will you do about welfare?'"⁴ It was an issue that he discussed in numerous speeches during both the primary and general election campaigns, and in locations throughout the state. Moreover, whilst welfare was clearly not the only issue that he addressed, it related to many of the other topics of the day, such as the student unrest at the University of California's Berkeley campus, law and order, the Watts riots of August 1965 and the costs of government.

Some background to the election, and to Reagan and Brown, its two main protagonists, may be helpful here. Reagan, a Democrat who officially became a Republican in 1962, had worked as an actor before spending time with General Electric, touring the company's plants and presenting a popular television show sponsored by the firm. After delivering a televised speech on behalf of the Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater's failed 1964 presidential bid, raising some \$8 million for the campaign, he was approached by the so-called 'Kitchen Cabinet' of several wealthy Californian Republicans about launching gubernatorial candidacy.⁵ His

³ Mittelstadt, J., *From Welfare to Workfare: the Unintended Consequences of Liberal Reform, 1945-1965*, University of North Carolina Press, 2005, pp. 165-166.

⁴ 'News Release: Excerpts from Reagan Speech at Hayward', Ronald Reagan Gubernatorial Campaign Files, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, (hereafter RRGCF), Box C30, Book I, 27 September 1966.

⁵ Dallek, M., *The Right Moment: Ronald Reagan's First Victory and the Decisive Turning Point in American Politics*, The Free Press, 2000, p. 68; Nofziger, L., 'Press Secretary for Reagan, 1966', Ronald Reagan Gubernatorial Era Series, Regional Oral History Office, Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley (hereafter RRGES-OH), 1978-9, accessed online at:

opponent, Pat Brown, who was a Republican-turned-Democrat, serving as California's Attorney-General before taking advantage of a fractured state GOP to be elected governor in 1958. In 1966, he was running for a third term, having defeated Richard Nixon in 1962. Only narrowly beating the Mayor of Los Angeles, Samuel Yorty, to the Democratic nomination, the increasing tensions within the Democratic party contrasted with the Republican candidates' adherence to the 'eleventh commandment' not to speak ill of fellow Republicans. A well-run Reagan campaign, using some of the most modern election techniques, allowed Reagan to take 58% of the vote on 8 November 1966, and every county in the state save three.⁶

Reagan's large margin of victory was no small achievement in a state where registered Democrats outnumbered Republicans by a margin of three to two.⁷ Despite this, and the significance of California, which in 1964 had become the nation's most populous state,⁸ Reagan's 1966 campaign has received relatively little attention from historians. Only one full-length study of the campaign has been written, along with a handful of articles in journals mostly focused on the history of the region.⁹ More frequently, the contest occupies—in varying amounts of detail—mentions or chapters in works on Reagan or Californian politics or, following more recent historiographical trends, the history of conservatism.¹⁰ Lisa McGirr's study of wealthy Orange County, for example, discusses Reagan's victory as the "first significant triumph" of the Right,

[http://bancroft.berkeley.edu/ROHO/collections/subjectarea/pol_gov/reagan.html], January-August 2012.

⁶ McGirr, L., *Suburban Warriors: the Origins of the New American Right*, Princeton University Press, 2001, p. 209.

⁷ Anderson, T., and Lee, E., 'The 1966 Election in California', *Western Political Quarterly*, June 1967, pp. 535-554, at p. 537.

⁸ Cannon, L., *Reagan*, Putnam's Sons, 1982, p. 147.

⁹ Dallek, *Right Moment*; Anderson and Lee, '1966 Election'; De Groot, G., 'A Goddamned Electable Person: the 1966 California Gubernatorial Campaign of Ronald Reagan', *History*, July 1997, pp. 429-228.

¹⁰ Cannon, *Reagan*; Boyarsky, B., *The Rise of Ronald Reagan*, Random House, 1968; Putnam, J., 'The Pattern of Modern California Politics', *Pacific Historical Review*, February 1992, pp. 23-52.

and Kurt Schuparra sees Reagan's 1966 election as a key victory for conservative forces within the state's previously fractured Republican Party.¹¹ However, whilst such accounts do study the Reagan campaign, the issue of welfare forms only a small part of the story.

Indeed, whilst Gerard de Groot has offered a focused study on Reagan's treatment of the campus unrest at Berkeley, and Todd Holmes has provided a detailed account of the campaign in relation to the Cesar Chavez-led California grape-growers' strike, no similarly detailed or specific study has been made of the issue of welfare in Reagan's 1966 campaign.¹² It has not been completely ignored as a topic, being mentioned by both McGirr and Schuparra, as well as in Robert Dallek's study of Reagan's rhetoric, and Ellen Reese's account of the post-WWII Californian 'welfare backlash'.¹³ Several histories of social welfare in the US also discuss welfare as an issue in Reagan's campaign or eight-year governorship, but only in brief.¹⁴ Given that Reagan would be elected president just fourteen years after his success in 1966, and would come to be associated with the dismantling of the American welfare state, the issue of welfare in his first electoral race is clearly deserving of more study than it has so far received. If welfare did, between 1935 and 1967, become "the object of a highly contentious debate", as Ed Berkowitz argues, then it is hoped that this

¹¹ McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*; Schuparra, K., *Triumph of the Right: the Rise of the California Conservative Movement, 1945-1966*, ME Sharpe, 1998.

¹² De Groot, G., 'Ronald Reagan and Student Unrest in California, 1966-1970', *Pacific Historical Review*, February 1966, pp. 107-129; Holmes, T., 'Economic Reaganism: Corporate Conservatives, Political Economy, and the United Farm Workers Movement, 1965-1970', *Western Historical Quarterly*, Spring 2010, pp. 55-80.

¹³ Dallek, R., *Ronald Reagan: the Politics of Symbolism*, Harvard University Press, 1984, pp. 31-53; Reese, E., *Backlash Against Welfare Mothers: Past and Present*, University of California Press, 2005, pp. 86-97.

¹⁴ Berkowitz, E., *America's Welfare State From Roosevelt to Reagan*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991, pp. 133-135; Chappell, M., *The War on Welfare: Family, Poverty, and Politics in Modern America*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010, pp. 77-79.

study will fill a gap in our understanding of how this change occurred, and add to our knowledge of Reagan's stance on welfare.¹⁵

In so doing, the work of those, such as McGirr and Schuparra, who have demonstrated the existence of conservative sentiment and organization in 1960s California, will implicitly be followed. Similarly, the suggestions of historians such as Jonathan Schoenwald, Donald Critchlow, Mary Brennan and Rick Perlstein, all of whom have located the rise of the modern Right earlier than previously thought, and frequently in the Sixties, are to an extent being implicitly built on by this study's focus on Reagan, a conservative Republican, in 1966.¹⁶ However, it is not suggested here that a linear connection can be drawn between Reagan's election as governor and election as president, or, as Matthew Dallek argues,¹⁷ that Reagan's victory in 1966 marked a major shift in American politics and the beginning of the Reagan revolution. The significance of Reagan's triumph for conservative Republican forces in California and beyond is, generally, outside the scope of this study.

Instead, it is merely suggested that conservatism was indeed present in California by 1966, and that antipathy towards liberal welfare programs, as expounded by Reagan, was a major component of this. In this way, it is the content of Reagan's rhetoric on welfare that will be primarily studied, rather than its effectiveness with the electorate, although this will be discussed where appropriate. Reagan's portrayal of welfare recipients, it will be shown, influenced his staunch criticism of liberal welfare and anti-poverty programs, and from this grew his

¹⁵ Berkowitz, *America's Welfare State*, p. 119.

¹⁶ Schoenwald, J., *A Time for Choosing: the Rise of Modern American Conservatism*, Oxford University Press, 2001; Critchlow, D., *Conservative Ascendancy: How the GOP Right Made History*, Harvard University Press, 2007; Brennan, M., *Turning Right in the Sixties: the Conservative Capture of the GOP*, University of North Carolina Press, 2005; Perlstein, R., *Nixonland: the Rise of a President and the Fracturing of America*, Scribner, 2008.

¹⁷ Dallek, *Right Moment*, p. ix.

condemnation of liberalism's belief in the use of government to ameliorate social and economic conditions. Therefore, it is suggested, historians would do well to fully integrate welfare into their work on modern American political history and, in particular, their work on conservatism, for welfare formed a major part of conservatives' ideological opposition to the philosophy of liberalism.

In order to demonstrate how Reagan's rhetoric on welfare expanded into an assault on liberal welfare programs and liberalism, this study will effectively comprise two parts. The first two chapters will focus on Reagan's portrayal of those on welfare, and the distinctions that he made between the 'deserving' disabled and elderly poor and the 'undeserving' able-bodied poor, as well as on his suggestion that welfare recipients were lacking in self-reliance and becoming dependent on government 'handouts'. In the last two chapters, the focus will shift to Reagan's attack on liberal welfare programs as perpetuating certain behaviours among the able-bodied poor, and creating costly and bureaucratic programs that, crucially, impinged on the age-old American value of liberty by expanding the size and scope of federal government. His alternative vision to liberalism, the 'Creative Society', will also be discussed.

Yet before this study can begin, an understanding of one particular idea is required, because it was an idea that would be reflected—in a conservative fashion—by Reagan in his discussions of welfare recipients and, therefore, in his attacks on liberalism and its welfare programs. This was the 'culture of poverty' thesis, prevalent amongst policy-makers and academics in the early Sixties. Developed by the anthropologist Oscar Lewis, who coined the term in his studies of Mexican and Puerto Rican families, the 'culture of poverty' revolved around the idea that "one can speak of the culture of the poor, for it has its own modalities and distinctive social and

economic consequences for its members.”¹⁸ The emphasis was seemingly on the behaviours and values of the poor, and the idea was popularized—and brought to the attention of President Kennedy—by the publication in 1962 of Michael Harrington’s *The Other America*, Harrington also used the term ‘culture of poverty’—though not in a way that Lewis approved of¹⁹—and wrote mainly of the urban poor, suggesting that they “think and feel differently; they look upon a different America than the middle class looks upon.”²⁰ As well as suggesting that the poor acted in ways which made them distinct from the rest of society, Lewis and Harrington both also suggested that the culture of poverty was “a way of life... passed down from generation to generation along family lines.”²¹

The idea achieved even greater publicity—if not notoriety—following the leak of Assistant Secretary of Labor Daniel Patrick Moynihan’s report *The Negro Family: the Case for National Action* in 1965. Focusing on African American poverty to a greater extent than Harrington and Lewis had done, Moynihan felt that decades of racial oppression, combined with the lack of employment opportunities for black men, was leading to the disintegration of African American families, which were becoming increasingly matrifocal and dependent on welfare programs such as AFDC.²² “A cycle is at work”, he warned, infamously noting that the culture of poverty’s “tangle of pathology is tightening”.²³

¹⁸ Lewis, O., *Five Families: Mexican Case Studies in the Culture of Poverty*, BasicBooks, 1959, p. 2.

¹⁹ Lewis, O., *La Vida: A Puerto Rican Family in the Culture of Poverty—San Juan and New York*, Secker and Warburg, 1967 (1965), p. xlvii.

²⁰ Harrington, M., *The Other America: Poverty in the United States*, Collier-McMillan, 1962, p. 146.

²¹ Lewis, *La Vida*, pp. xxix-xl.

²² Moynihan, D., *The Negro Family: the Case for National Action*, Office of Policy Planning and Research, US Department of Labor, 1965, accessed online at

[<http://dol.gov/oasam/programs/history/webid-moynihan.htm>], March 2012.

²³ *Ibid.*

The ‘culture of poverty’ concept thus appeared to be defined by the sense that the poor inhabited a different world to the rest of American society, and that this way of life and the welfare dependency in which it resulted was transmitted from parents to children. Yet the idea was, as David Harvey and Michael Reed convincingly argue, broadly sympathetic to the plight of the American poor, perceiving their behaviour as an adaptive response to broader social and economic trends—including the discrimination that African Americans faced.²⁴ Harrington, Lewis and Moynihan were all also politically left-of-centre (to varying degrees; Moynihan would later serve President Nixon, a Republican). More important, however, was the emphasis of the two most influential figures in the formulation of policy—Harrington and Moynihan—on liberal solutions to the ‘culture of poverty’: government-led action and programs.²⁵ However, the emphasis which they placed on behavioural analyses of the poor made the concept unclear and open to multiple interpretations and varying emphases.²⁶ As Kirsten Gronbjerg notes, the idea did see a ‘culture of poverty’ as emerging from broad social and economic structures, but also saw this ‘culture’ as soon affecting the behaviour of the poor.²⁷ In 1966, Reagan emphasised this latter component of the ‘culture of poverty’ thesis, focusing on the ‘otherness’ of the poor’s behaviour and the transmission of welfare dependency from one generation to the next, from which he would launch his attack on welfare programs and liberalism. Although the he did not use the term specifically, nor necessarily seek to intentionally invert the original idea in this way, he was aware of the works of Harrington and

²⁴ Harvey, D., and Reed, M., ‘*The Culture of Poverty: An Ideological Analysis*’, *Sociological Perspectives*: Winter 1996, pp. 465-495.

²⁵ See *Ibid.*

²⁶ Patterson, J., *America’s Struggle Against Poverty, 1900-1985*, Harvard University Press, 1986 (1981), p. 120.

²⁷ Gronbjerg, K., *Mass Society and the Extension of Welfare, 1960-1970*, University of Chicago Press, 1977. p. 5.

Moynihan, which were mentioned amongst his campaign files.²⁸ Reagan's rhetoric on welfare recipients appeared to offer a conservative version of the 'culture of poverty' which will be explored in the first two chapters; from this would come his attack on liberalism and its welfare and anti-poverty efforts, examined in the second half of this study.

