

INTRODUCTION

FRAMING THE DEBATE: FROM UNDERSERVING TO “UNDESERVING”

While accepting his party's nomination in October 1991, Bill Clinton said, “If you can work, you've got to go to work” (Clinton 1992:645). Also part of this “new covenant,” he declared, was “ending welfare as we know it” (Clinton 1992:645). In 1996, President Clinton authorized the most significant regressive legislative change to welfare in the United States since the enactment of the New Deal, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA). During the presidential administrations of Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush, it would have been hard to imagine that such a regressive shift in domestic antipoverty policy would soon occur during the presidency of a so-called moderate Democrat. Twenty-one years prior, in the fall of 1975, Irving Kristol, a writer regarded as the godfather of neoconservatism, signaled a warning to the corporate elite in an influential essay that warned against “elitist” liberal reforms. He cautioned that to ward off the total appropriation “of their decision-making powers” by the state, elites “must create a constituency . . . which will candidly intervene in the ‘political game’ of interest group politics” (Kristol 1975:228). Among the most egregious of the liberal reforms to be targeted were the programs implemented through the Kennedy-Johnson War on Poverty and their “perverse consequences” ([1971] 1995:48). This call to arms would be heeded.

The emergent political culture and the corresponding policy discourse came to constitute a new American welfare consensus and, subsequently, welfare state, which was more conservative, fiscally austere, demeaning, and coercive. The United States, unlike many other advanced capitalist societies,

had not maintained an extensive social safety net (Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development 2015; Smeeding, Rainwater, and Burtless 2002). In a survey of the 19 richest nations, only Japan spent a lower percentage of its gross domestic product (GDP) on cash and noncash social expenditures (Smeeding, Rainwater, and Burtless 2002). The same study showed that the United States had the highest poverty rates, measured at 40 percent of the median adjusted disposable person income (ADPI), for individuals (Smeeding, Rainwater, and Burtless 2002). This is often taken for granted as part of the culture and legacy of rugged individuals who bravely pulled themselves up from nothing to carve out their existence along and beyond the untamed frontier. For some, it represents a superior arrangement—leaner than the comparably massive European-style welfare states—with an emphasis on self-sufficiency, productivity, and hard work. However, misconceptions abound in relation to how the United States compares to other societies in this respect, and the ideology persists that the American welfare state is among the most permissive and generous. This book sets out to demythologize and trace the origins of such ideology. Rather than uncritically accepting such narratives, a fundamental premise here is that the prevailing ideologies about welfare have been developed in a rather complex and particular context. It is not simply a product of the frontier ethic, that Americans intrinsically appreciate hard work, or that everyone knows welfare produces idleness and malaise. This consensus is steeped in ideology and is the product of a particular historical confluence of economic, political, and social currents.

In the United States, the attack on welfare was initially waged by conservative politicians and intellectuals. While many figures who did not identify with conservative politics and saw themselves as “moderate,” “pragmatic,” or “centrist” Democrats, or even mild liberals, would later come to support austerity measures in relation to social spending, the origins of American antiwelfare lie in divergent traditions of conservative thought. Today’s conservative movement in the United States is the synthesis of other substrands of conservatism. It has been able to successfully define the parameters of acceptable discourse around the issue of welfare due to its development of a large pool of resources, proficiency in the arena of activist and electoral politics, establishment of a vast infrastructure for the production and deployment of ideas, and its endurance as a resilient presence in the everyday lives of Americans (Lakoff 2002; Post 1996). Therefore a study of the erosion of the American

welfare state must trace the content and development of these ideas and the means by which they became situated as axiomatic.

The process outlined in the book discloses an intriguing story in that divergent strands of conservatism during the interwar period, which were often mutually antagonistic, ultimately came together into a cohesive movement and successfully influenced significantly the limits of acceptable dialogue around American welfare-state policy. This especially encompassed, for example, the shift of focus in policy discourse from structural economic concerns to the now familiar orientation that emphasizes behavioral “pathology” and reframes welfare economically in terms consistent with the prerogatives of capital and privileged groups.

THE ASCENDANCE OF A CONSENSUS

The configuration of the new welfare consensus corresponds to several factors. For one thing, the consolidation and organization of different components of conservative thought and politics (mainly classical, laissez-faire liberalism,¹ and social conservatism²) and the mastery of circulating its ideas made the movement more publicly accessible and politically powerful. In other words, the fusion of libertarian and social conservatism has been an integral feature of the contemporary conservative movement’s success in not just constructing an aura of apparent consensus on the surface of its deep-seated, historically rooted contradictions, but also its prolific ability to shape discourse and structure ideology (Crawford 1980; Gottfried 1987; Lind 1996; Williams 1997). More syncretic forms of conservative thought and politics embodied syntheses of these two older traditions and had materialized in the middle of the 20th century in the form of the New Right (also called “fusionism” or “fusionist conservatism”) and, not too many years later, neoconservatism. These more contemporary traditions had distinct origins and histories which, along with their contributions to retrogressively reframing and restructuring welfare, will be discussed in detail in chapters 2, 3, and 4. Second, these narratives would not have become compelling if not for important transformations in the social and economic conditions that enabled such ideas to take hold. This included the decline in the two-parent nuclear family ideal in the 1960s, nativist and racist reactions to the great migration of African Americans from the rural US South to mostly urban centers in the Northeast and Midwest and to the influx

