

PART 2 - PRO'S AND CONS OF THE COMMUNITY ACTION CONCEPT AND
THE WAR ON POVERTY - 1960's
What the critics said about the community action concept.....

Both supporters and detractors of the War on Poverty have come up with lists of why community action and the War on Poverty was set up to fail in its mission of eliminating poverty. Are these criticisms deserved??

✓Lyndon Johnson's Great Society institutionalized many important social changes:

Health care for the poor and elderly with all its current limitations is still better than it used to be

Legal services, though underfunded, are recognized as important for the poor

The civil rights movement led to many legal - if not economic - advances for minorities

Early childhood development programs - including Head Start - are now widely recognized as important for disadvantaged children.

This is progress - and much of it began in the 1960's. Yet the War on Poverty is still derided by its critics as a massive failure because "we fought a war on poverty and poverty won."

CRITICISMS

✓Professor Peter Edelman - Georgetown Law Center says that CAAs did make a contribution but that three factors made CAP agencies dangerous in the beginning:

CONTRIBUTION was that CAAs gave a generation of poor people a sense of having control over their own lives, HOWEVER they also learned that using federal money to challenge political institutions is inherently problematic.

He says three key features made CAP agencies a troublesome concept for local politicians to swallow:

1. CAP agencies were set up outside the political system and so weren't accountable to mayors or other local elected officials

2. "Maximum feasible participation" was perceived to mean that CAAs were controlled by the same people they were serving

3. Funding came directly from the federal govt. not through any intermediate govt. entity.

In other words the autonomy of CAAs made them beholden to no one and they were widely viewed as a threat to established political powers. This is

Why the Green amendment was passed - to thwart the independence of CAAs and make them more accountable to public officials

Conservative critics of community action, most notably the Heritage Foundation, take a different view and say the crucial errors of the community action concept were:

1. Policymaking was too centralized in Washington

2. The implementation of the War on poverty was guided by a welfare rights principle

3. The War on Poverty failed because it assumed that sending trained professionals into the community to help poor people was the best way to help the poor.

(DB - This is from the Atlantic Monthly article - which is also a handout - -

***Nicholas Lehman says the above three charges were all wrong that in fact

1. Community action was as decentralized a program as possible,
2. the War on Poverty rejected the welfare system and instituted the idea of self-help and
3. the community action program was locally controlled and in large part staffed by low-income members of the community - not outside professionals)

A Wall street Journal editor wrote on a recent article in the American Spectator magazine that the Great Society went wrong because:

1. Resources were used to put political pressure on the government for handouts
2. The Johnson administration failed to consider the side-effects of handing out money to people who had done nothing to earn it.
3. As the Great Society "showered money on the poor" the Supreme Court was dismantling traditional means of preserving of law and order.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Which of these criticisms do you agree or disagree with - why?

What was the reasoning behind setting up the CAAs outside of the local power structure?

Did the Johnson administration realize this structure would backfire or do you think they really believed it could work?

X

EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
BUREAU OF THE BUDGET
WASHINGTON 25, D.C.

EXECUTIVE
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SEP 18 1965

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

Subject: Poverty program: Opposition from the Mayors

The major complaint of the mayors against CEO relates to the Community Action Program (CAP). Many mayors assert that the CAP is setting up a competing political organization in their own backyards.

I think we can do something about this and I have several proposals. But first, some background explanation:

To get at the problem we have to look at the original purposes of the CAP when it was first conceived, in late 1963. It was based on two central propositions:

- a larger "dole" is not the answer -- the poor must become producing members of the American society.
- the war against poverty can only be won at the local level, mobilizing and unifying the resources of the local community. The battle won't be won solely by handouts and program direction from Washington.

Based on these concepts, the CAP had three major goals:

1. To use Federal grants as an enticement to get comprehensive community anti-poverty plans developed. These plans would bring together the many -- often warring - programs of Federal, state, local, and private agencies in each community. Fighting poverty is no excuse for wasteful competition and duplication among social welfare agencies.

Nothing else sent to
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David Zarefsky

President Johnson's War on Poverty

Rhetoric and History

The University of Alabama Press

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Inception

The War Is Declared

The decision to call the antipoverty effort a war was made at the Johnson ranch during the Christmas holidays of 1963. Although the choice of language might seem casual, Johnson maintained in his memoirs that it was deliberate. He wrote, "The military image carried with it connotations of victories and defeats that could prove misleading. But I wanted to rally the nation, to sound a call to arms which would stir people in the government, in private industry, and on the campuses to lend their talents to a massive effort to eliminate the evil."¹ His intentions were publicly announced in his first State of the Union message, on January 8, 1964. Perhaps the most newsworthy element of the speech was the president's confident assertion that "this administration, here and now, declares unconditional war on poverty."

I

Instinctively, the president sensed the need to inspire and rally the nation and found in the war metaphor the means to that end. Aroused by President Kennedy's untimely death, many Americans longed for redemption through

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sacrifice. The Harris Poll reported on December 30, 1963, that Americans massively rejected political extremism and also that many had "an individual sense of guilt for not having worked more for tolerance toward others."² Enlisting in the national service during wartime might expiate that guilt. Before the military conflict in Vietnam called into question the patriotism of war, the administration could use war against an ancient, impersonal foe as the means by which to cater to the national need.

Not only was the declaration of war responsive to the national mood after Dallas; but it also was personally and politically valuable to the new president. When he told Walter Heller to continue planning for a program, his decision reflected his own roots: his youth in a region to which poverty had been no stranger, his memory of how poverty debilitated the young, and his knowledge that the New Deal had brought not just relief but a sense of hope. Johnson's background and convictions were not well known among the American people when he took office, however. Only 5 percent of the people thought they knew a great deal about Johnson—compared with 24 percent for Kennedy at the time of his inauguration. On the other hand, 67 percent reported that they knew very little about Johnson, as opposed to 17 percent for Kennedy. Both Republican candidates Nelson Rockefeller and Barry Goldwater had been seen or heard by twice as many people as had Johnson.³ Clearly the new president needed to establish an identity and create a positive impression among the American people. Aside from averting chaos and panic, developing his image probably was his single greatest need in the days following the assassination.

Moreover, although he disdained such labels, Johnson often had been regarded as a southern conservative whose perspective was limited to his own region. Recent scholar-

ship has clearly demonstrated the influence of Franklin D. Roosevelt on Johnson.⁴ But that influence was felt most clearly in the Texan's early years, and the years since World War II seemed to suggest that Johnson had trimmed his liberal sails and had catered to the wishes of the new Texas wealth. Unless he could change this image to become a *national* politician, Johnson could not depend upon the support of a nationwide majority. Paradoxically, however, his heritage also counted in his favor. His advocacy of a major government program presumably would constitute reluctant testimony to its effectiveness, thereby enhancing his own credibility. This phenomenon illustrated a principle described by his speechwriter, Harry McPherson: "reasonable things could be done best by those whose heritage required that they oppose them."⁵

Other aspects of the new president's image also were important. He needed a transition between his caretaker role after the Kennedy assassination and his own presidency. He had to safeguard and nurture the Kennedy legacy, in keeping with his role as executor of the late president's political will. But as president in his own right, he also needed to define himself as a leader separate and distinct from President Kennedy. This seeming dilemma could be overcome by identifying himself with a program which Kennedy supporters might champion enthusiastically but which was not yet publicly labeled as a Kennedy effort. The new president also could distinguish himself from his predecessor if he could break the congressional logjam. By late July 1963, for example, nearly 40 percent of Kennedy's proposals had not been acted on by *either* House.⁶ By initiating a major program and obtaining prompt congressional action, Johnson could restore a sense of momentum.

