

Governing the Poor: The Rise of the Neoliberal Paternalist State

Joe Soss

University of Minnesota
jboss@umn.edu

Richard C. Fording

University of Kentucky
rford@email.uky.edu

Sanford F. Schram

Bryn Mawr College
sschram@brynmawr.edu

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In the recent history of American political development, few changes have been as striking as the transformation of poverty governance. The state's new look can be seen in the shift from entitlement to conditional aid under welfare reform (Weaver 2000), in the rise of an unprecedented era of mass incarceration (Western 2007), and in the reinvention of government to replace "rule-based, authority-driven processes with market-based, competition-driven tactics" (Kettl 2005: 3). Today, a great deal is known about these changes and their social and economic effects. Yet their shared political sources and significance remain poorly understood.

In poverty studies, scholars commonly proceed as if political questions were, somehow, irrelevant to policy analysis. One might think that students of politics would be eager to fill this void. Yet even as inequality has garnered greater attention in recent years (Jacobs and Skocpol 2005; Bartels 2008), the poor have continued to be roundly ignored by mainstream political scientists. As a result, the political forces that have reshaped poverty governance, and the political implications of this development, have remained obscure.

Indeed, when scholars turn to the question of *why* poverty governance has shifted in recent years, it is remarkable how little gets said about power and political action. Most accounts link policy developments to disembodied social forces, neatly cropping political agency out of the picture. Thus, dramatic changes in welfare systems are attributed to "shifting tides" that have swept across the developed nations, such as globalization and demographic transition (Gilbert 2004). The rise of a new "Schumpeterian workfare post-national regime" is presented as a functional response to the evolving needs and crises of capital (Jessop 2000). The new forms of public aid in the U.S. are described as a logical result of "changes in our understanding of the causes and consequences of poverty" (Danziger and Haveman 2001: 8).

Against this backdrop, we pursue two goals in this paper. The first is to offer a political explanation for recent changes in poverty governance that highlights organized efforts to redirect the exercise of public authority. In pursuing this explanation, we emphasize that the politics of poverty is not an island unto itself, untouched by the broader dynamics of power and conflict in the American polity. With few exceptions (e.g., Piven 2007; Noble 1997), political studies of events such as welfare reform have focused on ideas, actors, and obstacles that are specific to the domain of poverty. Thus, policy changes are analyzed as political efforts to navigate the distinctive value tensions and "helping conundrums" that reformers confront in the context of poverty (Ellwood 1988). Or they are explained as products of the distinctive discourses and images that swirl around poor black women as "welfare queens" (Hancock 2004). Even the best studies in this area tend to emphasize what is unique about poverty politics: the "traps" that stymie anti-poverty efforts, the internal evolution of policy developments and arguments, and the issue networks of actors who have a seat at the poverty-policy table (Weaver 2000; Hecl 1994).

If new approaches to governing the poor had emerged in isolation, it would make sense to seek explanations from within this domain. But they have not. Poverty governance has been transformed as part of a much broader political effort to redirect activist government in the United States (Pierson and Skocpol 2007). Its new look can be traced to the same political forces that have worked to deregulate industries, cut government tax revenues, shift risks onto private actors, and weaken social protections for the middle class (Hacker 2006; Soss, Hacker, and Mettler 2007). The ambitious schemes that have been applied to the poor reflect broader societal agendas; their political successes are best understood as reflections of larger changes in the organization and mobilization of power within the American polity.

The second goal of this paper is to specify the political rationality of poverty governance today. Public policies are more than just political outcomes; they are institutions that structure

political relations and organize the exercise of public authority (Pierson 2006). Thus, a political analysis of poverty governance must clarify, not only the forces that have driven policy change, but also the political logic of the resulting forms. The key changes, we suggest, are best captured by the concepts of neoliberalism and paternalism. These ideas did not cause changes in poverty governance, and they are not faithfully enacted as intellectual scripts today. Rather, as conceptual tools, they help to specify the implicit political logics that guide the exercise of authority. They are the “practical rationalities” that connect seemingly disparate policy activities.

Neoliberalism and paternalism are contested concepts, used by scholars in a variety of ways. To give them some precision, we begin by specifying the meanings we attach to them as modes of governance. In our second section, we analyze the political forces that drove the rise of neoliberal paternalism. Drawing together a variety of political developments, we explain why poverty governance became a focal point for a political campaign that had far broader ambitions – and why programs for the poor were positioned as “low-hanging fruit” available for the political taking. In our third section, we specify the changing contours of poverty governance, providing policy details to make the abstractions of neoliberal paternalism more concrete. Finally, in our last section, we theorize contemporary poverty governance in relation to the past, seeking to clarify the elements of historical change and continuity that define its current state.

Neoliberalism and Paternalism

Neoliberalism, as we use the term, refers to an intellectual and political movement that emerged in the late 20th century to advance a radical agenda in global and domestic relations. Like all forms of liberalism, it prizes the “possessive individual” and privileges the freedoms associated with private property, market relations, and trade across nations. Yet neoliberalism should not be confused with classical forms of 19th century liberalism for at least two reasons.

First, while liberal thought has often proposed an intimate relationship between political freedoms and market freedoms, neoliberalism goes further by treating market liberties as a model for, and substitute for, political freedoms. Neoliberalism is an effort to extend the reach of market logic, to apply it as an organizing principle for all social and political relations. As such, it represents a particularly muscular form of economic liberalism that has few ties to the political liberalism of any era. In practice, neoliberal governance prioritizes economic freedoms at the expense of political freedoms as well as democratic values such as egalitarianism, universalism, commitments to an active citizenry, and conceptions of a public good (Brown 2006).

Second, as a 20th century movement, neoliberalism departs in significant ways from 18th and 19th century *laissez faire* doctrines of classical economic liberalism (Brown 2003). It is not a revival of the drive to limit state power so that markets, understood as a natural mode of human relations, can flourish independently. It is a movement to integrate state and market operations, mobilize the state on behalf of market agendas, and reconfigure the state on market terms.

Much of the confusion that surrounds neoliberalism today arises because of its historical emergence as an attack on the Keynesian welfare state and as a program to deregulate capitalism on a global scale. Intellectually and politically, neoliberalism developed as a challenge to the activist state’s role as a “countervailing power” to the market (Galbraith 1952); it was an assault on what Karl Polanyi (1957) famously called the “double movement” of state protections tempering the creative destruction of capitalism. Neoliberalism’s most important early theorist, Friedrich Hayek (1960), cast Keynesian collectivism as the enemy of freedom and argued for easing the state’s constraints on market relations and inequalities. Its most prominent leaders in

the 1980s, Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, emphasized the need to “free” markets by reducing government regulations and taxes, scaling back worker protections, and giving multinational corporations greater latitude (Harvey 2006). Similar themes animated the “Washington Consensus,” which used organizations such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) to pressure governments in the global South to adopt “structural adjustments” designed to deregulate their economies (Stiglitz 2002; Peet 2003). And indeed, the gutting of state regulations on finance capital, which permitted unprecedented flows of financial assets and exchanges through new technologies, has arguably been the feature of contemporary globalization that most sets it apart from earlier eras of transnational market integration.

In all these developments, neoliberalism looks very much like a resurgence of *laissez faire*, focused on “rolling back” state involvements in the market (Somers and Block 2005). As forms of market fundamentalism, however, the two diverge in significant ways. Contrary to *laissez faire*, neoliberalism does not presume that market relations flow predictably from human nature when people are freed from the distortions of the state. It entails a more constructivist view of human nature: market behavior is not natural but learned and, once learned, can be extended to various realms of social existence. Thus, neoliberalism deploys market rationality as a normative ideal to be achieved through applications of public authority and privileges it as a basis for interpreting and evaluating behaviors in wide array of societal arenas.

Thus, rather than seeking to limit the state, neoliberalism envisions the state as a site for the application of market principles. Through contracting, decentralization, and competitive performance systems, it reconstructs the state’s operations to mimic market forms and promotes market standards for evaluating its performance. Through privatization and collaboration, the state is made more reliant on market actors to achieve public purposes. Through policy discourses centered on costs and benefits, investments and returns, government action is rendered suspect when it cannot be justified through a market calculus. Efforts to limit state restraints on markets persist but are assimilated into a broader project that embraces the activist state for alternative purposes: serving and subsidizing market actors, enhancing profitability, stabilizing market disruptions, absorbing market losses, and expanding the scope of market relations and opportunities. A key function of the state in this regard is to foster market rationality – to construct governing and governed subjects who think and behave as market actors. As Wendy Brown (2003: 9-10) explains:

Neo-liberalism does not simply assume that all aspects of social, cultural and political life can be reduced to [a rational market] calculus, rather it develops institutional practices and rewards for enacting this vision. . . . In contrast with the notorious *laissez faire* and human propensity to “truck and barter” of classical economic liberalism, neo-liberalism does not conceive either the market itself or rational economic behavior as purely natural. Both are constructed – organized by law and political institutions, and requiring political intervention and orchestration. Far from flourishing when left alone, the economy must be directed, buttressed, and protected by law and policy as well as by the dissemination of social norms designed to facilitate competition, free trade, and rational economic action on the part of every member and institution of society.

Just as the state’s operations are privatized, so too are the social problems and risks confronted by citizens. Matters of shared consequence, once addressed through collective decisions about how to organize our lives together, are increasingly approached as personal problems to be solved through rational individual choices. Thus, the democratic citizen, positioned as one who must act collectively with others to gain preferred policy outcomes, has been redefined to mimic the individualistic market roles of consumer, worker, and paying

customer. Citizens, in this guise, are “taxpayers” who have a contractual right to expect efficient institutional actions that produce a good return on their investment. They are positioned, through vouchers and choice programs, as “consumers” who pursue better goods by exercising their individual freedom to seek goods from other providers (exit) rather than by joining together to participate in or improve the institutions they share (voice). They are encouraged to help others, not by deciding how to organize their communities in a just manner, but by pursuing individual work as volunteers, charitable givers, and virtuous providers of services (Crenson and Ginsberg 2002). The competent and self-reliant market actor – working, investing, making consumer choices, and demanding a good return – is made synonymous with the good citizen.