of Latino immigrants, and the economic decline, initiated in the late 1960s but more greatly realized in the 1970s, which destabilized the material well-being of the middle and working class. Next, welfare program administration and financing had been decentralized, which allowed state and local governments greater autonomy to initiate and implement their own reforms. This welfare “devolution” especially became a priority of the Reagan administration and subsequently emerged as conventional policy practice. This involved state-level policy “innovations,” which were often more austere and harsh than could legally be done on the federal level. Such innovations were empowered by the Reagan tax cuts, which regressively shifted the tax burden and put pressure on states and localities to tighten eligibility and reduce benefits. Finally, there emerged an overarching paradigm for framing the origins of poverty and structuring policy that focused on individual behavior. This approach identified the origins of poverty as rooted in behavioral deficiencies and the best policy strategies as those which set out to discipline welfare recipients either through the market or direct administrative sanctions.

The neoconservatives have been at the heart of the critique of welfare from the mid-1960s and were instrumental in the reframing of policy narratives. They helped transform the vernacular of policy analysis critical of welfare state programs from a largely economic language rooted in a *laissez-faire* individualist political philosophy to a more clinical and managerial critique that emphasizes constructs like behavioral pathology and family and community disorganization. The neoconservative label had been first used to describe a particular set of ex-Trotskyists and ex-liberals, especially the writing and activism of Sydney Hook, Irving Kristol, Daniel Bell, Nathan Glazer, and Daniel Patrick Moynihan, among others. These early or proto-neoconservatives were ex-radicals and -liberals who had expressed “a mood and a fashion rather than a deeply felt political stance” (Coser [1973] 1974:4). As Coser ([1973] 1974) described them, “They are liberals who got cold feet in the late 1960s. . . . They have now made it, and having made it they are concerned with the maintenance of an order that has been good to them.” However, neoconservative has come to be used as a general expression for a reactionary defense of the social order and to describe a political position that advocates a foreign policy based on imperialism, a negative position toward the welfare state, and a desire for the restoration of traditional morality or “family values” (Bronner 2004). This definition

of *neoconservatism* is consistent with that of this text, but will be further elaborated as a complex and variable set of ideas (depending on who is expressing them and for what)—an amalgamation of a gamut of conservative ideas that became salient at a particular historical juncture. The erosion of the American welfare state, the focus of this work, was just one outcome of this convergence.

Considering the principal, contradictory elements of conservatism in general requires a careful analysis of the historically determined social relations in which they were developed as reactions. Historically, laissez-faire libertarianism was a reaction to traditional conservatism, their conflict embodied in the tension between the philosophy of the Enlightenment (with its privileging of individual rights and freedoms against arbitrary power) and what the social and political theorist Max Weber called traditional authority (Clark 1991; Weber [1919] 1958; Weber [1899] 1978). Though these two factions of conservative thought created a lasting and successful political amalgamation, these two positions are essentially incompatible. Friedrich von Hayek (1969), an Austrian economist whose *The Road to Serfdom* is cited by leading conservative scholars as a chief inspiration and is credited by many as the text that helped initiate a resurgence of libertarian ideas in the United States, expressed his wariness of coalescing with traditionalist conservatives and wrote of the lack of harmony between libertarianism and social (or traditional) conservatism. In particular, he was leery of traditional conservatism's paternalism and authoritarian tendencies, but he understood that a coalescence with this strand of conservative thought would be strategically advantageous to advance libertarian principles (Hayek 1969). To clarify, social conservatism during the postwar years in the United States was often antidemocratic and was characterized by a fear of the body politic. In brief, for the social conservatives, morality should be the guiding principle of government, and government had an important role to play in regulating personal moral conduct. The key political questions in this camp are religious and moral (Brennan 1995, 2003, Nash 1998). Libertarianism also had some strains of disparagement toward the masses (e.g., the later writings of Albert Jay Nock and Ludwig von Mises), but its rhetoric fiercely emphasized individual liberty and antistatism. For this wing of conservatism, the key political questions are economic. As philosophical individualists, they champion laissez-faire economics, private liberty, limited government, and anticollectivism as the cornerstones of a free society.