Poverty, then, offered Johnson immense benefits as a public issue, but only if he could arouse public and congressional support. Otherwise he could neither respond to the national mood after the assassination nor reap the personal and political dividends. It is easy in retrospect to underestimate the need to generate substantial public support, but in 1963 there existed no sense of national urgency about poverty. Douglass Cater, then national affairs editor of *The Reporter*, complained that publicists had not made it a national issue. The governor of North Carolina, Terry Sanford, testified in Congress that among the basic problems of poverty was the fact that people were unaware of it. Nor were there organized strong interest groups, either among the poor or in their behalf. Nor were Americans sanguine about the prospects of an antipoverty campaign: the Gallup Poll reported in 1964 that 83 percent of its sample did not believe that poverty could be ended.¹¹

Although the public could be described as generally apathetic about poverty, there were occasional expressions of interest and concern from the politically marginal "new left" and from the civil rights movement. The left for some time had shown concern for the poverty problem. *Dissent* and *New America*, Lander reports, devoted far more attention to poverty than did the less radical *Commentary*, the *Nation*, and the *Progressive*. Moreover, leftist publications described the conditions of the poor in terms of moral outrage rather than romanticism.¹² Poverty also received mention in the Socialist party platforms of 1960 and 1962 (the latter contained the phrase "war on poverty") and in the 1962 Port Huron statement of Students for a Democratic Society. Probably the most significant event in making the general public aware of poverty,

however, was the publication in 1962 of Michael Harrington's *The Other America*.¹³

Lacking the political leadership of lobbies or the informal political organization of the slums, Harrington argued, the poor themselves could not be expected to launch a movement for their own material improvement. They would need allies, but therein lay the paradox. Because so many Americans enjoyed the luxuries of affluence, they were indifferent or blind to poverty, and would remain that way "until there is a vast social movement, a new period of political creativity."¹⁴

Harrington's book, however, hardly was received with instant acclaim. But it attracted the attention of Dwight Macdonald, who reviewed the book (and several others) in the January 19, 1963, issue of the *New Yorker*. Theodore Sorensen reportedly urged President Kennedy to read the Macdonald article; Walter Heller gave the president a copy of *The Other America*, "although it is not known whether the President read it."¹⁵ The civil rights movement, at about the same time, came to see that widespread social reform would be needed in order to achieve its objectives and that poverty was the issue which would expose this need. Once the nonviolent demonstrations of the early 1960s had kindled what Bayard Rustin called "the resurgence of social conscience,"¹⁶ it was easier to see economic deprivation as part of an overall pattern. Once racial discrimination was shown to be national rather than peculiarly southern, it was easier to argue that civil rights laws would be of no avail to those without means. Once the problem of the black was defined as inequality, it was easier to maintain that redistributive policies were necessary.

The experience of its own social programs, the "new

left," and the civil rights movement led members of the Kennedy administration in 1963 to redefine poverty as a generic condition underlying many specific social problems. But these efforts failed to incite any significant public interest, and most Americans remained unaware of the problem of poverty at the time that Lyndon Johnson took office.

President Johnson engaged in a persuasive campaign to change this public judgment. He followed the State of the Union address with a series of speeches in the spring of 1964 to informal gatherings, university audiences, conventions, and civic groups, ranging, according to Doris Kearns, "from the Daughters of the American Revolution to the Socialist Party, from the Business Council to the AFL-CIO."¹⁵ By his own account, the president chose to emphasize the goals rather than the contents of the poverty program. His basic message to the nation was that "the War on Poverty was not a partisan effort. It was a moral obligation and its success rested on every one of us."¹⁶ These memorable, though vague, statements of objectives answered a vital need, by conveying a sense of Johnson's ability quickly to cope with the problems of the presidency.¹⁷ In addition to his speeches, the president made personal visits to poverty-stricken areas. He also enlisted the support of influential businessmen who spoke in behalf of the program. They too, frequently spoke only of the program's goals. They had been convinced that antipoverty legislation was essential as a matter of principle, and they were not very familiar with the legislative details. Also aiding the campaign were a number of articles and books aimed at convincing the layman of the scope of the problem.¹⁸ Unlike the more technical literature, these books had as their goal the mobilization of attitudes rather than the presentation of data. They pro-

vided the general reader with basic information and arguments which could cultivate a favorable attitude toward the antipoverty program.

Another force aiding Johnson's national campaign was the speaking of Sargent Shriver. Shriver was talented as a lobbyist, as was evident from his successes in inspiring the nation to support the Peace Corps and in securing ample appropriations from an economy-minded Congress. He also had a special talent for identifying his message with the needs of his audience. Murray Kempton described Shriver's abilities in this regard by writing, "Sargent Shriver is a man who, at one and the same moment, manages to remind the dedicated that they can achieve the American vision only by intense personal sacrifice and to assure the indifferent that the American vision is theirs on a payment plan so easy that they will barely feel it."¹⁹ Although Shriver's capacities as a salesman and lobbyist would not always be regarded as strengths, they definitely were assets in eliciting public support for an antipoverty program.

One particular aspect of the appeal for public support deserves mention. The Democrats had won the 1960 election by the slimmest of margins, and it appeared that the urban black vote was crucial to this success. Especially with the disappearance of traditional urban ethnic political machines, it became important that the Democrats solidify the loyalty of urban blacks. One obvious way to try to do so was by making them the beneficiaries of federal largesse. It also was important, however, that whites not be alienated, lest the Democrats gain one source of support only by losing another. Therefore, programs in aid of the poor must mute the question of race, translating it into terms which would command biracial support.

It is unclear to what degree this political situation functioned as a conscious motive for President Johnson and his staff. Writing retrospectively, Daniel Patrick Moynihan has claimed that administration planners were aware of the Democrats' need to solidify their political base, and that it was their intention to recreate the urban political machines. Other writers, such as Frances Fox Piven, have identified the appeal to the black vote as a function which the antipoverty program could perform, without addressing the question of whether such appeal was the administration's conscious objective.²⁰

In any case, the president was successful in generating public support. Doris Kearns has written that "what had been largely the concern of a small number of liberal intellectuals and government bureaucrats became within six months the national disgrace that shattered the complacency of a people who always considered their country a land of equal opportunity for all."²¹ In performing this feat, Johnson was aided greatly by the language in which he cast his program. The elements and implications of the military metaphor therefore deserve careful attention.

II

Even a casual reading should make plain the degree to which the military imagery penetrated public discourse. The war metaphor may be seen, of course, in President Johnson's State of the Union address and in his subsequent speeches. It may be found in the call made by Congressman Phil Landrum of Georgia for total mobilization of all the nation's resources, "moral, spiritual, intellectual, and financial, to challenge a condition."²² It may

be found as well in numerous corollary metaphors. Walter Reuther testified that the labor movement had "made it clear to the President that we enlist with him in the war against poverty for the duration." Mayor Raymond Tucker of St. Louis said that "to wheel up weapons and ammunition together for the first time for a coordinated, concerted, multifront offensive" was the aim of the Economic Opportunity Act, the plan of battle for a war in which the U.S. Conference of Mayors was one of the first recruits. Describing the Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) program, the president rhapsodized in his message to Congress that dedicated Americans would be given "the opportunity to enlist as volunteers in the war against poverty." The normally staid Council of Economic Advisers described chapter 2 of its 1964 report as "designed to provide some understanding of the enemy and to outline the main features of a strategy of attack." And Secretary of Labor Willard Wirtz told the House committee, "This war on poverty is not going to be fought in the tradition of emotional crusades. H.R. 10440 [the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964] is a carefully worked out battle plan based less on praising the Lord than on passing the ammunition." Even opponents of the pending measure indulged in military symbolism. For example, Senator John Tower of Texas referred to the preemption of local control and representative government as "the first casualty of the war on poverty."²³

Three elements of the war metaphor particularly deserve attention. It defined the objective and encouraged enlistment in the effort; it identified the enemy against whom the campaign was directed, and it dictated the choice of weapons and tactics with which the struggle would be fought.