The counterpart to the good citizen, of course, is the bad citizen, and neoliberalism offers a moral and political vision in this regard as well. From Hayek (1960) onward, neoliberal discourse has valorized individual responsibility and self-discipline as the *sine qua non* of freedom. Individuals, in this view, have a moral and political obligation to act as disciplined entrepreneurs, planning to meet their own needs, accepting personal responsibility for their problems, and managing their daily affairs with prudence. The individual who does otherwise fails, not just as an economic actor, but as a moral being and member of the political community. This formulation has two key implications for governance.

First, it obscures the political dimensions of diverse social needs and problems by defining them as matters of personal choice. Insofar as “the rationally calculating individual bears full responsibility for the consequences of his or her action,” the causal story of “a ‘mismanaged life’ becomes a new mode of depoliticizing social and economic powers” (Brown 2003). There is, of course, nothing new about depoliticizing socially-produced harms by framing them as personal responsibilities. Under neoliberalism, however, this old dynamic is set in motion and given greater societal reach through the broad application of a market frame. The default assumption, from this perspective, is that the problems of the person are products of individual choice that call for rational efforts to seek individual solutions.

Second, this formulation turns efforts to promote disciplined entrepreneurial behavior into a primary task of governance in a free society. Without such discipline, the free citizen cannot exist. Thus, the state in a free society has an obligation to bring discipline to the lives of individuals so that, thinking and behaving as competent market actors, they may function as full and independent members of society. Taking up this responsibility,

The state attempts to construct prudent subjects through policies that organize such prudence: this is the basis of a range of welfare reforms such as workfare and single-parent penalties, changes in the criminal code such as the “three strikes law,” and educational voucher schemes. Because neoliberalism casts rational action as a norm rather than an ontology, social policy is the means by which the state produces subjects whose compass is set by their rational assessment of the costs and benefits of certain acts, whether teen pregnancy, tax cheating, or retirement planning (Brown 2003).

For low-income Americans, the neoliberal turn has converged with a second critical development: the rise of the new paternalism (Mead 1997). As the term suggests, paternalism is rooted in a traditional conception of the father-child relationship. The child, in this view, lacks the capacity to know what is in her or his best interest and has yet to develop the self-discipline needed to act effectively on such knowledge. As an adult, the father is in a better position to understand what is in the child’s best interest. And as a parent, the father has a moral obligation to act on this knowledge. He must use his legitimate authority to direct and supervise the child in ways that help her or him to flourish. For the child’s own good, he must at various times deny

what the child wants, impose what the child resists, and punish what the child chooses to do.

Contemporary scholarship on paternalism typically begins from a liberal conception of adult citizens as independent individuals who, whatever their imperfections, are in the best position to know their own interests. Building on John Stuart Mill's principle of free choice, they define paternalism as a violation of individual liberty that can be justified only in exceptional cases. As Mill (1983: 92) argued in *On Liberty*, "All errors which an individual is likely to commit... are far outweighed by the evil of allowing others to constrain him to what they deem his own good." The narrow exceptions, for Mill, are defined by cases where individuals are incapable of exercising free choice – primarily children and, more infamously, "barbarians" who lack the civilization needed to make rational judgments. Liberals today enumerate a wider range of factors that can justify paternalism by impairing choice, such as "ignorance, emotional stress, compulsion, undue influence and/or mental illness" (Smiley 1989: 300). But their basic conception remains aligned with Mill's. Paternalism is usually defined as "the interference with a person's liberty of action justified by reasons referring exclusively to the welfare, good, happiness, needs, interests or values of the person being coerced" (Dworkin 1971: 120).

In referring to paternalist *governance*, our use of the term departs from this definition in three important ways. First, we begin with political relations rather than unencumbered individuals, emphasizing that paternalism is an authority relationship based on unequal status and power (Smiley 1989). It is not a form of "interference" with individuals whose desires exist, somehow, prior to social relations. Rather, as the father-child metaphor suggests, it is a relationship that makes the individual's development through social relations into a self-conscious project pursued by a directive and supervisory authority. Second, although paternalism may involve a "person being coerced," power may operate and be exercised in a variety of ways that do not require coercion of a resistant individual (Hayward 2000; Barnett and Duvall 2005). Indeed, in Mary Jackman's (1994) formulation, the political importance of paternalism lies precisely in its capacity to make hostile and coercive force less necessary for the maintenance of unequal power relations. Third, because governing arrangements are always supported by multiple rationales, paternalist governance cannot be limited to activities "justified by reasons referring exclusively" to the well being of the governed person or group. In practice, paternalist poverty governance is motivated by a mix of broad public purposes, particularistic interests, and beliefs about what is good for the poor.

The "new paternalism" that informs poverty governance today follows the general logic of paternalism. Thus, its leading proponents begin from the premise that the poor lack the competence needed to manage their own affairs. Although the poor may recognize what is in their interest, they lack the discipline needed to make "behavior... consistent with intention" (Mead 1997: 5). Their lives are disorderly to the point that no opportunity or incentive, however clear, can induce them to act in their own interest. As a result, the poor "need direction if they are to live constructively" (Mead 1997: 2). Government must step in as a directive, supervisory, and disciplinary authority, and must do so for the poor's own good. In adopting this stance, the new paternalism "in effect treats adults like children" (Mead 1997: 26) and calls on governing agents to act as fatherly "authority figures as well as helpmates" (Mead 2004: 158).

As a late 20th century development, however, the "new paternalism" has several features that distinguish it from earlier forms, including the extreme versions associated with American slavery (Genovese 1974) and European colonialism (Narayan 1995).

First, it is rooted in the context of contemporary citizenship and proceeds within a broader framework of institutionalized rights. Rather than denying the citizen's rights, it

emphasizes the obligations of citizenship as a justification for enforcing behavioral expectations (Mead 1986). Unlike the paternalism of slavery or colonialism, the new paternalism is a project of civic incorporation that aims to draw its targets toward full citizenship. As such, it focuses on segments of the poor who are identified as being too irresponsible “to merit the esteem of others [or make] a community of equal citizens imaginable” (Mead 1997: 229) – people such as “the homeless, criminals, drug addicts, deadbeat dads, unmarried teenage mothers, and single mothers claiming welfare-benefits... who have by their behavior indicated that they do not display the minimal level of self-control expected of decent citizens” (Wilson 1997: 340-41).

The behaviors of these groups threaten, not only their own interests, but also liberal-democratic aspirations for an inclusive and egalitarian political order. Thus, the new paternalism seeks policy arrangements that enforce a more appropriate “operational definition of citizenship” – one that premises the extension of social rights on the fulfillment of social obligations (Mead 1986). The poor are subjected to directive and supervisory governance, not just for their own good, but equally for the good of society and democracy.

Second, the paternalism of contemporary poverty governance is a species of the late 20th century political movement known as neoconservatism. In the U.S., neoconservatism arose as a political response to perceptions that the American state had allowed, and even fostered, a steep decline in social order and morality during the 20th century. As such, it drew diverse constituencies together under the banner of “a strong, state-led and -legislated moral-political vision” (Brown 2006: 697). Internationally, it sought a more interventionist U.S. foreign policy rooted in moral purposes and carried out by an empowered military. Domestically, it pursued a wide range of agendas designed to restore “traditional” values and combat social disorder.

The new paternalism identifies the breakdown of social order in poor communities as a threat to society and, most of all, to the poor themselves. Individuals who are surrounded by social disorder will find it exceedingly difficult to act on their interests or discipline their own behavior. For poor individuals to develop such abilities, poor communities must first be made secure – and the legitimacy and capacity needed for this task can only be found in a strong state. Thus, paternalists fold a broad agenda of social control into the rubric of exercising authority for the poor’s own good. The disorders that have arisen from the poor’s lack of discipline – non-work, criminality, teen pregnancy, single motherhood – must be met by “a strong state and a state that will put its strength to use” (Norton 2004: 178). For the poor’s sake as well as society’s, the state must employ directive social programs, strengthen policing and surveillance, and remove disruptive individuals through incarceration. Appraising America’s poor urban communities in the 1990s, paternalist theorist Lawrence Mead (1997: 230) concluded:

It is difficult to recall an era of Western history when the restoration of order was so much an imperative in and of itself.... Destitution no longer raises issues of justice.... The only answer to poverty is a slow building up of community institutions... to the point where they can again enforce the obligations of citizenship.... Only if order is restored in cities, and especially if work levels rise, could the poor become more self-respecting. Only then could they stake claims on the collectivity as equals, rather than seeking charity as dependents.

Third and finally, as a late 20th century development, the new paternalism emerges in the context of what Andrew Polsky (1991) has called “the therapeutic state.” Therapeutic state interventions aim to do more than just coerce individuals or alter the opportunities and incentives they confront. They aim to change a person’s basic values and self-conceptions, reconstructing the citizen as a different kind of self-regulating subject (Cruikshank 1999). Drawing on a medical model, they begin from the premise that the individual suffers from a social or

psychological pathology that expert authorities must “cure” for the suffering individual’s own good. Thus, paternalists seek to use state authority, not simply to impose choices on the poor, but to cure the deeper pathologies of dependence and disorder – to turn the poor into subjects who regulate their conduct in new and normalized ways (Schram 2000). “By bringing about profound changes at the most intimate levels of human experience, the state aims to integrate marginal citizens into the social mainstream” (Polsky 1991: 3-4).

Specified in these ways, neoliberalism and the new paternalism converge on a number of distinctive commitments for poverty governance. Although their differences are not minor, the two rationalities overlap in significant ways. At their intersection, one finds a strong state-led effort to bring discipline to the lives of the poor so that they can become competent actors who (liberated from social disorder) recognize and act on their interests as freely choosing agents of the market. As Jacob Segal (2006: 327) notes, “The link between [neoliberalism and the new paternalism] lies in a common definition of freedom as a practice of efficient living that requires an inner discipline. Those who fail at freedom must be trained into it.” Thus, *freedom* for the poor is pursued through modes of governance that discipline poor individuals and impose order on poor communities. “The discipline of civilization,” Friedrich Hayek (1960: 163) states, “is at the same time the discipline of freedom.” “Those who would be free,” writes Lawrence Mead (1997: 23), “must first be bound.” The state must “tell the poor what to do” (Mead 1998).