With a conservative movement whose various factions did not quite see eye-to-eye on fundamental issues, it would be reasonable to presume the same about its view toward social welfare programs. In fact, there were divisions within the dominant strands of conservative thought and among sectors of the ruling class through the late 1960s, regarding the responsibility of the state to provide a safety net for its most needy and the extent to which organized labor should be placated. Of course no movement consists of a complete consensus on any one issue, but rhetorically abstracting global communism and the welfare state as various forms of “collectivism” helped empower different strands of conservatism in the United States against a common ideological entity. The political divergences (and somewhat improbable and paradoxical convergences) were due to the fact that the welfare state (like all social phenomena) is a complex whole composed of multiple contradictory parts (Abramovitz 1996; 1979; Marcuse 1964; Offe 1987). The contradictory role of the welfare state has been addressed before. From the perspective of capital, while the welfare state provides guaranteed incomes and other provisions for the least fortunate outside the context of the labor market and is understood as an obstruction to labor discipline, it also helps mitigate some of the antisocial effects of capitalism and thus is important for its legitimation and continuation. Put another way, and from the perspective of the individual, while welfare state programs provide social services such as health care, Social Security, social wages, education and training, and housing, they also represent the regulation and surveillance of private activities by the state (Abramovitz 1996; Gough 1979; Marcuse 1964; Offe 1987).

Structural economic conditions are paramount, but the relentless ideological production, persistent efforts at political consolidation, and the embattled, last-stand disposition (illustrated in Kristol’s quote) of the conservative intellectual and political movement in the United States were instrumental in its ascendance. While the politics and ideology of free-market and traditionalist conservatism are contradictory, they are also consistent in some ways. They both placed great emphasis on ideas themselves as engines of change and on a morally absolutist premise that their propositions were superior, universal, and independent of the contingent circumstances. A possible explanation for this emphasis is the lack of popularity of conservative ideas in American society during the time leading up to the New Deal and through World War II (Nash 1995). Therefore a belief in the power of ideas and in the absolute moral rightness of those ideas was necessary “in the face of an often hostile

environment” (Nash 1998:28). For example, universalist and absolutist themes are evident in the otherwise divergent thought of the traditional conservative, Richard M. Weaver and Hayek’s mentor and teacher, the Austrian economist and libertarian, Ludwig von Mises. Weaver romanticized the southern aristocratic tradition, while Mises opposed systems of inherited rank and privilege. However, both of them greatly favored private property as a metaphysical right.

The libertarian renaissance did not exactly proliferate during the postwar period. There was much disagreement among its leading intellectuals, demonstrated by the, at times, dramatically contrastive ideas of figures like Friedrich von Hayek, Henry Hazlitt, and Murray Rothbard. However, its later synthesis with components of traditionalist conservatism and the entrée of a group of anticommunist ex-radicals like Frank Meyer and James Burnham, and later Daniel Bell and Irving Kristol, would profoundly shape the movement’s thinking in the years to come about work, family, and public versus private obligation. While prior to this shift was a period when the ideas of limited government and unregulated markets fell on many deaf ears, by the late 1940s and early 1950s, periodicals like *Human Events*, the *American Mercury*, and especially *The Freeman* provided for libertarians “a regular forum for hitherto dispersed writers” (Nash 1998:22).

As the 1950s came to an end, fear-based narratives and behavioral explanations for poverty were acquiring analytic credibility from the work of the neoconservative critics of social programs through the 1960s and were gaining political momentum via the corresponding softening of a principled and oppositional progressivism in mainstream politics as well as in an enlarging sector of the intellectual left. Politically, the largely grassroots conservative base that supported the Barry Goldwater movement, along with the great popularity of his book, *The Conscience of a Conservative*, helped to further discredit social welfare programs. This predominantly white, conservative base expressed an affronted and resentful temperament toward the direct action politics and successes of the women’s movement, welfare rights movement, and civil rights and black freedom struggles. The political potential of this group, wary of the economic, social, and political, changes that were taking place, was well expressed by Richard Nixon’s reference to them as a “silent majority” during a time of progressive political movements and social upheaval. Interestingly, Donald Trump had revived the term, *silent majority* for his campaign efforts during the 2015 to 2016 lead-up to the presidential election, and, like Nixon, has emphasized the need

for “law and order.” Analogously, this contemporary rehashing and resonation of these narratives have been during a time when white resentment and anxiety in relation to the current civil rights struggle and to hysteria over immigration sanctuary cities and incredible fabrications like Muslim no-go zones is palpable.

Weaving narratives about the virtues of unregulated markets and small government with conventional discursive and cultural patterns like white identity politics, nationalism, the moral work ethic, patriarchy, and prevailing ideologies that evoke the dysfunction and disorganization of communities and families of color makes them sound like good traditional American common sense. In the contemporary situation they take the form of a politics of privilege-denial and scapegoating, which are more effective in socioeconomic conditions where people feel less secure. Historically, as inflation increased, earnings began to decline, unemployment grew—overall, as economic conditions were reducing feelings of material security and well-being, the fear of falling to the lower class or worse yet becoming destitute likely made people “more protective and conservative” (Edsall 1984; Aronowitz, Esposito, Di Fazio, and Yard 1998:58). These feelings represented the “white, respectable,” hard-working common person in “seething revolt” about the poor “boondoggling on relief payments” (McGinniss 1969:20). Such ideology drew attention away from the confluent conditions that were far more plausibly deteriorating social life for the common American: The escalated involvement in the Vietnam War, the increase in income inequality due to the liberalization and expansion of world markets and decentralization of industrial and banking capital, the export of industrial jobs and the increase in lower-paying service sector positions, the push toward privatization, the collapse of Bretton Woods system, the oil crisis of 1973, and, ironically, the attack on the welfare state (Harvey 1994; Panitch 1994; Quiggin 1995; Harvey 2005). These changes shifted the ground beneath, making conservative economic narratives more compelling through exploiting white, dominant culture fear and resentment along with patriarchal insecurity while portraying welfare programs as too generous, unmanageable, enabling of immoral behaviors, damaging to the traditional family, invalid, and wrought with fraud. Those who utilize public assistance have been represented as being sexually irresponsible, predominately urban and black or Latino, work averse, on the rolls for extended periods of time, largely abusers of the system, and welfare “dependent.” These portrayals, though wrought with chauvinism and

