The Rise and Fall of Need-Based Grants: A Critical Review of Presidential Discourses on Higher Education, 1964–1984

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Introduction

Calls today for a reinvigorated federal role in higher education come from across the political spectrum and are framed by moral, economic, and political imperatives. One prominent thread in this dialogue is the continuing decline of Pell Grant availability for low-income students and the related trend of grants' weakening purchasing power relative to total college costs. By all indicators, the future of need-based grants is uncertain. On the basis of historical and correlational evidence, economists Friedman (2005) and Fogel (2000) have separately advanced an economic rationale for reinvesting in grants that higher education scholars have yet to include in their policy debates. Social equality and economic development in America, they assert, depend on enhancing human capital formation, which may be achieved by returning to the education policy of the 1970s (Fogel, 2000), including a reinvestment in Pell Grants (Friedman, 2005). However, historiographical review and analysis of US presidential discourse between 1964 and 1984 reveal that the problem of equal opportunity today is more complicated than reasserting a purely economic rationale to direct more funding toward Pell Grants. Given higher education policy's contingency upon historical events and policy in other arenas, equal opportunity may need to be reconceptualized for our historical and political context. Furthermore, economic rationales for financial aid policy since 1964 have reliably been intertwined with arguments based on political ideology and the desired sociopolitical aims of education, suggesting the need to reconstruct a multidimensional argument for reinvestment that balances these rationales.

US presidential discourse on higher education has yet to be reviewed in the literature, despite higher education's prevalence in presidential speeches as a theme linked to other domestic policies. Discourse analysis facilitates deeper historical understanding of policy by revealing the rationales that motivate policy and drive public opinion, a critical task in that these rationales delimit the acceptable boundaries of proposed policy and frame our eventual evaluation of a policy's success or failure. Scholars from education, history, and the social sciences have identified three types of rationales for higher education investment circulating between 1964 and 1984, as well as shifts in focus occurring within each type. First, they find that justifications grounded

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in the desired sociopolitical ends of education shifted from concerns about equity to excellence. Second, rationales aligned with prevailing political ideologies[1] followed the nation's political shift from Johnson's liberalism to Reagan's neoconservatism. Changing beliefs about the capacity and responsibility of the federal government to help meet social needs constitute an important dimension of political ideology during this time. Finally, economic rationales grounded in human capital theory focused on the economic returns of higher education investment and shifted from aims of upward social mobility for the poor to national economic growth. Clearly these three types of rationales are linked, but scholars have yet to explore the nature of those relationships. This chapter uses a review of presidential discourse to investigate how various rationales converge and diverge and to trace US presidents' rationales for college access policies in the context of other policy debates and interests.

Presidential discourse suggests that the politics of higher education generally, and financial aid policy specifically, are more complex than the dichotomous categorizations previous scholars have suggested. All three types of rationales described above are evident in presidential speeches, but none neatly predict a given president's approach to college opportunity. Equity and excellence are neither mutually exclusive nor static in meaning. Moreover, both the human capital justifications and the equity to excellence shift are related to a deeper ideological shift toward neoconservatism. Juxtaposing educational history with presidential rhetoric shows that the political revolution and decline of need-based grants typically attributed to Reagan was a much longer process that began with Richard Nixon's 1968 election and unfolded throughout the 1970s.

Methodology

Periodization

This study begins with the policy-crafting conversations preceding President Lyndon Johnson's announcement of his Great Society legislation. Johnson advanced the 1965 Higher Education Act (HEA) as part of a large-scale policy response to the civil rights movement and, with the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, represented a major enhancement of the federal role in education. Drawing on egalitarian rationales and faith in the government's duty and ability to

[1] Ideology is defined here as a system of beliefs that guides the action of individuals, groups, and/or institutions. As in critical theory, ideologies are examined to help uncover the ways that inequality is reproduced over time by perpetuating deeply held assumptions about what count as acceptable policy and social relations. Likewise, consonant with the postmodern tradition, ideologies are regarded as historically situated, socially constructed discourses that assert a "regime [and] general politics of truth" (Foucault, 1980, p. 131). For an excellent review of ideology in social science and education research, see Slaughter (1991, pp. 60–64).

solve social problems, HEA created college encouragement programs, aided historically black colleges and universities (HBCU) and, under Title IV, expanded the availability of resources to defray students' college costs. President Richard Nixon's 1972 amendments to the HEA promised Basic Educational Opportunity Grants (now known as Pell Grants) to all income-qualifying students pursuing postsecondary education. The 1972 amendments retained Johnson's view of higher education as a mechanism for social mobility, but leaned more visibly on human capital arguments and introduced market-based logic by tying grants to students who could take their funding to any postsecondary institution. Through executive orders and influential speeches, Johnson and Nixon also promoted affirmative action in college admissions.[2] However, despite Nixon's promotion of higher education access by class and race, he sparked public doubts about the capacity of government to solve social problems and thus laid the groundwork for a political realignment and the ideological revolution typically attributed to Ronald Reagan.

From 1965 to 1975, despite a ballooning budget for the war in Vietnam, federal student aid expenditures grew rapidly. And while tracing historical causality is a spurious business at best, it is more than a simple correlation that college enrollment disparities declined in the wake of Johnson's and Nixon's college access policies. By 1975 the college enrollment gap among White, African-American, and Latino high school graduates reduced to zero (St. John, 2003, p. 23). As the 1970s progressed, though, a middle-class majority pressured the federal government – now the dominant player in the financial aid enterprise – to facilitate their financial access to higher education as well. In both student aid and other policy arenas, scholars and politicians alike increasingly justified policy on the basis of majority interests, fiscal restraint, and protecting America's competitiveness. Thus, the first set of existing policies to be challenged was the so-called entitlement programs, including Pell Grants. In 1978, President Jimmy Carter's Middle Income Student Assistance Act (MISAA) began shifting federal aid support from grants for poor families to loans for middle-class families, and the Supreme Court established limits on affirmative action in the case of *Regents of the University of California vs. Bakke* (1978). Under President Reagan, and especially with the release of *A Nation at Risk* (1983), the educational/political revolution begun with Nixon's election was fully realized. Principles of limited, laissez-faire government took hold, excellence became the watchword in education policy at all levels, and the strongest rationale for higher education investment became its potential to advance the national economy vis-à-vis international competitors.

[2] Although this work analyzes aid policies, presidential advocacy has also proved critical to the rise and fall of affirmative action, and it should thus be considered in studies of the contemporary struggle over affirmative action in state ballot initiatives. Johnson spoke out in 1965 for affirmative action as a means of redressing the unequal representation of African-Americans in higher education, and his Executive Order 11246 required postsecondary institutions to draft admissions policies to that end. Nixon's Executive Order 11478 both broadened and deepened the federal requirements.

Secondary Data

Historiography

Within the education literature, considerably more historical policy research has been published on equal opportunity in K–12 schooling and the role of the federal government than on higher education. Most histories of college access and opportunity tend to focus on either admissions or student financial aid, with the exception of Gelber's (2007) comprehensive history of equity in college access which considers both, tracing two centuries of access to American higher education by race, class, and gender using policy frameworks of preparation, access, finance, and completion.

Several works from the higher education literature trace and interpret changes in federal financial aid policy through historical research. For example, Karen (1991) charts changes in access to higher education from 1960 to 1986 across race, class, and gender, concluding that the mobilization of interest groups representing women and minorities positively influenced the legal environment for affirmative action. Lower-income families, whose main access issue was financial, did not similarly mobilize and so did not directly affect the climate for aid policy.

Hearn (1993) offers a particularly rich history of financial aid policy by investigating the paradox of sustained growth in federal aid spending from 1965 to 1990 in the absence of the usual prerequisites of rational policy development. One of the elements of rational policy development glaringly absent from the federal aid history is philosophical coherence. Driven by multiple logics and sometimes unconnected goals, aid programs have frequently been developed in response to noneducational goals, such that compromise across competing interests has become a major characteristic of aid policies. Nevertheless, the lack of a singular logic has not hindered aid's steady growth when total expenditures are tracked. Using this paradox as an analytic tool, Hearn delineates four phases of federal aid policy history under various instantiations of the HEA and presents five possible explanations for the paradox. Four of the five explanations put a different set of actors at the center of the paradox. Bureaucrats, interest groups, legislators, and the middle class each may influence the nonlinear process of policy development and/or the steady growth of expenditures according to the first four views. Hearn's fifth interpretation, which he considers the most viable, makes sense of aid's sustained growth on the basis of "organized-anarchy" as a characteristic of federal education policymaking. While substantially enriching our understanding of aid policy development and implementation over 25 years, and spurring needed dissatisfaction with the incrementalism observed during that time, Hearn's (1993) attention to total growth downplays the important shift that occurred in the population targeted for aid (i.e., from low- to middle-income families) and changes in the types of aid that predominated (i.e., grants versus loans and work study).

Attending specifically to those facets of aid policy history, St. John and Elliott (1994) argue that aid history may be divided into three periods: pre-1965, 1965–1978, and post-1978. Their view highlights the development of consensus

around equal opportunity as an aim of federal aid policy between 1965 and 1978. They bracket the time before 1965 as a phase of establishing the foundations of modern aid programs and the period since 1978 as a phase of greater concern with aid policy's fiscal sustainability and with universal access goals over and against equal opportunity for historically disadvantaged groups. In presenting future policy researchers with a framework for critical analysis, St. John and Elliott (1994) also encourage critical questioning of the assumptions that underlie the paradigms within which we research.

Rationales for Federal Higher Education Investment

A review of existing research also makes clear the predominant rationales for federal higher education investment between 1964 and 1984, creating a framework for this study's analysis of presidential discourse. Three major perspectives emerged: the sociopolitical ends of education, the dominant political ideology, and the economic returns of education (see Table 1).