Defining the Objective. In declaring *unconditional* war, the president made clear that his objective was vast. Not for limited goals was this fight to be waged. It was to be a total assault on the foe, as Agriculture Secretary Orville Freeman testified, "for as long as it takes, using whatever means must be employed, until the goal is won."²⁴ The strategic value of declaring unconditional war was apparent. It logically demanded a nationwide program.

As vice president, Johnson had played no role in the embryonic thinking and planning about poverty during the Kennedy administration, which had built largely on the experience of the juvenile delinquency program initiated in 1961. This measure made available federal funds to support demonstration projects in the prevention and control of delinquency. Approximately fifteen cities had pilot programs designed to alter the "opportunity structure" of the inner-city ghetto, thought to be the breeding ground of delinquency.²⁵ In a similar vein, the antipoverty task force in December 1963 favored small-scale demonstration projects in no more than fifty poverty areas. Moreover, a project would be started only after completion of comprehensive, coordinated planning. Early news reports had stressed that the forthcoming antipoverty program would *not* be an accelerated, all-out effort.²⁶

Labor Secretary Willard Wirtz attacked this assumption. An unconditional war, he contended, could not be fought with a single weapon in a small number of target areas. Shriver, who had just assumed the chairmanship of the task force, was impressed by this presentation. Accordingly, on February 4, he decided to broaden the community action concept to include the entire nation—without, however, any increase from the \$500 million proposed for community action projects. Shriver's explicit justification for this expansion was that the War on Pov-

erty should be equal in scope and glamour to the image being presented in the communications media.²⁷ The rhetorical stance determined the direction of the policy. It converted a geographically limited program to an effort of national scope, and it de-emphasized comprehensive planning in favor of a stress on quick action.

Moreover, to advocate *unconditional* war was to imply that additional resources would be committed to the struggle as necessary in the future. In this way the antipoverty planners could reconcile the grand objectives of their effort with the low level of funding proposed for the Economic Opportunity Act. The 1964 act was to be but a *first step* in the War on Poverty. Larger attacks would be mounted as soon as the experimental probes exposed the enemy and demonstrated the weaponry for a successful assault. Shriver and his aides reportedly believed that the successes of early poverty projects would generate a supportive constituency which would demand massive increases in funds in subsequent years.²⁸ The unconditional war appeal was a device by which to establish first-claim upon additional future revenues.

If a total national effort were to be made to wage unconditional war, then clearly there had to be centralized command. This rationale justified the creation of the new Office of Economic Opportunity, bypassing existing departments and agencies. Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare Anthony Celebrezze explicitly linked this administrative structure to the war metaphor. "If you are going to declare war," he said, "you have to have one general of the Army. You cannot have six generals." And Congressman Landrum described the program by saying, "in recognizing this as D-day, we are just setting up a general just like we set up General Eisenhower as commander of all the forces in World War II and had him

directing all those different areas of strength."²⁹ Moreover, a separate agency would dramatize the administration's commitment to its program and would secure maximum publicity.

The war metaphor enlisted participation in the unconditional struggle. To begin with, it substantially reduced the administration's burden of proof. In any controversy, one side ultimately must prove its case; the other side enjoys presumption. The defendant in a criminal trial enjoys presumption because it is the prosecution's burden to establish guilt. Acquittal need not signify that the accused definitely has proved himself innocent; it means that the state has failed to prove guilt. Likewise, in disputes over public policy, presumption normally rests with the status quo, on the theory that present policies will continue unless alternatives are shown to be better. The classic treatment of presumption and burden of proof was written in the early nineteenth century by Richard Whately, who assigned presumption to the status quo. "There is a Presumption," he wrote, "in favour of every existing institution. Many of these (we will suppose, the majority) may be susceptible of alteration for the better, but still the Burden of Proof lies with him who proposes an alteration; simply, on the ground that since a change is not a good in itself, he who demands a change should show cause for it."³⁰ Recourse to the presumption is, in Whately's view, one of the advocate's strongest arguments, since it enables him to avoid defending his position until it has been attacked.

Applied to the situation of 1964, Whately's presumption normally would rest with the existing antipoverty programs. To justify the adoption of the Economic Opportunity Act, the Johnson administration would have been required to identify substantial problems which

those policies could not solve. Such an attempt would have been time-consuming and unlikely to succeed, given the predispositions of Congress and the nation. A far more expedient course would be for the proponents of the act to offer a counterpresumption which would have enabled them to claim preoccupation of the ground. This function the military symbolism accomplished. When a nation is at war, by definition, it has acknowledged the existence of a foe sufficiently threatening to warrant attack. A crisis is at hand, the need for action is assumed, and the persistent challenge of the enemy becomes prima facie evidence of the insufficiency of existing measures.³¹ Hence, the Shriver group could stress getting programs started quickly because of the urgency of the problem and then making changes in the law later if need be.

While the war metaphor made it easier for the American people to enlist, it also made it harder for anyone to oppose the campaign. The president was able to identify the contending armies so as to isolate his opposition. A war, of course, implies the existence of an enemy. The enemy was an impersonal force, but it was aided by certain "neutrals" who did not enlist in the struggle. In a speech to the Communications Workers of America in June, the president attempted to describe these neutrals. The contest, he declared, was between the concerned and the indifferent, between the farsighted and those without vision, between "those who know that their future is tied to the future of all and those who ignore this great lesson of history."³² This definition of the competing forces placed Republicans and dubious Democrats in a difficult position. They felt compelled to endorse the objectives of the bill, in order to rescue themselves from Johnson's characterization. On what other grounds, though, could they justify their opposition?

Some opponents charged that the symbolism of war was eulogistic covering for a bad bill. Senator Millard Simpson of Wyoming likened "War on Poverty" to "truth in lending": "an appealing phrase which is used in an attempt to make the bad seem good, the deceitful seem honest, and the fraudulent seem trustworthy." Senator A. Willis Robertson of Virginia decried symbolism which called upon him to vote for a bill "primarily because of the name it carries and the purposes it seeks to achieve, rather than upon testimony that the measure is actually needed and soundly conceived."³³

Opponents of the Economic Opportunity Act also tried to capture the military symbolism for themselves, by claiming the prior existence of a war against poverty. The minority report of the House Education and Labor Committee claimed that America had already succeeded in its war against poverty, largely because of "a free and unregulated society, marked by a labor force and an industrial community untrammelled by the harsh hand of statism."³⁴ Opponents also made several retorts to the proposed mobilization of resources and commitment to total victory. They taunted the administration for proclaiming this goal with respect to poverty when it seemingly was unwilling to do so in foreign affairs.³⁵ They argued that the programs would raise the expectations of the poor without providing the means to satisfy them; for this reason, former vice president Richard Nixon proclaimed the effort a "cruel hoax."³⁶ They argued that the commitment to use any resources necessary, while expressing the generous instincts of the American people, did not absolve legislators of the obligation to examine closely the propriety of the methods proposed.³⁷

Republicans especially objected to the image of Sargent Shriver as commander in chief. During the House hear-

ings, Congressman Frelinghuysen of New Jersey mused, "Maybe this is a good figure of speech to use and maybe it is not." By the time of the floor debate, he had decided the question. "The label of 'anti-poverty' on this poisonous concoction does not alter its content," he charged. "Every power-struck totalitarian regime in modern history has promised to eliminate poverty through the complete centralization of power. Such nonsense has been the lowest common denominator of totalitarianism of both the right and of the left."³⁸

For the most part, these tactics of opposition were unsuccessful. Having chosen to focus the issue on the poverty problem rather than a proposed solution, the administration doggedly maintained its position, reinterpreting opposing arguments as denials of the need for action. President Johnson referred obliquely to several objections raised by Frelinghuysen and then dismissed them, saying, "Why anyone should hate an antipoverty program, I don't know."³⁹ Once the attacks had been redefined in terms of the administration's chosen focus, it was easy to derogate them as partisan, trivial, and pernicious.