not reflected in the demographics of welfare use, have come to be regarded uncritically as true.

Clinton certainly came through on his campaign promise. Prevailing conditions of social insecurity along with the unrelenting ferocity of the critique on welfare programs by intellectuals and the efforts of policy planning organizations in redefining how public relief, family, and personal responsibility are imagined ushered in a welfare reform bill that ended AFDC as an entitlement, gave states more flexibility in experimenting with their own reforms (including the option to completely eliminate AFDC and other programs), imposed time limits on receiving benefits, and allotted \$50 million per year for abstinence education (Post 1996). The field of opinion on welfare programs grew increasingly oppositional and hostile. In such an ideological and political atmosphere, the process of program development comes under a higher degree of reactionary and critical scrutiny and expansions of welfare state programs must always be justified, by definition and by virtue of their already being administratively and ethically questionable. The welfare state's existence continues to be that of an embattled and frail "historical freak between organized capitalism and socialism," to use Herbert Marcuse's ([1964] 1991:52) words. This characterization presents the welfare state as an antinomy between control and freedom. However, in the 32 years between Marcuse's insights and the enactment of PRWORA, the consequences of the new welfare consensus encompass an important contemporary dynamic. That is, while welfare programs continue to be indispensable for capitalism, sociopolitical dynamics have made the welfare system especially vulnerable to reforms that diminish its role in liberating its participants from wage work and economic coercion and enhance the welfare state's control function. Put another way, with welfare entitlements (and recipients) increasingly stigmatized, a scanted social wage and a system of taxation and welfare that favors capital and the affluent are now sufficient to achieve the level of legitimacy required for the system to avert crisis.

THE FRAMEWORK

This investigation works to develop a critique of ideology, for this case the ideological content within American welfare policy discourse, which avoids deterministic simplifications. Thus it advances a critique that eschews thinking

about ideology simply as a form of false consciousness produced as a monolithic shell concealing or falsifying some objective truth or positive essence. Also, the production of ideology is not treated as a process where representations directly generate rigid structures of belief that are wholly generalized and internalized by the population. Consider the concept of dominant ideology. It cannot be presupposed that any dominant ideology precisely and completely subsumes all of society's thought. Large corporate media (news and otherwise) are notoriously chief agencies of ideological production; nonetheless there is no one dimensional process by which they control, organize, and ascribe values in toto. Rather, even while there is an ever increasing degree of concentration of media ownership among major outlets and the range of perspectives undoubtedly narrows, such narratives within this network can still appear critical and even reflect a degree of independence from these relationships. The narratives transmitted are even contradictory and even dissenting at times. All this said, some ideas do become more dominant than others, and though they may ostensibly be constituted by a multitude of disparate "cover concepts," as Theodor Adorno (2000b: 408) has noted, they are predisposed to reflect an overarching paradigm.

The complexity of this process of ideological production and reproduction is evident, given the fact that ideologies are mediated through the economic and social position and experiential practices of social actors. Experiential practice and social position mediate ideology, dominant or otherwise. So the same "dominant" ideology that reflects the ruling ideas of the epoch, influence those in different social positions differently based on numerous factors, for example, where they live, the household in which they were raised, the material conditions in which they were brought up, as well as their current standard of living, the type of education they received, their gender and sexual orientation, their racial background, and so on. For example, regarding class position, the ideology of the moral work ethic may divide organized laborers from precarious and informal workers and the welfare poor by way of the distinction between worthy and unworthy poor, and may contribute to a sense of hopelessness and low self-worth in the latter category. Both of these groups are responding to the same ideology, but this ideology is mediated by the different material conditions and identity affiliations from which social actors are oriented. From the perspective of class privilege, reports on poverty may be seen as exaggerating the scale of the problem, and poverty and inequality in the United States has often been rationalized by asserting a high standard of living among America's

poor compared to those in other societies. Hardship is framed in individualistic terms—that those who are struggling do not work hard enough or foolishly refuse jobs that are adequate and abundant. These narratives fulfill a variety of functions, and for the dominant classes they help legitimate the existing normative order in which they enjoy great rewards and privileges (Gans 1995). For members of subordinate classes able to upwardly socially mobilize—that is, “work their way up”—these narratives highlight their own achievements and seemingly weaken critiques of the system by virtue of the valorized few who “worked hard” and “made it.” If they can do it, can’t everyone? Many rags-to-riches texts and biographies contain compelling and even moving content about figures that have overcome adversity and achieved great material successes, but in the current social order where such patterns are not at all typical, these texts reinforce the myth of meritocracy and the moral work ethic. The subtle weaving of these themes into everyday life has helped contribute to the constitution of the existing political culture in which social entitlements are often considered suspect without their provisions being fully understood, and without poverty in the United States being fully comprehended.