Table 1 Rationales for federal higher education investment, 1964–1984

	Sociopolitical ends of education	Dominant political ideology	Economic returns of education (i.e., human capital)
Summary	Education is a tool in which investment can bring about positive social and political outcomes	Education is an institution that reflects prevailing beliefs about society, and the degree of investment should align with those beliefs	Throughout history, broadening educational attainment has stimulated individual mobility and collective prosperity
Shift in focus from 1964 to 1984	Equity to excellence as desired ends of education	Liberal, to market-based, to neoconservative ideology	Individual income to national economic growth
Presidents who deployed	Johnson, Reagan	Johnson, Nixon, Ford	Johnson, Carter, Reagan
Assets of rationale	Gives focus to specific policies and programs	Grounds policy in deeply held values	Historically strongest justification; widely accepted; pragmatic appeal
Liabilities of rationale	Subject to changing political conditions	Unstable across time and constituencies; policies tend to lack sustained and mass appeal	Cannot cut through political ideology; only addresses material conditions
Relationship to other rationales	Desired ends of education manifest political ideology	Encompasses the sociopolitical and economic rationales	Economic advancement facilitates equity and excellence
Examples in the literature	Berube (1991); Hansen and Stampen (1987)	Anderson (2007); Giroux and Giroux (2004)	Becker (1964/1975); Friedman (2005)

Sociopolitical and Ideological Rationales

Berube (1991) and Hansen and Stampen (1987) exemplify the view that educational priorities shifted from equity to excellence during this period. Berube's (1991) view seems derived in part from his close attention to developments in K–12 education and in part because of a sort of selection bias in his data. Rather than tracing the historical narrative across presidencies, his book presents case studies of education policy under three presidents – Johnson, Reagan, and George H.W. Bush – and how the presidents shaped the focus of policy. From this perspective, presidents' education policies emerge as they rearticulate education's social aim in response to perceived external pressures. Johnson's response to the civil rights movement motivated his view of education as a tool to erase inequality in the 1960s, Berube argues, while Reagan's Cold War-driven agenda in the 1980s justified his treatment of education as a tool to bolster American preeminence. By skipping directly from Johnson to Reagan, however, Berube fails to capture what role the presidents and events of the 1970s played in reshaping the national education agenda. He places presidents' approaches in the context of specific historical events, but takes the events out of a broader historical context.

Anderson (2007) takes a different view, perceiving a qualitative shift in educational policies due to the rise of neoconservative political ideology. To some extent, his interpretation can be understood as a function of his methodology, a discourse analysis of congressional debate preceding major education legislation of this era. Critical discourse analysis assumes that individuals' beliefs influence discourse and, especially when congressional debate is the specific discourse being analyzed, we may expect the debate to be at least partly driven by political ideology. While he makes a compelling case for the role ideology plays in shaping educational policy discourse, Anderson (like Berube) presents case studies of the debate preceding individual policies. The effect for both authors is that these histories lack a historical narrative that places the actors, policies, and events in appropriate contexts.

Critical theorists Giroux and Giroux (2004) read the history of higher educational policy from Johnson through George W. Bush as part of a politically charged story in which, "assault on big government" quickly turned into an "ideological war against the 'underclass'" (p. 189). Progressives' perceptions of a crisis in educational equity can partly be explained by federal cuts to education that began under Reagan, who argued that public schools were wasteful and ineffectual due to the federal government's monopoly over their interests. Giroux and Giroux's interpretation implicitly maps the rise of neoconservatism in domestic policy onto the erosion of an equity agenda for higher education that consisted of desegregation and affirmative action policies. However, for today's context they argue that the first policy efforts should aim to improve K–12 education (including desegregation efforts) and financial aid availability, and that affirmative action does little for the student who cannot afford tuition.

Lavin and Hyllegard (1996) come closer to an explicit integration of the equity/excellence and liberal/conservative perspectives than other histories. They use the City University of New York's transformation to an open access system in the late 1960s as a prism for exploring higher education access and opportunity. They argue that

the liberalism of the 1960s and early 1970s motivated policy efforts to reduce inequality, and ascendant conservative reform efforts of the late 1970s and 1980s specifically blamed higher education for an alleged decline in academic standards. They also acknowledge that the excellence movement of the 1980s affected the political climate for higher education. However, one finds less evidence for an ideological conflict in their treatment than the existence of a simple policy dispute over the effectiveness of higher education opportunity programs.

Economic Rationales

Disagreement exists over the extent to which equity/excellence concerns and political ideology influenced rationales for investing in education through this period, but scholars agree that variants on Becker's (1964/1975) human capital theory assumptions about the economic benefits of educational investments proved persuasive to legislators from both parties. Whether benefits of education accrued to individuals or society and how much the government should subsidize education were subject to debate, but the theory's flexibility and relatively apolitical assumptions have made it a broadly appealing rationale (St. John, 1998). Slaughter (1991) finds it such a prominent theme in the testimony of university presidents to Congress from 1975 to 1985 that she cites it as a core element of the "official ideology of higher education" (p. 70). Indeed, in a period characterized by political discontinuity on several levels, human capital theory's sustained acceptance from 1964 to 1984 stands out as one of a few continuities.

Although outside the higher education literature, two recent economic histories offer fresh perspectives on human capital rationales for higher education investment that any contemporary dialogue on the topic should consider. Through comparative historical analysis, noted economist Benjamin Friedman (2005) analyzes the meaning of economic growth conditions for individuals, finding that an increasing standard of living in a society is associated with greater openness, tolerance, democracy, and other social virtues (p. 11).[3] To stimulate economic growth in America (and, by implication, growth's positive moral consequences), he advises economic policy that combines renewed physical capital investments and greater human capital formation. Targeted higher education investments keep students in school longer, thus raising the labor force's overall education level, and therefore its productivity.[4] By Friedman's calculation, at least 8% of Americans remain

[3] A major critique of Friedman's (2005) text has been that he implies a causal relationship between growth and social virtues (e.g., the book's title is, *The Moral Consequences of Economic Growth*), yet presents solely correlational evidence for the relationship.

[4] Friedman's (2005) position on the needs of K-12 education is very different. He advocates enhancement of choice at both the primary and secondary levels to create conditions of competition, which he believes function as performance incentives for schools (pp. 429–430). Collectively, schools will have better outcomes under market competition, "thereby enhancing the nation's human capital formation" (p. 431).

financially constrained from college attendance (p. 425), and he implicitly regards policy efforts to facilitate their financial access (e.g., Pell Grants) as a means of achieving his primary objective – national economic growth. As Friedman puts it, “[t]he central question is not the poverty of the disadvantaged, nor the success of the most privileged. It is the economic well-being of the broad majority of the nation’s citizenry” (p. 435). Friedman also contends, however, that equalized opportunities are frequently a byproduct of higher education investments made with an eye to economic growth. According to correlational data, he finds that when human capital arguments are deployed, the least advantaged benefit most.

In a very different style of historical analysis, Robert Fogel, a Nobel laureate in economics, integrates economic, political, and religious views of American history. Four Great Awakenings (i.e., revivals) in evangelical religion have not only shaped the texture of contemporary American religion, he contends, but each has also produced a set of egalitarian political and economic reforms.[5] Of particular interest here is the relationship between disciples of the third and fourth Great Awakenings. Those influenced by the third grew up on Social Gospel theology and produced what Fogel calls a modernist egalitarian agenda aimed at material redistribution through the programs of the New Deal and Great Society. According to Fogel, these programs essentially offered forms of physical capital, and this agenda can reasonably be seen to include the HEA of 1965 and its 1972 amendments. The fourth Great Awakening began with the spike in religious conversions in the late 1950s to early 1960s and the subsequent migration of churchgoers from mainline to evangelical churches. Adherents of this revival retooled the meaning of equal opportunity to their own ends to produce a “postmodern egalitarian agenda” emphasizing equal distribution of immaterial and spiritual assets, including human capital.[6] That human capital has displaced physical capital as a more highly valued commodity is not a new argument, but Fogel’s position that the trend has its origins

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[5] Egalitarianism has been a “national ethic” (Fogel, 2000, p. 4) in American history, but there has been a struggle to define and implement specific egalitarian agendas. Fogel argues that overlapping politico-religious cycles (i.e., Great Awakenings) have played an unacknowledged yet key role in shaping this struggle. Born in revivals of religious interest, Fogel (2000) explains:

“These Great Awakenings are reform movements with an ethical/programmatic phase followed by a legislative/political phase, both of which arise out of the lag between technological change and institutional adjustment. Each awakening lasts about one hundred years, including a declining phase during which exponents of one Great Awakening clash with those of the next” (p. 9).

[6] Postmodern egalitarianism, according to Fogel, provided the intellectual inspiration for movements like lifelong learning (Fogel, 2000, p. 179). The fourth Great Awakening also created the reforms and agenda associated with the Moral Majority and Christian Coalition. Leaders of these politico-religious groups pitched a form of Christian political activism marked by single-issue campaigns such as abortion and prayer in schools. As individuals supported these campaigns, the organizations’ leaders both downplayed the Social Gospel-inspired egalitarian agenda and, in some cases, presented it as at odds with the new evangelicalism. As a result, many evangelicals groups since the mid-1970s have rejected the religious relevance of education, health, and welfare policies produced by disciples of the third Great Awakening. However, Fogel anticipates that a significant portion of the evangelical bloc may yet come to support antipoverty policies and programs, including education.

in evangelical revival certainly is. Given that the aims of the modern egalitarian agenda were never fully realized and that the postmodern egalitarian agenda holds sway in contemporary public opinion, he advocates simultaneously advancing both. While Fogel recognizes the challenge of competing demands in modern and postmodern egalitarianism (e.g., a focus on correcting historical inequality versus generally broadening opportunity today), he does not suggest how they might be reconciled. Instead, on the basis of both groups' support for universal education, he assumes contemporary evangelicals influenced by the politics of the fourth Great Awakening will also support education for material equity. However, as this review will show, among followers of the fourth Great Awakening the perception of a zero-sum game in pursuing equal opportunity became a major obstacle in the sustainability of programs supporting need-based grants.