Throughout both sections, an array of sources will be used. These will include the research materials used by the campaign to provide information from which to craft speeches, contained in a series of binders that accompanied Reagan throughout the campaign.²⁹ The statements and speeches made by Reagan—many of which he himself wrote³⁰—will provide a core part of this study's analysis of Reagan's message on welfare, and will be supplemented by oral histories from those involved with the campaign and Californian Republican party. Whilst it is the content of Reagan's attack on welfare programs and liberalism that is the focus here, articles from the generally right-of-centre *Los Angeles Times* and data from the respected California Field Poll will be employed to demonstrate how Reagan also reflected concerns existent among much of the Californian electorate, of the sort that Brown's Attorney-General had warned of back in 1960.

²⁸ 'Negro Father's Family Position Undermined by Economic Conditions- He Leaves', RRGCF, Box C38, Folder U, Undated; 'Psychological Effects of Poverty', RRGCF, Box C39, Folder E, Undated.

²⁹ Dallek, *Right Moment*, p. 197.

³⁰ Nofziger, 'Press Secretary for Reagan', RRGES-OH.

Chapter One:

The ‘Other’ Californians—Reagan’s Portrayal of Able-Bodied Welfare Recipients

As Michael Harrington wrote in *The Other America*, “the poor are not like everyone else. They are a different kind of people.”³¹ This sense that the poor were distinct from the rest of American society was a cornerstone of the ‘culture of poverty’ thesis, and although it was not, as already noted, necessarily meant to suggest that the different behaviour of the poor was the cause of their poverty, there was room for this more negative interpretation. Reagan’s rhetoric offered this more negative, conservative version of the idea by distinguishing able-bodied welfare recipients from the rest of the Californian citizenry: they became the ‘other’ Californians. By continually juxtaposing disabled and elderly welfare recipients with the able-bodied, he made it clear that he supported welfare payments for the former group, but was much more reticent about ‘handouts’ for the latter. In this way, the disabled, elderly, or blind on welfare were suggested to be the ‘deserving’ poor, and the able-bodied the ‘undeserving’ who, Reagan argued, were so different from the rest of society in their values and behaviour that they even resorted to fraud or migrated to California in order to receive the state’s benefits and avoid work. Moreover, he clearly distinguished between taxpayers and those in receipt of welfare, further creating the sense that able-bodied welfare recipients were separate from the deserving poor in the state, and California’s hard-working taxpayers.

It is through understanding the dichotomies and distinctions in Reagan’s presentation of welfare and welfare recipients that his attacks on liberal welfare programs and liberalism, explored in later chapters, can best be understood. As Joel Handler and Yeheskel Hasenfeld argue, “social welfare policy cannot be fully

³¹ Harrington, *Other America*, p. 146.

understood without recognizing that it is fundamentally a set of symbols that try to differentiate between the deserving and undeserving poor in order to uphold such values as the work ethic...”³² In suggesting that able-bodied welfare recipients were distinct from other groups in receipt of welfare, and from taxpayers, Reagan would later suggest that this ‘otherness’ of the able-bodied poor, and their different values and attitudes, underlay the failure of liberal welfare programs.

AFDC, and other public assistance programs for the elderly, blind and disabled had all been enacted in 1935, at the height of the New Deal. On a significant number of the occasions on which he referred to welfare during the 1966 campaign, however, Reagan made it clear that he distinguished the former from the latter. As he bluntly stated in March, “I divide welfare into two segments”.³³ It was these two segments—the able-bodied and the disabled—that he would juxtapose continually, suggesting that one group was more deserving of public aid than the other. His remarks in an interview broadcast on ABC News shortly before the primary election in June offered a prime example of this:

“...I think in this welfare program—and let me make one thing plain, you always have to do this, and I am happy to do it, that there is a segment of welfare that, if I have any complaint, it is that we are not doing enough. Now, this is the part of welfare of those people who, through disability or old age, must depend on the rest of us. I feel that we should do everything we can, and perhaps aren’t doing enough because we are spread so thin in the many welfare programs that have sprung up, actually, since the Depression days with regard to able-bodied people and they were programs originally intended to put those people back out into productivity, and I think we have strayed from that goal.”³⁴

Reagan’s statement suggested that he saw the disabled and elderly as completely deserving of public assistance—perhaps, even, increased assistance—but was less

³² Handler, J., and Hasenfeld, Y., *The Moral Construction of Poverty: Welfare Reform in America*, Sage Publications, 1991, p. 11.

³³ ‘Occidental College Political Science Forum’, RRGCF, Box C30, Book I, 8 March 1966.

³⁴ ‘Issues and Answers, ABC News’, RRGCF, Box C30, Book II, 29 May 1966.

certain about the merits of aiding the able-bodied. Indeed, he implied that the amount being spent on the able-bodied was diverting funds from the more deserving disabled and elderly poor. As he wrote to one Californian, he had great sympathy for those in receipt of welfare through disability, but was “critical of that other part of our welfare program having to do with able-bodied people, and where I believe there are opportunities for saving which will make it possible to do more for the truly needy.”³⁵ Indeed, one campaign memo proposed increasing the allowable family income of “truly deserving recipients” from \$173 to \$282 per month, whilst also emphasising the need for able-bodied welfare recipients to work unless there was “good cause” to prevent them from doing so.³⁶ Of course, it may be that Reagan’s continual emphasis on his support for disabled and elderly welfare recipients, and his argument that more should be done for them, was a way of ensuring that he was not perceived to be adverse to all welfare spending, and thus that he appeared moderate. Certainly, Stuart Spencer and Bill Roberts, whose firm Spencer-Roberts managed the Reagan campaign, sought to ensure that the candidate appeared reasonable to voters—something particularly important when Brown’s main charge against Reagan was that he was a conservative ‘extremist’ related to groups such as the right-wing John Birch Society (JBS).³⁷ Yet, according to Spencer, Reagan did also have strong personal beliefs on issues such as welfare, so his apparent desire to aid the ‘deserving’ poor may also have stemmed from genuine conviction.³⁸

Either way, Reagan’s continual contrasting of the able-bodied and disabled poor also contained a strong sense that those receiving public assistance from programs such as AFDC—which provided cash payments to the needy children of

³⁵ ‘Letter to Mrs Fern Aston of Burbank’, RRGCF, Box C34, Folder 66 H&W, 9 May 1966.

³⁶ ‘Social Welfare’, RRGCF, Box C34, Folder 66 H&W, Undated.

³⁷ Spencer, S., ‘Developing a Campaign Management Organization’, RRGES-OH, 1978-9.

³⁸ Ibid.

widowed or otherwise single mothers, and which had been extended in California in 1963 to cover the children of two-parent families affected by unemployment, part-time employment, and seasonal employment,³⁹-- were distinct in their values and behaviour from the rest of Californian and American society. Firstly, Reagan implied that many of the able-bodied receiving welfare payments were averse to work. Speaking towards the end of the campaign, he again noted his willingness to help the “aged and infirm”, but argued that it was “ridiculous for the present administration to call on the people of California to do more and more for those whose only desire is to do less and less.”⁴⁰ The distinction between the disabled and those who wished to do “less and less” clearly suggested that it was able-bodied welfare recipients who were seeking to avoid work. Similarly, Reagan had stated just a few weeks earlier that

“we’ll continue to help those in true need and even try to improve our care for those who, through no fault of their own, *must* depend on their fellow man. But those whose only disability is unwillingness to work will discover that we don’t consider that an incurable ailment. From now on the able-bodied will work for their keep or take training to fit themselves for jobs, and there’ll be no pay for play.”⁴¹

Once again, the implication was that the able-bodied who received welfare were, quite simply, lazy. Although Spencer Williams, who would be appointed state Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare by Reagan, disputes that Reagan perceived able-bodied welfare recipients as indolent,⁴² the candidate certainly presented the idea to the California electorate, making references to “those who refuse to provide for themselves.”⁴³

³⁹ ‘Welfare Package Bill Signed by Governor’, LAT, 22 May 1963.

⁴⁰ ‘News Release: Excerpts from Hayward’, RRGCF.

⁴¹ ‘Transcript of Reagan Campaign Kick-Off Telecast’, RRGCF, Box C30, Book II, 9 September 1966 (emphasis original).

⁴² Williams, S., ‘The Human Relations Agency: Perspectives and Programs Concerning Health, Welfare, and Corrections, 1966-1970’, RRGES-OH, 1986.

⁴³ ‘Transcript of Campaign Kick-Off’, RRGCF.

As well as suggesting that able-bodied welfare recipients were distinct from the rest of society—and from the ‘deserving’ elderly and disabled poor—through their apparent aversion to work, Reagan also implied that fraud was another form of behaviour that set those on programs such as AFDC apart from other Californians. In Los Angeles County alone, Reagan stated, fraud had risen by 170% in just three years.⁴⁴ Speaking at Berkeley’s Boalt Hall law school, he also recounted the story of a friend who, whilst skiing in Colorado, had found that some of the skiing instructors were receiving unemployment compensation from California, despite being employed.⁴⁵ (Unemployment insurance, which was generally paid to the able-bodied unemployed had, Reagan charged, been made into a form of welfare rather than a temporary program by the Brown administration,⁴⁶ an accusation which may have been related to the extension of AFDC to the children of the unemployed). Whilst the future president recognised that anecdotes were not entirely useful in debating a point, he still apparently felt them useful enough to use in appealing to the electorate by suggesting that fraud existed amongst able-bodied welfare recipients.⁴⁷ Indeed, he had also used stories in his 1964 speech in support of Goldwater to suggest the presence of welfare fraud: a Los Angeles judge, he said, had told him of one woman pregnant with her seventh child and planning to divorce her husband in order to receive a welfare cheque higher than his earnings.⁴⁸ The woman had apparently got the idea from two friends, who had already carried out their own suggestions.⁴⁹ The fraud that Reagan suggested was present among programs for the able-bodied poor further implied that the group was different in its behaviour from the rest of society.

⁴⁴ *New Release: Excerpts from Hayward*, RRGCF.

⁴⁵ *Boalt Hall Institute on Law and Politics*, RRGCF, Box C30, Book I, Undated.

⁴⁶ *Budget Speech, Hollywood Palladium*, RRGCF, Box C30, Book II, 20 April 1966.

⁴⁷ *Boalt Hall*, RRGCF.

⁴⁸ *Televised Nationwide Address on Behalf of Senator Barry Goldwater*, 27 October 1964, in Reagan, R., *Speaking My Mind: Selected Speeches*, Hutchinson: 1990 (1989), p. 30.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p. 30.

Such an impression was further created by Reagan's frequent reference to able-bodied persons who, he alleged, moved to California in order to obtain the state's relatively generous welfare payments. The "humanitarianism" of Californians, Reagan argued, was being exploited by those amongst the able-bodied poor who recognised "a chalk mark on our door informing the initiated that here in California is an [sic] easy access to a variety of welfare programs."⁵⁰ His talk of the 'initiated' and of 'chalk marks' on doors implied that at least some of those on welfare were a group separate from most other people in society, with their own values and behaviour, which encouraged them to migrate to California in a bid to receive welfare cheques rather than find work. In fact, Reagan claimed, people were eligible for welfare the moment they entered the state of California.⁵¹ The state had actually adopted a residency requirement of one year for welfare programs back in 1950; various counties also had their own requirements for the length of time spent in the area before welfare could be claimed.⁵²

In suggesting that able-bodied welfare recipients moved around the country or even committed fraud in an effort to avoid earning money through employment, Reagan suggested that they were at odds with the traditional American values of self-help and hard work. In his version of the 'culture of poverty' thesis, the able-bodied poor exhibited behaviour different from such values and were thus set apart from the rest of society. Yet in offering this portrayal of those in receipt of benefits from programs for the able-bodied, Reagan was also advancing concerns which already existed within the state. Controversy over welfare programs—and especially over AFDC—had been present in California for some years, reflecting fears in other parts

⁵⁰ *Transcript of Campaign Kick-Off*, RRGCF.

⁵¹ *A Plan for Action*, RRGCF, Box C30, Book I, 4 January 1966.

⁵² Reese, *Backlash Against Welfare Mothers*, p. 94.

of the nation about the demographic shift taking place amongst recipients of AFDC payments: away from the children of white widows the 1935 program was originally designed to aid to, instead, increasing numbers of divorced or separated African American mothers and their children. In 1937, on a national level, 43% of families on AFDC were headed by widows; but by 1961 this figure had fallen below 8%.⁵³ At the same time, the proportion of families in receipt of AFDC that were black had risen to 48% by 1961.⁵⁴ This change, combined with increasing welfare rolls, had created controversies before Reagan's 1966 campaign. The most notable of these was in Newburgh, New York in 1961, when the town manager sought to impose stringent restrictions on welfare recipients—and particularly those on AFDC—in an apparent attempt to prevent fraud. The *Los Angeles Times* dispatched a reporter to Newburgh, and noted in an editorial that

“the terrible injustice that escapes those who find no fault in the current system is that by allowing aid to go to the freeloaders, the truly needy are short-changed. And by tolerating, if not promoting, such abuse, welfare programs have had the effect of creating a growing group of persons who labor only to exploit public generosity.”⁵⁵

The attitudes of the large southern Californian paper sounded remarkably similar to those which would be displayed by Reagan some five years later.

Indeed, concerns about welfare fraud, or ‘welfare chiselling’, as it was labelled, were certainly present in California prior to 1966. As early as 1960, one writer for the *LA Times* had worried that “in our Aid to Needy Children program [there] are literally hundreds of instances of dishonesty, fraud, immorality, illegitimacy which range from the challenging through the dismaying to the

⁵³ Ibid., p. 37.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 37.