In this case, to grasp the substantive attributes and historical emergence of the new welfare consensus, this investigation aims to clarify dynamic macro-level systems and transformations with a microanalytical critique of ideology. Such analysis enables a more complex understanding of the shifting fields of opinion and influence related to welfare state discourse and how such a dynamic functions to shape and constrain policy proposals and reproduce structures of power in contemporary society. This procedure is considered in this investigation as a system-critique of ideology. Macrolevel systems, their structures, processes, and rationales are analyzed and disclosed through an interpretive analysis of various types of texts such as policy statements, journal articles, press releases, political addresses, congressional transcripts and testimony, archived papers, books of influence, primary and secondary source interviews, legislation, and newspaper and magazine articles pertaining to what is called welfare and that have contributed to producing our common understanding of it. That is, the particularities of the texts studied are located within their larger disciplinary and sociohistorical contexts to more critically understand the formation of the new welfare consensus. In other words, the new welfare consensus is not immanently validated (i.e., taken for granted); neither is the relationship between these realms understood to be causal in a linear, deterministic manner.

For instance, one aim of the book is to provocatively highlight the ideological contradictions and political tensions that were formative for the development of the American conservative movement and the contingent elements of the contemporary welfare consensus, most evident in the conditions surrounding the formation of the New Right and later neoconservative political traditions. These contradictions, along with some important commonalities, were evident in the disparate conservative literature and commentary covering the topics of equality, distribution, work, and economic and political liberty. Also formative was the acquiescence of the left and absorption into the right of many former progressives and leftists. The narratives that grew out of this process are studied in relation to the systems-lens incorporated into the approach. The critique looks to build on work that has theoretically comprehended the welfare state as a contradictory and dynamic part of late capitalist society, both as part of its own necessity and survival but also its self-representation as counterproductive and invalid. The decades-long attack on the modern welfare state and the consequence of bringing an end to welfare entitlement in the United States reveals particular system-imperatives and mechanisms by which US capitalism persists and its institutions structure the perceptions and practical activity of both policy elites and nonelite agents.

The terms, *ideology* and *discourse* feature prominently in this framework, and are utilized as methodological and theoretical categories to critique the particularities of texts and ideas determined to be substantively relevant and to assess their modes of deployment. Ideology is treated here as an idea structure that naturalizes and dehistoricizes social patterns and processes. The study considers how ideology grips the “minds of the masses,” becoming a “material force,” as Stuart Hall ([1986] 2005:27) has described. Therefore, ideology is not identified as something solely derived from material economic forces but simultaneously constitutive and derivative of them. It is seen as possessing a material basis in reality but a reality already constituted by ideology. A more thorough explanation of the concept of ideology and its application in this book will be detailed below. Discourse, relatedly, refers to social practices, such as speech acts, political/policy and scholarly analysis, media representations, and so on that reproduce ideological structures. The intellectuals, ideas, and organizations explored, and their corresponding political and ideological efforts and accomplishments, were selected based on a review of work (e.g., that of George H. Nash, Russell Kirk, Irving Kristol, Murray Rothbard, et al.)

that identified people and institutions instrumental in unifying the conservative movement and advancing its ideals around policy considerations. The work includes memoir passages, articles, a posthumously released monograph, intellectual history, and so forth. Such observers, themselves influential conservative thinkers, have provided their own accounts of who it was that influenced their own perspectives on these issues and shaped the perspectives and strategies the larger movement would employ going forward to pursue and advance policy objectives.

THE CRITIQUE OF IDEOLOGY

The critique of ideology is not a contemporary breakthrough. Thorough investigations into the etymology of the term *ideology* and the lineage of the concept's role as part of a critical methodology can be found in the thorough and readable work of Jorge Larraine (1979), George Lichtheim (1969), and others. Rather than a complete review of work that has utilized and developed the concept, this section presents a somewhat limited range of such work, but one that informs the critique of ideology utilized here. Its utilization in this book is based on its practicality as a methodological and theoretical category in relation to the subject matter being studied. As Adorno (2000:69) has suggested, social research methods should be attuned to "the subjects to which they are applied." In practice, Karl Marx brilliantly employed the critique in his discussion of Ludwig Feuerbach's analysis of religious belief and practice. Feuerbach accepted that the notion that God made man is an inversion of the truth (that in fact it is man who made God). Whereas Feuerbach accepted this simply as philosophical alienation or illusion, for Marx the inversion is an expression of the contradictions and sufferings of the real world (Marx and Engels [1845] 1976). The constellation of ideological productions related to welfare can be understood similarly. For example, on the one hand, capitalism is portrayed as a system of immutable laws in the form of an ideal type in the Weberian sense of the term. This comes across in language that praises efficiency, liberty, and justice by means of an ideology of neoliberal economic rationalism and of the virtue supposedly reflected in the discipline imposed on individuals through unrestricted markets. State measures that enable collective bargaining, a social wage, or taxation for the purposes of progressive redistribution, therefore, come to embody nondemocratic