Primary Data

The historiographical review helped create a framework for discourse analysis of 35 US presidential speeches given between 1964 and 1984. Transcripts of inaugural speeches were accessed and downloaded from the Avalon Project at Yale Law School; transcripts for all State of the Union addresses were downloaded from ThisNation.com; and other notable speeches made by individual presidents were accessed and downloaded from online archives of the respective presidential libraries (see Table 2 for a full list of speeches analyzed). These speeches reveal several layers of meaning.

Table 2 Presidential speeches analyzed ($N = 35$)

	Johnson	Nixon	Ford	Carter	Reagan
Inaugural addresses		1969, 1973		1977	1981
State of the Union Addresses	1965–1969	1970–1974	1975–1977	1978–1981	1982–1984
Other speeches	Signing of ESEA (1965) Affirmative action speech at Howard University (1965)	Comments to Congress on EEO (1972) Signing of Education Amendments (1972)	Tulane University convocation (1975)	Receipt of honorary-doctorate from Notre Dame University (1977)	Receiving the Final Report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983)
		Special Message on Education Priorities (1974)	Accepting the GOP presidential nomination (1976)	Crisis of Confidence (1979)	Signing the Education for Economic Security Act (1984)

Most importantly, presidents' speeches uncover the terms of discourse on federal postsecondary educational policies and spending. Taken at face value, the speeches also provide a chronicle of what the presidents viewed as the nation's most pressing issues and how they framed those issues. They also illuminate how presidents viewed education in the context of the larger policy arena, and how education policy relates to other salient elements of the historical narrative during this time.

Data Analysis

The objective and method of discourse analysis is to study texts in relevant contexts, working outward from words to understand the contexts in which they are expressed (see Table 3). Johnstone (2008) defines discourse as, "conventional ways of talking that both create and are created by conventional ways of thinking. These linked ways of talking and thinking constitute ideologies (sets of interrelated ideas) and serve to circulate power in society" (p. 4). Of the many types of discourse, this research focuses on rhetorical discourse, which is marked by relative self-consciousness, a public context, and strategic aims of persuasion.

Critical discourse analysis is a qualitative technique intended to be open-ended and inductive rather than prescriptive, but in order to uncover embedded assumptions, the researcher is directed to pay close attention to the array of choices a speaker makes in creating discourse. Informed by guidelines set out by Johnstone (2008), Table 4 delineates the heuristic guide developed to analyze the discursive choices presidents make. Persuaded that these choices are not made randomly in political discourse but to accomplish specific aims, rhetorical choices are always evaluated in the context of what those aims might be. Thus, to each of the questions listed in Table 4, one could append the question, "[t]o what end?"

Table 3 Aims and assumptions of discourse analysis

Aims	Assumptions	Assumptions vis-à-vis this review
Study texts in relevant contexts	Context informs meaning of discourse; discourse informs subsequent contexts for discourse	Presidents' discursive power shapes the national agenda; the national agenda also sets the context for and shapes the terms of acceptable presidential discourse
Uncover assumptions to reveal ideological structure of discourse	Discourse and ideology are inseparable	Presidents speak and act from particular social locations and ideological orientations
Analyze the array of choices that a speaker makes (to uncover assumptions)	Rhetorical choices are not made randomly; one must consider to what end (and to whose benefit) discourse takes the shape it does	Presidential speeches are designed to persuade, but may hook into or use prevailing opinion as a means of persuasion

Table 4 Heuristic framework for analyzing presidential speeches (Adapted from Johnstone, 2008)

Analysis	Questions to ask of the text	Textual cues
Representation of actors	Who is an actor? Who is not? Who is portrayed as having responsibility? Who is not?	Passive/active voice
Representation of knowledge	What is portrayed as truth? As debatable? How secure/certain is the president's position?	Syntax of certainty
Naming	How do words chosen correspond to ideologies? Which ones?	Euphemism/dysphemism
	How are names used to constitute claims about a subject?	Metaphors
Intertextuality	How does the president connect/distinguish his from prior discourses?	Allusion
	How does the president build on/draw from other paradigms?	Direct quotation/paraphrase Parenthetical comments

Discourse analysts regard presidential rhetoric as a critical tool for buttressing public support and constitutional authority, generally, and in the case of presidents during this period, a way to define the legacy of the civil rights movement on their own terms (Aune and Rigsby, 2005; Shogan, 2006). Critical policy discourse analysis assumes that presidents' discursive power shapes the national agenda, but also that the national agenda sets the context for and shapes the terms of acceptable presidential discourse (Johnstone, 2008).

Theoretical Framework

Policy researchers are exhorted to transparency about the analytical assumptions of one's chosen methodology. St. John and Elliott (1994) likewise encourage researchers toward a posture of reflexivity about their own tacit assumptions and the ways those assumptions influence the language of research. The methods and interpretations of presidential discourse in this review are informed by perspectives found at the intersection of critical theory and postmodernism; however, because of the diversity of views inherent in both, critical and postmodern theory may be better characterized as groups of theories. Indeed, some postmodern stances toward values, truth, and progress are clearly at odds with fundamental assumptions of critical theory, while others are clearly aligned with those same critical assumptions. Tierney and Rhoads (1993) concur that postmodernism and critical theory are "contested terrain"

(p. 316), yet promote the value added by research and practice in higher education that occurs at the intersection of the two approaches.[7]

Table 3 introduces the assumptions embedded in methods employed for this review. Critical discourse analysis assumes all texts are value-laden and assumes speeches such as those analyzed here to be highly intentional, “loaded” discourse. This view of discourse does not presume deceptive intent from the presidents, but given their strategic aims of persuasion it does not take words simply at face value. One of the key tasks of deconstructing discourse, then, is uncovering embedded assumptions by placing claims in relevant contexts. Rhetorical discourse is designed simultaneously to hook into prevailing opinions and to persuade – and in some cases to *use* prevailing ideas as a means of persuasion.

The approach to historical analysis employed here also assumes that discontinuity may be used as a working concept and analytic frame, and that meaning is as much to be made of inconsistency and incongruence as it is of neatly aligned claims, historical evidence, and interpretive narratives. This view derives largely from Frankfurt School theorists’ approach to dialectic (e.g., Marcuse (1964) and Habermas (1987)) and Foucault’s (1972) compelling critique of grand narratives in historical research.[8] Historians’ search for meta-narratives has tended to obscure the value of that which is historically important, but which does not fit our conventional wisdom. For this review, then, to make meaning of the federal politics of higher education in the 1970s, discontinuities over time were examined with reference to (a) the meaning of equal opportunity and the parties for whom it was deployed and (b) inconsistencies of political ideology with policy during the Nixon, Ford, and Carter administrations.

In studying the social and political world historically, this acceptance of discontinuity also leads the researcher to question the shorthand of standard categorizations (e.g., liberal/conservative) and to understand how these categories have been constructed over time. By reducing complex phenomena to simple labels, categorization (especially dichotomous categorization) is an essentially modernist project. In historical research it is also presentist, for the meanings of social categories are historically situated. Liberal and conservative, for example, had different meaning in 1984 than they did in 1964; therefore, in assessing the discourse and policy of presidents between those years it was important not to conflate (and thus mischaracterize) their policies, ideologies, and public discourses into a single word.

In addition to informing my method of analysis, critical and postmodern theory intersect in my interpretations. Giroux’s (1983) and Foucault’s (1980) overlapping conceptualizations of power frame my perception of how political power is

[7] Tierney and Rhoads (1993) identify five premises for “critical postmodern” research: (a) Research should investigate the structures within which research exists; (b) Knowledge should be treated as contested and political; (c) Difference and conflict are accepted as organizing principles; (d) An effort to integrate theory and practice (i.e., praxis) is made; (e) Scholars admit their positivities and own assumptions (p. 327).

[8] The Frankfurt School refers to a collective of neo-Marxist scholars associated with the Institute for Social Research at Germany’s University of Frankfurt am Main. Their work spans several generations of thinking (beginning in 1930) and is widely recognized as an important origin of critical theory.

structured and operates in a late modern, pluralistic democracy. Not the singular attribute or possession of individual agents, power "works both on people and through them" (Giroux, 1983, p. 63). Similarly, Foucault (1980) views power as a set of strategies working synergistically:

> Power must be analysed as something which circulates, or rather as something which only functions in the form of a chain. It is never localized here or there, never in anybody's hands, never appropriated as a commodity or a piece of wealth. Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organization. … Individuals are the vehicles of power, not its point of application. (Foucault, 1980, p. 98)

Critical theorists acknowledge how power may be used for both oppressive and emancipatory ends, and that individuals' capacity for agency and resistance frame a case for hope (Tierney and Rhoads, 1993). In a fragmented and diverse democracy such as America's during the period under analysis, Congress and the President clearly wielded power to effect change, but so did vigorous movements of aggrieved citizens in acts of civil disobedience and voting realignments. Thus, elected officials are as wrapped up in the reciprocity of democratic power as citizens, whose power is evident in forms including direct political action and collective (re)election of leaders.

Review of Presidential Discourse

This research traced US presidents' rationales for federal investment in higher education in the context of other policy debates and analyzed the consistency of presidents' expressed ideologies with the higher education access policies adopted under their administrations. While histories of student aid policy to date emphasize the role of human capital rationales for federal investments in higher education, analysis of presidential speeches from 1964 to 1984 reveals that presidents also substantively drew from rationales grounded in their political ideology and/or sociopolitical aims for education. An historic political realignment occurred between the Johnson and Reagan administrations, evidence of which is observed in inconsistencies between each president's ideology – reflected in their discourse – and the substance of their education access policies. Despite contemporary views that Reagan is culpable for the decline of need-based grants as a focus of aid policy, this research finds his leadership and the decline of grants marked the culmination of a movement toward neoconservativism that, ironically, had begun even before need-based grants were legislated in 1972.

Lyndon Johnson, "The Ultimate Education President"

With 60 education bills signed in 5 years, Lyndon Johnson rightfully earned the name he coined for himself: "the ultimate education president" (quoted in Berube, 1991, p. 59). It was how he wanted to be remembered and his Great Society programs – including the HEA and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act

(ESEA) – dramatically increased the federal role in education. His college access and opportunity efforts had two fronts: financial aid and college encouragement programs through the HEA, and expanding college admissions opportunities among students of color through affirmative action.