Likewise, neoliberalism and the new paternalism converge on the idea that governance itself must be transformed if the state is to effectively manage poor populations. Both promote efforts to extend the state’s capacity to govern by enlisting the institutions of civil society (for-profit and non-profit) through privatization and market-based forms of collaboration. Paternalism emphasizes that these cross-sector collaborations must be state-led, while neoliberalism emphasizes that they must be organized and evaluated on market terms. But in this sense, they are complements: just as neoliberalism seeks an alliance of state and market, “paternalism transcends the old opposition of the public and private sectors” (Mead 1997: 11). The two converge as well on efforts to decentralize policy operations: to facilitate tailored, local forms of supervision and engagement with the poor (paternalism) and to open governance up to greater entrepreneurial innovation and competition (neoliberalism). And at the same time, both call for governance to be based on new forms of knowledge – greater surveillance and documentation of poor people’s behavior, closer measurements to evaluate and incent performance in governance, more scientific analyses to create legible profiles of the populations being managed, and so on.

Above all, neoliberalism and paternalism converge on the agenda of work enforcement. Paternalists identify work as the most fundamental social obligation of citizenship and as an indispensable starting point for a well-ordered life (Mead 1986). Cast as a necessary foundation for all other virtues, the enforcement of “work first” unites moralists who ultimately may differ considerably in their priorities. Whatever forms of self-discipline the poor may need, the state must begin by demanding the poor’s “acceptance of the verdict of the marketplace” (Mead 1986: 87). And of course, it is this same verdict that neoliberalism prizes most. The neoliberal state is called upon to make the poor available to the market on terms set by the market. The state must teach the poor to conceive of themselves and behave as market actors and, to do so, it must actively position its policy targets as actors in market relations.

Readers who are conversant with Michel Foucault’s writings on “governmentality” will no doubt find these themes familiar. Indeed, our understanding of neoliberal paternalism aligns closely with this concept. Poverty governance today incorporates the powers involved when governors impose their authoritative will on subjects (sovereignty) and when governors deploy

institutional techniques for reforming disordered individuals (discipline) into a broader project of managing the behaviors and securing the wellness of a population. It seeks to impose order as a condition of freedom and, at the same time, to bring order to the exercise of freedom. Its ultimate goal is to transform the poor into subjects who, under conditions of apparent autonomy, will choose and act in ways that comply with market imperatives and political authorities. Toward this end, it is organized to “translate the goals of political, social, and economic authorities into the choices and commitments of individuals” (Miller and Rose 2008: 214).

Politics and the Transformation of Poverty Governance

As analytic concepts, neoliberalism and paternalism help to specify the logic of poverty governance today, but they do little to explain why poverty is being governed in new ways. For that, one must turn to a more direct analysis of American politics. Specifically, one must begin with the conservative resurgence in U.S. politics that reshaped public policy and drove levels of economic inequality skyward after the 1970s. In the closing decades of the 20th century, well-organized and well-funded political actors mobilized against the activist national state that had developed from the New Deal through the Great Society (Pierson and Skocpol 2007). Their grievances were not specific to poverty. They were a response to the major political victories of the preceding decades: the establishment of an expansive regulatory state, progressive taxation, and social protections (Pierson 2007), the achievement of civil rights (Weaver 2007), and revolutions in race, gender, and sexual relations (Luker 1996). The successes of the counter-movements, incomplete as they have been, flowed from their deep resources and strategic creativity as well as from changes in the organization of U.S. politics. Their outsized effect on poverty governance reflected the special political utility of the “disorderly poor” as a vehicle for advancing their broader ambitions, the political vulnerability of the poor to their agendas, and the political weakness and strategic choices of their opponents in this domain.

By the end of the turbulent 1960s, social movements had combined with Democratic Party control of government to fundamentally alter the United States as a society and polity. The old racial order was upended; gender relations were recast; and new sexual and reproductive freedoms were reconfiguring the social landscape (Davis 1983). The regulatory powers of national government had expanded in both depth and the breadth, reaching new dimensions of consumer protection, occupational health and safety, and environmental protection (Melnick 2005). Citizenship and governance were redefined by a sweeping rights revolution that spread outward from civil and voting rights to anti-discrimination laws targeted at a wide variety of specific social groups and policy areas (Skrentny 2002). The national welfare state designed in 1935 had grown dramatically in coverage, protection, and cost (Noble 1997).

Through much of the mid-20th century, business interests and political conservatives adopted a posture of pragmatic acceptance toward the state’s expanded social protections, recognizing the stability they afforded as well as the political risks involved in attacking them. With most of the industrialized world still recovering from the decimation of World War II, American businesses could afford to be tolerant: they held a dominant position in global markets that generated steady and sizable profit margins. And of course, many firms benefited directly from government programs that subsidized employee benefits and created markets for the goods they produced. By the end of the 1960s, however, the relatively peaceful terms of this settlement had fractured. Global markets became more competitive, and profit margins declined (Noble 1997: 107). The burdens of regulation and social protection were not only more costly now; they

were expanding sharply. Indeed, in the four years from 1969 to 1972 “virtually the entire American business community experienced a series of political setbacks without parallel in the post-war period” (Vogel 1989: 59). The political response from business was not long in coming.

The nascent political operations that business had developed in the early 1960s, with encouragement from the Kennedy and Johnson administrations (Martin 1994), exploded into a fierce organizational offensive. Between 1974 and 1978, the number of corporate-sponsored political action committees (PACs) grew from 89 to 784, with an additional 500 PACs emerging to represent trade associations and business interests (Conway 1986: 73). Older organizations like the Chamber of Commerce worked to increase their memberships, resources, and lobbying capacities, as new organizations like the Business Roundtable were created to draw corporate leaders together as a more unified and potent political force (Akard 1992). Offices representing business proliferated in Washington, where they paired the pursuit of insider influence with strategies for mobilizing a flood of “grassroots support” for legislative efforts (Vogel 1989).

Going on the offensive, business interests pushed a broad agenda (Ferguson and Rogers 1986; Vogel 1989; Akard 1992; Noble 1997). They fought to cut overall taxes and shift tax burdens toward workers and wages, deregulate financial markets and weaken environmental and workplace protections. They moved to curtail worker power by undercutting labor unions and pushing recipients of income support into labor markets. They fought to reduce the costs of existing social supports and to block the creation of new protections against changing societal risks. Their efforts had profound implications for inequality and democracy in America, restructuring the political economy in ways that allowed “the rich to pull away from the rest” in the closing decades of the 20th century (Jacobs and Skocpol 2004; Soss, Hacker, and Mettler 2007). As we will see, this campaign was no less momentous for poverty governance, not just because it advanced employers’ interests in weakening programs that shield workers from market pressures (Piven and Cloward 1971), but also because of its intersection with a second movement on the rise in American politics: social conservatism.

In the mid-20th century, Christian fundamentalists generally disdained “mainstream culture” and the worldly activities of political conflict. The first stirrings of change occurred in the early 1960s, in the form of outrage at the U.S. Supreme Court’s ban on prayer in public schools. In the years that followed, anxieties rose steadily as Christian fundamentalists watched the struggles for women’s rights and gay rights advance, changes in sexuality and reproduction take root, and legalized abortion become the law of the land. For many Christian leaders, it seemed clear that the time had come “to get in there and fight” (Hodgson 1989: 174). In the 1980s, churches began to develop new capacities for “decentralized local activism” that would later be stitched into a potent national network by Pat Robertson’s 1988 presidential campaign and the effort to roll back abortion rights (Diamond 1995). By the 1990s, “the Family Research Council had 300,000 subscriber members in its communication bank, the Eagle Forum had 80,000 members, and the Christian Coalition could marshal 1.7 million donors and activists” (Hecllo 2001: 181). Leaders such as Jerry Falwell, Oral Roberts, Ralph Reed, and Pat Robertson moved aggressively to amass resources, build organizations, recruit foot soldiers and, ultimately, remake state institutions and public policies as instruments for the pursuit of moral purposes.

The social-conservative movement drew the ascendant Christian Right together with other groups activated by perceptions of moral decline and social disorder. In the 1960s, neoconservatism emerged as a group of disaffected liberal and left intellectuals became fervent anti-communists and then, responding to the disorders of social protest and perceived excesses of social programs, began to argue for a strong American state that would use its power as a force for social order and morality, both domestically and abroad (Norton 2004). At the same time,

racial conservatives galvanized by the passage of the Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act began to pursue a broader campaign for “law and order” that identified social protest, civil disobedience, urban riots, street crime, and “deviant” behaviors in poor minority communities as elements of a single problem: the breakdown of social order (Weaver 2007). At the intersection of these groups, a powerful social-conservative coalition emerged to promote an agenda rooted in order, discipline, personal responsibility, and a moral state.

As social conservatives and business interests mobilized, they sought more than just immediate legislative victories. Adopting a longer view, and adapting to the political obstacles they confronted, they invested in efforts to transform the intellectual and organizational landscape of American politics. Corporations and wealthy conservatives, such as Richard Mellon Scaife, poured millions of dollars into the creation of new think tanks, foundations, and academic societies designed to shift the terms of political debate and discredit the arguments that underpinned the activist Keynesian state. In the legal arena, their investments fueled the rise of the Federalist Society and law and economics movement (Teles 2008), and in the policy process, it produced a right-wing revolution in think tanks (Stefancic, Delgado, and Tushnet 1996). At organizations such as the Heritage Foundation, American Enterprise Institute, Cato Institute, and Hoover Institution, conservatives turned broad ideas into detailed policy proposals, churned out research of dubious quality to support their agendas, and spent lavishly to spread their arguments through books, periodicals, and public events (Rich 2004). Nowhere was this more the case than in the area of poverty governance, where think tanks invested heavily in promoting the ideas of welfare critics such as Charles Murray, Marvin Olasky, Lawrence Mead, and Robert Rector.