obstructions that stifle individual hard work and competitive ambition on the part of the poor, working, and middle class. Among the more affluent and for capital, they represent a limitation imposed on entrepreneurial drive and investment. This might prompt observers to accept quasi-laissez-faire, anti-statist discourse at face value or as a form of conceptual deception advanced in bad faith. However, one does not need to look far to discover that such ideology reflects a reality in which aspects of a strong centralized state are favored by capital to secure international investments militarily, quell social unrest domestically, and enforce “good” behavior both economically and through the coercive use of the welfare and criminal justice systems, all publicly financed. Thus, neoliberalism (laissez-faire individualism in its practical and contemporary incarnation) is not a system of thought setting out to abolish the state due to its a priori corrupting and malevolent character but rather an ideology that obscures a process that appropriates the state to serve the needs of capital rather than those of the public. The wave of “bailouts” that followed the 2008 financial crisis and reinforce the “too big to fail” doctrine has also highlighted some of the contradictions inherent in these relationships. These revelations clarify a deeper truth (though obscured) regarding the way political and economic institutions, actors, and the interests and rationales of each interact to both accommodate and reproduce system-imperatives. PRWORA ultimately was framed in connection with a breakdown of enforcement and discipline regarding the behavior of the poor, especially with regard to work and employment but also in relation to traditional gender roles, family organization, and sexual and reproductive behavior (Murray 1984; Mead 2009). The conservative retrenchment in relation to the welfare consensus facilitated more regressive redistribution and greater inequality in relation to wealth and income and very slow income growth among the poorest, compared to the more affluent (Denavas-Walt, Proctor, and Mills 2004; US Bureau of the Census 2008a). All this, despite claims that ending entitlements and enforcing work would create better conditions at the bottom. Framed in terms consistent with economic rationality, those conditions constitute a system of just inequality, which is to say of hierarchy justified by the myth of meritocracy and thus having the appearance of being “natural.” The ascribed historical origins of neoliberalism, those of the Enlightenment and the struggle against traditional authority and for individual liberty have allowed it to appear committed to a framework of fairness (and even equality),

given its expressed stance against the ascribed hierarchy that corresponds to inherited rank. Like Marx in his critique of Feuerbach, such ideology reveals itself to be not merely manipulative, illusory, or deceptive, but expressive of an exploitive reality with which it is intimately bound, one where the disempowering of the working and nonworking poor is framed as expanding liberty and necessarily accompanied by vilifying the nonworking (“undeserving”) poor.

The modern rationalistic tendency in political and social theory is evident in, and in part due to, Weber. That same tendency in contemporary policy analysis necessitates a breaching of the surface of his work in this area as well and requires a formidable critique of it. In Weber’s work, pure types of rational, means-end oriented action are empirically observable to the social scientist and are contrasted with types of irrational action that he regards “as factors of deviation from a conceptually pure type of rational action” (Giddens 1972; Weber [1899] 1978:6). Based on this typology, rational considerations become separate from moral ones (Giddens 1972). Georg Lukács reproached this predilection in the social sciences and in social thought. He was a friend of Weber’s, but Lukács’s association with Communism would come to deeply strain their relationship (Karádi 1987). Along with Antonio Gramsci (and others), Lukács is widely regarded as a “founding father” or part of the “first phase” of Western Marxism (Arato 1997:5; Holub 1999:39), which represented a departure from the vulgar Marxism of the day and an anticipation of the rich critique that would develop through the work of the Frankfurt School and later scholars. In particular, Lukács and Gramsci’s explication of the concepts of reification, ideology, and hegemony was seminal for the development of the later intellectual traditions of critical theory, cultural studies, the New Left, et al. Lukács (2000:157) saw Weber’s means-end rationality and its integral acceptance of the coercive and exploitive conditions under capitalism as symptomatic of modern capitalism itself and indicative of the tendency for bourgeois thought to open up “an irrational chasm between the subject and object of knowledge.”

The concept of reification was realized by Lukács to grapple with the possibility that “commodity exchange together with its structural consequences” were “able to influence the *total* outer and inner life of society” (Lukács 2000:84 [author’s italics]). In capitalism’s earlier phase, he argued, the “personal nature of economic relations was still understood clearly on occasion” (Lukács 2000:86). However, with economic relations having become more sophisticated, complex, and less direct, it has become rare that society’s members are able to breach the

“veil of reification” (Lukács 2000:86). For Lukács, reification described the condition of not seeing phenomena as dynamic and contingent processes, but rather perceiving reality as something that just happens to be, interpreting facts as isolated and ossified (Lukács 2000). Objectively, social groups (e.g., classes) come to comprehend their situation as crystallized and therefore neither non-contingent nor alterable through their own thought or activity. Subjectively, social activity becomes estranged from social experience (and social actors themselves) and becomes commodified, and with regard to the social sciences, subjects are reduced to purposive or value-driven actors in pursuit of predetermined and “rational” ends (Lukács 2000).