On May 22, 1964, Johnson gave the commencement speech at the University of Michigan and announced his intentions to gather "the best thought and the broadest knowledge from all over the world" to develop policy that would "begin to set our course toward the Great Society" (Johnson, quoted in Graham, 1984, p. 55). This policy was not to be crafted through public debate or the typical legislative process. Instead, Johnson gathered 14 small task forces of technical experts to develop education, metropolitan, and environmental policy proposals to "strike out in bold new directions," emphasizing that these groups "will operate without publicity" (Moyers, cited in Graham, 1984, p. 56). Several months later, after his November 1964 election, Johnson stood before Congress for the 1965 State of the Union address (SOTUA) and laid the policy plans that had been developed for America to become a Great Society. His proposals were framed by three goals: (a) a growing economy, (b) opportunity for all, and (c) improving the quality of American life. Education is his cornerstone intervention to both increase opportunity and the quality of life for all Americans, and his argument draws from personal experience. "As a son of a tenant farmer," he said, "I know that education is the only valid passport from poverty" (Johnson, 1965b, p. 3). In outlining the substance of the Great Society, "[w]e begin with education," he says, and recalls Thomas Jefferson's rationale for public investment in education in his own. "No nation can be ignorant and free. Today, no nation can be ignorant and great" (Johnson, 1965b, p. 3). His reference to greatness assumes comparison with less great nations, although he never really specifies whether he has in mind the United States in the past or other nations. Johnson regarded ESEA as "a major new commitment of the Federal Government to quality and equality in schooling," and its signing marks the beginning of "a new day of greatness in American society" (Johnson, 1965a, p. 2). Thus, while we may interpret Great Society programs as an effort to overcome inequality and poverty, Johnson clearly viewed equality as more than a moral good. Historians Berube (1991) and Skrentny (1996) both convincingly argue that Johnson's equity policies are born of political pragmatism. Skrentny's revisionist reading specifically regards his civil rights and Great Society legislation as "crisis management" (Skrentny, 1996, p. 67) aimed at protecting America's precarious reputation given the war in Vietnam.

Johnson rhetorically treats education as a single cause, with early childhood education programs advocated in the same breath as support for low-income schools and resources to enhance college access. In his 1965 State of the Union address, he cites the government's imperative to "help at every stage along the road to learning," and the forms of college "help" he specifically mentioned that night included scholarships to high achieving, high need students and guaranteed low-interest loans (Johnson, 1965b, p. 5). Johnson gave form to these commitments through the HEA of 1965, which created college encouragement programs, aided HBCU development, and vastly expanded the federal financial aid enterprise. Hearn (1993) regards

HEA as "a landmark event destined to make earlier need-based student aid award levels seem trivial" (p. 101). Johnson never spoke directly about the 1965 HEA in his public speeches, however. One of his private task forces specifically studied education, and Parsons (2005) argues this powerful group set the terms of the HEA and its subsequent six reauthorizations. While the HEA's "programs rested on a common ground no larger than a metaphorical dime, the narrow overlap of social and economic rationales shared by liberals and conservatives was enough to nurture, develop, and support a massive higher education policy arena" (Parsons, 2005, p. 137). The tight-knit "communication community" devoted themselves, Parsons contends, to problem solving guided by their own beliefs and relationships with each other as individuals and institutional representatives (p. 134).

Making college affordable, however, was only one facet of Johnson's policy efforts to increase college access. Johnson never publicly appealed to racial justice as a basis for ESEA or HEA, framing that policy in a philosophy of cross-generational uplift and broader notions of equity as a characteristic of his Great Society. However, St. John and Parsons (2004) persuasively argue that the sociopolitical *context* of civil rights, in which racial injustice was so salient, motivated Johnson's pursuit of equity in college access (Chapter 12). Their view is consistent with Graham's (1984) and Berube's (1991) interpretation of Johnson's education policy (and domestic policy, more generally) as a product of external pressures created by the civil rights context.

Thus, later in Johnson's 1965 State of the Union address, the man who had voted multiple times against antilynching legislation while a Texas senator claimed the rallying cry of the Black freedom struggle, declaring in the chamber of Congress that "[w]e shall overcome" (Johnson, 1965b, p. 2). In proposing the specifics of Great Society legislation, Johnson argued that Blacks' "cause must be our cause too. Because it is not just Negroes, but really it is all of us, who must overcome the crippling legacy of bigotry and injustice" (Johnson, 1965b, p. 6). Steinberg (1994) asserts that Johnson's speech that night represents the "last hurrah" of the civil rights movement. With its legislative objectives met, the movement's future was uncertain,[9] as was the place of racial issues in the Democratic agenda.[10]

African-American leaders as ideologically diverse as Martin Luther King, Whitney Young, and James Baldwin recognized that political rights and compensatory educational programs like those under ESEA would not translate into racial equality, that something more would be needed to counteract disadvantages accumulated over 300 years (Steinberg, 1994). First promoted from the Oval Office

[9] Critical race theorist Howard Winant (2008) interprets the second half of the 1960s as a period in which a new racial hegemony was institutionalized through codifying legal equality without adequate enforcement. With the new laws on the books, movement activists were expected to cease protests, putting power back in the hands of government to control civil rights implementation.

[10] Johnson, himself, is said to have commented after signing the 1964 Civil Rights Act that he had "just handed the South over to the Republicans for at least a generation" (Johnson, quoted in Scott, 2008, p. 1).

by President Kennedy, affirmative action in college admissions, hiring, and housing was picked up by Johnson as one effort to level the playing field (Skrentny, 1996). Receiving an honorary J.D. from Howard University in June 1965, Johnson gave a landmark speech to this effect. "To Fulfill These Rights," began with an acknowledgement that legislating justice and freedom did not ensure an equal playing field. Johnson (1965c) explained:

> Freedom is not enough. You do not wipe away the scars of centuries by saying: Now you are free to go where you want, and do as you desire, and choose the leaders you please. You do not take a person who, for years, has been hobbled by chains and liberate him, bring him up to the starting line of a race and then say, "You are free to compete with all the others," and still justly believe that you have been completely fair. (p. 2)

At this point Johnson's speech, written by Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Assistant Secretary of Labor and architect of the War on Poverty, sharply and strangely turned to explorations of perceived inadequacies in Black families and the role of families in "stunting students' abilities" (Johnson, 1965c, p. 3). Conflating ability and opportunity was pervasive in contemporary sociological research, some of it personally conducted by Moynihan. The culture of poverty or the cultural pathology perspective blamed inequality, as Johnson (1965c) put it, on "circumstances present in the family within which he grew up" (p. 3), and was used with human capital theory as a crucial rationale for compensatory War on Poverty programs. Perceiving matriarchal family structure at the heart of inequality, Moynihan and Johnson sought a body of policy that would "create conditions under which most parents would stay together," including jobs (which he argued would "permit a man to provide for his family"), homes, an "equal chance to learn," welfare, and social programs (Johnson, 1965c, p. 4).

In a marvel of political rhetoric, Johnson's speech thus juxtaposed a rationale for compensatory programs like those under HEA and ESEA that deemed Black families and individuals liable for unequal conditions with a rationale for affirmative action that acknowledged the government's responsibility for inequality. When this speech was leaked to the press, public furor ended up sabotaging a conference that had been planned to craft policy to fight racial inequality (Scott, 2008). Rancor came from opposition to the speech's equally radical stances that (a) the government should seek not only equal opportunity, but also equal outcomes, and (b) Black families suffered from a "cultural pathology." Moynihan retreated from the administration back to academia within weeks.[11]

Still, that August, Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act and a month later filed Executive Order 11246 which delineated affirmative action requirements in hiring, contracting, and higher education. All higher education institutions receiving federal aid would henceforth be required to draft affirmative action plans (Steinberg, 1994). However, the dominant core of the Democratic coalition that had held sway since the New Deal pragmatically argued that highlighting racial issues would be a

[11] Moynihan left the administration in 1965, but returned to Washington in 1968 to join President Nixon's closest circle of advisors (Steinberg, 1994).

self-defeating move, one that would drive a wedge into the coalition (Steinberg, 1994). Instead of affirmative action, they rationalized that the focus should be on programs to eliminate poverty for everybody, which would ultimately serve Black interests since they counted disproportionately among the poor (Steinberg, 1994). This logic helped justify an expansion of college encouragement and aid policies in subsequent iterations of the HEA.

Constraints borne of the escalating Vietnam War also figured into discourse about the place of race-conscious policy. With televised riots in Watts breaking out just days after the Voting Rights Act was signed, White sympathy for civil rights waned. Richard Goodwin, one of Johnson's speechwriters, admitted that the war was sapping the "moral energy" it took to persuade Americans to fight inequality at home (Scott, 2008, p. 2). Johnson's 1966 State of the Union address urged, "Vietnam just must be the center of our concerns," yet the war on poverty should also be "prosecuted with vigor and determination" (p. 1).

Johnson's aim of domestic equity, as expressed in the 1968 State of the Union address, was to "[c]reate a better life for the many as well as the few" (Johnson, 1968, p. 6). Aware that explicitly expanding the definition of whose interests counted (i.e., taking a nonmajoritarian view) was controversial, he called on the will of the people to carry forward the gains made to date. He challenged his audience to view them as a "foundation for further progress" and not mere "monuments to what might have been" (Johnson, 1968, p. 4). Among the accomplishments of the last 3 years, he highlighted Head Start programs giving one million children a "chance to learn," improving the education of seven million "deprived children," and enabling one million students to enroll in college (p. 5). Publicly, Johnson consistently rationalized investment in education as a means of ameliorating perceived cultural deprivation for which the country and its government had some responsibility.