Conservative mobilization had equally profound consequences for the political party system. Opportunity came in the form of a fraying Democratic coalition, loosened by the Party’s support for civil rights in the 1960s – which proved particularly costly for its “solid” hold on the South and for its support among working-class white men. Capitalizing on this opening, business interests and social conservatives did more than just increase their support for the Republican Party; they organized a concerted effort to push the Party to the right. Conservative activists recruited far-right candidates and poured resources into their electoral campaigns. New organizations like the Club for Growth targeted moderate Republicans for elimination, disparaging them as RINOs (Republicans in Name Only) and funding challengers from the right in partisan primary contests (Hacker and Pierson 2005). The result was a steep and asymmetric increase in partisan polarization, driven by the rightward movement of Republican political elites. As conservative southern Democrats lost offices to Republicans, the average ideological position of the Democratic Party moved slightly to the left. By contrast, the Republican Party shifted sharply to the right as it replaced its moderates with more aggressive advocates for markets and morality (Theriault 2006; McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2006).

Conservative mobilization was not accompanied by a rightward shift in public opinion (Fiorina 2004; Page and Jacobs 2009), and it did little to shift voters’ attention from economic to cultural issues (Stonecash 2000; Bartels 2008). Instead, it drove the Republican rise to power by supplying the Party with organized networks of business leaders and Christian conservatives and, perhaps more importantly, by providing unprecedented financial resources for political combat.

Indeed, conservative mobilization was advanced considerably by the rising political importance of money in the late 20th century, as electoral campaigns and lobbying efforts became vastly more expensive. When Republicans captured the White House in 1980 and the U.S. Congress in 1994, they rode a wave of business money as corporate interests abandoned their usual pragmatic strategy of investing in both major parties (Piven 2007: 151). And as money

became more central to electoral competition, spiraling inequality concentrated this resource at the highest reaches of the income distribution. In 2000, one-eighth of U.S. households had incomes over \$100,000 per year, yet these households made up 95% of those who gave \$1,000 or more to a campaign that year (APSA Taskforce 2004). Both major parties reorganized their operations to reflect their increasing reliance on the wealthiest Americans. At election time, the two parties now contact between a quarter and a third of the richest Americans directly, up from less than 15% in the 1950s (Campbell 2007). For Republicans, efforts to attract dollars from the wealthiest households fit easily into a pro-business policy agenda. For the Democratic Party, the need to win support from affluent donors has introduced significant cross-pressures, creating strong incentives to downplay questions of inequality, redistribution, and social protection.

The transformation of poverty governance in the U.S. was ultimately a product of these broad political developments. The organized interests that drove new approaches to governing the poor did so as part of a far-reaching campaign to deregulate industries, reduce worker power, cut taxes, and institutionalize conservative moral agendas. Yet it would be incorrect to say that poverty governance was merely swept up in this political tidal wave, as one facet of change among many. From their inception, the rising conservative movements made the poor, and policies directed at the poor, a central focus of their political rhetoric and reform efforts. Indeed, the emphasis on poverty governance was no accident. It reflected the distinctive strategic utility of focusing on “the unruly poor” as a way to unite the emerging coalition, divide and discredit the opposition, avoid obstacles found in other policy domains, and distract attention from an array of policy agendas that attracted far less public support.

Disorder among the poor offered conservatives a powerful symbolic vehicle for advancing their broader political agenda. Its symbolic uses were demonstrated as early as the 1960s by Barry Goldwater and George Wallace, who both campaigned for the presidency on “law and order” platforms, with Wallace also calling for welfare recipients to be put to work. Although their campaigns failed, Goldwater and Wallace succeeded in showing how a focus on social disorder could link political protest and urban riots to street crime, capitalize on racial resentments, and lay blame at the feet of New Deal and Great Society liberals. The lessons of their campaigns were not lost on leading Republicans. In 1968, Richard Nixon made law and order the centerpiece of his Southern Strategy for winning over white Democrats alienated by social protest and civil rights victories. In 1970, he followed through by declaring war on “the criminal elements which increasingly threaten our cities, our homes, and our lives.” By the 1980s, conservatives had elaborated a rich narrative of “the underclass” that identified Great Society policies – coddling criminals, rewarding bad choices with handouts, and so on – as the major forces to blame for the urban poor’s irresponsibility, promiscuity, violence, and welfare dependence. Ronald Reagan extended the war on crime to a war on drugs, and made the outrageous image of the “welfare queen” into a powerful metaphor for the idea that hard-working, law-abiding Americans were being exploited by the lazy and criminal poor.

The prominence of these themes in the conservative rise to power is best understood as a tactical response to the political opportunities and obstacles the coalition confronted. On the opportunity side, they offered a wedge issue almost uniquely well-suited for exploiting fractures in the Democratic Party coalition and popular anxieties produced by rapid social change in the 1960s. The racially coded themes of urban disorder, crime, and welfare were aimed at the newly contested white electorates of the South as well as a broader portion of the white working class that felt abandoned by Democratic support for civil rights, desegregation, busing, and affirmative action. Criticisms of welfare, a program that by the 1970s was equated with poor single mothers

of color (Hancock 2004), played on diverse anxieties surrounding changing gender roles and sexual and familial norms. And as the real wages of U.S. workers fell, images of lazy welfare recipients provided a scapegoat for economic fears, channeling popular anxieties into anger at government for taxing working families to support the undeserving and irresponsible poor.

At the same time, a focus on the unruly poor provided conservatives with an opportunity to put a populist face on their agenda, clothing it in anti-statist and anti-elitist rhetoric by attacking welfare as the self-serving creation of a liberal “intelligentsia” controlling big government (Ehrenreich 1987, 165-73). Welfare, in this frame, was not a hard-won protection for poor workers and their families; it was a policy imposed against workers’ most cherished values and basic financial interests. Indeed, the image of a “silent” and “moral” majority being victimized by liberal policies for the poor became a central trope of the conservative movement. People who played by the rules were being victimized by freeloading welfare queens and violent criminals, their plight ignored by a liberal government bent on maximizing the rights of the victimizers – criminal defendants, welfare recipients, and the dysfunctional urban poor. The interests of “everyday Americans,” in this frame, were equated with efforts to promote victims’ rights, taxpayers’ rights, and a society based on personal responsibility for individual choice.

The conservative emphasis on questions of poverty governance was not simply a matter of seizing opportunities, however. It was also a reflection of the constraints and challenges that confronted an emerging political coalition. Pro-market conservatives and social conservatives have never been easy allies. Libertarian desires for unfettered capitalism clash with the drive to create a powerful moral-authoritarian state. Social conservatives recoil at the sight of corporate operations running roughshod over local community traditions, promoting mass consumerism, and profiting from the sale of sex and sin. The growing alliance between the two movements depended on the suppression of potentially divisive issues and the elevation of agendas valued by both wings. In this regard, poverty governance offered an inviting issue alternative. The drive to reorganize poverty governance as a neoliberal-paternalist regime had strong appeal for two segments of the business community: low-wage employers eager to keep labor on the market and firms that stood to profit directly from privatization (Ehrenreich 1997; Piven and Cloward 1993). It was equally important to social conservatives, who were eager to bring vice and violence under control in poor urban neighborhoods and believed that welfare encouraged marital breakdown, sexual promiscuity, and personal irresponsibility (Ehrenreich 1987; Gilder 1981).

At the same time, conservatives’ emphasis on poverty governance was also a tactical response to the significant barriers they confronted in trying to mount a frontal assault on the activist Keynesian state. Even as the Republican Party took control of state capitals, the White House, and the U.S. Congress, conservatives found that the expanded capacities and operations of the state could not be easily repealed (Pierson 2007). The “status quo bias” of the U.S. political system, which had so often thwarted efforts to expand the welfare state, now allowed retreating liberals to block direct efforts to dismantle it (Noble 1997). Rising party polarization made it more difficult to build bipartisan coalitions for policy change (McCarty 2007), and in many areas, the activist state had produced policy constituencies that now mobilized to defend the programs they relied on (Pierson 1994; Campbell 2003). Repeatedly too, conservatives discovered that the American public tends to welcome the rhetoric of individualism and personal responsibility far more than actual policy changes that strip them of social protections and leave them to fend for themselves on the market (Free and Cantril 1967; Page and Jacobs 2009).

As Jacob Hacker (2004; 2006) rightly points out, these and other obstacles channeled the broad assault on social protections toward strategies of “stealth” (diminishing protections below

the public radar) and “drift” (diminishing protections by preventing policies from adapting to evolving risks and needs). Poverty governance has been a notable exception to this rule. Dramatic changes in policies for the poor have been pursued in the most visible of ways, and achieved with great fanfare. Several factors explain the discrepancy.

First and most obviously, the poor provided a weak and isolated political target, unable to push back as others could. Stigmatized and lacking resources, the poor are rarely able to defend themselves in the policy process (Piven and Cloward 1977). And by the last decades of the 20th century, organized allies were in short supply. Labor unions were in sharp decline and focused on their own problems (Goldfield 1989). Professionally managed, foundation-supported nonprofits that focused on poverty, such as the Children’s Defense Fund, had no grassroots networks or mass memberships to mobilize (Skocpol 2003). The public interest organizations that proliferated on the left after the 1960s focused mainly on “quality of life” issues, devoting few resources to issues of economic distribution and protection (Berry 1999). Even social justice organizations, formed to advocate for disadvantaged groups such as women or racial minorities, tended to pay limited attention to conflicts over welfare, treating them as narrow subgroup issues with limited significance for their broader constituency (Strolovitch 2008).

Organizational weakness was compounded by institutional isolation, especially for welfare recipients in the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program. Over the course of the 20th century, successive legislative actions segregated poor single women and their children from bona fide social insurance contributors (1935), from the surviving dependents of deceased social insurance contributors (1939), and from low-income people with certified disabilities (1972). Thus, as the attacks on AFDC moved into high gear, recipients could not seek political cover through alignment with more positively constructed and powerful groups receiving aid from the state. Poor women with children stood alone, denigrated as a lazy and licentious racial other (Hancock 2004), distinct from and contrasted with more deserving beneficiaries (Winter 2008). Common cause was further undercut by America’s “hidden welfare state” of tax expenditures, which obscured the full extent of public supports going to non-poor American families and made it appear that AFDC was unique in offering government support to able-bodied parents (Howard 1997; Hacker 2002). Coalition along gender lines was undercut by the paucity of childcare and other supports being offered to working women, which made it seem like welfare clients received special benefits unavailable to other women with children (Orloff 2002). And of course, there was the design of the AFDC program itself, which kept recipients very poor, insecure, and mired in the social crises that generally accompany such life conditions (Edin and Lein 1997). In this policy context, demands for policy change came from across the political spectrum, and few allies could be found to oppose the conservative vision of change.