Not only did it reduce the burden of proof and isolate the opposition, but the war metaphor also sustained national interest and participation. It was an effective unifying device. It is an item in the national folklore that war subsumes all partisan strife in united effort for victory, and pre-Vietnam history offers enough examples to make the folklore credible. Appealing to the same spirit would have maximum power in arousing an indifferent nation, and would also help to stifle opposition (on the theory that criticizing the government during wartime gives aid and comfort to the enemy). In his congressional testimony, Mayor Daley of Chicago stated, "One characteris-

tic of the American people when a war is declared is that all sides come together, and this is a war."⁴⁰ This same appeal, it was hoped, would evoke an idealistic fervor which would prevent later backsliding or erosion of support. Interior Secretary Stewart Udall spoke to this theme in suggesting that the antipoverty effort might serve as William James's desired moral equivalent of war—more than self-defense, retaliation, or even vendetta, it was to be a crusade. President Johnson shared the same sentiments with the Advertising Council: "It is almost insulting to urge you to enlist in this war for just economic motivations. This is a moral challenge that goes to the very root of our civilization."⁴¹

In sum, the metaphor of war profoundly influenced the objectives of the poverty program. It made them vast; nothing less than the complete conquest of the foe would do. It made them national in scope and called for a centralized command. It captured presumption and thereby reduced the administration's burden of proof in appealing for recruits. It isolated the opposition and made opponents seem almost treasonous. And it served as a unifying device, rallying the nation behind a moral challenge.

It was assumed, of course, that the challenge could be met if only the will were there. Sometimes this assumption was made explicit. For the first time in history, the president believed, it was possible for a nation to eliminate poverty, and the government knew how to do it. He sounded this theme in his 1964 economic report and again in June in an address to the Communications Workers of America.⁴² Both Robert Kennedy and Hubert Humphrey argued that, if America could launch a program of foreign aid for other peoples of the world, surely she could do as much for her own.⁴³ Others declared that a nation which

could send a man to the moon certainly could relieve distress on earth. President Johnson acknowledged the potency of this comparison, noting in his memoirs that "space was the platform from which the social revolution of the 1960s was launched."⁴⁴

Strictly speaking, of course, this claim to capacity and expertise was invalid. Statements about the nation's economic ability referred to the ability to fill the poverty-income gap—the difference between the income of the poor and the official "poverty line." Inasmuch as the poverty planners had *rejected* a definition of poverty as income deficiency, however, these statements were irrelevant. No evidence was introduced, nor could any have been, that the administration fully understood or knew how to deal with the cycle-of-poverty theory which it espoused. Similarly, the administration's presentation of its program as carefully conceived and designed was at variance with the facts, as the above review of the task force's decision-making processes should indicate. Finally, the analogies suggested by the *a fortiori* arguments were more apparent than real. The programs selected for comparison involved the technical capacity to implement agreed-upon objectives, such as the shipping of food or the assembling of rockets, rather than the selection of the objectives themselves. Competence in the former did not imply ability in the latter.

Largely because of the lack of expertise within the Congress, however, the administration's claims of adequate knowledge and technology did not receive serious challenge. Poverty was a new issue, and the Economic Opportunity Act cut across the jurisdictions of several congressional committees. Few members, therefore, were competent concerning all its provisions, and the prevailing disposition was to trust the executive.

Identifying the Enemy No less substantial was the influence of the war metaphor on the identification of the enemy. It was not so much a precise statistical definition or a census of the poor that was needed, since by any acceptable definition the Economic Opportunity Act could help only a fraction of those in need. What was needed, though, was a working theory of the nature of poverty, so that a direction for the new program could be determined and appropriate targets selected.

This characterization drew on the American past. From the colonial period onward, the dominant belief was that poverty was an individual, not a social, problem. The working or self-supporting poor were paid scant heed; public policy concentrated on the control of pauperism. Paupers, those unable or unwilling to work, were seen in the same light as were criminals. They were characterized by reference to their drunkenness, vice, and moral depravity, conditions which in turn were asserted to be the causes of their plight. The mid-nineteenth-century humanitarian reform movements reinforced this approach, since their emphasis was on *individual* actions to improve one's life. Later, both the frontier West and the urbanizing East offered apparent access to economic opportunity. The seeming ease with which one could enjoy prosperity strengthened the belief that poverty was caused by individual defects. The individualist conception of poverty was given further support by the application to the society of Charles Darwin's theory of evolution. Although thoroughly rooted in the nineteenth century, this point of view remained dominant well into the twentieth.

Between 1900 and 1960, however, this traditional view of poverty was challenged by a second perspective. The Progressive movement contributed the argument that poverty was a social phenomenon, not an imperfection of

the individual, and that powerful social groups had an economic stake in its perpetuation. This argument placed special-interest groups on the defensive and led social reformers to become more tolerant of the personal deficiencies of the poor. If poverty had its origin in circumstances too powerful for the individual to alter, then personal vices were more likely to be mechanisms for coping with the environment than the root causes of the individual's woe.

For those for whom relief was justified by this new perspective, private, voluntary measures were thought in principle to be superior to public aid. But increasing legitimacy was given to the use of the state's police power to compel behavior which would improve the individual's chance to escape poverty. It was assumed for some time, though, that local government should be responsible. Proponents of federal action suffered a major setback in 1854 when President Franklin Pierce vetoed a bill appropriating land to the states for the establishment of hospitals for the insane, on the grounds that charitable activities were a state function. Pierce's strict constructionism dominated most of the next century. Congressional moves to gain federal aid for the unemployed in 1893-94, 1914, and 1921 all failed. Federal child-labor laws were declared unconstitutional although similar state statutes were upheld. In 1932, President Hoover opposed direct federal relief for the unemployed because local communities could not be allowed to abandon their "precious possession of local initiative and responsibility."

It was Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal which established the place of the federal government in antipoverty policy. Roosevelt responded to the depression's severity by establishing the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, under the charge of Harry Hopkins. For the first

time, the federal government assumed substantial responsibility for the administration and finance of relief. For the first time, aid was given as a right to which a citizen was entitled rather than as a charity bestowed upon particular groups. For the first time, relief was comprehensive, including not only the cost of food but other necessities such as rent, clothing, and medical care. Even so, Roosevelt soon wished to eliminate relief entirely, believing it to be destructive of individual initiative and spirit. In its place, he proposed a massive program of public employment and the adoption of the Social Security Act. Both measures departed from previous policy by recognizing a national interest in the economic security of families and individuals. Both public employment and Social Security, however, were addressed more to the problem of temporary unemployment than to the problem of recurrent poverty. Many of the poor were not even covered.

The individualist theory of poverty was the dominant view; the theory that poverty was a social phenomenon, the recessive. The Johnson War on Poverty identified the enemy so as to assimilate the social into the individualist theory, offering a unified perspective.