⁵⁵ ‘*A Counter-Revolution in Newburgh*’, LAT, 19 July 1961.

ridiculous.”⁵⁶ By 1962 a secret ‘welfare fraud squad’ was working out of LA County’s District Attorney’s office, and in several counties of the state, early-morning raids on the homes of welfare recipients had occurred to check for undisclosed male earners—even going so far as to check recipients’ beds—although the State Social Welfare Board banned this in July 1963.⁵⁷ Reagan’s rhetoric mirrored these worries, apparently not recognising the words of LA County’s Superintendent of Charities, who stated that fraud represented only 1%-2% of the area’s welfare caseload, “a much smaller scale than chicanery and fraud in the general population.”⁵⁸ The candidate was also not the first to portray the able-bodied as migrating to California so as to receive its welfare benefits, with a special series of *LA Times* articles in 1960 drawing a parallel with the state’s history by suggesting that a “second gold rush” was underway, drawing in “latter-day Argonauts” who appeared, “in a great majority of cases, to be positively allergic to work.”⁵⁹

Reagan’s portrayal of the able-bodied poor as distinct from the elderly, disabled, and indeed the rest of society therefore represented a conservative version of the ‘culture of poverty’ idea that also reflected existing concerns within California. Yet it also made a particularly clear distinction between able-bodied welfare recipients and the state’s taxpayers, thus further suggesting that the poor were different from mainstream society by the sheer fact that they did not work. As Kurt Schuparra rather forcefully argues, the candidate “implicitly praised the working class and entrepreneurs alike (property-owning ‘producers’)... while inveighing against welfare recipients, privileged academics and bureaucrats (parasitic ‘non-

⁵⁶ ‘County Welfare Inspires Second Gold Rush for Relief’, LAT, 7 February 1960.

⁵⁷ ‘Secret Squad Ferreting Out Aid Chiselers’, LAT, 18 November 1962; ‘Welfare Board Bans Mass Raids’, LAT, 27 July 1963.

⁵⁸ ‘Facing the Issue: the State of Welfare’, LAT, 27 January 1966.

⁵⁹ ‘County Welfare Inspires Second Gold Rush’, LAT.

producers’)...”⁶⁰ Speaking in Orange County, in the generally more conservative south of the state, Reagan wondered whether it was not “approaching the point at which the people on welfare are beginning to outnumber the people who are paying the bills.”⁶¹ Here a dichotomy was clearly established between taxpayers and welfare recipients, something possibly well-received in the wealthy suburban Orange County where, Lisa McGirr argues, residents felt that they had a right to keep what they had earned.⁶²

This dichotomy could also be found in many of Reagan’s other campaign speeches and statements. Responding in April to Governor Brown’s budget for the forthcoming fiscal year, Reagan noted that Brown had claimed that the budget was “lean and hard”. Yes, Reagan joked, the governor’s budget was “leanin’ hard on us!”⁶³ ‘Us’ referred to taxpayers; the able-bodied poor were seemingly excluded and distinct from this group. In fact, Reagan at times implied that taxpayers were being detrimentally affected by their funding of welfare programs. This view was perfectly summarised in a letter to one Californian after his election as governor:

“I’m sure everyone feels sorry for the individual who has fallen by the wayside... But my own compassion goes beyond that to those millions of unsung men and women who get up every morning, send the kids to school, go to work, try to keep up the payments on their house, pay exorbitant taxes to make possible compassion for the less fortunate, and as a result have to sacrifice many of their own desires and dreams.”⁶⁴

He suggested that this support by the taxpayers of the able-bodied poor was unfair and, when officially announcing his candidacy in January 1966, he further emphasised the dichotomy between those on welfare and the rest of Californian

⁶⁰ Schuparra, *Triumph of the Right*, p. xix.

⁶¹ ‘Orange County’, RRGCF, Box C30, Book I, 30 March 1966.

⁶² McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*, pp. 154-155.

⁶³ ‘Budget Speech’, RRGCF.

⁶⁴ Quoted in D’Souza, D., *Ronald Reagan: How an Ordinary Man Became an Extraordinary Leader*, Touchstone, 1999 (1997), p. 69.

society, remarking that “working men and women should not be asked to carry the additional burden of providing for a segment of society capable of caring for itself, but which prefers... free-loading at the expense of more conscientious citizens.”⁶⁵

Such rhetoric was perhaps appealing to low-wage white Californian workers, as well as the residents of wealthier areas such as Orange County. Brown’s support amongst low-income and unionized whites—a traditionally Democratic group—was lower in 1966 than in previous elections.⁶⁶ Many of these voters contributed to the one million Democrats that voted for Reagan on 8 November. By distinguishing them as taxpayers from able-bodied welfare recipients, Reagan implied that their incomes were being used to support ‘freeloaders’. As Caspar Weinberger, the Californian Republican and future cabinet member under Presidents Nixon and Reagan, later argued, Reagan appealed to union workers by discussing issues that they cared about—but in a conservative way.⁶⁷ Welfare costs seemingly were an issue that many taxpayers cared about: shortly after Reagan announced his gubernatorial bid, the *LA Times* editorialized that “increased welfare expenditures have brought...[a] sense of public frustration.”⁶⁸ Reagan’s rhetoric reflected this frustration, and it was perhaps a mark of how effective he felt his discussions of the issue to be that he emphasized the distinctions between taxpayers and the able-bodied poor throughout the campaign, and across the state. As Pat Brown later mused in his stinging critique of Reagan, the future president was “the self-appointed leader of ‘Us’, and the enemy is always ‘Them’”.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ ‘Plan for Action’, RRGCF.

⁶⁶ Anderson and Lee, ‘The 1966 Election’, pp. 547-550.

⁶⁷ Weinberger, C., ‘California Assembly, Republican State Central Committee, and Elections, 1953-1966’, RRGES-OH, 1978-9.

⁶⁸ ‘Use and Abuse of Welfare Funds’, LAT, 10 January 1966.

⁶⁹ Brown, E., with Brown, B., *Reagan the Political Chameleon*, Praeger Publishers, 1976, p. 3.

In Reagan's discussions of welfare, 'us' seemed to refer to taxpaying Californians, and 'them' to the able-bodied poor who, the candidate suggested, exhibited values and behaviour at odds with that of much of the rest of society, and at odds with historic American values. As Kirsten Gronbjerg notes, the American tradition of making one's own fortune leads

“any person or group who fails to make at least token approximations to these goals... [to] be suspected of not sharing fully in the public belief in the 'American way'... Those who are thought not to share these beliefs are seen as being clearly outside the mainstream of American society: they are thought to have a culture of poverty or some individual or group deficiency which explains their low standing in society.”⁷⁰

Reagan's rhetoric seemingly followed this model. He offered a conservative version of the 'culture of poverty' thesis in which the able-bodied poor were quite clearly portrayed as distinct from the 'deserving' disabled poor, taxpayers and the rest of Californian society as a result of their seeming aversion to work, occasional recourse to fraud, and movement to the state in an effort to obtain its welfare benefits. Reagan was, therefore, reflecting Oscar Lewis' idea that the culture of the poor was distinctive, yet was doing so in a way that did not suggest that this culture was an adaptive response to broader social and economic trends. Instead, Reagan's version of the idea instead seemed to suggest that able-bodied welfare recipients were “different and inferior and hence... the undeserving poor”, an interpretation that the vague 'culture of poverty' thesis, as Walter Trattner notes, did allow for.⁷¹ Whilst Reagan did not necessarily intend to use the 'culture of poverty' idea in this way, he certainly reflected the distinction that it made between the poor and the rest of society.

⁷⁰ Gronbjerg, *Mass Society*, pp. 30-31.

⁷¹ Trattner, W., *From Poor Law to Welfare State: A History of Social Welfare in America*, The Free Press: 1999 (1997), p. 329.

He would also, as the next chapter will demonstrate, reflect another of the cornerstones of the ‘culture of poverty’ thesis by suggesting that these ‘other’ Californians—able-bodied welfare recipients—were transmitting poverty and welfare dependency to their children as a way of life. From this would come his attack on liberal welfare programs and liberalism’s belief in government action to cure social ills: the inversion, or subversion—whether intentional or not—of the entire ‘culture of poverty’ thesis. Before we turn to this, however, Reagan’s discussion of poverty transmission and welfare dependency must first be explored.

Chapter Two:

'The Cycle of Poverty'—Reagan's Discussion of Welfare Dependency and the Erosion of Self-Help

In his controversial 1965 report, Daniel Patrick Moynihan wrote of the “cycle of poverty and disadvantage” that existed amongst African American families, arguing that this cycle had led to a considerable increase in welfare dependency.⁷² This echoed the emphasis that Oscar Lewis had placed on the transmission of poverty as a way of life from poor parents to their children. “By the time slum children are six or seven”, Lewis had written, “they have usually absorbed the basic values and attitudes of their subculture and are not psychologically geared to take full advantage of changing conditions or increased opportunities which may occur in their lifetime.”⁷³ The sense that living in poverty, and on welfare, was being passed down from generation to generation was, therefore, a key part of the whole ‘culture of poverty’ thesis. Indeed, as Michael Katz argues, the concept “located the perpetuation in attitudes and behaviours transmitted from one generation to the next.”⁷⁴ Reagan’s discussions of welfare in 1966 similarly contained references to welfare dependency and what he alleged was its corollary: the erosion of self-help and the work ethic. In suggesting that these two traditional American values were being damaged by the dependence of the able-bodied poor on welfare payments, he would pay particular attention to attempts by various Californian counties to place welfare recipients on farm-work schemes. Moreover, whilst bemoaning the rise of welfare dependency and loss of the work ethic, Reagan would simultaneously positively reinforce these values which he felt were in decline, although he was careful to avoid explicit racial or

⁷² Moynihan, *The Negro Family*.

⁷³ Lewis, *La Vida*, p. xli.

⁷⁴ Katz, M., *The Undeserving Poor: From the War on Poverty to the War on Welfare*, Pantheon Books, 1989, p. 28.

gender stereotypes of those on welfare. The combination of these themes, along with his portrayal of able-bodied welfare recipients as distinct from the rest of society, would underlie Reagan's criticism of liberal welfare programs and the very philosophy of liberalism.

Welfare dependency was a theme frequently mentioned in Reagan's speeches and statements and, as may be expected of a candidate in the midst of an election campaign, this often took very similar rhetorical forms, with certain phrases repeated over and over again.⁷⁵ Particularly notable amongst such phrases were Reagan's anecdotal references to Californian families in which multiple generations were in receipt of welfare payments. Speaking at Berkeley, he noted that

“our housing administrators in Washington tell us now that in public housing in the area of welfare we have come to a third generation in a family, taking it for granted that this is a way of life and this is their pattern of life and they will grow up and marry and have children who will [also] look to that pattern...”⁷⁶

Almost exactly the same story was alluded to in a March speech, in which the candidate repeated his assertion that “we now have housing administrative [sic] point out that we are in a third generation that has been living on public's assistance [sic], taking for granted that it is the way of life because they have never known anything [else] in the family for three generations...”⁷⁷ He even suggested that this was a large problem, remarking in an ABC News interview shortly before his primary victory over George Christopher that “we have in California any number of cases, any number, that are people in the third generation of their families who are living on welfare”, and making it clear that he by no means approved of this.⁷⁸ Through such

⁷⁵ Boyarsky, *Rise of Reagan*, p. 11.

⁷⁶ 'Boalt Hall Institute', RRGCF.

⁷⁷ 'California Council for Adult Educators, International Hotel', RRGCF, Box C30, Book I, 12 March 1966.

⁷⁸ 'Issues and Answers', RRGCF.

statements, Reagan echoed the ‘culture of poverty’ emphasis on the transmission of poverty and welfare dependency from parents to children. Indeed, amongst the several black ringbinders full of reference information provided by the research team of Kenneth Holden and Stanley Plog’s behavioural science company, BASICO, one index card quoted an excerpt from a volume edited by the economist Burton Weisbrod, an advisor to Presidents Kennedy and Johnson:

“poverty breeds poverty. A poor individual or family has a high probability of staying poor... Poor parents cannot give their children the opportunities for better health and education needed to improve their lot. Lack of motivation, hope and incentive is a more subtle but no less powerful barrier than lack of financial means. Thus the cruel legacy of poverty is passed from parents to children.”⁷⁹

Whilst the campaign’s inclusion of this note amongst its reference materials does not, of course, inherently mean that Reagan or his advisors agreed with it, the candidate’s public pronouncements did contain similar themes, such as the emphasis on multiple generations of a family becoming dependent on welfare.

Indeed, Reagan suggested that welfare was, for some of the able-bodied poor, becoming “a way of life”.⁸⁰ Dependency was, he strongly implied, leading to higher costs for Californian taxpayers. In a televised speech from San Diego, he informed his audience that

“the average family of four... its share of the cost of welfare is now \$243.00, and a good portion of this is dead-end money. Yes, it supports someone if you pay the bills for a day and then the money is gone. Well this makes welfare addicts out of millions of Californians.”⁸¹

Reagan’s use of drug-related imagery, which reflected another major concern of the period, was also suggestive of Moynihan’s description of the ‘culture of poverty’ as a “tangle of pathology”, and the broader use, discerned by James Patterson, of medical

⁷⁹ *Poverty is Self-Perpetuating*, RRGCF, Box C39, Folder E, Undated.

⁸⁰ *Ronald Reagan TV Speech, Hilton Inn, San Diego*, RRGCF, Box C30, Book I, 25 February 1966.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

metaphors to describe the poor and the transmission of poverty between generations.⁸² Those on welfare were becoming addicted to it, Reagan argued, and this contributed to increasing welfare costs which, according to the campaign, had risen by 113.7% in the state between Brown's first election in 1958, and 1965.⁸³ The extent to which this rise was attributable to welfare dependency was, however, debateable: one study by the State Department of Social Welfare in 1963 had found that the average length of time spent on AFDC in the state was two years, and that one-third of recipients were able to leave relief within a year.⁸⁴

For Reagan, though, dependency was a major problem which was associated with the perceived erosion of the work ethic and self-help. This sense, as will be discussed later, would underscore the future president's attack on liberal welfare programs and the broader philosophy of liberalism. Just one month after announcing his candidacy, Reagan stated unequivocally that the "entire philosophy" of welfare needed to be investigated, and that it "must be stopped short of becoming so attractive people will make it a way of life."⁸⁵ His attitude concerning the apparent lack of work ethic and desire to aid oneself amongst welfare recipients was well summarised by his future appointee Spencer Williams, who reflected that "when the government steps in and assumes people's responsibility that they should take care of themselves, they can be irresponsible because of the easy way out."⁸⁶ This way of life—poverty, welfare dependency and apparent irresponsibility—was, Reagan seemingly believed, being transmitted from parents to children. One index-card amongst the campaign's reference materials noted that "the 18 year old girl who is no

⁸² Patterson, *America's Struggle*, p. 120.