With the poor isolated by institutions, as well as social and residential segregation, Americans were encouraged to think about changes in poverty governance as if they mattered only for deviant others, not for themselves. Yet this was far from the case. The conservative assault on the poor served as a symbolic vehicle for mobilizing opposition to the welfare state more generally and for discrediting the ideas of political liberals and Democrats. It made iconic black images of dependent single mothers and criminally violent men into the symbolic faces of social entitlement and government support.

As Jacob Hacker (2006: 51) points out, the themes sounded in the campaign to transform poverty governance were only the most visible part of a “Personal Responsibility Crusade” that sought to undermine a wide array of collectivizing policies so that Americans would take greater “ownership” of their risks and choices. “By protecting us from the full consequences of our

choices,” reformers argued in areas from healthcare to pensions to childcare, government supports erode “our incentives to be economically productive and personally prudent” (Hacker 2006: 38). The political spectacle created around poverty governance served the broader effort, not just by using the deviant poor to legitimate these broad themes, but also by distracting attention from the far less visible strategies of “stealth” that were shifting risk onto the backs of working Americans. The narrative of generous Great Society programs breeding pathology and disorder in poor urban neighborhoods focused public attention and framed an argument with far wider consequences. Former Republican Congressman Dick Armey stated the point succinctly in 1995: “social responsibility is a euphemism for individual *irresponsibility*” (Armey 1995: 317).

The effectiveness of the conservative onslaught sowed division in the Democratic Party, not just in the electorate but also in the form of elite factions, such as the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC), that organized to push the Party away from Great Society liberalism. Politically divided and outgunned, Democratic Party leaders fought back selectively as they engaged in a tactical retreat. In the policy areas of greatest concern to affluent donors and well-organized constituencies, Democrats worked aggressively to block or temper conservative legislation. In the area of poverty governance, however, Democratic Party leaders increasingly adopted a strategy of cooptation, seeking to evade the charges of being soft on crime and weak-kneed on welfare by embracing modified versions of conservative proposals as their own.

Poor people, of course, had little ability to force the Party to expend its dwindling political capital on their behalf. And with images of the poor increasingly racialized, a vigorous counter-offensive would have risked deepening the racial divides that threatened the Party’s coalition (Frymer 1999). Instead, leading Democrats increasingly embraced the idea that liberal positions on crime and welfare were costly political liabilities that undercut support for the Party’s candidates and broader progressive agenda. By aligning themselves with efforts to transform poverty governance, they hoped to take the corrosive issues of race, crime, and welfare off the table – freeing the party from the wedge issues that Republicans had used so effectively and clearing the way for less “distorted” debates over work and poverty (Soss and Schram 2007).

Time and again, the same storyline played out on crime and welfare legislation. Badly damaged by the “law and order” campaigns, leading Democrats worked to counter the Party’s image as a weak link in the wars on crime and drugs. Thus, when the drug-induced death of basketball star Len Bias set off a moral panic over crack in the summer of 1986, Speaker of the House Tip O’Neill moved quickly to make sure that Democrats would establish a strong anti-drug position before the upcoming elections. As a result, the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986, which established mandatory minimum drug sentences, was passed with less than a month of public deliberation, just in time for the November elections. As Dan Baum recounts (1997: 225):

[Returning from the July 4th recess] Tip O’Neill called an emergency meeting of the crime-related committee chairmen. Write me some goddamn legislation, he thundered. All anybody up in Boston is talking about is Len Bias. The papers are screaming for blood. We need to get out front on this now. This week. Today. The Republicans beat us to it in 1984 and I don’t want that to happen again. I want dramatic new initiatives for dealing with crack and other drugs. If we can do this fast enough, he said to the Democratic leadership arrayed around him, we can take the issue away from the [Reagan] White House.

“The grand strategic game of realigning the image of the Democratic Party” (Weaver 2002: 116) reached its high point in the 1990s, under the presidency of Bill Clinton. As a presidential candidate in 1992, Clinton combined populist economic appeals with efforts to establish himself as a “New Democrat” who would not be beholden to labor unions, racial

minorities, feminists, environmentalists, or other groups viewed as “special interests” of the Democratic Party (Williams 2003). Clinton emphasized his credentials as a pro-death penalty, tough-on-crime governor, and underscored them by returning to Arkansas for the execution of a cognitively disabled black man, Ricky Ray Rector. The crowd-pleasing centerpiece of Clinton’s effort to distance himself from the “ghetto poor,” however, was his oft-repeated pledge to “end welfare as we know it,” bolstered by the accompanying refrain of “two years and you’re off.”

Clinton’s pledge would be put to the test four years later, after the Republican Party took over Congress in 1994 based on a Contract with America that promised to get tough with the welfare poor. As Republicans seized control of the welfare agenda, Clinton was forced to address proposals that were far more stringent, and included far fewer supports, than the plans that he and his welfare advisor David Ellwood had envisioned (Ellwood 1988; DeParle 1996). After contesting some of the most extreme provisions, Clinton ultimately came to the same conclusion that Tip O’Neill had reached in 1986. To shed an electoral liability and clear the path for new policy efforts, “the welfare mess” would have to be abolished and Democrats would have to position themselves out front. Surveying the electorate for the upcoming election, Clinton’s most trusted pollsters instructed him to “fast-track the Gingrich agenda” (Dick Morris), “transcend welfare politics (Stanley Greenberg), and “clear the way for [the Democratic Party’s] rejuvenated influence... over ghetto poverty” (Dick Morris again).

As the election season moved in to high gear, Clinton signed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), abolishing welfare as an entitlement and replacing it with a new block-grant to the states that emphasized work requirements, time limits, sanctions for non-compliance, and governing arrangements designed to promote privatization and performance-based contracting. For poor families in the new Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, the era of neoliberal paternalism was officially at hand.

Specifying Contemporary Poverty Governance

Federal welfare reform in 1996 was the most visible legislative event in the recent transformation of American poverty governance. It also produced one of the most stunning policy effects: between 1994 and 2008, the number of AFDC/TANF recipients in the U.S. declined by about 72 percent. Focusing on these developments, many observers have described recent changes as a “rolling back” of the welfare state – a return to *laissez faire* logics in which government retreats and the poor are left to fend for themselves in the market (Somers and Block 2005). Others combine this narrative with a focus on rising incarceration rates: “as the state more completely sheds economic responsibility,” it produces insecurity and disorder which, in turn, “necessitates the grandeur of the penal state” (Wacquant 2009: 19; see also Lowi 1998).

In the area of poverty governance, however, the American state has not shed its economic responsibilities; it has recast and, indeed, deepened them. In this domain, as in many others, political challengers did not dismantle the activist state; they reorganized it and turned it to new purposes (Pierson and Skocpol 2007). The approaches to governance that they put in place operate according to the logics of neoliberal paternalism described earlier, and they rely on a strong activist state in *both* the social-welfare and penal-carceral fields. The key developments have not occurred along the quantitative dimension of more versus less state intervention. They have centered on how the state is intervening, for what purposes, and for whose benefit.

Thus, poverty governance has been reorganized to replace centralized state control with privatized and decentralized collaboration (Kettl 2005: 3) and, at the same time, to serve as a site

of profitable investment for corporations such as Lockheed Martin, Maximus, Affiliated Computer Systems (ACS), and Corrections Corporation of America (CCA). Welfare investments that shield the poor from market pressures have, indeed, declined. But these resources, and far more, are being invested in neoliberal-paternalist governing strategies: policing, incarceration, and parole supervision; aid made conditional on behavior; social programs that emphasize direction, supervision, and penalty; policies that use tax dollars to subsidize wage costs; and a host of efforts to incentivize, enable, and enforce the placement of labor on the market.

Programs for working-age, non-disabled Americans that fall outside this rubric have been curtailed. In some cases policymakers took action to curb supports. The Reagan administration cut federal investments in state unemployment insurance trust funds (Pierson 1994: 116-20); many states moved to terminate or restrict their General Assistance (GA) programs (Gallagher et al. 1999); and of course, the federal government abolished the AFDC entitlement in 1996. Most of the erosion, however, was accomplished through “drift,” as conservatives blocked efforts to keep benefits aligned with inflation and coverage aligned with changes in labor markets (Hacker 2004). Even before welfare reform, the value of the combined AFDC-Food Stamp package had declined precipitously, mostly because lawmakers allowed the real value of AFDC benefits to decline by 42 percent between 1970 and 1996 (Pavetti 2001: 233).

Unemployment Insurance (UI), which serves a more diverse group of lower- and higher-income people, declined as well. Although lawmakers did not reduce the average replacement rate for wages or the length of the aid period, access to UI benefits was restricted by policy changes that allowed businesses to challenge applications by former employees (Fagnoni 2007) and by policy drift that left workers unprotected in the fastest-growing sectors of the low-wage labor market (GAO 2000). As a result, spending on unemployment benefits declined from \$12,000 per unemployed worker to less than \$4,000 between 1970 and 2000, (Massey 2007: 169), with the bulk of reductions coming from declining coverage of the lowest-wage workers (GAO 2000). By the 1990s, low-wage workers were twice as likely to be unemployed but less than half as likely to receive UI, relative to other unemployed workers (GAO 2000).

As income support outside the market dwindled, equally momentous changes occurred in policies designed to incent employment and “make work pay” at the lower reaches of the labor market. The crucial shift involved the decline of the minimum wage, which forces employers to bear the costs of raising incomes for low-wage workers, and the rise of the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), which puts this burden on taxpayers. From 1968 to 2006, the real value of the minimum wage dropped from \$9.30 to \$5.15 per hour – a decline from 45% to 28% of the average wage in the economy as a whole (Bartels 2008: 26) and from 93% to roughly 50% of the federal poverty line (Massey 2007: 167-8). Faced with overwhelming public support for increasing the minimum wage (Bartels 2008: 229-33), business interests pushed hard for expansions of the EITC as an alternative (Herd 2008). The EITC offers no protection for the unemployed, and puts no floor under wages. Instead, it uses the state’s tax revenues to strengthen work incentives for the poor, and relieve wage pressures on employers, by directly augmenting wages. From 1975 to 2006, federal spending on the EITC rose from \$5 million to \$45 million (Scholz and Moffitt 2009). And as one would expect, these investments have substantially increased labor force participation among the poor (Grogger 2003; Meyer 2002) and led to reductions in wages for workers with limited skills and education (Rothstein 2009).