Rejecting the belief that poverty was the necessary outcome of a mismanaged economy, the program's planners took the traditional view, that people were poor as a result of their own inability to succeed within the economic system. Monetary relief could deal, at best, with the manifestations of poverty. Only a program concerned with the individual roots of poverty could offer a permanent solution. In the sense that the antipoverty program was aimed at changing individuals, it was fundamentally conservative, consistent with Social Darwinism.

But the program's designers modified the traditional view. They did not maintain that individual deficits were

the result of drunkenness, indolence, or sin. Instead they believed that poverty was an entire style of life, sustained by its isolation from the dominant economic and social system. The Senate Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, following its hearings, reported its conviction that "the other America" is a world apart, inhabited by people isolated from the mainstream of American life, unfamiliar with its values and unprepared for its opportunities."⁴⁵ Therefore, the poor must be provided with the skills and opportunities which would enable them to adopt a new style of life.

The factors causing poverty were thought to exist not in isolation but together. Lack of requisite skills and abilities led to low income, which required living in slums and ghettos, in which was generated a lower-class life-style, which prevented the development in the next generation of the requisite skills and abilities to break the cycle. This cycle, a self-perpetuating vicious circle, was the key image in the program planners' thinking. They proposed to break it with a coordinated approach addressing itself to all the influences perpetuating the cycle. In his 1964 budget message, for instance, President Johnson described his plans "to break that cycle by raising the educational, skill, and health levels of the younger generation, increasing their job opportunities, and helping their families to provide a better home life."⁴⁶

The cycle-of-poverty theory comported well with public opinion. In the spring of 1964, a Gallup poll revealed that 54 percent of its sample still believed that, when a person is poor, the cause is "lack of effort on his own part," whereas 46 percent attributed the cause to factors beyond the individual's control.⁴⁷ By stressing individual deficits as the explanation of poverty, the program's designers could appeal to those who believed that poverty primarily

was a matter of personal indolence. By stressing cultural, rather than personal, explanations for the deficits, they also could appeal to those who believed that the poor were not to blame for their plight.

The cycle-of-poverty theory also offered the administration a possible defense against the charge that its programs were too limited to accomplish their objectives. Since the causes of poverty were circular, intervention at any point on the cycle would affect, at least indirectly, the entire chain. Therefore, any antipoverty measure would be desirable; intervention at any point would have effects throughout the cycle.

Although the image of the cycle logically justified intervention to break it at any point, remedial measures were most likely to succeed if they were focused on certain pivotal points. For example, the program concentrated on youth, in the belief that improvements in habits and skills could make good job opportunities available to youths, interrupting the poverty cycle before it affected another generation. For this reason, the Shriver task force stressed the role of the Job Corps in developing motivation and skills. Once the poor had acquired training and work habits, jobs surely would be available.

Since the cycle-of-poverty image made the selection of battlegrounds flexible, the administration also could mute considerations of race, implying that the Economic Opportunity Act was not another civil rights program. (The Civil Rights Act of 1964 had not yet passed Congress, and race was the most explosive issue in American politics.)

This distinction was hard to maintain. Although 78 percent of all poor families were white, nearly half the nation's black population was poor. Moreover, the heaviest concentrations of poverty, in the slums of the major

cities, were predominantly black. Nevertheless, the War on Poverty did not focus on race. The only black involved in establishing the program was Adam Clayton Powell. The anticipated benefits of the program for the northern ghettos were not discussed. Instead, early literature and publicity about the program concentrated heavily on rural poverty and used Appalachia as the prototype. President Johnson's tour of poverty areas in the spring of 1964, for example, was confined mainly to Appalachia.

To the degree that the War on Poverty *would* concentrate on blacks, moreover, it attempted to redefine a racial crisis as an economic problem. The riots of 1964, for instance, were interpreted widely as protests against generalized deprivation, rather than as racial revolts. Elinor Graham has suggested that the redefinition was a crucial feature of the 1964 antipoverty debates. It allowed the monetary costs of fighting poverty to substitute for the high emotional costs involved in combating racial prejudice. The white liberal, the urban public official, and the southern politician all benefited from the exchange.⁴⁸

Even in 1964, however, there were signs that this disjunction would be hard to sustain. To assure blacks that the poverty program was not a cover for abandoning the commitment to civil rights, administration officials were forced to link both programs. Shriver, for example, told a symposium on integration that the struggles against poverty and for civil rights "are all part of the same battle."⁴⁹ In his testimony in Congress, Whitney Young of the National Urban League expressed the hope that the community action program would be "a way of shoring up responsible Negro leadership in the community, . . . planning with Negroes rather than for Negroes."⁵⁰ Finally, in the congressional floor debates, the Economic Oppor-

Inception

tunity Act sometimes was regarded as but the logical counterpart of the Civil Rights Act which had just been passed in June.⁵¹

Selecting the Weapons. If the nation is to engage in unconditional war, it must not only define the enemy but also select the weapons and tactics which will best achieve its strategic objective. A primary weapon in the War on Poverty was to be local community action, which was talked about as conservative, tested by experience, and a reflection of the values of grass-roots democracy. The Senate Labor and Public Welfare Committee, for example, found the community action program to be based upon "the traditional and time-tested American methods of organized local community action to help individuals, families, and whole communities to help themselves."⁵² That local citizens were in a position to know the needs of their communities better than the more remote federal officials was argued by several witnesses, including Jack Conway of the United Auto Workers (who would become Shriver's deputy after the scuttling of Adam Yarmolinsky), Attorney General Kennedy, and Senators Pat McNamara of Michigan and Warren Magnuson of Washington. These sources took their cue from President Johnson, whose March 16 message to Congress included the argument that each community knows its needs best and should not have plans imposed upon it from Washington.⁵³ Shriver offered one of the clearest elaborations of this traditionally conservative point of view. In a speech to the Advertising Council on May 5, 1964, he declared, "What will work in Cleveland will not work in Los Angeles, and a program which Chicago might use to fight urban slum poverty will not take root in the rocky soil of

The War Is Declared

Appalachia. That is why the heart of poverty legislation is local community action and *voluntary* participation."⁵⁴

Locally oriented community action also would be likely to involve local citizens, a goal encouraged by a phrase in the act calling for the "maximum feasible participation" of residents of the areas and members of the groups served by the legislation. The precise history of the phrase is unknown. Precedents can be found in draft bills prepared early in February by the Departments of Labor and Health, Education, and Welfare. The draft of February 24 was the first to refer specifically to "maximum feasible participation."⁵⁵ Most likely, the phrase was authored by Richard W. Boone of the President's Committee on Juvenile Delinquency, although credit also was claimed by Congressman Adam Clayton Powell.⁵⁶ It soon was apparent that "maximum feasible participation," like "community action" itself, was an ambiguous term. Psychologists Kenneth Clark and Jeannette Hopkins even argued that the term was inherently vague, because the legislation did not specify the nature, extent, level, goals, consequences, or standards of participation.⁵⁷

This very vagueness, however, allowed the administration to combine *different* justifications for the choice of this weapon. While there are many shadings of difference, the basic conflict was between participation as individual therapy—the most successful way of changing individuals—and participation as a means to organize the poor into an interest group in search of political power. The former view derived from group-dynamics research which concluded, as Gordon Allport expressed in his "law of active participation," that, when the individual is involved actively in a learning situation, he acquires the desired response more rapidly and the response is likely to be

more stable than when learning is passive. This view was supported by social-welfare professionals who argued that active participation was a necessary condition for therapy. As social-welfare professional Charles Schottland testified, "in 1 to 1 personal services we recognize that a helping service does not begin until the individual wants it and participates in the helping process."⁵⁶

The view that participating in community action was a path to political power for the poor began with the observation that poor communities frequently were characterized by weak social organization. With the exception of a few articulate leaders, who often moved from the community or took little interest in its development, residents could not make their voices heard in any meaningful way. Participation in community action was the means by which these people could be organized and their concerns represented.⁵⁷ A slight variation on this theme was the argument that participation was a means to take advantage of the presumed expertise of the poor about matters concerning them. This argument contrasted participation with the paternalistic administration of many social programs, in which individuals had little voice in decisions affecting them. It was a fortuitous move to take over the favored symbol, "democracy," and to align it with a particular procedure for achieving that value.