However, when speaking to legislators he frequently presented a different perspective. While a strong case for equity as an end of education was made early in his administration, later he relied on the more widely accepted assumptions of human capital theory. Justifying ongoing support for education, Johnson (1967) rationalized: "Learning brings skills; and skills bring jobs; and jobs bring responsibility and dignity, *as well as taxes*" (p. 2; italics added). Enhancement of fiscal revenues via employment, then, was also a primary goal of education – with individual character improvement a fortuitous byproduct. Despite the ascendancy of human capital theory in congressional debates over education policy during the Johnson administration, his first public mention of economic returns to educational investments did not come until 1968 (Slaughter, 1991). In that year's State of the Union address, he regarded college access as one type of evidence for the country's economic prosperity. He cited the near weekly establishment of new colleges, the college enrollment rate of high school graduates, and comments with a sense of wonder, that "hundreds of thousands of fathers and mothers who never completed grammar school will see their children graduate from college" (Johnson, 1968, p. 3). Yet despite this prosperity, "there is in this land a certain restlessness – a questioning" of whether to continue investing their abundance in interests supportive of "all" Americans (Johnson, 1968, p. 3). As in his 1967

speech, in 1968 Johnson tried to galvanize the will of the people to continue a course of "sharing our abundance" through the War on Poverty and Great Society programs (Johnson, 1968, p. 9).

Throughout this period, economic prosperity was an important context for Johnson's policy. He made the case for the Great Society on both moral and pragmatic grounds. "The first test of a nation," Johnson said, "is the quality of its people. … We built this Nation to serve its people" (p. 4). Yet, his choice of words makes clear that some economic contexts make public investment more feasible than others. Based on the strength of the economy he asserted: "We *can* turn increased attention to the character of American life" (Johnson, 1965b, p. 3; italics in original). Indeed, it was in part *because* of the country's current economic well-being that investments in the people should be made.

Scott (2008) argues that after 1965, the vast majority of racial discourse by presidents went underground, that race was only spoken of in coded terms. This perspective clearly holds true in an analysis of Johnson's major speeches, and complicates interpretations of his work of justifying equal educational opportunity. Responding to mounting public fears about urban decay and crime that had been spurred by race riots, in both the 1967 and 1968, in the State of the Union Address Johnson devoted considerable attention to these issues. Although he did not directly comment on the riots, in both speeches he referred to lessons learned in the summer months about "how wide the gulf is for some Americans between the promise and the reality of our society" (Johnson, 1968, p. 4). Those events "represent the bitter consequences of more than three centuries," and thus "cannot be changed in a day"; nevertheless, the imperative to work toward change remained (Johnson, 1968, p. 4). As part of this work, but also to advance the social mobility of non-Blacks, he proposed an Educational Opportunity Act that would "speed up our drive to break down the financial barriers that are separating our young people from college" (Johnson, 1968, p. 7). This legislation, in hardly recognizable form, eventually passed both houses of Congress in 1974. He also urged Congress to reauthorize the HEA in 1968, which they did.

In his last State of the Union address, just days before Richard Nixon was inaugurated, Johnson again cited Head Start and student financial aid programs among those accomplishments of his administration that have "taken on the flesh of achievement" (Johnson, 1969, p. 1). Yet his speech reflects a sense of inevitability that the Great Society he envisioned would not come to pass. "Now it is time to leave," Johnson (1969) concluded:

> I hope it may be said, a hundred years from now, that by working together we helped to make our country more just, more just for all of its people, as well as to insure and guarantee the blessings of liberty for all of our posterity. That is what I hope. But I believe that at least it will be said that I tried. (p. 7)

In summary, Johnson was a political idealist whose ideals were shaped by the political demands of his historical context. Fogel (2000) regards him as a classic example of a modernist egalitarian and his War on Poverty as the twentieth century's "boldest initiative" (p. 132) for material redistribution. His ideology of New Deal-style liberalism was characterized by faith in policies and programs as instruments

of social change. In particular, he held up education as a social panacea, once declaring it "the answer for all our problems, the answer for all problems of the world" (quoted in Berube, 1991, p. 96). Aims of equity across class and race formed the core of his public rationale for the many new forms of education spending he introduced. To Congress, however, he balanced a case for equity returns on higher education investment with human capital arguments of the economic returns – a critical adjustment given the ballooning budget for the war on Vietnam. By bridging social and economic arguments, his HEA of 1965 passed and vastly expanded loan availability to low-income college students. In so doing, Johnson established the context in which grants for the same population could be justified under President Nixon.

Richard Nixon and 'The Emerging Republican Majority'

President Nixon's administration extended Johnson's legacy in higher education access and in several ways expanded on it, but his rhetoric and style of politicking also laid the groundwork for an ideological revolution and major political realignment that culminated with Ronald Reagan's election. The inconsistency between his public policies and political ideology makes for delicate historical interpretation. Acclaimed historian Rick Perlstein aptly summarizes the duality of Nixon's administration:

> The Nixon White House, a machine for manipulation: its story can only be told by observing two separate documentary records. There was a public transcript: the inauguration address, the photo opportunity, the bill proposal. Then there was a private transcript, only to be revealed by historians in later generations from the traces a presidency leaves behind, even in the lies the president tells himself. (Perlstein, 2008, p. 363)

A staunch Republican, Nixon nonetheless supported the expanded federal role in education that Johnson initiated. Unlike Johnson, though, "[t]here is little to suggest that President Nixon was deeply involved in any phase of shaping the Administration's higher education proposals. … Certainly this was not a program that he personally inspired or initiated" (Gladieux and Wolanin, 1976, p. 67). Nevertheless, in addition to maintaining funding for programs already in existence, his reauthorization of the 1972 HEA created Basic Educational Opportunity Grants (i.e., Pell Grants) for all income-qualifying, enrolled college students. Political scientist Erwin Hargrove wrote of him in 1973 as follows: "A conservative president has acted as we said only a liberal should act" (p. 819). This would not have been a problem if his lack of fiscal restraint, together with the Vietnam War budget and oil crisis, had not led to rapidly rising inflation at the same time as slow economic growth.

While Nixon's higher education policies appear progressive by early twenty-first century standards, there is no doubt that he initiated the rise of a new political ideology characterized by a much reduced role for the federal government, especially in correcting historical inequities of race and class. Moreover, 1968 was a trying, emotional year for the nation, as Nixon's presidency would be. During the

campaign that led to Nixon's election, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert Kennedy were assassinated, cities erupted in riots, and the Democrats' New Deal coalition fell apart at the national convention over the candidates' views on Vietnam. His campaign employed what historian Kotlowski (2001) describes as a "cautious courtship of Southern conservatives" (p. 18), and he tried to represent a moderate position between Democratic nominee Vice President Hubert Humphrey and segregationist Alabama Governor George Wallace. Nixon discovered Kevin Phillips' 1969 treatise *The Emerging Republican Majority*, whose thesis was that the excesses of 1960s liberalism would disillusion White Southerners and blue-collar workers in the North (a group Nixon appealed to as America's "silent majority"), making possible the realization of a new Republican majority.[12] Phillips advised Nixon that this realignment could be hastened by suggesting the scope and role of the federal government needed to be reduced, and from the tenor and content of Nixon's State of the Union addresses it appears Nixon agreed (Kotlowski, 2001, p. 22).

Nixon entered the presidency at a pivotal point in the civil rights movement – just after Dr. King was assassinated, rulings from federal courts mandated busing for school desegregation, the Fair Housing Act passed, and college student Huey P. Newton founded the Black Panthers. During his 1968 campaign, Nixon confused many by juxtaposing Black power and capitalist principles. He advocated "black ownership … black pride, black jobs, black opportunity, and yes, black power in the best, the constructive sense of that often misapplied term" (Nixon, quoted in Kotlowski, 2001, p. 132). Like Johnson declaring to Congress in 1965 that "[w]e shall overcome," Nixon appropriated and reframed the language of the freedom struggle not to ally himself with Black Power activists, but to hook into prevailing rhetoric for the advancement of his own agenda, which was coined Black capitalism. "In order to be secure in their human rights," he argued in his first State of the Union address in 1970, "people need access to property rights" (p. 3). Alluding to the riots that had engulfed cities the previous year in the wake of King's assassination, "[p]eople who own their own homes don't burn their neighborhood" (Nixon, 1970, p. 3).[13]

Nixon's fundamental dilemma was, as historian John David Skrentny (1996) put it, "how to appeal to Blacks, how to appear liberal without yielding to liberals" (p. 210). Yet following inflammatory speeches on race from Vice President Spiro

[12] It is important to note that Fogel (2000) sees this new coalition at the heart of the evangelical revival that led to the Moral Majority's formation in the 1979 and efforts to elect Ronald Reagan in 1980.

[13] Unlike affirmative action and civil rights legislation of the 1960s, Black capitalism was not about antidiscrimination. Nixon viewed it as a subsidy, an economic development measure. "The first need is to replace dependence with independence," he explained. Support for minority enterprise was a "race reifying policy" that could be used to meet two ends that were unassociated with civil rights justice: reducing the economy's welfare burden and creating a new class of businessmen (Skrentny, 1996, p. 193).

Agnew in which he explicitly advocated a politics of polarization,[14] Secretary of Labor Daniel Patrick Moynihan advised Nixon: "The issue of race could benefit from a period of 'benign neglect'. The subject has been too much talked about. … We may need a period in which Negro progress continues and racial rhetoric fades" (Moynihan, quoted in Clymer, 2003). Like the speech Moynihan wrote for Johnson to give at Howard University in 1965, this memo was leaked to the press and caused more controversy. This time, the president defended Moynihan, although the furor forced Nixon to make immediate accessions to activists pushing for school busing – a cause for which he had so little sympathy that he fired any staff member who publicly expressed support for it (Kotlowski, 2001; Skrentny, 1996). In race matters generally, he ordered his staff that, "a low profile is key" (quoted in Skrentny, 1996, p. 189). In 1971, Nixon's speechwriter Patrick Buchanan strategized how the Republican Party might use the politics of polarization Agnew advocated to bring about the Republican majority Phillips had foreseen. The plan, which exploited the resentments of some White voters over progress toward racial equity in the1960s, is famously known as the Southern Strategy, and was bluntly described by Phillips to the *New York Times* in 1970:

> From now on, the Republicans are never going to get more than 10 to 20 percent of the Negro vote and they don't need any more than that … but Republicans would be shortsighted if they weakened enforcement of the Voting Rights Act. The more Negroes who register as Democrats in the South, the sooner the Negrophobe whites will quit the Democrats and become Republicans. That's where the votes are. Without that prodding from the Blacks, the whites will backslide into their old comfortable arrangement with the local Democrats. (Phillips, quoted in Boyd, 1970, p. 215)

Taken together, Nixon's development of a racialized strategy for winning votes and expression of need for a "low profile" on and "benign neglect" of race suggest he was fully aware of racial issues' salience, but that he downplayed them publicly to preserve his political standing and hasten the realization of a new Republican majority.