⁸³ 'Social Welfare', RRGCF.

⁸⁴ 'Needy Children Barely Survive, Survey Shows', LAT, 16 September 1963.

⁸⁵ 'Reagan Would Fight Federal Welfare Plans', LAT, 11 February 1966.

⁸⁶ Williams, 'Human Relations Agency', RRGES-OH.

longer eligible for assistance when living with her mother may have considerable incentive to become a mother herself so as to be eligible again as the head of a new family group.”⁸⁷ Therefore, in addition to suggesting that poverty and dependence on welfare were being passed down from generation to generation, Reagan was also implying that the erosion of the values of self-reliance and work was being transmitted to the children of poor, able-bodied parents. He reflected one of the cornerstones of the ‘culture of poverty’ thesis; but the version which he offered Californian voters was more conservative than that of Lewis and Harrington.

Reagan made his concerns about the apparent decline of the work ethic, and of self-help, particularly clear with regards to the Bracero farmworkers program. Established during WWII, the program allowed Mexican farmworkers to cross the border and assist with agricultural work in a number of states, including California. Eventually, in 1964, the program was ended, leaving major Californian growers with a worker shortage—although Braceros had never actually constituted a majority of seasonal workers.⁸⁸ Various growers in the state therefore attempted to encourage work requirements to be attached to welfare programs for the able-bodied, as Ellen Reese documents.⁸⁹ In some counties, this was agreed to, and welfare recipients were required to undertake farmwork in order to continue receiving their benefits: an early form of the arrangement that would come to be known later in the century as ‘workfare’. Growers complained, however, that those on welfare did not have the “work habit”, a complaint that may have been made in the hope of encouraging the

⁸⁷ ‘Welfare Benefits and Wages—Is There Incentive to Get a Job?’, RRGCF, Box C38, Folder EEE, Undated.

⁸⁸ Reese, *Backlash Against Welfare Mothers*, p. 53.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 50-53.

reinstatement of the Bracero scheme.⁹⁰ Whether this was the case or not, the issue was a major one in the state, to the extent that candidate Reagan discussed it in his campaign some eighteen months later.

The apparent problems that growers had had with welfare recipients, he argued, were symptomatic of the fact that generations were increasingly seeing welfare as a way of life, rather than self-help or hard work. Speaking in San Francisco, he referred to those “people who showed up [to replace Bracero workers] for half a day and went home with backache”.⁹¹ At another campaign stop, he spoke of the unemployed who had “never averaged more than two days in the orange groves before they went back on one of our many welfare programs.”⁹² Seemingly, this was a way in which Reagan was able to appeal to the more liberal north of the state, where agriculture was a considerable part of the economy, with one poll suggesting that a key weakness for Brown was the Bracero issue.⁹³ More than this, however, it demonstrated the extent to which Reagan felt old values of work and self-reliance were in decline amongst the able-bodied poor. Perhaps he had not taken note of an October 1964 survey by the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA), which found that over half of those LA unemployed questioned stated they would be prepared to undertake Bracero work, as long as certain basic conditions were met.⁹⁴

Clearly, then, Reagan felt that able-bodied welfare recipients were becoming increasingly dependent on government ‘handouts’, rather than on themselves or employment. These concerns were underscored in his rhetoric by his positive

⁹⁰ ‘Farmers Ask County to Pay Relief Workers’, LAT, 7 October 1964; Reese, *Backlash Against Welfare Mothers*, pp. 96-97.

⁹¹ ‘Advertising Clubs Speech’, RRGCF, Box C30, Book I, 1 March 1966.

⁹² ‘Elk Grove Speech’, RRGCF, Box C30, Book II, 11 May 1966.

⁹³ Field, M., ‘Press Release Number 551’, California Field Poll (hereafter CFP), 23 February 1966 accessed online at [http://ucdata.berkeley.edu/data_record.php?recid=42], August 2012; Boyarsky, *Rise of Reagan*, pp. 119-122.

⁹⁴ ‘Many Jobless Here Found Willing to do Bracero Work’, LAT, 25 October 1964.

reinforcement of the values of self-help and hardwork. Frequently, the candidate contrasted depictions and accusations of welfare dependency with the values that he believed should be being promoted instead. Work was certainly one such value: Reagan made repeated references to “productivity”, something which appeared to be at odds with the perceived erosion of the work ethic amongst the able-bodied poor. Shortly before the June primary, Reagan emphasized the need to encourage welfare recipients “out into that productive life”, implying that whilst receiving welfare cheques they remained unproductive. Similarly, in remarks made some time earlier, he had advocated the importance of employment and training “for as many welfare recipients as possible in order to give them the self-respect which comes from useful service and to hasten the day when they can take their rightful place in California’s productive economy.”⁹⁵ Towards the end of the campaign, Reagan made this contrast between productivity stemming from work, and unproductivity stemming from welfare dependence, even more stark, comparing the “lazy and greedy” with those “who see no sin in honest toil.”⁹⁶ Honest toil and self-help were positive values, Reagan argued, which were also sanctioned by the “Biblical definition of charity and the idea of helping those who are either temporarily or permanently in need of help; and, of course, in the ancient Hebrew philosopher’s words that the highest form of help to the needy is to help them to help themselves.”⁹⁷ The historian Robert Dallek offers a psychological explanation for Reagan’s positive reinforcement of these values, arguing that the candidate’s childhood, in which he had had to cope with an alcoholic father, “implanted in him powerful feelings about dependence and independence, loss of control and self-possession.”⁹⁸ Whilst one must surely hesitate

⁹⁵ ‘*Speech*’, RRGCF, Box C30, Book II, 24 March 1966.

⁹⁶ ‘*News Release: Excerpts from Hayward*’, RRGCF.

⁹⁷ ‘*Issues and Answers*’, RRGCF.

⁹⁸ Dallek, *Reagan: Politics of Symbolism*, p. 14.

in placing analytical weight on attempted psychological studies of historical figures, Dallek is right to note that self-help and hard work were values emphasised by Reagan throughout his political life. His 1966 gubernatorial campaign was no exception to this.

As with Reagan's portrayal of able-bodied welfare recipients as distinct from Californian society, taxpayers and the disabled poor, his discussion of the apparent erosion of the work ethic and self-reliance was not entirely new. Indeed, as well as reflecting a conservative version of the 'culture of poverty' thesis, Reagan's rhetoric on alleged dependency also mirrored existing concerns within California. Some five years prior to the 1966 campaign, a county supervisor from Santa Cruz had remarked at a statewide conference that the belief existed that "it is better to be on welfare than self-providing."⁹⁹ In a similar fashion, the grand jury tasked with investigating San Diego county's welfare programs (and one may wonder at the meaning of grand juries, usually used to conduct criminal investigations, being asked to examine welfare) worried in 1962 that "society is running into the danger of being responsible for a whole generation which lacks moral and economic integrity."¹⁰⁰ Self-reliance was also applauded in way similar to Reagan's emphasis on its positive importance. As early as 1960, the *LA Times* recounted the story of a woman and her son, hoping to pick enough cotton in the state to pay for their trip home to North Carolina. Offered help by local welfare officials, the woman declined, stating that she did not believe in government aid, and that her son was able to pick ninety pounds of cotton a day. The *LA Times*, which would officially endorse Reagan in 1966, praised her stance, wishing that "there were more of the same spirit." The woman's son was five years

⁹⁹ 'Aid to Needy Children Set-Up Draws Criticism', LAT, 20 April 1961.

¹⁰⁰ 'More Rehabilitation in Welfare Work Asked', LAT, 13 January 1962.

old.¹⁰¹ Such celebration of self-help, and worry about its decline, was not unique to California: during the 1960s, these themes also suffused popular national magazines.¹⁰²

Reagan did not, however, repeat some of the more controversial stereotypes of welfare dependency and poverty as a ‘way of life’ from generation to generation that existed in California. A brief study of articles and letters in the admittedly right-of-centre *LA Times* suggests that at least some, although by no means all, Californians often associated welfare with African American single mothers: the ‘welfare mother’ stereotype. At times, references were made to women’s “hordes” or “broods” of children, and illegitimacy and promiscuity was seen as rife amongst those receiving AFDC.¹⁰³ This was, at least in part, related to the changing demographics of welfare recipients, as already discussed. As the numbers of people on welfare rolls rose from two million in 1950, to nine million in 1970, welfare also became increasingly associated with African Americans, both nationally and in California (an association that the Moynihan Report arguably added to).¹⁰⁴ Indeed, by the early 1960s the African American ‘welfare mother’ stereotype had emerged.¹⁰⁵

Reagan did not, however, explicitly refer to this in 1966, although he would, in 1974, famously refer to ‘welfare queens’. The journalist Bill Boyarsky, who covered some of Reagan’s first gubernatorial campaign, argued that the future president “conjured up visions of unwed mothers—Negroes, in the minds of many of his listeners—relaxing in sin, in front of a color television set, while living in welfare

¹⁰¹ ‘*The Long Walk to Bakersfield*’, LAT, 9 September 1960.

¹⁰² Reese, *Backlash Against Welfare Mothers*, p. 117.

¹⁰³ See, for example, ‘*Illegitimacy Called Worst County Welfare Problem*’, LAT, 11 February 1960; ‘*Attorney Criticizes Law, Social Welfare System on Illegitimacy*’, LAT, 30 April 1965.

¹⁰⁴ Handler and Hasenfeld, *Moral Construction of Poverty*, p. 85.

¹⁰⁵ Patterson, *America’s Struggle*, p. 110.

payments.”¹⁰⁶ However, the speeches and statements examined for this study do not explicitly contain such images. This was, perhaps, because Reagan and his campaign managers were so concerned to avoid the charge that the candidate was an extremist, or because he did not wish to evoke the controversies which had arisen in the wake of the Moynihan Report. It should also be clearly stated that Reagan was deeply upset by any insinuation that he was racist, and when he felt that it had been implied by others that he was prejudiced, had stormed out of one event.¹⁰⁷

However, it may also be the case that the Reagan campaign did not need to make references to the race or marital status of welfare recipients. Given the depictions that were appearing in the *LA Times*, a major newspaper, and the awareness of African American struggles brought about by the civil rights movement, many of those listening may, as Boyarsky partially suggests, have thought of black single mothers when the word ‘welfare’ was mentioned. Winslow Christian, Brown’s executive secretary in 1966, and the state’s former Secretary of Health and Welfare, warned the governor that “people think that welfare is supporting hordes of illegitimate Negro children produced by women who probably welcome a new pregnancy as a chance to augment the welfare check. Rational argument will not put this idea down.”¹⁰⁸ Campaign manager Stuart Spencer admits that “white conservative Republicans” were targeted by the campaign’s direct mail,¹⁰⁹ and that Reagan “was the first candidate that they [white conservatives] really identified with.”¹¹⁰ By contrast, African Americans were not a target voting group for the campaign: Spencer’s fellow campaign manager, William Roberts, later stated that they did

¹⁰⁶ Boyarsky, *Rise of Reagan*, pp. 166-167.

¹⁰⁷ Dallek, *Right Moment*, pp. 199-200.

¹⁰⁸ Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 225.

¹⁰⁹ Spencer, ‘*Developing a Campaign Management Organization*’, RRGES-OH.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

virtually no work in black communities, as there were “no votes there to speak of.”¹¹¹ This was in contrast to the campaign’s concerted efforts to woo Mexican American voters in the state, which would be rewarded with around 25% of the Mexican American vote.¹¹² Indeed, it was arguably this diversity that had prevented the ‘welfare mother’ stereotype from becoming as prevalent in California as it had become in many other states.¹¹³ The fact that these ideas did exist in the state prior to Reagan’s campaign, however, and the way that Reagan would link the 1965 riots in the predominantly black Watts area of Los Angeles—discussed in the following chapter—suggests that the ‘white backlash’ against civil rights issues was something linked very subtly with the welfare issue in 1966. Matthew Lassiter’s study of the southern Sunbelt argues that the Republicans in the late 1960s developed a ‘suburban strategy’ in which white concerns, such as taxes, were discussed in ways that subtly and implicitly linked them to the white ‘backlash’; although he does not apply the concept to California, it arguably fits Reagan’s campaign in 1966.¹¹⁴

Whether or not themes of race and gender were explicitly or implicitly woven into Reagan’s discourse on welfare, the sense that able-bodied welfare recipients were transmitting their poverty and dependency to their children was a clear theme of the future president’s discussions of welfare. These ideas had been a key part of the ‘culture of poverty’ thesis as put forward by Lewis, Harrington and Moynihan, but in Reagan’s campaign formed part of a more conservative version of the concept. The candidate suggested that welfare recipients were lacking in self-reliance and the will to work, becoming dependent instead on welfare and passing this ‘way of life’ from

¹¹¹ Roberts, W., ‘*Professional Campaign Management and the Candidate, 1960-6*’, RRGES-OH, 1978-9.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Reese, *Backlash Against Welfare Mothers*, p. 94.

¹¹⁴ Lassiter, M., *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South*, Princeton University Press, 2006.

generation to generation. Reagan bemoaned the loss of these values, and reinforced their importance in his speeches, contrasting them with the apparent dependency of the able-bodied poor. Through offering this conservative version of the ‘culture of poverty’s’ emphasis on the transmission of poverty and welfare from parents to children, he reflected the age-old belief that “welfare must promote independence from welfare.”¹¹⁵

However, he would argue, this was not occurring under liberal welfare programs. Able-bodied welfare recipients, distinct in values and behaviour from the rest of society, were losing the traditional values of self-help and hard work, instead becoming “too dependent on the government, which had become the master instead of the servant,”¹¹⁶ and passing this dependency on to their children. Existing welfare programs, Reagan argued, were allowing this, and even perpetuating poverty. It was in this way that his conservative version of the ‘culture of poverty’ thesis would inform his attack on liberal welfare and anti-poverty efforts, and his broader assault on the philosophy of liberalism, the points to which we must now turn.