Writing around the same time as Lukács and struggling with similar questions, Gramsci ([1971] 2005:12) described hegemony as the ability of the dominant group in civil society to exercise its power over subaltern groups because of the prestige enjoyed by the former by virtue of its “position and function in the world of production.” Thus, the dominant group becomes capable of generating the “spontaneous consent” of the “great masses of the population” (Gramsci [1971] 2005:12). While describing ideology “in its highest sense,” Gramsci ([1971] 2005:328) portrays a more pervasive and ominous form of social domination existing in all aspects of lived experience, describing it as

Any conception of the world, any philosophy which has become a cultural movement, a “religion,” a “faith,” any that has produced a form of practical activity or will in which the philosophy is contained as an implicit theoretical “premise.” One might say “ideology” here, but on condition that the word is used in its highest sense of a conception of the world that is implicitly manifest in art, in law, in economic activity and in all manifestations of individual and collective life. This problem is that of preserving the ideological unity of the entire social bloc which that ideology serves to cement and to unify. (Gramsci [1971] 2005:328)

While this description presents hegemony as pervasive, it is never permanent or fixed, and neither is ideology completely comprehensive or stable (Hall [1986] 2005; Williams 1977). These structures are historically specific and temporary, and under constant revision, modification, alteration, and pressure by those resisting and challenging them from without (Hall [1986] 2005; Williams 1977).

Lukács and Gramsci's work was deeply consequential for the burgeoning tradition of critical theory, which offered a forceful critique of the fetish of rationality, of Weber's particular concept of interpretation, and of his methodology more generally. Some of its key practitioners were associated with the Institute for Social Research at the University of Frankfurt, or the "Frankfurt School," as it is more commonly termed, specifically Max Horkheimer, Herbert Marcuse, and Theodor Adorno. A synthesis and application of some of their substantive concepts and methods in a policy studies context can help interrogate and problematize the scientific practice of reducing the lives of those who are economically marginalized, down to their productive and reproductive functions. Critical analyses of Weber have tended to locate his mode of interpretation in the positivist project more broadly and to view means-end rationality in general as the ideological reduction of reason to a mere instrument rendering social subjects, down to their social functions (Adorno 1997; Adorno 2000; Horkheimer 1972; Horkheimer 1974; Horkheimer 2002; Horkheimer and Adorno 2001; Marcuse 1969). This critique also opposes the downgrading of ethics as separate from rationality (science) and its relegation to the realm of the individual subject (Adorno 1997; Adorno 2000; Horkheimer 1972; Horkheimer 1974; Horkheimer 2002; Horkheimer and Adorno 2001; Marcuse 1969). This line of reasoning in Weber removes the possibility of (social) scientific theory or empirical knowledge to entail ethical determinations, or judgments of value, outside of considering the empirically observed values held by social actors in pursuit of specified, rationally determined ends. This formalization of reason, expressed in Weber's work (and lamented to an extent by Weber himself), is regarded in the critical theory of the Frankfurt School as contributing to the standardization of all social life—and thus represents a Huxley-style negative utopia (Horkheimer 1974).

Therefore, the conceptual tools of interpretation and understanding were reapplied by critical theory's main figures as a more thorough and encompassing critique. One important application was to examine the relationship between texts and social actors per mental structures. For complex material produced through what Adorno (along with Max Horkheimer) called the culture industry, the methods, or as Horkheimer said, "all the tricks used," of generating a noncritical consensus can be understood only by introducing a qualitative component to the analysis (Adorno 2000:87; Horkheimer and

Adorno 2001). This process of inquiry is one that immerses itself in the cultural material of the mass culture's particular details and extracts its social content (Adorno 2000). Complex social content can only be realized through analysis of a text's "immanent structure" (Adorno 2000:88). While means-end rationality provided Weber with a tool to apply a scientific empiricism to his interpretive analysis, it nonetheless presents itself as an unrealistic, ideal construction, "since the great majority of the so-called 'social action' of human beings are carried out not in relation to some imagined social goal but more-or-less as reflex actions" (Adorno 2000:107). Grasping how this pattern of cultural practice assumes autonomous characteristics constituted by the nonreflexive repetitive actions of social subjects (and thus with a dulled/muted subjectivity) is necessary for understanding how ideology functions in late capitalist society.