The administration was not forced either to reconcile these justifications or to choose between them, particularly because the specific "maximum feasible participation" language received little public attention. Robert F. Kennedy was the only administration witness to refer to the phrase in his congressional testimony; even Sargent Shriver, in his description of the operations of community action programs, omitted any reference to "maximum

feasible participation."⁵⁸ Although the Republican members of the House Education and Labor Committee generally were skeptical about community action, they directed no specific challenges to the "participation" clause. Anne Murphy characterized the image of participation presented in the House committee report as "renniscent of barn-raising and husking bees where everyone collaborated on a community task."⁵⁹ The same pattern of neglect persisted in both Houses during the floor debates in 1964.

By default, then, the proponents of antipoverty legislation were able to defend "maximum feasible participation" as a natural concomitant of community action. In turn, community action was justified as being consistent with traditions of grass-roots democracy and therefore conservative. It could be a means of coordinating existing programs for greater efficiency—a rationale strongly championed by the Budget Bureau and endorsed by the president. "Community participation," he wrote, "would give focus to our efforts."⁶⁰ Although Johnson referred to the need for "shaking up" existing institutions, the context of his memoirs suggests that he had in mind a reorganization of resources to avoid duplication and waste, not that he envisioned social or political activism.

Participation also was justified as a way to counter impersonal forces. During the 1960s, a general reaction began to set in against the increasingly impersonal large bureaucracies, from the workings of which many individuals felt alienated. Miller and Roby have suggested that the emphasis during the decade on "participatory democracy," of which the Economic Opportunity Act's "participation" clause was a part, was an attempt to reverse this trend. A similar explanation is offered by Goldman, who

claims to have suggested that the 1964 State of the Union address emphasize participation as opposed to a "spectator society."⁵³

Community action was not the only weapon in the War on Poverty. Manpower programs would also figure prominently. These programs of job training, vocational education, and work experience would attack the cycle of poverty at one of its vulnerable points, as has been noted already. They also permitted the administration to distinguish its new program from public welfare, which was politically unpopular. Relief agencies were anathema to those seeking lower taxes and convinced that welfare subsidizes indolence and illegitimacy. Particularly when Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), rather than Old Age Assistance, became the most substantial relief program, hostility grew. Gilbert Steiner thought the image conjured up by AFDC was "an uneducated, unmarried Negro mother and her offspring," and therefore that it was politically vulnerable.⁵⁴

There is abundant evidence of efforts to define the poverty program as entirely different from traditional public welfare. In his opening statement before the House Committee on Education and Labor, Walter Heller specifically rejected an "income" strategy for the War on Poverty, claiming that it would touch only the symptoms and not the roots of the problem. Congressman Roman Pucinski of Chicago asserted that the underlying purpose of the new legislation, far from sustaining welfare, was to get people off relief and to reduce the welfare state. Senators Pat McNamara of Michigan and Ralph Yarborough of Texas argued that economic opportunity was the very antithesis of the dole.⁵⁵ These disjunctions were encouraged by President Johnson. To the convention of the United Auto Workers, to a group of Argentine sena-

tors, to the American Society of Newspaper Editors, the president contrasted the War on Poverty with traditional welfare programs, insisting that the new effort's aim was "making taxpayers out of taxaters." The same theme was repeated twice in the president's remarks upon signing the Economic Opportunity Act in August, at which time he declared, "We want to offer the forgotten fifth of our people opportunity and not doles," and again in October at the swearing-in of Shriver as director of the Office of Economic Opportunity.⁵⁶

The final major tactical choice was to emphasize that the war would be frugally administered and accountable to the Congress. It would not be marked by profiteering or cost overruns which might erode public trust and support, and it was not to be a grant of unlimited authority to the commander in chief that would permit a "poverty czar" to operate in dictatorial fashion.

By early January 1964, even before the outline of the poverty program had been conceived, President Johnson had decided that its net cost would not exceed \$500 million. This low initial cost enabled Congressman Phil Landrum to champion the measure, asserting, "This will not be an expensive program. This will be the most conservative social program I have ever seen presented to any legislative body. There is not anything but conservatism in it."⁵⁷ Furthermore, it was expected that future increases in cost would be offset by savings elsewhere in the federal budget. The main source of these savings, ironically, was expected to be the Defense Department, whose budget already had been reduced by Secretary McNamara as an economy move.⁵⁸

In the long run, furthermore, the program would save more money than it would cost. Supporters of the legislation argued that the costs of inaction were greater than

the costs of the bill. Senator Humphrey cited lost production, lack of purchasing power for the poor, and welfare payments as costs of continued poverty.⁶⁹ By contrast, it was argued that tax revenues gained and welfare payments saved by making citizens productive would justify the cost of the new program.

This emphasis on cost-consciousness came directly from the president. In a cabinet meeting in the fall of 1964, he insisted that the public would support social programs "only if we take positive steps to show that we are spending what we legitimately need to spend."⁷⁰ In a similar vein, Shriver tried to answer congressmen who had reservations because the scope of the 1964 bill was limited. He stated, "We propose to do this first year only so much as we are sure we can carry out efficiently, with a dollar's value for a dollar spent."⁷¹ Moreover, supporters argued that the limited resources could be extended farther than might be expected, because the bill's emphasis on coordination would prevent duplication of programs.

Not only did the program planners insist that the war would be frugally administered, but they also emphasized their accountability to Congress. Sargent Shriver made frequent reference to the fact that the Economic Opportunity Act would require an annual appropriation. As a result, he told the legislators, his office would have to come back in a year and justify itself; "you are not buying a pig in a poke."⁷² In several respects, the administration catered to the legislative branch's desire for accountability. President Johnson recalled that, when Shriver was appointed to head the planning of the poverty program, he was told that "he would have to work fast. Not only did I want to propel a program through the Congress immediately but I wanted the plan to produce visible results, so

that there would be no question about Congress' continuing the effort with adequate funding in the years ahead."⁷³

The selection of the military metaphor, then, significantly influenced both the design of the poverty program and the public discourse surrounding it. The image of war affected the objective, the enemy, and the weapons. These choices, in turn, proved quite helpful to the president in 1964. Some helped to define his image as a liberal humanitarian; some, to quiet opponents and rally public support; some, to enable Johnson to avoid clear-cut selections among alternatives; and some, to persuade the Congress.

III

In March of 1964, Congress received the proposed Economic Opportunity Act. It was an omnibus bill which members of the Shriver task force could support, each for his own reasons. Title I, including employment and training programs, was authored by Daniel P. Moynihan. Richard W. Boone of the juvenile-delinquency staff drafted the community action section, which became Title II. The remaining titles were written by James Sundquist (agricultural loans and grants); Harold Gallaway of the Small Business Administration (SBA loans); James Adler of Health, Education, and Welfare (work-experience programs for welfare recipients); and William Cannon of the Budget Bureau (administration and coordination).⁷⁴ Much of the bill was not new. Similarities could be found, for example, between the Job Corps and the New Deal's Civilian Conservation Corps, between work-study and the National Youth Administration, between VISTA and the

Peace Corps.⁷⁵ What was new, though, was the combination of these elements under a single rubric.