Nevertheless, as the nation entered the 1970s important indicators suggested that higher education access was improving. College enrollment had doubled since 1960 to a total of 7.9 million, and half of all Black college students attended predominantly White universities despite the lack of a federal desegregation order for higher education (Gelber, 2007, p. 2270). Overall, Black enrollments began rising at the same time as the enactment and implementation of civil rights legislation and the HEA. They continued to rise after King was assassinated, a new generation of civil rights activists took center stage, and institutions pledged to substantially

[14] Agnew played a critical role in the administration, voicing positions viewed as too risky for Nixon to express. One such position was the "politics of polarization," which was intended to appeal to the silent majority and isolate opponents as extreme. Agnew declared in 1969, "I say it is time for a positive polarization. It is time to rip away the rhetoric and to divide on authentic lines." Previous Vice President Hubert Humphrey interpreted Agnew's comments as "the most calculated appeal to our nastiest interests" since Joe McCarthy. For an outstanding chronicle of 1964–1972, the Nixon administration's politics of polarization, and its powerful contemporary legacy, see Rick Perlstein's (2008) *Nixonland*.

improve the representation of students of color (Gelber, 2007; Gladieux and Wolanin, 1976; St. John, 2003).

Provisions of the 1972 amendments to the HEA promised to further enhance access. It expanded the guaranteed student loan program created by Johnson's version of the HEA, but the bill's greatest innovation was to extend financial access to all-income eligible students through Basic Educational Opportunity Grants (BEOG). Later renamed in honor of Rhode Island Senator Claiborne Pell, BEOG were the first truly student-based form of aid in that monies were awarded directly to students who could take their grant to any institution of their choice.[15] The amendments also widened the scope of students and institutions eligible for federal aid by targeting all "postsecondary" educational institutions instead of just "higher" (i.e., 4-year) education (Hearn, 1993). Title IX of the bill also sought gender equity in higher education through a focus on athletic participation and funding.

Although his higher education policies extended Johnson's, Nixon makes a clear effort to distinguish his presidency and the 1970s from Johnson's leadership and the 1960s, which he once called, "our country's most tortured decade" (Nixon, 1972, p. 1). In that same speech, Nixon (1970) reflects on the previous decade:

> Never has a nation seemed to have had more and enjoyed it less. At heart, the issue is the effectiveness of the government. Ours has become—as it continues to be, and should remain—a society of large expectation. Government helped to generate these expectations. It undertook to meet them. Yet, increasingly, it proved unable to do so. As a people, we had too many visions—and too little vision. Now, as we enter the seventies, we should enter also into a great age of reform of the institutions of American government. Our purpose in this period should not simply be better management of the programs of the past. The time has come for a new quest—a quest not for a greater quantity of what we have, but for a new quality of life in America.

This "new quest" became a hallmark of Nixon's rhetoric. More importantly, it became his public rationale for following Phillips' advice to frame a limited role for government that would attract the silent majority. Best expressed in the 1973 State of the Union Address, the first speech after his 1972 reelection, Nixon argued, "the time has come to draw the line," to make a break with the Great Society in a "fresh approach" to government that would meet the needs of a new decade (Nixon, 1973b, p. 2). "The time has come to make clear choices" between Johnson's programs and his, between competing programs, if necessary. Yet he insists in this same speech that his proposals "represent an affirmation, not an abdication of federal responsibility" and a "pragmatic rededication to social compassion and national excellence" (Nixon, 1973b, p. 2).

We must remember that comments like these cannot be read apart from their State of the Union context, which is an annual opportunity for a president to

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[15] In making BEOG "portable," Hearn (1993) suggests that Nixon introduced the logic of market-based competition into financial aid policy. With funding in the hands of students rather than institutions, the policy assumed institutional efficiency and quality would be improved by students' freedom to choose among institutions (versus a student choosing an institution on the basis of the funding it promised to them).

persuade the nation and Congress of his agenda's merits. Essentially, then, the State of the Union addresses represent the public face of a president's agenda. With Patrick Buchanan serving as his speechwriter, President Nixon demonstrated incredible consistency across the five State of the Union addresses he gave, citing an overarching priority on establishing a "structure of peace" at home and abroad (Kotlowski, 2001, p. 12). Six goals guided his domestic vision, among which education is *not* included (Nixon, 1971). While saying little about equal educational opportunity in the State of the Union addresses, we know that he both spoke vociferously against metropolitan busing for desegregation, but also that he continued the effort Johnson had begun to pass an Equal Educational Opportunity Act (Nixon, 1972).

Like Johnson's rationale for Great Society spending, the economic context becomes one of Nixon's primary justifications for reordering political priorities. Johnson had rationalized the massive investments demanded by his Great Society programs in terms of economic surplus opportunities, egalitarian moral demands, and human capital assumptions. Nixon justified his reduced role for the federal government and the need to choose between competing policy aims on the basis of a tenuous economic context (Nixon, 1973b).[16] He conspicuously redefined what it would mean for America to be a great society, juxtaposing greatness with goodness and inferring a new national morality – that "America is great *because* it is good" (Nixon, 1974b, p. 1). Under the revised economic and moral frames, public investment in education was more palatably justified in terms of human capital formation than erasing inequality. In his 1970 State of the Union address, Nixon challenged the popular perception of a contradiction between economic growth and quality of life, and suggested that a growth agenda need not be abandoned but rather refocused (p. 5).

Another feature of Nixon's domestic agenda, mentioned in each of his State of the Union addresses, was a charge to abolish the welfare system, which he described as a "monstrous, consuming outrage" (Nixon, 1971, p. 2). While some observers of the 1960s consider support for education to be a critical dimension of the modern welfare state, Nixon repudiates the idea, framing education as a means of helping people help themselves and thereby rationalizing it as an investment alongside his passionate recommendations to restructure welfare. These discursive themes of self-help and human capital formation are taken up by each of the subsequent presidents in this era. In what turned out to be his last State of the Union address in 1974, Nixon commended Congress to support education at all levels – including new loans and grants for college students – as a "needed investment in America's most precious resource, our next generation" (Nixon, 1974b, p. 4).

Whether it was a function of his "benign neglect" of racial discourse, an effort to code racial speech in alternate terms, or something else, Nixon almost never spoke directly about race in his speeches. Nevertheless, Title III of his 1972 amendments to the HEA included substantial support to tribal and historically Black colleges. According to his "black capitalist" thinking, HBCU were collectively important as

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[16] Accounts from Nixon's aides reveal that he sought out acceptable justifications for reducing the federal role as part of his Southern Strategy (Kotlowski, 2001, p. 22).

the largest Black-run institutions in the country and thus represented an important means of supporting the development of a Black middle class (Skrentny, 1996). Between 1969 and 1973, federal subsidies to Black colleges tripled from US$30 million to a full $100 million. Although Nixon is known for politically calculating behavior and Kotlowski (2001) posits that HBCU support was also a way for him to "rein in integrationists" (p. 154), it seems that Nixon sincerely supported HBCU. He made large personal donations to select institutions and held ongoing meetings with HBCU presidents, even into the year he was impeached and resigned.

In addition to supporting historically Black institutions, Nixon also assented to affirmative action efforts aimed at diversifying predominantly White institutions. Reviewing Nixon's overall record on civil rights, Jacoby (2002) expresses: "He and his aides created affirmative action as we know it, turning [Johnson's] vague idea about a leg up at the starting gate into a vast national web of goals and timetables" (¶ 1). Although the affirmative action policies most actively discussed during this period were not for college admissions but contracting and hiring, Nixon did not rescind Johnson's executive order for higher education institutions to develop affirmative action plans, but rather strengthened institutional requirements with Executive Order 11478 (Nixon, 1969).

In sum, it is difficult to dispute the claim that Nixon's policies improved college opportunities for women, low-income students, and students of color. Upon leaving the White House, however, Daniel Patrick Moynihan admonished those who would study Nixon's legacy to discern the substance of Nixon's policy from his "symbolic politics" aimed at the silent majority who elected him. Alluding to the 1968 Kerner Commission report, Moynihan explains: "Early on, an almost schizophrenic style took hold of his administration. Symbolic rewards were devised for 'middle America' while legislative proposals were drafted for the 'other America'" (Moynihan, quoted in Gladieux and Wolanin, 1976, p. 69). One interpretation of his education policy is that access policies served as cover for an essentially regressive political ideology, one betrayed by the Southern Strategy and comments on welfare, crime, and urban poverty. The three presidents who succeeded him would in various ways build on Nixon's ideological foundation in their arguments for higher education spending.[17]

In higher education policy, specifically, Nixon carried forward Johnson's equal opportunity and human capital rationales for student aid investment as consistent with the dominant political ideology, but Nixon was not motivated by Johnson's faith in the government's capacity to solve social problems and actively sought a narrower scope of federal responsibility. Moreover, he played a critical role in

[17] The balance of power during Nixon's administration also helps explain the inconsistency between his ideology and his actual policy. Nixon could not have easily succeeded in bringing about his domestic platform of welfare reform, reduced federal spending, increased employment, and an end to the war because he won the election on a mere 43% plurality of the vote (Converse et al., 1969). Hardly a national mandate for change, Nixon's capacity to bring about a new direction for domestic policy in the 1970s was also eroded when the Republican Party lost seats in both houses in 1970 (Mayhew, 1991).

introducing new forms of market-minded logic to social policy (e.g., "black capitalism" and portable student grants), one of the few pieces of Nixon's shattered legacy that President Ford actively adopted and built upon.