The EITC is aimed at working-age, non-disabled adults who are in the labor market. On one side of this group lie target populations such as the disabled and elderly, whose major programs continue to provide more generous non-market protections but have been reformed to

present modest but clear work incentives (as is the case in Social Security Disability Insurance and Supplemental Security Income). On the other side, one finds means-tested programs for the working-age, non-disabled poor who lack a clear work attachment. Here, the work push is far stronger and more paternalist. The best-known example, of course, is the TANF program, where poor families receive cash benefits that are time-limited, must engage in “work activities” as a requirement of aid, and can be sanctioned off the rolls for non-compliant behavior (Schram 2000). TANF expenditures, increasingly run through for-profit contractors, have shifted dramatically from cash aid to services and classes that seek to eliminate “work barriers” and make labor more marketable (Allard 2009). And as the state actively pushes TANF recipients into jobs, it uses tax expenditures to directly subsidize their wage costs for businesses, offering employers up to \$9,000 for hiring program leavers under the Work Opportunity Tax Credit.

The work push is hardly limited to TANF, however. Since 1998, when President Clinton signed The Quality Housing and Work Responsibility Act, the federal government has required recipients of public housing aid to work or volunteer each month and has made families receiving TANF sanctions ineligible for rent reductions due to lost income. Similar changes occurred with food assistance. Today, recipients of SNAP (formerly known as Food Stamps) must register for work, accept suitable employment, and participate in work-promoting programs as a condition of aid. Working-age adults without children can only receive SNAP for 3 months in a 36-month period if they do not work or participate in a workfare program – a development that parallels the stringent work requirements now imposed on adults without dependents in state GA programs (Gallagher et al. 1999). And of course, since 1979, the federal government has promoted prison labor by allowing the sale, interstate commerce, and international export of goods made by prisoners. Between 1979 and 2005, this “prison industry” initiative contributed an estimated \$97 million dollars toward the costs of incarceration and \$47 million in federal and state taxes (DOJ 2009). Over this same period, cheap prison labor was increasingly contracted to for-profit firms, with private prison operators such as CCA also profiting directly by using prisoners as maintenance workers (Kang 2009).

Adopting a paternalist stance, the state has also assumed a far stronger posture in supervising the poor. Work promotion in means-tested programs has been accompanied by dramatic increases in procedures for monitoring and documenting client behavior. Aid recipients have been increasingly subjected to drug-testing, finger-printing, and questioning regarding their sexual relations (to establish paternity and pursue child support). Moreover, the administrative reach of supervision has been extended beyond the participation spell, as transitional benefits are accompanied in some places by work-focused “post-exit paternalism.” The most stunning expansions of supervision, though, have occurred on the criminal justice side. Between 1970 and 2003, state and federal prison populations grew seven-fold, with most of the growth occurring among poor, under-educated, minority groups (Western 2007). In this same period, expenditures on incarceration in the fifty states increased from \$23 per capita (1970) to \$125 per capita (2001), rising from 1% to 3.5% of all budget outlays (Guetzkow and Western 2007).

And just as welfare leavers need to comply with work requirements in order to continue to receive transitional supports, parolees increasingly face an elaborate system of surveillance designed to monitor their behavior. In fact, institutionalized prisoners are now only a small part of the population under direct state surveillance as a result of changes to criminal justice policy. In 2003, 4.7 million Americans were under probation or parole supervision (Western 2007), and the number of prisoners returning home each year had reached 630,000, quadruple the rate in 1978 (Travis 2005). During this period, parole supervision was strengthened and applied to an

escalating percentage of the post-prison population. By 2003, more than 80 percent of people leaving prison were being placed on parole, and the number being sent back for parole violation was seven times higher than it had been twenty years earlier (Travis 2005: 40). Drug offenders receive even closer scrutiny, as they are increasingly released to private “recovery houses” where they are monitored daily and risk a return to prison if they relapse (Fairbanks 2009). As David Garland (2002: 178) notes, prisoners today are typically released into “a closely monitored terrain, a supervised space, lacking much of the liberty that one associates with normal life.”

In these and other ways, low-income Americans face a governing regime today that differs dramatically from the systems in place only a handful of decades ago. The rise of neoliberal paternalism, however, has been equally marked by a change in how poverty governance is organized and put into practice. Neoliberalism, as described earlier, is fundamentally an effort to transform the state. Thus, rather than being rolled back in recent decades, the centralized Keynesian state has been “rolled out” to diverse actors and locales through privatization and devolution (Peck and Tickell 2002). Emphasizing values such as efficiency, customer service, and performance competition, reformers have worked to “reinvent government” as a diffuse network of governing relationships, rooted in market principles. Increasingly, poverty governance is structured by contractual relations, decentralized to facilitate entrepreneurial innovation, and evaluated on market terms as opposed to democratic values.

The roll out of governance was not just a product of ideology, however; it also served practical political purposes. Outside the elected offices of national government, the entrenched liberal activist state could not be easily purged of its established cultures, routines, and actors. In this sense, devolution and privatization served the crucial political purpose of shifting governing authority to sites with fewer barriers to establishing new governing logics. In this regard too, the rise of performance-based evaluation was more than an organizational expression of market fundamentalism. By providing an outcome-based yardstick for evaluation that could be applied to any provider, it established a new logic of public accountability (distant from concerns of democratic control and transparency) that made private contractors equal to government bureaucracies as collaborators and competitors. Equally important, as poverty governance became more decentralized, performance-based contracting and management provided mechanisms for monitoring and disciplining the operations of far-flung agents to improve the odds that the work-enforcing goals of centralized principals would be achieved.

Many of these developments have been accompanied by rhetorical attacks on “big government” that celebrate the greater efficiency of private firms, local knowledge of lower-level authorities, and compassion of non-profit and religious organizations. The political salience of such appeals has largely obscured a more basic fact: neoliberal paternalism is not about weakening the state; it is about strengthening the state as a disciplinary authority. Indeed, the new approaches to governing the poor have extended the reach of government via contractual relationships with market and civil-society organizations. The state’s powers of surveillance and discipline vis-à-vis the poor have expanded dramatically, even as the public sector has been attacked and prevented from growing to meet new needs.

Theorizing Historical Change and Continuity

Surveying these developments, it is tempting to posit a sharp break with the past and define the present through a static contrast with the rights-centered era of the 1960s. Thus, poverty governance today is celebrated by some as a decisive break with the bad old days of

“permissive handouts” (Mead 2004) and reviled by others as the oppressive counterpart to the preceding period (Reese 2005). Skeptics respond by inverting such comparisons: citing parallels with eras before the 1960s, they conclude that poverty governance today is just old wine in new bottles, a return to familiar forms in poor relief (Block and Somers 2005; Pimpare 2004).

To understand poverty governance today, one must move beyond the false choice of viewing it as a break with the past or a faithful repetition of history. Instead, the task should be to clarify the elements of continuity and change that define its operations. To achieve this goal, one must do more than describe changes in policy and administration. Efforts to compare the past and present are inevitably rooted in theoretical frames that specify what governing arrangements are and do. Different dimensions of development come into focus as one considers poverty governance from alternative conceptual vantage points. The most important of these, for our purposes, are provided by theories of social control, social construction, and social citizenship.

Social control refers to the means by which collectives secure adherence to ideational and behavioral norms and curtail disruptive forms of deviance (Piven 1981). From this perspective, the history of poverty governance can be seen as an evolving series of efforts to shape the prevailing terms of the social order and/or secure them from disruption. Public welfare programs, in this view, are more than just vehicles for distributing benefits and services. They are mechanisms used to shape power, position, and behavior in the political economy (Piven and Cloward 1971), cement particular formations of race, class, and gender as organizing principles for social relations (Gordon 1994; Mink 1998), and regulate practices associated with sexuality, reproduction, and care giving (Smith 2007; Stone 2008).

To locate contemporary poverty governance in this historical trajectory, it is useful to begin with the touchstone of modern scholarship on social provision and social control: Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward’s *Regulating the Poor* (1971). Piven and Cloward begin from the premise that welfare states function as secondary institutions; their operations are shaped by the changing needs and conflicting demands of actors in the primary institutions of the state and market. Political authorities, for example, may expand public relief to shore up state legitimacy, build political followings, or restore order in times of unrest. As they do so, however, they simultaneously alter the terms of market relations. Accessible and generous relief places a floor under wages, reduces competition for the worst jobs, and improves the bargaining position of labor in employment relations. To reverse these costs, employers typically seek to intensify work pressures by making assistance less available and generous, stigmatizing welfare receipt, and creating conditions of aid that are inferior to the least desirable jobs in the labor market.

Poverty governance today continues to serve the political and economic functions that Piven and Cloward specified in 1971, but the operations that fulfill these functions have shifted in important ways. For much of the modern history of welfare, labor regulation has been pursued through a variety of practices closely tied to the principle of “less eligibility.” The principle, most famously articulated in the English Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, states that the condition of the aid recipient must never be “really or apparently” as attractive as the condition of the poorest worker in the lowest job. To the extent that welfare programs have operated as politically defined sites of needs-based provision (Stone 1984), they have provided a shield from market pressures to sell one’s labor as a commodity at any price. Thus, workers have generally been protected by expansions of relief; labor compliance has been enforced by keeping benefits well below wages and limiting access to aid (Piven and Cloward 1971).

The extent to which social policies “decommodify” labor has always been a matter of degree (Esping-Anderson 1985). In the U.S., for example, social insurance programs have

institutionalized a stronger form of exemption from market pressures at the national level (Stone 1984). Means-tested programs that target the poor have offered only partial and temporary exemptions, controlled by lower-level authorities that face stronger pressures to respond to local labor market needs. At the extreme, such programs have hardly been decommodifying at all. Through much of the early 20th century, for example, relief operations abetted the exploitation of black workers in southern agricultural economies by providing benefits so low that they offered nothing more than a subsistence level of support when the fields lay idle. The poor were pushed out of welfare and into work through morality tests and intrusive administrative inspections, and by simply closing the doors of welfare offices when hands were needed in the fields (Bell 1965).