¹¹⁵ Weiler, M., ‘*The Reagan Attack on Welfare*’, in Weiler, M., and Barnett Pearce, W., (eds.), *Reagan and Public Discourse in America*, University of Alabama Press, 1992, p. 228.

¹¹⁶ Cannon, *Reagan*, p. 108.

Chapter Three: ‘Poverty is Winning’ – Reagan’s Attack on Liberal Welfare Programs

For Matthew Dallek, Reagan’s 1966 victory represented a defeat from which liberalism would never fully recover.¹¹⁷ Whilst this is perhaps an exaggeration, Dallek’s sense that Reagan’s campaign mounted a stinging attack on liberalism is accurate. A major component of this assault on the philosophy of liberalism was Reagan’s criticism of liberal welfare and anti-poverty efforts which, as already discussed, he conflated.¹¹⁸ Lengthening welfare rolls, and increasing costs in the state stemmed, Reagan suggested, from the failures of liberal programs which, he charged, had been expanded and liberalized, allowed for fraud and aided the decline of the values of self-help and hard work which Reagan so prized. His conservative version of the ‘culture of poverty’—his repeated emphasis on the ‘different’ values of the able-bodied poor and their transmission of poverty and welfare dependence as a way of life to their children—led him to suggest that liberal programs were wrong in their emphasis, as they did not arrest the decline of these values. These programs, Reagan would argue, actually perpetuated poverty and contributed to the civil unrest of the Watts riots. His accusations would merge with other campaign themes, such as ‘law and order’, to create a sense that liberalism, broadly, was failing, and that its emphasis on governmental activity, as will be discussed in the following chapter, was threatening American liberty. Yet he would also offer an alternative: the ‘Creative Society’, which placed an emphasis on employment rather than ‘handouts’ and private, rather than public, activity.

Reagan’s charge that liberal welfare and anti-poverty efforts were failing was made repeatedly, and he suggested that increasing welfare costs and the growing

¹¹⁷ Dallek, *Right Moment*, p. 239.

¹¹⁸ Mittelstadt, *From Welfare to Workfare*, p. 166.

numbers of able-bodied Californians in receipt of public assistance were the result of these failures. This argument was introduced at the very beginning of the campaign, with Reagan firmly laying the blame for increasing welfare costs at the door of Governor Brown, and trying to appeal to taxpayers in the process:

“if you are an average family of four... your share of the state and local tax burden is \$1,396 this year... The portion of that which goes for public welfare has doubled in these eight years, and in spite of so-called prosperity, the number of people receiving welfare has increased since the end of WWII from two out of every hundred citizens to more than 15 out of 100.”¹¹⁹

In fact, around only 5% of Californians received welfare,¹²⁰ and Reagan’s error spurred his campaign managers to hire Holden and Plog’s BASICO research efforts to ensure that the candidate did not make any further mistakes in the campaign.¹²¹ Reagan did not, however, stop emphasising the increasing numbers on relief and burgeoning welfare costs in the state, disproving the Californian Democratic Party’s chairman’s argument that Reagan’s inaccuracy rendered him bereft of “all public credentials to criticize the welfare programs.”¹²² Indeed, by the latter stages of the campaign, Reagan was even more explicitly linking Brown’s time as governor with the state’s growing welfare budget, noting that each Californian’s share of state welfare costs had increased by 90.2% since 1958, when Brown was first elected governor.¹²³ If more people were receiving welfare, and costs were increasing, Reagan suggested to the Californian electorate, then liberal programs were clearly not working.

In fact, Reagan charged, not only were liberal welfare and anti-poverty efforts floundering, but they were also worsening the problems which they sought to solve.

¹¹⁹ *Plan For Action*, RRGCF.

¹²⁰ *Brown Urges Reagan to ‘Get Facts Straight’*, LAT, 7 January 1966.

¹²¹ Dallek, *Right Moment*, pp. 195-196.

¹²² *Brown’s Record Seen as Main Issue in ‘66’*, LAT, 30 January 1966.

¹²³ *News Release: Excerpts from Hayward*, RRGCF.

As he wrote in a letter to a journalist for a Japanese American newspaper in the state, “the vice of the present situation is that... unfortunates are given nothing but a partial anaesthetic in the form of a money dole, which only insures [sic] their remaining in the ‘slums’.”¹²⁴ The same accusation had been made even more bluntly in front of an audience earlier in the campaign, when Reagan remarked—with a touch of his characteristic wit—that “all I can say about the War on Poverty is that poverty is winning!”¹²⁵ As well as increasing welfare costs, Reagan argued that liberal programs had increased and perpetuated welfare dependency. Telling one audience of a booklet produced by the State Welfare Department, he jibed that it “explains that dependency is your social right.”¹²⁶ Welfare historian Michael Katz argues that liberals in the 1960s—as well as originators of the ‘culture of poverty’ thesis such as Harrington and Moynihan—felt that without liberal programs developed by the government, the poor “would remain mired in degradation”.¹²⁷ Reagan, however, suggested the opposite: the poor were remaining mired *because* of liberal welfare and anti-poverty programs, which had “institutionalized and perpetuated poverty, at the expense of welfare recipients and the public alike.”¹²⁸

Liberal welfare policy had done this, Reagan charged, through emphasising the wrong values and failing to encourage the right ones. As already demonstrated, the future president believed that self-help and hard work were vital and positive values, but, in the conservative version of the ‘culture of poverty’ thesis which he presented in his campaign rhetoric, he felt that these forms of behaviour were in

¹²⁴ ‘Letter to Kats Kunitsugu’, RRGCF, Box C34, Folder 66 H&W, 1 November 1966.

¹²⁵ ‘California Council for Adult Education’, RRGCF.

¹²⁶ ‘Pacifica Junior Annual Chamber of Commerce Meeting, Nick’s Rockaway Restaurant’, Box C30, Book I, 2 April 1966.

¹²⁷ Katz, *Undeserving Poor*, pp. 22-23.

¹²⁸ ‘Proposed Answers to Questions Submitted by Bill Boyarsky’, Box C34, Folder 66 H&W, RRGCF, Undated.

decline amongst able-bodied welfare recipients. Liberal programs, he argued, had failed to arrest this decline, and had even exacerbated it, thus worsening the problem. His key accusation in this regard was that liberal programs gave the able-bodied poor cash payments, a ‘dole’, rather than encouraging work. As he remarked in March, “we are doing the age old mistake of perpetuating poverty... instead of using that same money to cure and end poverty and find ways through training and education to make people self-sustaining.”¹²⁹ These rehabilitative methods—employment and education—were what was necessary, Reagan argued, telling the journalist Kats Kunitsugu in response to an article she had written that if elected governor, he would “provide the necessary stimulus and help so that the ‘uncultured’ can *help themselves* to be more cultured, so that the ‘unclean’ can help themselves to be clean, and so that the ‘unambitious’ will *help themselves* to acquire the necessary ambition to enable them to leave the slums....”¹³⁰ Whilst his references to the ‘uncultured’, ‘unclean’, and ‘unambitious’ may have been responses to words that Kunitsugu had used in her article, rather than his own adjectives, the fact that Reagan saw a ‘stimulus’ to these groups as necessary, and that he sensed they required ambition, underlines the ways in which his conservative version of the ‘culture of poverty’ concept, discussed in chapters one and two, informed his criticism of liberal welfare problems. As Kirsten Gronbjerg argues, Reagan’s and other conservatives’ ideas about welfare policy rested “to a large extent on the culture of poverty theory... any effort to combat poverty and rising welfare rolls, then, must begin with rehabilitating and changing the poor, since they are assumed to be deficient or at fault.”¹³¹ This sense that liberal programs were misguided in their approach—by failing to reinforce the importance of

¹²⁹ ‘California Council for Adult Education’, RRGCF.

¹³⁰ ‘Letter to Kats Kunitsugu’, RRGCF.

¹³¹ Gronbjerg, *Mass Society*, p. 7.

work and self-help—was neatly summed up by the northern Californian Republican Vernon Cristina, who was involved with the Reagan campaign:

“all of the social welfare programs were just extremely liberal. Well, those are things that I just didn’t approve of, because I thought it took a man’s independence away from him. When you start holding everybody’s hands and try to lead them around, you’re gonna run out of hands sooner or later.”¹³²

Ronald Reagan seemingly took the same attitude, believing that liberal welfare programs did too little to encourage the self-help, and hard work that he felt was so important, and were apparently lacking amongst the able-bodied poor.

A related, although smaller accusation made by the future president was that the policies and programs advocated by Brown and his fellow liberals had done too little to prevent fraud, a behaviour that Reagan had also identified as existent amongst able-bodied welfare recipients. One campaign memo discussed Brown’s veto of a bill in summer 1965 which had proposed giving all new welfare applicants in California a personal interview in an attempt to reduce fraud.¹³³ It was implied that the failure of the Brown administration to take such action had directly allowed fraud to continue, a problem which had “increased rapidly in the last several years”, especially amongst those on AFDC, according to the Reagan campaign.¹³⁴ Whilst this element of his criticism of liberal programs was less fundamental than his charge that they were failing to boost values of self-reliance and hard work, it was a theme that already exercised many Californian voters, as has been shown. Moreover, it linked to his belief that liberals were failing to prevent certain behaviour amongst the able-bodied

¹³² Cristina, V., *A Northern Californian Views Conservative Politics and Policies, 1963-1970*, RRGES-OH, 1986.

¹³³ *Social Welfare State Bulletin Number One*, RRGCF, Box C34, Folder 66 H&W, Undated.

¹³⁴ *Social Welfare*, RRGCF.

poor: the behaviour and values which he had identified in his conservative version of the ‘culture of poverty’ idea.

It was the accusation that existing welfare programs were not emphasising rehabilitation through education and training which remained the main focus of Reagan’s attack on liberal anti-poverty and welfare efforts, however. Yet this attack was, to some extent, unfair. In Brown’s 1963 inaugural address, shortly after winning a second term, he stated that “our social programs place new emphasis on the principle that those receiving assistance want a chance for honest work, not government charity for life.”¹³⁵ As early as 1962, a commission had been established, headed by Winslow Christian, to study the state’s welfare system and its achievements and flaws.¹³⁶ Moreover, in January 1965, Brown had requested \$100,000 for a study of welfare administration, noting that “the welfare reservoir is made up of people who are under-skilled and under-educated... its back can only be broken by an all-out effort to help as many recipients as possible back to a productive place in society.”¹³⁷ The *LA Times* was moved to comment just weeks before the election that “when the issue of welfare reforms comes up... it often sounds as though the two candidates had the same speechwriter... the candidates agree not only on the importance of rehabilitation of welfare recipients but also on the need for over-all improvement in welfare administration.”¹³⁸ This was apparently not enough for the newspaper, however, which would officially endorse Reagan a fortnight later, despite its publisher having told Brown that the paper would not endorse either candidate in

¹³⁵ ‘Text of Brown’s Inaugural Speech’, LAT, 8 January 1963.

¹³⁶ Christian, W., ‘The Human Side of Public Administration’, Interviews on Social Welfare History, Regional Oral History Office, Bancroft Library, University of California-Berkeley, (hereafter SWH-OH), 1993, accessed online at [http://bancroft.berkeley.edu/ROHO/collections/subjectarea/ics_movements/social_welfare.html], March 2012.

¹³⁷ ‘Brown to Seek Funds for Full Welfare Study’, LAT, 29 April 1965.

¹³⁸ ‘Proper Goals of Welfare’, LAT, 2 October 1966.

the general election if Reagan was victorious in the primary.¹³⁹ Reagan himself also suggested that Brown's rhetoric on welfare was similar to his, arguing that the governor was trying to copy his apparently popular stance on welfare.¹⁴⁰ When Brown dismissed his state Director of Welfare, John Wedemeyer, in August over a minor scandal involving funds paid to an anti-poverty group, a 'white paper' produced by Reagan's campaign argued that Brown was trying to blunt their attack on his "misguided" welfare policies, an impression that Wedemeyer himself largely agreed with.¹⁴¹

There was, perhaps, a level of calculus in Brown's actions and rhetoric on welfare, something unsurprising for a politician campaigning for office. However, his early emphasis on the importance of rehabilitation in welfare was also reflective of the broader liberal social policy of the period, suggesting that Reagan's criticism was not entirely fair. As many historians have noted, War on Poverty and welfare programs placed a strong emphasis on rehabilitating able-bodied welfare recipients through employment and education.¹⁴² Indeed, as Mittelstadt argues in her study of AFDC in the postwar period, rehabilitation "became the centrepiece of postwar poverty and welfare policy" amongst liberals.¹⁴³ However much Brown's emphasis came from electoral expediency or broader trends, though, Reagan still argued that liberal welfare programs were misguided in their apparent failure to promote self-reliance and hard work, and thus were increasing welfare costs, numbers on relief, and dependency.

¹³⁹ Gottlieb, R., and Wolt, I., *Thinking Big: the Story of the Los Angeles Times, Its Publishers, and their Influence on Southern California*, GP Putnam's Sons, 1977, p. 400.

¹⁴⁰ 'News Release: Excerpts from Hayward', RRGCF.

¹⁴¹ 'White Paper', RRGCF, Box C34, Folder 66 H&W, Undated.

¹⁴² Mittelstadt, *From Welfare to Workfare*, pp. 11-19; Trattner, *From Poor Law*, pp. 321-325.

¹⁴³ Mittelstadt, *From Welfare to Workfare*, p. 11.