Gerald Ford's "New Realism"

Nixon's resignation over the Watergate scandal did not help the nation to believe in the effectiveness of its government, which ironically reinforced public support for the more limited federal government Nixon had advocated during his presidency. Appointed by President Nixon in 1973 to replace Vice President Spiro Agnew, Gerald Ford assumed the presidency in the summer of 1974, vowing a "policy of communication, conciliation, compromise, and cooperation" and encouragement that "the long national nightmare is finally over" (Ford, 1974, p. 1). During his short tenure, college access and opportunity issues – indeed higher education issues, writ large – did not feature prominently in policy debates. When Ford took office in 1974, Great Society programs and agencies were still expanding and seemed to be institutionalized. By the mid 1970s, consensus seemed to have emerged about the federal government's role in higher education, that is, in promoting equal educational opportunity (Gladieux and Wolanin, 1976). In 1975, for the first time in history, the college enrollment gap among high school graduates reduced to zero among Whites, African-Americans, and Latinos. Pell Grants, introduced in Nixon's 1972 amendments to the HEA, were almost fully implemented (St. John, 2003, p. 23). After this year of equal enrollments, though, disparities began reopening and have persisted to this day. What happened during Ford's term? Without reducing his leadership or policy to be the cause of resurgent inequality, the political discourse of these years does set an important context that must be understood as part of the story.

Ford's major policy objective was to bring inflation under control, a goal he used as a pretense for making significant cuts in domestic spending. Among these, he proposed flattening or reducing federal student aid allocations each year (Brainerd, 2007). Introducing the platform on which he would do so, he warned his audience in the chambers of Congress: "Now, I want to speak very bluntly. I've got bad news, and I don't expect much, if any, applause" (Ford, 1975a, p. 1). To curb the 11% inflation rate, Ford argued that America needed to "move in a new direction … by fashioning a new partnership between the Congress on the one hand, the White House on the other, and the people we both represent" (Ford, 1975a, p. 1). However, given the tenor of the new policies, one does not sense his political compact included the least advantaged people he and Congress represented. Indeed, his "new direction" better reflects policies typically associated with privatization – tax reductions for the wealthy, cuts to so-called entitlement programs, and welfare reform.

As the country commemorated the bicentennial in 1976, Ford sought a "fundamentally different approach – a new realism" (p. 1). The politics he outlined gave shape to the ideology Nixon had privately advocated and enhanced the break with

Johnson that Nixon had tried to establish. Ford's new realism was sharply differentiated from the idealist policy of the 1960s. Unlike standard presidential rhetoric, Ford did not even try to euphemize his political ideology (e.g., as a "new idealism"). Especially coupled with the "bad news" he promised to share earlier in the speech, the new ideology represents a sobering turn for the spirit of 1970s political discourse. Perhaps because it reflected the national mood in the wake of Watergate and Vietnam, Ford was better able to enact the agenda that Nixon sought.

Justifying the need for a "new realism," Ford claimed in his 1977 State of the Union address that efforts to "transform the country through massive national programs … did not work. Too often, they only made things worse. In our rush to accomplish great deeds quickly," he explained, "we trampled on sound principles of restraint and endangered the rights of individuals." The nation's "overconfidence" in government facilitated its role as "an indulgent parent" (Ford, 1977). While the parent metaphor was new for Ford in 1977, he had also spoken in 1975 of self-indulgence vis-à-vis domestic programs. By the repeated votes of Congress for these programs, particularly programs like BEOG whose expenditures could not be perfectly anticipated in advance, he argued the federal budget had "taken on a life of its own" (Ford, 1975a, p. 2). A new balance needed to be struck between the government and the people, "a balance that favors greater individual freedom and self-reliance" (Ford, 1975a, p. 1). Self-reliance, in this case, referred to trimming the government's safety net and, to his credit, Ford was quite transparent about the range of social programs that stood to be trimmed.

One set of programs Ford attempted to scale back was student financial aid programs. Despite granting budgetary increases for academic research in excess of the inflation rate (which was high at the time), Ford proposed caps on and reductions to aid programs across the board. Congressional responses to Ford's budgets nonetheless increased student aid allocations and Congress twice overrode his vetoes of bills reflecting the Congressional provisions (Brainerd, 2007). Ford's administration is part of what Hearn (1993) named the "policy refinement and expansion" phase in federal financial aid history, although the primary force in refining and expanding aid during this time was not the president but the "student-aid coalition" (p. 111). Comprised of a loose association of postsecondary institutions, state and federal government officials, and aid organizations, the student aid coalition worked together to reach relative consensus about the proper structure of aid, its delivery mechanisms, and the underlying motives of equal opportunity (Hearn, 1993). They played a secondary lobbying role, which may have helped to protect student aid's security despite Ford's proposed reductions.

One layer of Ford's rationale for the politics of new realism was restoring a less expansive role for the federal government. However, he also introduced foreign policy rationales for reducing federal responsibilities to provide for citizen needs. On January 15, 1975, he attributed the economic disruptions to the oil crisis, which had quadrupled the price of petroleum in just 1 year. The only new spending to be initiated that year, therefore, was a set of programs aimed at reducing US vulnerability to cutoffs in foreign oil (Ford, 1975a). Within days of that speech, Saigon fell to the North Vietnamese Army, officially ending the longest war in

American history. Stopping short of blaming previous presidents and Congresses for what amounted to an American loss in Vietnam, Ford nonetheless argued in the 1976 State of the Union Address that "shifting our emphasis from defense to domestic problems" in recent years had compromised America's national security. By trying "to be a policeman abroad and the indulgent parent at home," America seemed to have forgotten "sound principles that guided us through most of our history"; therefore, a return to policy guided by "restraint, individual rights, and careful spending" was urgently needed (Ford, 1976, p. 1). Furthermore, while America had misjudged its capacity to "accomplish great things and solve age-old problems" (i.e., ameliorate poverty and racism), "our adversaries continued a massive buildup of arms," and any discretionary spending should thus be directed toward restoring America's military might (Ford, 1976, p. 1). This first attempt of a 1970s president to incite fear over national security in a State of the Union address was consistent with the generally dour mood of his speeches, and it effectively rallied support for defense spending; unsurprisingly, each subsequent president seems to have eagerly embraced the strategy.

In his 2006 obituary of President Ford in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Brainerd summarized Ford's legacy for higher education and society as "more symbolic than substantive" (¶ 4). Perhaps because of the crisis of faith in the Presidency that Nixon stimulated, Ford repeatedly articulated the need for a new partnership between Congress, the White House, and the American people. Accepting the Republican nomination for president, for example, Ford (1976) concluded,

> You know, the President of the United States is not a magician who can wave a wand or sign a paper that will instantly end a war, cure a recession, or make bureaucracy disappear. A President has immense powers under the Constitution, but all of them ultimately come from the American people and their mandate to him. (¶ 24)

Such rhetoric could have empowered and unified the nation to collectively turn a page in its history – to wake up from the nightmare that Ford, himself, claimed was over. It seems, though, that Ford, already a reluctant leader, was personally caught up in the national malaise.

Ford led the country during the only year in its history without a college opportunity gap, but this statistic hardly seems to be a legacy of his leadership. Rather, it could be argued that his grim "new realism" political ideology fueled skepticism that Nixon had introduced about the responsibility and capacity of government to create opportunity. Ford's expressed rationales for limiting the federal role in education, health, and welfare were rooted in a commitment to individual self-reliance, while his efforts to scale back funding for Title IV programs present the first example of a president rationalizing higher education spending in terms of military and economic competitiveness. On this level, Ford's rationales mark an important transition in presidential discourse from equity to excellence as sociopolitical ends of education. Inspired by Nixon's limited role for government, Ford's principles of new realism also bear a clear discursive relationship to those of neoconservatism, a movement typically associated with Reagan. If Nixon and Ford laid the ideological foundation for what is remembered as Reagan's revolution, Carter laid important elements of policy foundation for Reagan's approach to federal student aid, which largely persists today.

Jimmy Carter Redefines Equal Opportunity

Under President Carter the critical intersection of race and class in shaping college opportunities manifested itself, and middle-class families took up the concept of equal opportunity to rationalize an expansion of federal financial aid programs. Ineligible for student aid programs targeting the poor yet challenged to meet rising tuition costs, middle-class families began expressing to both the legislative and executive branches, shortly after Carter's inauguration, their perception of being left behind in college access (Hansen and Gladieux, 1978). The federal response, the 1978 Middle Income Student Assistance Act (MISAA), offered college loans to students outside the high-need category that the 1965 and 1972 HEA had established as a priority. Carter's initial proposal suggested funding grants to middle-class students much like Pell programs had.[18] St. John (2003) argues this proposal failed because human capital rationales had ushered in Pell Grants (and student subsidies more generally) in 1972, and the theory could not be adapted to accommodate both the interests of the middle-class and those of low-income students. However, MISAA did succeed in removing the income cap on Pell eligibility, which had previously structured Pell distribution as a system of larger grants to a fewer number of the neediest students. It is difficult to gauge how Carter personally rationalized MISAA since he did not discuss it in his speeches until his last State of the Union Address in 1981. There, he framed the legislation as an educational access accomplishment that expanded BEOG eligibility to one third of all college students and created new forms of aid. He did not mention that while awarding smaller amounts to many more people, the value of individual awards relative to total college costs began to decline, rendering grants a less powerful mechanism for financial access among those who depended upon aid the most.

History has shown that MISAA's passage was not associated with more equitable college access, but rather with reopening of historic enrollment disparities that persist today. Hearn (1993) frames MISAA's enrollment antecedents and outcomes using Wilensky's (1975) theory of welfare program support, which posits that higher college enrollment rates among low-income students would be associated with a greater likelihood of resistance from middle-income and highly educated parents. Gains toward equal opportunity would thus be eroded, although Hearn admits it is not clear whether this erosion was because funds for low-income families were redistributed to middle-income families or because prospective students from low-income families felt abandoned by the system (p. 114).