As this example suggests, poverty governance has traditionally enforced work through the *negation* of welfare activities – by offering lower benefits, limiting access, and making exemptions from the market less secure. These dynamics continue to guide poverty governance today. As evidenced by the withering of non-market benefits for the unemployed, and by the strategies of administrative closure that have driven the TANF caseload downward, neoliberal paternalism is partly an attack on decommodifying social protections for the poor. The principle of less eligibility, and the analysis offered by Piven and Cloward (1971), remain key guides to understanding contemporary poverty governance. But two key changes have made the negation of decommodifying welfare programs less singular as a mechanism of social control.

First, under neoliberal paternalism, welfare programs have been restructured to operate as *affirmative* enforcers of work – as ventures that actively service labor markets and function as market arenas in their own right. Thus, under welfare reform, state efforts largely bolster market pressures and do not need to be curtailed for workers to be pushed into the market. As Lawrence Mead (1997: 229) explains, paternalist programs make the state into an agent of market pressures, “assuming the function that the workplace did before.” When individuals apply for welfare today, they enter an arena that is organized to serve employers: its purpose is to groom workers for employment, offer them up for hire, and press them into available jobs. Welfare recipients are still targeted for meager benefits and forms of administrative *legerdemain* that deny access to aid. And in practices that echo the poorhouses of the past, they are required to engage in “work activity” as a condition of aid. But more so than in the past, welfare recipients today are subjected to reformatory programs designed to immerse them in a “market experience,” diminish their “barriers to work,” and teach them to be self-disciplined market actors. As a result, the relationship between benefits and wages has become less decisive for labor discipline, and the tensions between welfare receipt and labor-market availability have been reduced. Welfare participation has been recast as a state-sponsored mode of labor-market participation.

Second, carceral institutions and logics have come to play a more central role in the social control of poverty populations. The figures cited in the preceding section signal a dramatic turn toward custody and post-custody surveillance as tools for maintaining social order in poor communities, especially the poor communities of color that bear the highest burdens of punishment, removal, and return (Wacquant 2009). In the poorhouse era, the warehousing of paupers was intimately tied to the principle of less eligibility: harsh labor under horrifying conditions ensured that even the worst offerings of the market would be preferred – i.e., they were designed to keep the poor off relief and in the market. The carceral state today has a more complex relationship to labor markets. By using laws to push large numbers of the poor into detention, mass incarceration has the short-run effect of promoting social order in a way that *reduces* the pool of potential workers available to low-wage employers (Western and Beckett 1999). In the long run, however, it produces a large population of “marked” workers who have

severely limited employment prospects and, thus, face intense pressures to accept the least attractive jobs (Garland 2002; Western and Beckett 1999). To ensure that they do so, paternalist reformers are increasingly focused on designing “post-exit” technologies of state-governed work enforcement that extend the disciplinary systems of welfare reform (Mead 2007). Here again, the underlying logic is not one of rolling back the state so that market pressures will enforce work; it is one of expanding the state’s activism as an affirmative agent of the market.

For the poor, the relationship between welfare provision and criminal justice as mechanisms of social control has also shifted over the past two decades. In the mid-20th century, a project of “penal welfarism” emerged as liberal reformers drew social-service operations into prison settings under the banner of rehabilitation (Garland 2002). In recent years, the direction of influence has reversed: penal logics and criminal justice functions have been imported into the welfare arena, where they serve as adjuncts to the carceral system (Gustafson 2009). Echoing criminal discourse, movements between work and welfare have been recast in the language of “welfare recidivism” (Guetzkow 2006; ACF 1999). Welfare sanctions have been developed as tools of discipline based on a logic of “punishment for violation” (Schram et al. 2009). State welfare programs have designed a host of procedures that use criminal records as a basis for exclusion, seek out criminal activity among recipients, and prosecute welfare fraud (e.g., failures to report income or changes in household composition) as a felony crime (Gustafson 2009). Welfare recipients’ names are increasingly shared with law enforcement and, under a project titled Operation Talon, food stamp offices are used as sites for sting operations to arrest individuals with outstanding warrants (Gustafson 2009).

Poverty governance is not just a mechanism of social control, however; it is also a site of social citizenship (Marshall 1964). Government policies directed at the poor are instruments of civic incorporation. Their designs reflect changing conceptions of citizenship as “a status that evolves over time” (Marshall 1964); their practices actively define the ways that members of the polity are positioned vis-à-vis non-members, one another, the state, and other major societal institutions (Soss and Schram 2008). Thus, to understand poverty governance today, one must take stock of how neoliberal and paternalist movements have recast American citizenship.

As described earlier, the market rationality of neoliberalism works to de-democratize citizenship and flatten it into an economic register of meaning and practice (Wolin 2008; Brown 2006). It redefines the citizen in terms of the individualistic market roles of consumer, worker, and paying customer. In poverty governance, these developments have intersected with the particular vision of citizenship, and civic incorporation, advanced by new paternalists. In T.H. Marshall’s classic formulation of citizenship, duties such as voting and working flowed from the possession of rights and, outside the citizen’s obligation to obey the law, were a matter of civic expectation rather than state enforcement. Paternalists such as Lawrence Mead (1986) turn this formulation on its head, recasting the fulfillment of obligations as the foundation of citizenship and the enforcement of obligations as the primary responsibility of the state. Thus, self-reliance as a worker and self-discipline as a community member should be seen as “not just a moral good but a prerequisite for citizenship” (Mayer 2008: 167). They are preconditions for “moral standing” as a member of society who merits equal respect and rights, and can be presumed competent to participate in civic life (Mead 1986; 1992).

As a result, welfare programs have been redesigned to pursue civic incorporation through behavioral enforcement. They are organized to “require recipients to function where they already are, as dependents” (Mead 1986: 4) so that they can become self-reliant workers who “live as full and independent citizens” (Novak et al. 1987: 5). Civic incorporation is pursued today by

positioning welfare recipients, not as bearers of rights or participants in their own governance, but as targets of directive and supervisory administrative arrangements that require compliance (Mead 2005). Because “the welfare problem [is] one of authority rather than freedom” (Mead 1986: 4), poverty governance is designed to prioritize social order over social justice and civic compliance over civic engagement (see Mead 1998).

At the intersection of neoliberalism and paternalism, citizenship is “reduced to self-care” (Brown 2006); self-care is reduced to meeting one’s needs through self-discipline and work; and the use of authority toward these ends is cast as a primary obligation of the state. Uses of public policy to make “better citizens” become, in this logic, indistinguishable from efforts to produce docile subjects who comply with market imperatives and political authorities.

Throughout U.S. history, poverty governance has been rooted in prevailing conceptions of citizenship, including their racial and gender dimensions. During the progressive era, for example, the reformers who championed Mother’s Pensions did so explicitly in the name of republican motherhood and the need to support women’s special civic duty and right to care for the next generation of citizens (Skocpol 1992; Gordon 1994). Republican motherhood was an explicitly racial concept for these reformers, reflecting the race-specific meaning of American citizenship that prevailed at the time (Smith 1997). Accordingly, the goal of facilitating gender-specific civic obligations contributed to both the provision of benefits outside wage work and the exclusion of racial “others” from the system – especially black women, who were valued far more as workers than as mothers of citizens (Ward 2005).

Today, poverty governance remains just as rooted in the meanings and practices citizenship. But it is a neoliberal-paternalist vision of citizenship that collapses diverse civic values into the foundational obligations of self-discipline and work. Motherhood, for example, is not erased as a civic good in welfare discourse; it is evaluated on different terms. The mother’s non-market work, in care-giving and child-rearing, loses its status as a civic contribution meriting public support. Yet it retains its status as a civic obligation – a responsibility that poor women should be held accountable for, a practice to be monitored and disciplined. At the same time, work in the market is elevated as a standard for evaluating the fulfillment of this obligation. Thus, the non-working, welfare-reliant mother is framed as a civic failure, not just for dodging her own obligation to work, but also for presenting her children with a bad role model, exposing them to shame, and failing to go out and provide for their needs. The historically masculine role of the worker-citizen is impressed on the welfare recipient as a parental obligation that she must fulfill – either by marrying a family breadwinner or assuming this role herself (Korteweg 2003).

In this way and others, poverty governance has been transformed by what Meda Chesney-Lind (1995) has called “gender equality with a vengeance,” a historical pattern “whereby the replacement of gender difference with sameness led to the more punitive treatment of women” (Haney 2004: 340). Yet it is a mistake to see this change as a simple matter of wage work coming to be viewed as a normative expectation for “women in general.” Now as in the past, race matters greatly for the relationship between gender and efforts to enforce civic obligations. Poor women of color predominate in the populations that fill women’s prisons and welfare programs (Haney 2004). They prevail in the cultural images of the poor that motivate policies to enforce work and individual responsibility (Hancock 2004). And their distribution across political jurisdictions is a key factor shaping the adoption and implementation of disciplinary policy tools today (Soss, Fording, and Schram 2008).

Alongside social citizenship and social control, social construction provides a third conceptual anchor for understanding continuity and change in poverty governance. As we have

already described, poverty governance today is organized to address a set of social problems that have been construed in terms of race, behavioral pathology, and social disorder. These constructions reflect the successes of a concerted political campaign, and they provide the prevailing frame of reference for actors who govern the poor. Moreover, civic incorporation and behavioral regulation in poverty governance today follow a constructivist logic. Direction and supervision, incentives and penalties, are expressly understood as tools of social transformation.

In many respects, these developments are continuous with the history of American efforts to govern the poor. Poor relief has long been approached as a kind of “transformative moral work” seeking to instill civic virtues and cultivate right habits of mind (Hasenfeld 1992; Gordon 1994; Cruikshank 1999). And there is little new about such efforts being grounded in pathological explanations of poverty or racialized and gendered images of the poor (Ward 2005).