No one could be sure that the 88th Congress would support the program, and there was not yet tangible evidence of public pressure. Congress would need to be convinced. By persuading Congressman Phil Landrum of Georgia to sponsor the bill, the White House hoped that votes could be garnered from southern Democrats. In combination with administration loyalists, their numbers would be sufficient to obtain passage. Then if Republicans wished to take the partisan stance of opposing an antipov-erty bill, the administration would not object.⁷⁶ Opponents would be placed in a position of maximum discomfort, however, because of the way in which the bill's supporters set the terms of debate. They insisted upon focusing on the problem of poverty, not on the merits of the specific legislation or the alleged deficiencies of existing programs. In this way, the very existence of poverty would serve as a reason for the program. Opposition attempts to shift the focus of discussion could be ignored.

The administration strategy can be perceived by examining the hearings in the House. The bill promptly was referred to the Committee on Education and Labor, of which Adam Clayton Powell was chairman. A phalanx of administration witnesses testified in support of the measure: twenty-nine of the seventy-six supporting witnesses were from the administration or were consultants in planning the legislation.⁷⁷ Congressman Pucinski, a Johnson stalwart on the Education and Labor Committee, was moved to remark, "As far as I know, this is the first time in the history of this country that all of the Cabinet members, except the Secretary of State, have testified in support of an important measure. The President certainly

has assigned this as one of the most important measures of his administration."⁷⁸ The advocacy of administration spokesmen, however, was of a very general sort, stressing the need for antipov-erty action, assuring the committee that the bill would be compatible with ongoing programs, and occasionally discussing matters at best tangentially related to the legislation. The same pattern of emphasis may be found in the testimony of other supporting witnesses, representing social-welfare, civic, and religious organizations, state and local government, technical advisers, educators, businessmen, and members of Congress. Anne Murphy has characterized the function of these hearings as generating phrases for the expression of the official philosophy about the poverty program and the proposed legislation.⁷⁹

Opposition to the bill was ineffectual. Of the nine opposition witnesses in the House hearings, five opposed the measure on ideological grounds, but none of them represented organizations with vital interests at stake. The other four opponents were two Republican congressmen and two educators, who maintained that the program was misdirected or unnecessary. Among the objections raised against the bill were its unique administrative structure, which was alleged to duplicate programs already in existence, the challenge posed by the bill to states' rights, and the fear that the measure would hasten the pace of racial integration. The latter two objections, especially, would have been appealing to some southern Democrats who otherwise might have supported the bill.

By far the most persistent objection raised during the hearings, however, was the charge of unfair partisanship in their conduct. This charge was not without foundation. Chairman Powell selectively enforced a five-minute time limit on the cross-examination of witnesses, becoming

especially strict when Republicans were questioning. The minority party was not allowed to question a witness until six Democrats had done so, although the committee's custom was to alternate between majority and minority members. Republicans further complained that they were not given sufficient advance notice of the committee's meetings. Powell defended these departures from normal practice with the boasts, "The chairman has the right to use the procedure he desires," and, "I am the chairman. I will run this committee as I desire."⁸⁰ Republicans also were excluded from the final "markup" session in which the bill was revised. Every major amendment they proposed was rejected, often by straight party vote and frequently without time being allotted for the Republicans to explain the nature or purpose of their amendments.

Predictably, Republicans became enraged at this treatment. But, since the Democrats had chosen to focus only on the need for action, they were able to subordinate the Republicans' attack on their partisanship. They could argue that the opposition, unwilling to challenge directly the need for the legislation, could only engage in carping, dilatory tactics. The Education and Labor Committee reported the bill on a straight party-line vote.

Believing that the Democratic majority was more reliable in the Senate than in the House, though, the administration attempted to obtain the bill's passage from the upper body first. Brief hearings before the Senate Labor and Public Welfare Committee repeated the essential pattern of the House hearings. In the committee report, the minority charged that the administration had rushed the bill through "with such haste that the record is practically nonexistent,"⁸¹ but Senator Warren Magnuson of Washington insisted that the modern critics were "just as

hard pressed today to find real sources of criticism as the critics of [the New Deal] 30 years ago."⁸² Senator Goldwater denounced the bill as a "Madison Avenue stunt" by Lyndon Johnson.⁸³ The measure passed the Senate in midsummer by a vote of sixty-one to thirty-four. Twelve Democrats and twenty-two Republicans opposed it.

Still, there was no assurance that the bill would pass the House. Many northern Democrats became hesitant over the summer, owing perhaps to reports of a "white backlash" among their constituents. Many southern Democrats followed the Rules Committee chairman, Howard W. Smith, and became confirmed opponents, owing to their belief that the proposed legislation would quicken the pace of racial integration. The head count kept by congressional strategist Lawrence O'Brien showed the House deadlocked by July 31, with approximately thirty southerners undecided.⁸⁴ Accordingly, once the Rules Committee reported out the bill by an eight to seven vote, these undecided congressmen became the target for special appeals from the White House.

By early August, these efforts centered on a group of uncommitted Democratic congressmen from North and South Carolina, whose support was believed to be essential. It was obtained in return for a presidential pledge that Adam Yarmolinsky (then in the Defense Department but widely thought to be slated as Shriver's deputy) would not be involved in the program's administration.⁸⁵ The bill passed the House by a vote of 226 to 185, and on August 20, 1964, the Economic Opportunity Act became the law of the land.

The president had obtained his legislative victory, but the bill's passage did not necessarily suggest that there was a broad congressional antipoverty consensus. The House, in particular, was deeply split. Whether support

for the program could be retained was an open question: would a prosperous majority permanently support programs to benefit a poor minority? And, there were other unsettling questions posed by the administration's rhetoric. Did a declaration of "unconditional war" raise expectations that could not possibly be satisfied? What if the cycle-of-poverty theory did not fit the facts? What did community action really mean? Could meaningful results be obtained for such a relatively small expenditure? Perhaps most important, how would one *know* whether or not the war had been victorious? And without such knowledge, was the War on Poverty destined to be a war without end?

Rhetorical choices are not static entities. People understand and interpret the world through symbols on which they bestow meaning. A change in the symbolic "map" leads to changes in interpretation and expectation. Even as they contributed to the passage of the 1964 law and made the inception of the antipoverty campaign a success, the administration's choices modified the whole frame of reference for thinking and speaking about poverty. These modifications, most of them unintended, were harmful to the effective operation of the poverty program—even though, ironically, they were outgrowths of decisions very helpful in securing the program's adoption in the first place. How this irony came about is the concern in subsequent chapters, in which the transformation of each of the basic rhetorical choices during a period of rhetorical crisis is explored.

THE WAR ON POVERTY

The symbolism of Declaring a War On Poverty

President Lyndon Johnson wrote in his memoirs that he made a deliberate decision to call the antipoverty effort a "war." He wrote "the military image carried with it connotations of victories and defeats that could prove misleading, but I wanted to rally the nation, to sound a call to arms which would stir people in the government, in private industry, and on the campuses to lend their talents to a massive effort to eliminate the evil."

On January 8, 1964, President Johnson in his first State of the Union message, asserted, "this administration, here and now, declares unconditional war on poverty."

What does the "declaration of war" signify?

- o Sacrifice - sacrifice by nation to urge war against an ancient, impersonal foe to meet national need.

- o Only 5% of people thought they knew a great deal about Johnson when he took over as President.

This contrasts to 24% for Kennedy at the time he became President. Declaring a war certainly brings attention to you as an individual.