Horkheimer and Adorno's analysis of Weber is consistent with their larger critique of positivism, that is, they identify in his deeply subjectivistic framework a mode of thought that fails to allow for social actors to acknowledge the substantiality of one end from another or to discern the contradictions between the subjective meaning behind social actions and the objective meaning of those actions (Adorno 2000; Horkheimer 1974). Consider that industrial workers and members of labor unions who were registered Democrats and who voted in 1980 for Ronald Reagan may have subjectively done so as a vote against welfare cheats and high taxes, but the objective reality of such a vote was one that enabled a policy of redistribution to the advantage of the affluent. The December 2017 federal tax reform measures embody analogous contradictions. Only considering the means-end rationality or subjective origin of voters' actions at the polls ignores the substantive contradiction between them and the objective meaning of electoral outcomes as they relate to social and economic reality. As Marx ([1844] 1978:53 [author's italics]) asserted with regard to the fundamental structure of ideology, through an analysis of myth, ". . . Man is no abstract being squatting outside the world. Man is *the human world*, the state, society. This state, this society, produce religion which is an *inverted world consciousness*, because they are an *inverted world*."

With regard to social scientific investigation, Horkheimer (2002:208) notes that social inquiry should not accept the framework of traditional (scientific) theory, which accepts the origin of objective facts and the "practical application of the conceptual system by which it grasps the facts," as "external

to the theoretical thinking itself.” The objective of critical analysis is not simply to eliminate these practices, but it sees them as

Necessarily connected with the way in which the social structure is organized. . . . [Such analysis] is suspicious of the very categories of better, useful, appropriate, productive and valuable, as these are understood in the present order, and refuses to take them as nonscientific presuppositions about which one can do nothing. (Horkheimer 2002:207)

In other words, the categories themselves, uncritically utilized within policy studies, consist of profound political meaning that reveals the character of existing social relations and simultaneously shapes them. This is why institutions of power have historically tried to constrain scientific activities when deemed a threat to system interests and science has often (consciously and unconsciously) operated in the service of dominant institutions through history.

Critical social theory assesses the nature of reality as immanently interconnected to the processes of perception and identification and as something that is fundamentally historically contingent (Horkheimer 2002). Therefore, through such a method, social reality, scientific truth, and policy orthodoxy all lose their reified character (Horkheimer 2002). Through an effective critique of scientific and political knowledge and the systems in which they are produced, the dynamics by which vulgar policy analysis serves power potentially become less obscure. Regarding this study, the scientific developments within policy studies, which have conjured up analytical categories like dependency, cultural and behavioral pathology, family and community disorganization, illegitimacy, and even the term, *reform* itself as it has come to unthinkingly refer to reducing funding and participation for programs and to enhancing policy’s social control function, must be subject to this type of critical scrutiny. Once exposed to such a framework of critique, these categories are disclosed as ideological concepts that contribute to stigmatizing survival and coping behaviors of the poor and vilifying target populations of the policy themselves. Concurrently, these same categories naturalize the existing structures of inequality in the United States.

As ideological processes are those where the contradictory and contingent features of social experience are naturalized and disengaged from their historical and contextual milieu, such processes reinforce reality as a “natural order,” which therefore appears fixed and unchangeable. Social reality

becomes taken for granted and, in the case of contemporary policy discourse, progressive reform which falls outside the acceptable discursive parameters is understood as impractical and unrealistic. Consider Adorno's (2005:50) indictments that prevailing scientific tendencies petrify unfreedom as a social scientific given and generate a reality where "the whole is the false." Alas, the contemporary welfare consensus and its accompanying neoliberal or neo-laissez-faire ethos has normalized relations predicated on exploitation and domination. However, ideology functions as more than a shroud of deceptive claims cloaking the real with a misleading and untruthful facade. Rather, it is a surface representation of a set of objective conditions themselves constitutive of an inverted reality (Larrain 1979; Larrain 1983; Žižek 1999). Consider, also, Adorno's (1972a:198; ³ [1973] 2000:145) assertions that, "Ideologies in the proper sense become false only by their relationship to the existing reality," or that "A contradiction in reality, it is a contradiction against reality." Thus this study proceeds with the assumption that the social order and its derivative ideologies encompass a truth in their untruth. That is, reality as it is presented must be decoded and resituated in its accompanying sociohistorical context, not to conjure absolute truth but to better comprehend connections between social institutions and experience as they develop and change within and in relation to ever-changing conditions.

Historically, the Marxist critique of ideology was formulated to address the fact that history had yet to bring about a democratic resolution to the contradictions inherent in capitalism. Further, a more inclusive consideration of the cultural sphere of experience indicated additionally that social changes had not produced structures of social consciousness consistent with critical reasoning en masse, nor had they led to an effective popular exertion of pressure against ideological domination. For Adorno and Horkheimer, this was explained as a function of the all-encompassing culture industry, and for Marcuse, that of a mechanical apparatus producing technological rationality and one-dimensional thought (Horkheimer and Adorno 2001; Marcuse 1991; Marcuse 1997). Reiterating ideology's function as more than false consciousness, Adorno argued that it "is no longer objective spirit, . . . as crystallized blindly and anonymously out of the social process, but rather is tailored scientifically to fit the society. That is the case with the products of the culture industry, film, magazines, illustrated newspapers, radio, television, and the best-seller literature" (Adorno [1973] 2000:200). Again, ideology is thus not merely masking the false, but is