Reagan's criticisms of liberal welfare and anti-poverty efforts were particularly clear in relation to the 1965 Watts riots. Following an altercation between a young African American man and a police officer in the area, 32,000 'active rioters' and 72,000 'close spectators' became involved in riots which took several days to be quelled, and which left 34 people dead.¹⁴⁴ During the campaign the following year, Reagan stated that he did wish to make the riots a political issue, but the suggestions he made about Watts's causes implied otherwise.¹⁴⁵ One of Brown's most senior advisors, Hale Champion, felt that the riots made the 1966 election "a whole new ball game".¹⁴⁶

Poverty was soon linked with the riots, footage of which had broadcast live into the homes of Californians for four days.¹⁴⁷ The *LA Times*, just three days after the riots began, noted one earlier report showing that much of the housing in Watts was old and dilapidated, and stated that average family incomes in the predominantly African American area were around half that of families living in the more middle-class (and more white) San Fernando Valley.¹⁴⁸ Indeed, unemployment in parts of Watts stood at over 30%.¹⁴⁹ Reagan also linked the riots to poverty, but in a slightly different way: he suggested that anti-poverty programs had offered more than they could deliver, raising the expectations of the poor and then failing to meet them. Speaking at Berkeley, Reagan argued that many people had moved from the South to

¹⁴⁴ Horne, G., *Fire This Time: the Watts Uprising and the 1960s*, University of Virginia Press, 1995, p. 3.

¹⁴⁵ 'Issues and Answers', RRGCF.

¹⁴⁶ Quoted in Dallek, *Right Moment*, p. 149.

¹⁴⁷ Perlstein, *Nixonland*, pp. 3-10.

¹⁴⁸ 'Low Incomes, Bad Housing: Scene of Rioting is Substandard District', *LAT*, 14 August 1966.

¹⁴⁹ Dallek, *Right Moment*, p. 137.

California in the hope of a better life, seemingly referring to African Americans.¹⁵⁰

These hopes, he continued, had not been fulfilled:

“they had come here many times in their lack of education and knowledge... believing in a lot of promises that the streets were paved with gold and that all their problems solved if they once [sic] got to Los Angeles and it wasn’t true, of course. Every morning they woke up and there was not a bundle of goodies on the front porch.”¹⁵¹

His idea that migrants apparently hoped to simply find ‘goodies’ waiting on their porches seemed to imply that these able-bodied poor wished to improve their lives without working to do so. Yet in an apparent contradiction, he also argued that such migrants had been affected by the state’s “deteriorating business climate” and resultant unemployment.¹⁵² Both these ideas, however, carried the same underlying theme: that liberal welfare and anti-poverty efforts were raising hopes too far, whilst also failing to place an emphasis on the importance of employment in solving the poverty problem. As Dallek and Horne both note, Reagan portrayed liberals’ welfare promises and allegedly paternalistic programs as key causes of the Watts riots.¹⁵³ He was not the only one, however, to do so: the commission of inquiry into Watts, chaired by former CIA Director John McCone, detailed the numbers of welfare recipients in the riot area and advocated “additional incentives for welfare recipients to become independent of public aid.”¹⁵⁴

However, Reagan did not merely attack liberal welfare programs for their alleged perpetuation of dependency and erosion of values of self-reliance: he also

¹⁵⁰ ‘Boalt Hall’, RRGCF.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Horne, *Fire This Time*, p. 301; Dallek, *Right Moment*, p. 187.

¹⁵⁴ Governor’s Commission on the Los Angeles Riots, ‘*Violence in the City: An End or a Beginning?*’, December 1965, accessed online at [<http://www.usc.edu/libraries/archives/cityinstress/mccone/contents.html>], April 2012; Horne, *Fire This Time*, pp. 231-233.

offered an alternative.¹⁵⁵ This alternative further reflected his belief in the importance of rehabilitating able-bodied welfare recipients, and promoting the work ethic and efforts at self-help. Reagan's solution was labelled the 'Creative Society', a phrase clearly designed to rival Johnson's 'Great Society'. Taking the label from the conservative Reverend W.S. McBurnie,¹⁵⁶ Reagan's campaign applied it to a philosophy in which private enterprise played a key role in alleviating economic and social problems, reflecting the candidate's mistrust of government-led welfare efforts, the subject of the following chapter. Regarding Watts, the candidate proposed a 'Job Opportunities Board' (JOB), which would use citizens and private enterprise to collate government-provided information on welfare recipients, and attempt to find them employment or training.¹⁵⁷ According to the campaign, the JOB offered "the framework for a far better solution to welfare problems by turning to the people themselves to seek the solution".¹⁵⁸ Reagan further emphasised his belief in the importance of rehabilitative welfare programs by commending the work of a scheme run by the LA Chamber of Commerce, as well as a program in the city named 'Operation Bootstrap', in which private groups aimed to find work or training for those able-bodied poor in receipt of welfare.¹⁵⁹

Of course, Reagan's attacks on liberal welfare and anti-poverty efforts did not occur in a vacuum: there were many other issues which Californians were concerned about in 1966, and which Reagan also repeatedly discussed. These included the 'law and order' issue, particularly in the wake of Watts and the nascent Hunter's Point riots of September 1966 in San Francisco, civil rights, the cost of government and campus

¹⁵⁵ Dallek, *Right Moment*, p. 188.

¹⁵⁶ Schuparra, *Triumph of the Right*, p. 114.

¹⁵⁷ 'Social Welfare Bulletin Number Two: the Job Opportunities Board (JOB)', RRGCF, Box C34, Folder 66 H&W, Undated.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ 'Occidental College', RRGCF.

unrest at Berkeley, all of which were listed by voters in one February 1966 poll as important—along with welfare.¹⁶⁰ Reagan’s criticisms of liberal welfare programs would, to some extent, link to these other themes, forming part of a broad attack on liberalism. His portrayals of welfare recipients in the ways already detailed, and his accusations of liberal welfare programs’ inability to reduce poverty effectively, as discussed here, allowed events in the context of the election to be associated with the failure of such liberal programs and, therefore, liberalism itself. The ‘backlash’ against civil rights, which has been widely written about by numerous historians, was one clear part of this, as Reagan’s links between welfare and Watts suggest. Whilst the future president was not unsympathetic to the plight of African Americans, and generally avoided explicitly racial discussions of the welfare issue, many Californians seemed to be growing weary with the black struggle for civil rights. In 1964, voters had overturned Brown’s major civil rights achievement, the Rumford Fair Housing Act, which had outlawed discrimination in housing, although the law would be reinstated by California’s Supreme Court in 1966.¹⁶¹ Moreover, one poll following the Watts riots showed that 66% of whites believed the main solution to urban problems was to cure social conditions, yet only 29% of whites felt that they should “bend over backwards” to help.¹⁶² Furthermore, 36% of whites perceived a major cause of the riots to have been a lack of respect for law and order, and just over half felt that police should be quicker to suppress such events in future.¹⁶³ It was this sense that ‘law and order’ was lacking that Reagan would use, suggesting that liberals could not sufficiently uphold order. In this way, welfare was linked with the ‘law and order’ issue. As Brown later reflected, “the people tended to equate Negro unrest with *all*

¹⁶⁰ Field, M., ‘Press Release Number 528’, CFP, 24 June 1966.

¹⁶¹ Brilliant, M., *The Color of America Has Changed: How Racial Diversity Shaped Civil Rights Reform in California, 1941-1987*, Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 203.

¹⁶² Field, M., ‘Press Release Number 502’, CFP, 24 November 1965.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

crime, which was rising sharply, and to turn all the more against welfare and anti-poverty costs,”¹⁶⁴ suggesting that many Californians equated welfare with African Americans, Watts and crime.

Brown did emphasize the importance of law and order—he was, after all, a former District Attorney—but he also stressed the need to continue anti-poverty efforts.¹⁶⁵ Yet for many, it was the attempts of Brown and his fellow liberals to combat poverty which had led to unrest and were damaging the traditional American ideals of self-help and work, as well as contributing to increasing welfare costs, recipients, and dependency. Although Brown described himself as a ‘responsible liberal’, and later argued that “my own attitude toward the role of government in society cannot be appropriately labelled either ‘liberal’ or ‘conservative’”,¹⁶⁶ he was certainly perceived as a liberal in 1966. Reagan therefore benefited from Californians’ fears about welfare, civil rights, and ‘law and order’—as well as campus unrest and the youth counter-culture. As Rick Perlstein argues,

“the outrages... felt linked: the filth, the crime, ‘the kids’, the Communists... It all had something to do with ‘liberalism’. Pat Brown was a ‘liberal’. And it arrived that liberalism’s enemy, Ronald Reagan, wasn’t doing too poorly at all. He was providing a political outlet for all the outrages...”¹⁶⁷

Perlstein’s analysis is largely correct, but, crucially, ignores welfare as an issue. Indeed, welfare was not discrete from many of these other campaign topics, particularly ‘law and order’ and civil rights, as shown.

Reagan, then, clearly suggested that liberal welfare programs were not working, and even perpetuating poverty and dependency through their failure to

¹⁶⁴ Brown, E., *Reagan and Reality: the Two Californias*, Praeger Publishers, 1970, pp. 14-15 (emphasis original).

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 17.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, p. 65.

¹⁶⁷ Perlstein, *Nixonland*, p. 75.

challenge the behaviour of the able-bodied poor and reinforce the work ethic and value of self-help. Moreover, his attack on welfare policy merged with other major campaign issues to create a sense that liberalism was a floundering philosophy. By raising concerns about the efficacy of liberal welfare programs, Reagan was able to suggest that liberalism itself was at fault, and to propose an alternative, the ‘Creative Society’.

This generated one of the two pillars of the future president’s assault on liberalism. Welfare programs, to Reagan, were a cornerstone of liberalism’s belief in the ability and efficacy of governmental efforts to solve problems. This was a belief with which Reagan was ill at ease, viewing it as both misguided and, as will be seen, harmful to American liberty. As Brown later reflected, with a hint of bitterness, “Reagan...assumed that I, most Democrats, and all ‘liberals’ are ‘bleeding hearts’ who are eager to spend recklessly in the name of ‘omnipotent government’.”¹⁶⁸ It is Reagan’s attack on liberalism’s faith in government action—a faith which he saw as epitomised by welfare and anti-poverty policies—which is the focus of the following chapter.

¹⁶⁸ Brown, *Reagan and Reality*, p. 65.

Chapter Four: The ‘Price’ of Welfare—Reagan and the Assault on Liberalism

To Reagan, liberal welfare programs were problematic because they were failing: costs and the numbers of those receiving benefits were on the rise, and values of self-reliance and hard work amongst welfare recipients—already weak in Reagan’s view—were being further damaged by the ‘handouts’ they received. However, he also saw liberal welfare and anti-poverty efforts as a major part of a greater and more fundamental problem: the expansion of government, both at a state and federal level. The growth of governmental activity—particularly in the field of welfare programs and policy—was, he suggested, dangerous, as well as bureaucratic and inefficient. In this way, Reagan reflected fears of the era about the rise and spread of Communism. Over a decade on from the height of McCarthyism, fears about Communism remained a part of public concerns and political discourse; Reagan was elected governor amidst the escalation of American involvement in Vietnam. The increasing scope of federal and state activity regarding welfare was, Reagan claimed, a major component of liberal philosophy, and challenged the values of liberty that Americans held so dear. As Matthew Dallek states, for Reagan, “it all boiled down to totalitarianism versus freedom,”¹⁶⁹ and welfare seemed to fall more in the sphere of the former than the latter. Through linking welfare and anti-poverty efforts with liberalism, and arguing that this had led to increased bureaucracy and the expansion of government, Reagan offered a strong ideological critique of liberal philosophy. Through the ‘Creative Society’ and his presentation of himself as a ‘citizen politician’, moreover, he also offered Californian voters an alternative to liberal welfare policies.

According to the Reagan campaign’s press secretary, Lyn Nofziger, Reagan “felt that government should be cut, felt that government could be cut, felt that spending could be limited, felt that taxes could be cut, felt that government interferes too much in people’s lives.”¹⁷⁰ That philosophy, Nofziger told his oral history interviewer some years later, was

¹⁶⁹ Dallek, *Right Moment*, p. 40.

¹⁷⁰ Nofziger, ‘*Press Secretary for Reagan*’, RRGES-OH.

“pretty well developed before I got there [in 1966].”¹⁷¹ Through work with General Electric, and as president of the Screen Actors Guild union in the McCarthy era, Reagan had developed a belief in free enterprise, small government, and staunch anti-Communism.¹⁷² Welfare programs and, by the mid-1960s, anti-poverty and Great Society schemes, were seen by Reagan as detrimental to American liberty through the role they played in government expansion, at both the state and federal level. As he stated in his 1964 address on behalf of Goldwater,

“you and I are told increasingly that we have to choose between a left or right, but I would like to suggest that there is no such thing as left or right. There is only an up or down—up to man’s age-old dream—the ultimate in individual freedom consistent with law and order—or down to the ant heap of totalitarianism, and regardless of their sincerity, their humanitarian motives, those who would trade our freedom for security have embarked on this downward course.”¹⁷³

His idea that liberalism was leading towards totalitarianism, with its ‘humanitarian motives’ and attempt to provide ‘security’ through welfare and anti-poverty programs, was a theme which would be reused in 1966.

Indeed, it is vital to recognise that Reagan appeared to equate the philosophy of liberalism with the ‘welfare state’. Speaking in early 1965 to a journalism fraternity in Los Angeles, Reagan specifically referred to the “liberal-welfare philosophy”.¹⁷⁴ Over a year later, Reagan spoke to a conservative Republican group about “the philosophy, held by Leaders [sic] of the opposition party that freedom from the age old problems, physical distress etc. is more important than freedom to chart our own lives.”¹⁷⁵ Repeating almost word-for-word his 1964 speech, Reagan’s announcement of his candidacy in 1966 made reference to “those earnest humanitarians who’d trade some measure of man’s independence for security or material welfare...”¹⁷⁶ In Reagan’s rhetoric, then, liberalism was, in large part, characterized

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Cannon, *Reagan*, pp. 71-94.

¹⁷³ ‘*Televised National Address*’ in Reagan, *Speaking My Mind*, p. 26.

¹⁷⁴ ‘*Reagan to Decide Soon on Running for Office*’, LAT, 22 January 1965.

¹⁷⁵ ‘*CRA Convention, Miramar Hotel*’, RRGCF, Box 30, Book I, 5 March 1966.