- o What do you think the name recognition is in the U.S. of Saddam Hussien?

- o Does war conjure up "moral obligation?"

- o Congressman Phil Landrum of Georgia said that war means "total mobilization of all the nation's resources, moral spiritual, intellectual and financial, to challenge a condition."

- o War also permits rhetoric. Johnson said that dedicated Americans would be given "the opportunity to enlist."

- o The EOA could be perceived as a "battle plan."

- o 3 Key Elements so far:

- a. it defined the objective and encouraged enlistment in the effort;
- b. it identified the enemy against whom the campaign was directed; and
- c. it dictated the choice of weapons and tactics.
- o In declaring unconditional war, Johnson made clear that his objective was vast.
- o Agriculture Secretary Freeman testified that war would be waged "for as long as it takes, using whatever means must be employed, until the goal is won."
- o Strategic value - war must be waged nationwide.
- o Advocate unconditional war - implies that additional resources would be forthcoming.
- o '64 Act to but the first step. Larger attacks.
- o National effort - by definition, needs to be centralized command.
- o Secretary HEW, Celebrezze said if "you are going to declare wary, you have to have one General of the Army. You cannot have six Generals."
- o War substantially reduces the administration's burden of proof.
- o War makes it harder to oppose campaigns.
- o Downfalls:
 1. Exaggeration of results.
 2. False expectations.
 3. Buying more time.

RONALD REAGAN

I reached into my pocket and got the \$5 bill and handed it to him.

Well, I was now down to a dime and a penny. A couple of days later, we were in Ireland in the company of a young Irish guide when we passed a tombstone close to where, according to legend, St. Patrick had erected the first cross in Ireland. The tombstone was inscribed, "Remember me as you pass by, for as you are so once was I, but as I am you too will be, so be content to follow me." The sentiment had proven too much for another Irishman who'd scratched on the stone beneath the inscription, "To follow you I am content, I wish I knew which way you went."

The guide showed us a wishing well and suggested we might want to toss in a coin. I reached in my pocket, gave Nancy the dime, and I flipped the penny into the well.

After I got home, I liked to tell people what it was like to travel through Denmark, Belgium, France, Spain, Italy, England, and Ireland on \$5.11.

As my second term began, my most important priority was welfare reform. Because of lax eligibility standards, the number of people in California receiving welfare checks had almost quadrupled between 1960 and 1970 to more than two million. With about ten percent of the population, the state had more than sixteen percent of the nation's total welfare recipients; it had become a magnet for able-bodied people from around the country who preferred a hand-out to a job. During my first term, I appointed a special task force on welfare that concluded that even if we were able to pay off the deficit and solve the financial mess the state had fallen into during the Brown years, welfare expenditures were growing so fast that the state would be bankrupt again soon unless something was done to control the open-ended spending.

The task force tried to reduce waste and fraud and improve efficiency of the welfare program through administrative reform but encountered a brick wall: The last thing that many of the people who supervised the welfare program wanted was to reduce their caseload because it might have threatened their jobs. As always, the first goal of the bureaucracy was to protect the bureaucracy. The study panel concluded that the state needed a top-to-bottom re-writing of its welfare regulations.

RONALD REAGAN

islature, we'd have to go to the people, and this time we really put on the pressure.

I went back out, speaking about welfare reform and to urge people to demand that their legislators clean up the mess. We organized committees in all fifty-eight counties of the state to apply pressure on the legislature. Boy, did it work.

One day the liberal Democrat who succeeded Jesse Unruh, Speaker of the Assembly Bob Moretti, came into my office holding his hands in the air as if I had a gun on him and said, "Stop those cards and letters!"

"Sit down," I said. "Look, we're all partners in this. Let's put aside our personal feelings and jointly go to work and see what we can get done."

Over the next week or so, he and I, along with members of our staffs, met almost around the clock to put together a package of welfare reform that cut expenditures by hundreds of millions of dollars a year while raising benefits and providing cost-of-living increases for the *truly* needy in the state.

By tightening eligibility standards and eliminating loopholes, we turned a monthly increase in the welfare caseload of forty thousand to a monthly *decrease* of eight thousand. California was no longer the welfare capital of the country.

We obtained authority from the federal government, which set a lot of the rules regarding welfare, to let us try an experiment in which able-bodied welfare recipients were given a job. We contacted every level of government throughout the state and asked if there were things they would be doing if they had the money and manpower to do it. We got all kinds of affirmative replies—none of them boondoggles. Washington gave us permission to go ahead with the experiment only after President Nixon intervened on our behalf. We took the able-bodied welfare recipients, assigned them to these jobs in return for their welfare grants, and as they learned some job skills, they were moving into jobs in the private sector.

During the 1973–1974 recession, this program got seventy-six thousand people off the welfare rolls and put them into productive jobs. Later, a lot of them wrote and thanked me for the program, saying for the first time in their adult lives they had felt a sense of self-respect because they were doing something in return for their monthly check; the remarks reminded me of the smiles I'd seen on

RONALD REAGAN

freedoms, and limiting the government's intrusion into our lives—in sum, the protection of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. They never envisioned vast agencies in Washington telling our farmers what to plant, our teachers what to teach, our industries what to build. The Constitution they wrote established sovereign states, not administrative districts of the federal government. They believed in keeping government as close as possible to the people; if parents didn't like the way their schools were being run, they could throw out the Board of Education at the next election; but what could they do about the elite bureaucrats in the U.S. Department of Education who sent ultimatums into their children's classrooms regarding curriculum and textbooks?

Of course, I had been disturbed by the expansion of the federal government and its encroachment on our freedoms for a long time, but the problems increased dramatically during the years I was governor with the start of Lyndon Johnson's "Great Society" and "War on Poverty."

Those years were a watershed in the evolution of our central government that I think many historians have not yet paid sufficient attention to.

Between 1965 and 1980, the federal budget jumped to roughly five times what it had been while the federal deficit grew to fifty-three times as much and the amount of money doled out under various federal "entitlement" programs quadrupled to almost \$300 billion a year; along the way, a lot of the decision-making authority traditionally exercised at the grass-roots level of America was transported to Washington.

Yet, as you look back on that myriad of new federal programs, it's hard to find any that did much good for the poor or the nation as a whole.

A lot of the money just got lost in the administrative process. Hundreds of billions were spent on poverty programs, and the plight of the poor grew more painful. They had spent billions on programs that made people worse off.

The waste in dollars and cents was small compared with the waste of human potential. It was squandered by the narcotic of giveaway programs that sapped the human spirit, diminished the incentive of people to work, destroyed families, and produced an

intrusion into our lives—the pursuit of happiness.

Washington telling our
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into their children's class-
cs?

: expansion of the federal
freedoms for a long time,
y during the years I was
son's "Great Society" and

evolution of our central
have not yet paid sufficient

udget jumped to roughly
ederal deficit grew to fifty-
f money doled out under
quadrupled to almost \$300
decision-making authority
level of America was trans-

new federal programs, it's
r the poor or the nation as

he administrative process.
overty programs, and the
They had spent billions on

small compared with the
nde: by the narcotic of
man spirit, diminished the
families, and produced an

increase in female and child poverty, deteriorating schools, and disintegrating neighborhoods.

The liberals had had their turn at bat in the 1960s and they had struck out.

As I rode Little Man around Rancho del Cielo during the spring of 1975, I thought a lot about the lost vision of our founding fathers and the importance of recapturing it and the voices from around the country who were pressing me to run for president. And I remembered something I'd said many years before: A candidate doesn't make the decision whether to run for president; the people make it for him.