Poverty governance today is more distinctive, however, in its efforts to construct governing authorities and governed subjects as market actors. Leading accounts of social construction provide insights into this development that focus primarily on the targets of public policy. Poverty governance, in this view, is guided by particular definitions of poverty as a social problem (Blumer 1971), constructions of the poor as a target population (Schneider and Ingram 1997), and causal explanations for the circumstances and behaviors of the poor (Stone 1989). Extending this line of thought to the current era, Deborah Stone (2008) rightly emphasizes how the diverse obligations and needs of poor people are reframed in market terms. Refracted through this policy prism, all facets of poor people’s lives – mental illnesses, physical disabilities, educational deprivations, obligations to care for children or aged parents – are collapsed into the economic register, recast as “barriers” to work that must be overcome (Stone 2008).

Neoliberalism has been aptly described as “a political project that endeavors to create a social reality that it suggests already exists” (Lemke 2001: 203). And indeed, in poverty governance today, efforts to turn the poor into self-disciplined economic agents are rooted in the insistence that they are already, and always have been, market actors. This rewriting of identity is well captured by the exhortations of a TANF “job club” instructor observed by Anna Korteweg:

No one in this room has been out of work, the way we’re going to write your resume. You’re working in the house, you’re a taxi driver, a budget planner, you volunteer at your children’s school, you’re a food preparer. You’re self-employed, you’re not receiving the income but you’re working all the time. You have been successfully and diligently working daily (2003: 468).

Nevertheless, constructivist analyses that focus on policy targets, as most do today, obscure a more distinctive contemporary development: efforts to reconstruct governing authorities as market actors disciplined by market pressures. As conservatives sought to reshape poverty governance, they viewed the “liberal welfare bureaucracy” as a major barrier to getting tough with the poor. State bureaucrats were seen as liberal and lazy, accustomed to a culture of paper pushing. Socialized to approach the poor as social workers, or as state officials processing citizen claims, how could they be trusted to implement the new disciplinary agendas? Indeed, in a classic principal-agent dilemma, this problem was made all the more pressing by an agenda that prioritized the devolution of authority and discretionary paternalism at the frontlines.

The result was a concerted effort to reposition governing authorities as market actors confronting market pressures. In many cases, of course, this effort was advanced by contracting service provision out to market firms, where employees would literally govern the poor as part of a profit-making enterprise. In state agencies as well, however, poverty governance was recast to operate according to market identities, logics, and pressures. Frontline workers were immersed in

the new governing mentalities of neoliberalism: market-based beliefs about how we should govern, who we are when we govern, and what we aim to achieve by governing (Dean 1999: 17).

Thus, under welfare reform, recipients have been relabeled as “customers” or “candidates,” as in job candidates, and caseworkers hold titles such as “Financial and Employment Planner” (FEP) and “Career Counselor.” The terms of their relationship are set through the ritualistic signing of a contractual Individual Responsibility Plan (IRP). Sanctions that punish non-compliance are described, not just as a way to discipline clients for their own good (per paternalism), but also as a “wage deduction” for the client’s failure to do the job agreed to in the IRP contract. Administrators are encouraged to see their programs as market operations designed to serve local employers as much as the candidates on their official caseloads. Their “one-stop centers” are adorned with signs that promote market values and offer tips on how to market oneself by writing a better resume and dressing for success. Their meeting spaces are labeled with titles like “The Excellence Room” and “The Opportunity Room.” In these and other ways, welfare workers today are saturated in a discourse that continually reminds them: you work in a business; your business is to turn job candidates into employees; your relationship to the candidate is based on a contract; and it is your job to enforce the contract.

Such messages are rooted in a more basic organizational reality: under the new regime of performance management, program implementers have, in fact, been repositioned as actors in a quasi-market system (Radin 2006). Like the welfare recipients they serve, they confront financial incentives and penalties tied to documented outcomes that are closely monitored. In many states, local providers are explicitly placed in competition with one another and, in all states, contracts with private providers base profitability on pay points for performance. In celebratory portrayals, performance systems free local actors to innovate as creative entrepreneurs and then, later, give them the feedback they need to improve. In reality, however, performance pressures impose a strong form of market discipline. The focusing effects of outcome benchmarks, the pressures of competition, the prospects of incurring rewards or penalties, and the awareness that one is being closely monitored do more than just make agents accountable; they reconstitute agency itself (Moynihan 2008). Under this system, local providers learn quickly that they must make active use of disciplinary tools in handling clients if they are to meet their performance goals (Soss, Fording, and Schram 2008). In this way, neoliberal paternalism comes full circle, imposing a directive and supervisory form of market discipline on governing authorities so that they, in turn, can be relied on to impose a directive and supervisory form of market discipline on the poor.

Conclusion

In the preceding sections, we have analyzed the transformation of poverty governance as a key chapter in the recent history of American political development. The policy changes we have described are best understood as political achievements with far-reaching political implications. They were driven by actors who mobilized to reorganize and redirect the exercise of public authority – and who were aided by changes in the workings of American democracy that deepened the influence of the business class. The new systems they created were not necessitated by disembodied global forces or new ideas about poverty, and they are not politically neutral in their effects. They were products of political action, and they represent a significant reordering of relations between actors in the state and market, between workers and employers and, especially, between the poor and governing authorities.

Because our goal is to illuminate poverty governance in the U.S., our telling of this story has focused on low-income Americans. It would be a mistake, however, to imagine that the developments we have described matter only for poor people in the United States. As we have seen, the assault on poverty governance served as the visible face of a campaign that sought and achieved far broader changes. Arguments that were honed and legitimated by focusing attention on the disorderly poor provided the template for a broader “Personal Responsibility Crusade” that has left working Americans far more vulnerable to the predictable risks of social and economic life (Hacker 2006). The “ownership society” envisioned by President George Bush offered the clearest conservative expression of this drive to reposition citizens as self-disciplined, prudent market actors who bear personal responsibility for collective problems and seek to solve them through strategic individual choices (Feldman 2005).

Increasingly, however, Democrats and other political liberals are applying their own versions of neoliberal paternalism to policy issues that affect all Americans. The paradigmatic expression of this turn has been the “libertarian paternalism” advocated by Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein (2008), who reframe collective policy questions as problems of individual choice and use the portraits of incompetence provided by behavioral economics to justify active uses of authority to design “choice architecture.” This is not the muscular, supervisory brand of paternalism that poor people encounter in welfare and parole programs, but it applies a governing logic to all Americans that is cut from the same neoliberal-paternalist cloth.

Likewise, the rise of neoliberal paternalism is far more than just an American political development. It is a shift in how the poor are governed on a global scale. In the late 20th century, rich nations, led by the U.S. and served by the IMF and World Bank, adopted a more directive and supervisory stance in imposing market principles on poor developing nations (Serra and Stiglitz 2008). The “Washington Consensus” on international development in the 1990s was of a piece with American welfare reform in the 1990s. And in more recent years, developing nations have been increasingly pushed to adopt neoliberal-paternalist policies for dealing with their own impoverished communities (Rosenberg 2008). Conditional Cash Transfers (CCTs) have become a rapidly-spreading “global social policy” in the developing world, making aid for the poor conditional on behavior and deploying assistance to incentivize compliance with a variety of public health, education, and welfare initiatives (Thompson 2007). Such “fast track” policies have spread to 42 developing countries in recent years, where they have been elaborated in forms that are now being re-imported to sites such as New York City (Peck and Theodore 2009).

In the developed world, “Model USA” has provided a template for the turn to “labor activation” policies across the OECD nations (Piven 2002). Throughout Europe, public aid has been made more contingent on behavioral obligations and more focused on incenting labor-market participation (Torfing 1999). Yet the European nations continue to differ considerably in their approaches to poverty governance, and the patterning of policy change serves to underscore a basic point of our analysis. The political efforts that transformed poverty governance did not roll back or replace the activist state; they reorganized and redirected the activist state in ways that built on the specific institutions and policy regimes they confronted.

Indeed, by ignoring this fact, scholars enamored with the concept of globalization have frequently overstated the case for a global convergence in social policy (e.g., Gilbert 2002). The “three worlds of welfare capitalism” identified by Gosta Esping-Andersen (1990) continue to exhibit distinctive policy regimes for the poor and unemployed (Eichhorst, Kaufman, and Konle-Seidl 2008). And even where policy designs have converged, their implementation continues to reflect the diverse political geography of welfare provision (Martin 2004). To be sure, global

market integration has contributed to the restructuring of welfare states. Its effects, however, have depended on the ways political actors have responded within the contexts of their own institutions (Hay 2006). Political responses to the pressures of globalization have varied markedly across the wealthy democracies, with profound implications for patterns of inequality and poverty (Massey 2009). Likewise, political uses of the narrative of globalization – as an inexorable force requiring all states to curb social protections and pursue labor market “flexibility” – have proved far more viable in some polities than others (Schram 2006).

The United States, with its longstanding emphasis on market-conforming welfare policy and reliance on private agents of provision, has been the predictable epicenter of the global turn toward neoliberal poverty governance (Noble 1997; Katz 2002: 171-94; Hacker 2002). When business interests and social conservatives mobilized in the 1970s, they enjoyed an unusually hospitable environment for their political efforts. Isolated within the fragmented U.S. welfare state and never fully integrated into national coverage, the non-elderly, non-disabled poor were positioned as the “low-hanging fruit” for reformers – available to be taken without arousing more powerful constituencies. And in the wake of the turbulent 1960s, anxieties over race, gender, and sexuality combined with fears of social unrest and crime to provide conservatives with a powerful set of cultural resources that could be exploited to discredit Great Society liberalism and advance a “law and order” agenda for governing the poor.

The result is a new policy regime of supervision and discipline, organized by market logics and oriented to serve market needs. The new regime does not represent a decisive break with the past. To the contrary, it remains rooted in the perennial projects of social control and civic incorporation, as well as the recurrent longing to reform the deviant poor. Indeed, as political forces have eroded the policy victories won by and for the poor in the 1960s, echoes of eras gone by have surrounded the effort to construct a more decentralized and disciplinary system. But the history of poor relief, like the development of the activist state, cannot simply be rewound to an earlier time. From mass incarceration to the market discipline of performance management, significant changes have come to poverty governance in the United States. The logic that links them is neoliberal paternalism, and their consequences for American society should trouble all who are committed to social justice and democracy.

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