¹⁷⁶ ‘*Plan for Action*’, RRGCF.

by its welfare programs and attempts to achieve ‘security’. Whilst the future president recognized the humanitarian impulse behind liberalism and its efforts to ameliorate social ills, he also perceived it as potentially dangerous. Liberalism, and its attendant welfare programs, Reagan argued, increased bureaucracy and inefficiency, expanded the reach of the federal government into California, and, most dangerously of all, threatened the very idea of American liberty.

As Spencer, one of Reagan’s campaign managers, recalled, government efficiency was a key issue in 1966,¹⁷⁷ and the campaign suggested that efficiency was damaged by the increased bureaucracy and regulation which accompanied liberal welfare efforts. Responding to Brown’s budget for the fiscal year 1966-7, Reagan made a rhetorical display of the bureaucracy which he felt accompanied liberal welfare programs. Some county welfare officials, he stated, had to send to Sacramento each month

“more than 180 reports; and county case workers are guided by, and have to keep up with, 22 manuals and handbooks which, when stacked up and crammed together, fill a five-foot shelf. But, they can’t even keep ahead of them because in the Capitol the rule changers have made 1,655 revisions in this books [sic] in 18 months.”¹⁷⁸

This bureaucracy, Reagan claimed, was increasing costs and allowing welfare fraud to develop, as caseworkers were too busy dealing with paperwork to go out into the field, and he pledged to cut the federal regulations that state workers would have to obey.¹⁷⁹

What was crucial, however, was Reagan’s linkage of increased welfare bureaucracy with government and, particularly, the federal government, which provided some of the funds for state welfare and anti-poverty programs, and thus also had certain requirements about how the programs were administered. As he wrote in one letter, “evidence indicates that when the federal government gets into the act, there is more bureaucracy and red tape, not less.”¹⁸⁰ Indeed, Reagan painted a portrait of California as becoming increasingly beholden to the

¹⁷⁷ Spencer, ‘*Developing a Campaign Management Organization*’, RRGES-OH.

¹⁷⁸ ‘*Budget Speech*’, RRGCF.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ ‘*Letter to Mrs Aston*’, RRGCF.

federal government's whims. "How many of us realize," he asked, "that in order to get federal welfare funds, our state had to cancel all residence requirements for establishing welfare eligibility?"¹⁸¹ The liberals in Sacramento were responsible for this encroachment of the federal government into California, he argued, as well as the increased costs that it brought with it:

"we have a leadership gap in Sacramento. It abdicated their responsibility [sic] and they continue to seek the answer to every California problem in Washington. The free federal War on Poverty funds pay 90% of the bill for a while and then you read the fine print and you discover very shortly now we're supposed to pick up an increasing share of the task..."¹⁸²

The idea that welfare was leading to increased federal involvement in the state was a theme which he had also previously emphasised. In September 1965, in the midst of Johnson's flurry of Great Society legislation, the then-future candidate stated that "the wraps are off the Great Society, and we are to have the welfare state with an unprecedented federalization of American life."¹⁸³

To Reagan, this increased 'federalization' encroached on the freedom of California, and this process stemmed from liberal welfare programs. There are some, he argued—presumably referring to the Brown administration—"who'd give up state sovereignty and make the state an administrative district of federal government."¹⁸⁴ This could, Reagan felt, lead to the federal government making decisions concerning the state, with Californians having little or no control over such decisions. As he wrote in a November 1965 letter concerning the War on Poverty to a resident of Lancaster, some of the programs

"permit or even encourage cities and towns to bypass their state governments and give some of their local control directly to the federal government. Also under this program, Mr Shriver [Sargent Shriver, the head of the federal Office of Economic Opportunity, responsible for administering the various War on Poverty programs], has the authority to overrule the Governors and Legislatures of the 50 states."¹⁸⁵

¹⁸¹ *'Plan for Action'*, RRGCF.

¹⁸² *'TV Speech'*, RRGCF.

¹⁸³ *'Reagan Criticizes the Birch Society and Its Founder'*, LAT, 24 September 1965.

¹⁸⁴ *'Plan for Action'*, RRGCF.

¹⁸⁵ *'Letter to Mrs Glen'*, RRGCF, Box C34, Folder 66H&W, 18 November 1965.

More than simply impinging on the activities of the state, Reagan suggested, the expansion of federal government activities in the area of welfare and poverty was also increasing the tax burden of Californians. “We’re going to be paying for programs we didn’t plan”, he stated, “they were pre-fabricated in Washington and the only privilege [sic] and the only voice we had in regard to them was the privilege [sic] of paying for them.”¹⁸⁶ In this way, Reagan managed to link the expansion of government with increasing taxes and the subversion of freedom. As Robert Dallek argues,

“realistically perceiving that federal, state, and local governments were appropriating some of their hard-won material gains to aid less advantaged citizens, many of these people unrealistically saw public officials as undermining their freedom of choice or independence and made government the butt of their angry personal feelings about arbitrary authority.”¹⁸⁷

It should be noted that Reagan was not the first to raise concerns about the increasing scope of the federal government’s activities. Moreover, just two months before the election, the California County Supervisors Association, which spoke for county supervisors across the state, outlined a plan named ‘Cal-Flex’, under which bureaucracy and federal and state intervention in welfare programs would, supposedly, be lessened.¹⁸⁸ They sought a move back towards older traditions of local relief for the poor, but were opposed by Director of State Welfare John Wedemeyer, shortly before his resignation.¹⁸⁹ The *LA Times* and Reagan were more supportive, however, whilst Governor Brown asked an aide to look into the matter, noting that there were good arguments on both sides of the debate.¹⁹⁰ Therefore, in stating that liberal welfare programs were allowing greater federal expansion into state life, Reagan was not espousing a particularly novel view, but he was clearly reflecting the concerns of some Californians. Moreover, he was suggesting that liberalism, through the welfare programs that were seemingly so important a part of its philosophy, was endangering the freedom of the state that he wished to govern.

¹⁸⁶ ‘*TV Speech*’, RRGCF.

¹⁸⁷ Dallek, *Reagan: Politics of Symbolism*, pp. 31-32.

More fundamentally, though, and arguably more importantly, Reagan perceived liberalism—through the development of the ‘welfare state’—to be eroding the very *idea* of freedom. When announcing his candidacy, Reagan implicitly challenged the notion that Johnson’s Great Society programs were consistent with the American value of freedom, stating that “a big brother or paternalistic government can solve many problems for the people, but I don’t think we’ll like the price it charges—ever-increasing power over us and ever-decreasing individual freedom. A *great society* must be a free society...”¹⁹¹ His belief that welfare was harming freedom—and opening the door for Communism—was made more explicit just two months later, as Reagan sounded a clear warning to an audience of adult educators. “A concern for material welfare”, he told them,

“and the lack of an answer to so many of the problems brought on by age and disease and poverty and deprivation, have tempted all too many of us out onto the thin ice of the end justifying the needs. Of course, you will know that there can be no law and order if we ever subscribe to the philosophy that is so much a tenant of the secular nature of the Soviet.”¹⁹²

Here, in 1966, amidst the Cold War, Reagan’s linkage of attempts to eradicate poverty and provide welfare with the Soviet Union, and its secular nature—both values antithetical to those of many Americans—represented a strong attack on the liberal idea of attempting to remedy social problems through governmental action. Whilst he did not specifically mention liberalism in this speech, his references to ‘material welfare’ and ‘poverty’ would, most likely, have conjured the image of Governor Brown and his fellow liberals into the minds of many of his audience. As Lisa McGirr demonstrates in her study of wealthy Orange County, many conservatives sought to link expansions in federal activity with ‘collectivism’ or ‘socialism’, and thus appeal to the old American tradition of anti-statism.¹⁹³ Reagan’s rhetoric on welfare certainly followed this pattern, although this is not to state that he did not believe

¹⁹¹ ‘*Plan for Action*’, RRGCF (emphasis original).

¹⁹² ‘*California Council for Adult Education*’, RRGCF.

¹⁹³ McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*, p. 68.

what he was saying. Indeed, Dallek argues that “Reagan genuinely believed that communism was a serious threat to domestic tranquillity.”¹⁹⁴

This sense that liberals and their welfare programs undermined freedom was, moreover, linked to Reagan’s other criticisms that, as previously discussed, welfare payments led to dependency. Speaking to one Californian Republican group, he stated again that

“freedom from hunger and want are noble humanitarian goals, but there is no validity in our opponent’s assumption that it can only be obtained by giving up freedom to choose, freedom to try, yes, freedom to try and fail again. And no matter how generous the handout, there’s no real security, if the recipients of the handout are beholden to a force that can by its own decision take as well as give.”¹⁹⁵

Liberal welfare policies left people ‘beholden’ to the government and thus undermined their security; they also undermined freedom, Reagan suggested. Indeed, for Reagan, the whole idea of freedom was crucial, and thus its erosion through liberal anti-poverty and welfare programs was a serious concern. As well as suggesting that freedom was under threat from these policies, Reagan re-emphasised the importance of it as a value to be upheld. As he remarked in one speech, “the principle issue before the people of California today is the issue which confronts this country and the entire world. It is the dominant question which overrides all other considerations. The entire question can be summed up in one word: freedom.”¹⁹⁶ Liberalism, with its emphasis on government-led welfare efforts, Reagan argued, was undermining the values of liberty and freedom so vaunted by Americans in the Cold War era.

However, alongside these attacks on liberalism and its government-based approach to solving social issues through welfare and anti-poverty programs, the Reagan campaign also offered an alternative—unsurprisingly, for given the programs being undertaken both federally and in California by 1966, Reagan could hardly propose inaction on the issue. His key suggestion, as already introduced, was the ‘Creative Society’. As journalist Bill Boyarsky defined it, the ‘Creative Society’ essentially advocated that “politicians should be catalysts to

¹⁹⁴ Dallek, *Right Moment*, p. 40.

¹⁹⁵ ‘CRA Convention’, RRGCF.

¹⁹⁶ ‘Speech’, RRGCF.

harness all the resources of the private sector of the nation to solve America's problems."¹⁹⁷ Instead of government taking the lead role in solving social ills through welfare payments to the able-bodied, it would simply provide the information that would allow the private sector to provide employment and training for those who required it. In this way, the JOB, mentioned earlier, would have "its efficiency, productivity, and reactivity" assured.¹⁹⁸ Reagan suggested that private-sector solutions would be more efficient than governmental ones, and was firm in the intention that "the primary direction and control [of the JOB] would be exercised through the independent sector."¹⁹⁹ Indeed, so great was the campaign's faith in the ability of the private sector to help shorten the welfare rolls that it was even suggested that those private companies who provided training for welfare recipients (who would be required to accept positions or face losing their benefits, unless they could show good cause) may even receive payments from the state government to aid them in so doing.²⁰⁰

As well as perceiving the 'Creative Society' and its private sector emphasis as more efficient, the future president also suggested that it was morally more desirable than government action and intervention. In one speech in March 1966, Reagan rooted the idea in American history, suggesting that it was consistent with American values. Talking about the importance of getting ordinary people involved in solving problems through the 'Creative Society', Reagan argued that

"this country's been fighting the most successful war on poverty that the world has ever seen. We've been doing it for 200 of the 6000 years of recorded history. I think we have the energy and the ability on the part of our people to solve... every problem..."²⁰¹

His suggestion was that the values of America's founding nearly two hundred years previously had allowed for the activities of the people to solve problems and that this had been successful; liberal welfare programs, the suggestion went, were thus unnecessary and

¹⁹⁷ Boyarsky, *Rise of Reagan*, pp. 109-110.

¹⁹⁸ 'Social Welfare Bulletin Two', RRGCF.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ 'Occidental College', RRGCF.

potentially harmful to the ‘American way’. His belief that America and its old values had already lifted people out of poverty prior to liberal welfare efforts was something that resonated with those middle class, predominantly white, Californians who felt they had achieved success and wealth through hard work, rather than government aid. This was particularly the case in the south of the state where, McGirr argues, “the hundreds of individual success stories, the thousands of new businesses... reinforced an ethos of individualism that boded favourably for the Right.”²⁰² Reagan maintained that the expansion of government, at both state and federal level, due to liberal welfare policies and liberalism’s belief in the government acting to solve issues such as poverty, was harmful to both efficiency and American freedom. With the ‘Creative Society’, he offered an alternative—if relatively undetailed—philosophy to Johnson and his fellow liberals’ Great Society. As Lou Cannon states, Reagan suggested that “government must be reduced in size and... [that] ordinary citizens were competent enough to take charge of their own government and their own affairs.”²⁰³

As well as the ‘Creative Society’, the image of the candidate painted by both Reagan and his advisors also represented an alternative to liberalism and its belief in government action. Reagan was portrayed as a ‘citizen-politician’: an ordinary Californian interested in the problems facing the state and with a desire to help solve them. In this way, the ‘citizen-politician’ idea was strongly linked with the ‘Creative Society’ philosophy that Reagan espoused. To Reagan, liberalism, with its emphasis on government, was failing to harness the creative energies and ideas of ordinary people; he, in standing for the governorship of California, was attempting to become a role model for how citizens, rather than government, should be the driving force in politics. As he himself argued, the role of the citizen was to be

“an active participant in a creative society, with government serving as an agent to mobilize the full creative energies of the people, to solve the problems which in the last analysis only the people can solve, to let government ask for the

²⁰² McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*, p. 29.

²⁰³ Cannon, *Reagan*, p. 108.

leaders of industry, the professions, leaders from the campus, how modern technology can be applied to community life and to the community problems.”²⁰⁴

Of course, there were more political, and less completely philosophical, reasons for the portrayal of Reagan as a citizen-politician. Polls suggested that Reagan was seen by many as inexperienced, given that he had not held public office before.²⁰⁵ Therefore, the idea that he was simply a concerned Californian citizen could be an advantage in overcoming this.²⁰⁶ Yet many involved with the campaign also sensed that emphasising that Reagan was not a career politician could actually prove advantageous. As Spencer argues, “we felt it was a strength to have somebody that had been out of the system to be running for this high office. We felt that’s what people wanted for a change—somebody that wasn’t a bureaucrat or in the present system...”²⁰⁷ State Republican chairman Gaylord Parkinson concurred, stating later that the citizen-politician image was helpful in 1966, as politicians were unpopular and Brown, seeking his third term in office, was perceived as a politician.²⁰⁸ Yet whilst this may suggest that the citizen-politician portrayal of Reagan was not as entirely grounded in philosophy as Reagan inferred it was, the happiness of his campaign team to emphasize the fact that he was not a politician underlines the sense that Californians were dubious about government in 1966. Even Brown later reflected that Reagan had been advantaged by his lack of political experience.²⁰⁹ Reagan, the citizen-politician seeking to allow a ‘Creative Society’ to blossom, offered an alternative to the government activism of liberalism and its welfare programs.

The future president, therefore, had suggested that liberal welfare policies were failing to solve the problems of poverty, and were perpetuating welfare dependency whilst undermining traditional values of work and self-reliance. More than this, however, Reagan also argued that liberalism, characterised by government activity in the sphere of social

²⁰⁴ ‘Boalt Hall’, RRGCF.

²⁰⁵ Field, ‘Press Release Number 551’, CFP.

²⁰⁶ Dallek, *Right Moment*, p. 176.

²⁰⁷ Spencer, ‘Developing a Campaign Management Organization’, RRGES-OH.

²⁰⁸ Parkinson, G., ‘California Republican Party Official, 1962-1967’, RRGES-OH, 1980.

²⁰⁹ Brown, *Reagan and Reality*, p. 14.

welfare, challenged the basic American values of freedom and liberty. By expanding the reach of the federal government into California, as well as the role of state governments, welfare programs, as advocated by liberals, he argued, impinged on the freedoms of the state and its inhabitants. This was, he suggested to Californians, clearly dangerous in an era where Communism was seen as a clear threat to the US. As well as representing a serious threat to American liberty, Reagan suggested that liberal welfare and anti-poverty efforts also led to large, bureaucratic, and inefficient government. Yet what was most important was his attack on liberalism—and its welfare programs—as threats to American freedom and the ‘American way’. As Gerard De Groot argues, the Republican candidate “had some very basic beliefs about the relation of the citizen to the state and about individual freedoms.”²¹⁰ It was these beliefs that coloured his strong attack on liberal welfare programs, and which also informed his efforts to advance an alternative: the ‘Creative Society’ filled with ‘citizen-politicians’ such as Reagan. In this way, welfare had formed a key part of Reagan’s attack on the liberal belief in government action. The significance of this for future study—as well as Reagan’s difficulties in implementing his ‘Creative Society’ vision as governor—must now be briefly considered, alongside some other concluding thoughts.

²¹⁰ De Groot, *Electable Person*, p. 27.

Conclusion

Asked on January 4, 1966, as he announced his candidacy, what the central issue of the forthcoming campaign would be, Ronald Reagan replied:

“...I think there is a difference between the Republican approach and the Democratic approach in the ‘Great Society’... I don’t believe the pattern that has been laid down by the present ‘Great Society’ can at the same time include a free society. And I think what we must have in America is the opportunity for all, and all who are willing to accept opportunity; and, at the same time, compassion and care for all those who, through no fault of their own, are unable to accept it. But I think... the last resort is the handout, the dole; the most desirable and the most effective is to help people to help themselves and that, I think, typifies the Republican approach.”²¹¹

His answer was telling. It suggested that liberal anti-poverty and welfare programs—the ‘Great Society’ and the ‘handout’—were, for him, issues absolutely fundamental to the campaign. Moreover, his statement, as one may expect of a politician announcing their candidacy for public office, almost perfectly framed the ways in which welfare would be discussed as an issue in his forthcoming campaign. As this study has sought to demonstrate, welfare was indeed a major topic in Reagan’s first gubernatorial campaign. It was a subject to which he would return time and time again, reflecting both existing concerns amongst some Californians about the costs of welfare and anti-poverty programs, and the convictions about certain values and basic philosophical principles that Reagan himself seemed to hold.²¹²

Firstly, this dissertation has demonstrated that Reagan’s portrayals of able-bodied welfare recipients reflected a conservative version of the mid-century ‘culture of poverty’ thesis, originally developed by figures such as Oscar Lewis, Michael Harrington, and Daniel Patrick Moynihan. Reagan firmly distinguished between disabled, elderly and blind recipients of public assistance—the ‘deserving’ poor—and those able-bodied persons who received welfare through programs such as AFDC—the ‘undeserving’ poor. This latter group, he suggested, frequently exhibited behaviour completely different from that of the rest of society, such as fraud or sloth. Additionally, Reagan painted a portrait of many able-bodied welfare recipients as passing these behaviours, as well as dependency on welfare, to the next

²¹¹ ‘*Announcement*’, RRGCF, Box C30, Book I, 4 January 1966.

²¹² Spencer, ‘*Developing a Campaign Management Organization*’, RRGES-OH.

generation. Thus, two major elements of the ‘culture of poverty’ idea were—either deliberately or unintentionally—reflected in Reagan’s treatment of the welfare issue: that the poor were ‘different’, and that their way of life was being transmitted from parents to children. Rather than suggesting that the ‘different’ behaviour of the able-bodied poor was an adaptive response to broader social and economic issues, however, as Lewis, Harrington and Moynihan had done, Reagan implied that such behaviour was, to some extent, the cause of poverty.

Secondly, it has been shown that this conservative version of the ‘culture of poverty’ thesis, as offered by Reagan, led to policy prescriptions completely different from those of the idea’s original developers. Rather than arguing that the ‘other’ Californians required aid in the form of government programs, as figures such as Harrington and Moynihan had done, Reagan bluntly labelled such programs as failures, citing the state’s increasing welfare costs and rolls in support of his accusations. The failures of these liberal programs, Reagan charged, stemmed from the fact that they did not challenge the avoidance of work amongst able-bodied welfare recipients or their transmission of this apparent way of life to their children. Instead, as his above remarks implied, liberal welfare programs, with their ‘doles’, merely served to perpetuate such behaviours and thus perpetuate poverty. Referring to the 1965 Watts riots, he even suggested that these failing programs, which raised the hopes of the poor and then dashed them, were responsible for civil unrest. In this way, the issue of welfare was also subtly linked with some of the other major issues of the campaign, and most especially ‘law and order’ and the associated white backlash against the civil rights movement. Reagan may have avoided repeating the explicitly racial or gendered stereotypes of welfare recipients that existed amongst many at the time, but as welfare and anti-poverty programs were increasingly perceived as benefiting African Americans, race was not entirely lacking from his discussions of the welfare issue.

Thirdly, it has been argued that Reagan, through welfare, attacked the very cornerstone of the philosophy of liberalism. Liberals, at both the state and federal level, he

argued, believed in using government action to solve problems in Californian and American society. Welfare programs, combined with the Great Society initiatives of President Johnson, seemed to Reagan to exemplify liberals' faith in government. Yet this was something with which he was deeply uncomfortable. Welfare and anti-poverty programs had, Reagan charged, expanded the scope of the federal government into California to too great an extent, as well as greatly increasing the size and bureaucracy of the state government. Yet this was not simply a matter of efficiency: Reagan argued that liberal welfare and anti-poverty efforts were a fundamental part of liberalism's faith in government activity and intervention, a faith that was incompatible with America's founding ideal of freedom.

As Reagan's above remarks imply, however, he was to offer an alternative in his campaign: the 'Creative Society', in which liberal 'handouts' would be replaced by private groups and individuals offering training and rehabilitation for welfare recipients, thus positively reinforcing the "simple values [and] hallmark American traditions"²¹³ of the work ethic and self-reliance. However, following his considerable victory on 8 November 1966, the new Governor Reagan struggled to build a Californian Creative Society, perhaps learning the difficult way of the gap between electoral rhetoric and political possibility. AFDC rolls doubled in the state during his first term,²¹⁴ taxes and budgets increased,²¹⁵ and some within the administration later expressed their frustration that welfare "didn't go away; that you didn't just gather up the rolls and solve the problem."²¹⁶ Although Reagan in 1967 authorized the use of over 2,600 welfare recipients as workers for companies affected by an United Farm Workers' strike,²¹⁷ no major reform of welfare occurred until several months into Reagan's second term as governor. The 1971 Welfare Reform Act primarily tightened work requirements for welfare recipients, and the Reagan administration portrayed it as a

²¹³ Dallek, *Right Moment*, p. 228.

²¹⁴ Dallek, *Reagan: Politics of Symbolism*, pp. 50-51.

²¹⁵ Putnam, *Patterns of Modern California Politics*, p. 42.

²¹⁶ Williams, *Human Relations Agency*, RRGES-OH.

²¹⁷ Holmes, *Economic Reaganism*, p. 68.

significant reform, although it had, in truth, been somewhat moderated through negotiations with Democrats in the legislature, which the Republicans lost control of in 1970.²¹⁸

Of course, Reagan was most associated with attacks on welfare during his presidency in the 1980s, and in particular the cuts made to liberal welfare programs in the 1981 Omnibus Budget and Reconciliation Act (OBRA).²¹⁹ But if Michael Weiler is correct in his claim that Reagan's presidential rhetoric was little different from what it had been during the 1960s,²²⁰ then it is vital that his discussions of welfare in his 1966 campaign are studied, so that we may have a more comprehensive understanding of the ideas which shaped Reagan's welfare policy. Indeed, many surveys of Reagan's presidency have noted the importance in his thinking on welfare of scholars such as Ken Auletta and Charles Murray, who wrote of the American poor as an 'underclass', and argued that existent welfare programs were doing little to help them.²²¹ Yet it is also generally accepted that the 1980s discourse of the 'underclass' was merely a more modern version of the Sixties concept of the 'culture of poverty'.²²² Therefore, it seems important to consider, as this study has sought to do, the ways in which the 'culture of poverty' thesis was embedded in Reagan's campaign in 1966, as others have considered the relationship of the 'underclass' debate to Reagan's presidency.

Moreover, as has been demonstrated here, Reagan's treatment of the welfare issue in his first gubernatorial campaign included a strong attack on both liberal welfare programs and liberalism's faith in government action to solve the problem of poverty. This dissertation has, therefore, sought to underline the importance of incorporating the issue of welfare into our understanding of broader political and philosophical debates in modern American history. As Kirsten Gronbjerg argues, "different approaches to explaining poverty have necessarily affected government responses to conditions of poverty. Each of the different explanations of

²¹⁸ Cannon, *Reagan*, p. 183; Burbank, G., 'California Welfare Reform: the Grand Compromise of 1971', *California History*, Fall 1991, p. 286.

²¹⁹ Patterson, *America's Struggle*, p. 213.

²²⁰ Weiler, 'Reagan Attack on Welfare', p. 233.

²²¹ Trattner, *From Poor Law*, p. 371.

²²² Katz, *Undeserving Poor*, p. 234.

poverty has been associated with certain political ideologies...”²²³ In other words, ideas about poverty and welfare are inherently and intimately linked with broader political beliefs, as Reagan’s 1966 rhetoric clearly demonstrated. Yet whilst many accounts of modern political history do discuss welfare, it is all too often in a brief discussion of policy that does not fully explore how the issue linked with more basic beliefs in either conservatism or liberalism. Some welcome attempts at bridging this gap have been made; Jennifer Mittelstadt, for example, notes that welfare has become an issue “essential to political culture” since the Sixties.²²⁴ Yet this was written in a study focusing on welfare, rather than in a work on broader political history. The same is true of the words of James Patterson, who rightly states that Reagan’s political appeal “rested ultimately on his celebration of time-honoured values—the work ethic, rugged individualism and hostility to public ‘handouts’.”²²⁵ Such linkages between welfare and political philosophy and culture must be allowed to enter the field of political history, in order to enhance our understanding of these areas. Indeed, the ideas which Reagan was espousing in 1966—of welfare programs as threatening liberty, and perpetuating dependency on the government—remain current in American political culture. Welfare, then, must be understood in this context.

Recent shifts to a focus on the history of modern American conservatism, which have located its rise as far back as the 1960s and beyond, may allow and benefit from such an integration of welfare into political history. Whilst there is a clear danger in adopting what Matthew Lassiter terms a ‘telescoping’ strategy: seeing linear progressions from early forms of conservatism directly to Reagan’s presidency and beyond,²²⁶ the issue of welfare may well be a way in which understandings of modern conservative movements can be added to. This study, for example, has demonstrated that conservative stances on welfare clearly existed in 1966, implicitly challenging the idea that it was not until the economic woes of the 1970s that

²²³ Gronbjerg, *Mass Society*, pp. 12-13.

²²⁴ Mittelstadt, *From Welfare to Workfare*, p. 155.

²²⁵ Patterson, *America’s Struggle*, p. 213.

²²⁶ Lassiter, ‘*Political History Beyond the Red-Blue Divide*’, *Journal of American History*, December 2011, p. 761.

conservatives began to turn against liberal welfare programs.²²⁷ Yet it also the case that such programs remained in existence in 1966—and after—lending credence to Michael Katz's notion that welfare has been part of a "dialectic of reform and reaction."²²⁸ In appreciating the waxing and waning of welfare, then, we may be able to understand more fully the interactions between liberalism and conservatism in modern political culture.

It is hoped, therefore, that this dissertation, through exploring Reagan's discussions of welfare, has filled a gap which existed in existing literature, and stimulated ideas for future paths of study. Reagan's vanquished opponent, the 'responsible liberal' Pat Brown, sadly lamented some years later that "welfare programs make a perfect target".²²⁹ For Reagan, they certainly did, and it is time for historians to explore how and why this has been—and continues to be—the case.

²²⁷ Pierson, P., *Dismantling the Welfare State? Reagan, Thatcher, and the Politics of Retrenchment*, Cambridge University Press, 1994, pp. 2-3.

²²⁸ Katz, *Undeserving Poor*, p. 4.

²²⁹ Brown, *Reagan the Political Chameleon*, p. 125.

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