While Johnson and Nixon had both advocated education as a means of breaking the cycle of poverty (albeit from different political perspectives), job creation and "training" gradually began replacing education as the preferred means of addressing

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[18] Hearn (1993) helpfully shows that middle-class support had been part of financial aid policy deliberations since 1964. That year, the Senate passed a tuition tax credit in its version of the Higher Education Act and in 1972 Senator Pell argued middle-class grants would ensure the viability of aid policy over the long term (p. 113).

poverty in Ford's and Carter's rhetoric. Presidents associated education with the increasingly unpopular social welfare agenda, but training as a force facilitating self-reliance and one's ability to contribute economically. Carter's discourse exemplified this. In his 1979 State of the Union address, he spoke passionately of the need to prevent the entrenchment of a group of Americans "with no hope and no stake in building our society" (p. 2). He spoke specifically about the needs of unemployed youth (whom he specified as "especially minority youth" (p. 4) in three speeches), and in his last speech he assessed unemployment as "one of the most severe social problems in our nation" and "a top priority for action" (Carter, 1981, p. 11). Carter's solution, however, was not more or improved education for this group but provision of basic skills and jobs, including new affirmative action hiring programs. Two pieces of legislation, the Vocational Education Act (VEA) and the Humphrey–Hawkins Full Employment Act, reveal Carter's modest aspirations for those young people whom the education system had failed. By explicitly seeing alternatives to higher education for young men and women of color and developing legislation that prioritized middle-class interests in accessing college, Democratic President Carter was the first president of this period whose interests seemed less attuned to social mobility than social reproduction.

The US Supreme Court, however, took an active role during Carter's tenure in shaping policy around opportunities for college enrollment on the basis of race. The *Regents of the University of California vs. Bakke* (1978) upheld the general principle of affirmative action in college/university admissions while setting parameters on its implementation, and a set of *Adams* cases[19] called for desegregation of six southern state higher education systems. These decisions affirmed efforts to expand HBCU (as under the HEA of 1965) while seeking for systems as a whole to desegregate, especially through increasing Black enrollments in predominantly White institutions (St. John, 1998, pp. 107–108).

Carter's leadership, in many ways, carried forward the ideological momentum that had been building since the Nixon administration. His politics reflected the general shift of both parties to the right during the 1970s and a weakening of the ideological differences between the two parties. In addition to MISAA and VEA, Carter's rationale for establishing a U.S. Department of Education reveals his failure to fit the typical Democratic mold (Anderson, 2007). Carter and other proponents did not argue that a federal Department of Education would strengthen its capacity (the view one might associate with a Democratic president), but rather that it offered fiscal advantages by concentrating all federal education functions in one setting (a claim consonant with Republican values of this period). Indeed, the argument for consolidation *avoided* claims to improved capacity, because greater federal control over education was precisely what concerned consolidation opponents – both from the perspective of maintaining the historic tradition of local and state control over education and as part of more visceral fears during this period

[19] *Adams vs. Califano, Adams vs. Richardson,* and *Adams vs. Weinberger*.

of a strong centralized government. Daniel Patrick Moynihan, now a New York senator, spoke out against consolidation, quoting sociologist David Riesman: "Education is only safe in Washington as long as it is hidden, distributed, inaccessible, and nobody controls more than 5% of it" (quoted in Anderson, 2007, p. 113).

Jimmy Carter relied on popular distrust of the federal government for his election. He originally ran for president in 1976 as a Washington outsider on a character argument that he had no part in the scandals of recent years and thus could be trusted. He explicitly declared: "I will never lie to you" (quoted in Jenkins, 2006, p. 70) and spent considerable portions of his inaugural and first State of the Union address affirming the country in its basic goodness. "We've come through a long period of turmoil and doubt, but we've once again found our moral course, and with a new spirit are striving to express our best instincts to the rest of the world" (Carter, 1978, p. 1). The rise of a new moral vision for politics during the 1970s has been well documented in previous historical research, and an intriguing, repeated element of Carter's discourse is an articulation of various relationships between confidence and morality. Unfortunately, despite Carter's repeated efforts to convince America that it had reason to be confident, America experienced crisis after crisis under his leadership that suggested otherwise – e.g., the 444-day hostage crisis in Iran, the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan, and an oil shortage that led a car-crazed culture to long gas lines.[20] In 1979, Carter outlined his new energy policy in a speech that is remembered for its title and main theme, America's "crisis of confidence:"

> It is a crisis that strikes at the very heart and soul and spirit of our national will. We can see this crisis in the growing doubt about the meaning of our own lives and in the loss of a unity of purpose for our Nation.
> The erosion of our confidence in the future is threatening to destroy the social and the political fabric of America. The confidence that we have always had as a people is not simply some romantic dream or a proverb in a dusty book that we read just on the Fourth of July. It is the idea which founded our Nation and has guided our development as a people. Confidence in the future has supported everything else – public institutions and private enterprise, our own families, and the very Constitution of the United States. Confidence has defined our course and has served as a link between generations. We've always believed in something called progress. We've always had a faith that the days of our children would be better than our own.
> Our people are losing that faith, not only in government itself but in the ability as citizens to serve as the ultimate rulers and shapers of our democracy. (p. 3)

Carter attributed the crisis in large part to Americans' self-indulgent consumption patterns, which in turn fueled national retrenchment and the energy crisis. However well intentioned, the speech raised concerns from the left and the right about Carter's leadership and *his* culpability in creating the conditions of national weakness (Jenkins, 2006). The result was to push the political center right, to disillusion millions more

[20] In 1977s State of the Union address, Ford had spoken proudly of his work in rebuilding America's confidence in the Presidency and in its future and freedoms. That 2 years later Carter continued to devote precious rhetorical energy to the theme of doubt/confidence implies it was a significant, lasting psychological dimension in the relationship of the American people and their government.

northern working-class Democrats, and ultimately, to stimulate a political realignment resulting in Ronald Reagan's election (Germond and Witcover, 1981).

Under Carter, the government pursued a retooled version of equal opportunity, focusing on the ability of middle- and upper-income families to meet rising college costs. Both Hearn (1993) and St. John and Elliott (1994) point to 1978 and MISAA as a critical turning point in federal aid history. Previous to its passage, they argue federal aid policy was driven by a consensus among legislators and student aid advocates that equal college opportunity was the policy's aim, and thus it should also be the criterion by which the policy and program's success should be measured. The proportion of high school graduates enrolling in college did not change during the 1970s, but the overall size of the college going population increased and, until 1978, so did the proportion of low-income and students of color enrolling in college. St. John (2003) argues that the transition to loan-based aid beginning with MISAA appears related to this trend in "balancing the justice claims of conservative taxpayers and the demand for access by the majority of students" (p. 23). While placating middle- and upper-income families, the policy was also accompanied by a widening of the enrollment gap between low-income and middle-class students and between students of color and their White counterparts.[21] When MISAA proved to be fiscally unsustainable, the demands of the new equal opportunity turned low- and middle-income families' needs into competing priorities. Absent political pressure from low-income families equal to that of the middle-class (Karen, 1991) and given the rise of neoconservative ideology that deemed federal "handouts" misguided (St. John and Elliott, 1994), the context was set for federal grants to continue their decline under Reagan.

Ronald Reagan's Nation at Risk

With Carter running a 77% disapproval rating in June 1980 – the highest in presidential history at that time – Reagan's ten-to-one landslide victory in the electoral college vote surprised few (Jenkins, 2006, p. 171, 173). What was more striking to contemporary observers was Reagan's ability to pull off popular vote victories in 49 of the 50 states, including blue state strongholds like Illinois, Massachusetts, and California. So-called Reagan Democrats held the very demographic profile Nixon had appealed to in 1968 (Germond and Witcover, 1981), and therefore Reagan's definitive victory may better be remembered as the culmination of a political revolution already in progress than a revolution in itself. Likewise, with the exception of his never-enacted plans to eliminate the newly created Departments of Education and Energy, the content of Reagan's domestic policy and political ideology bear striking resemblance to Carter's.

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[21] Although a causal relationship has not been established, there seems to be a "direct linkage" between college participation among students of color and federal grant spending (St. John and Parsons, 2004, p. 87).

Voters elected Reagan on a promise to curb the runaway growth of federal spending and cut taxes, all while launching a huge expansion of the military. The Economic Tax Recovery Act of 1981 cut taxes across the board and severe, repeated, cuts in domestic programs made possible the military buildup (Jenkins, 2006). In his first 2 years as president, Reagan never mentioned education in his State of the Union addresses, except to announce his proposed cuts in education spending and to cite entitlement programs as the first targets of those cuts. Indeed, grants as a proportion of total federal aid for education spending decreased from 47% to 34% between 1980 and 1985, while loans grew from 48% to 62% of total aid for education expenditures (St. John and Elliott, 1994, p. 138). To fund the expanded loan programs, Reagan was successful in accomplishing what Carter's had been unable to do: eliminate specially directed forms of financial aid such as Social Security Education Benefits (St. John, 2003). Contrary to the popular view that Reagan bears primary responsibility for the decline of need-based aid, Hearn (1993) sees that decline as not a "controversial assault on federal largesse under the banner of the 'Reagan revolution' but rather [occurring] in the later years of the Carter administration" (p. 116). The impact of grant aid availability on low-income families' college access during the Reagan years seems to have varied by race; working-class Whites' enrollment rate remained constant from 1979 to 1984, while working-class Black enrollment dropped 29% (Gelber, 2007, p. 2275).

Reagan's primary discursive legacy in education relates not to rationales for college financial aid, but to his advocacy of "excellence" in education as a means of protecting America's economic and technological preeminence.[22] To "keep [America's] edge," he argued in the 1983 State of the Union Address, "we need to begin renewing the basics – starting with our educational system." Reagan outlined four major goals for education: (a) improvements in math and science training, (b) individual college savings accounts, (c) vouchers to subsidize enrollment in private schools (which he called "tuition tax credits"), and (d) a constitutional amendment to permit school prayer. This seemingly incongruous collection of goals he equated with "setting a standard of excellence" (Reagan, 1983).

Three months later, the Department of Education released *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), officially setting the excellence movement in motion. The report's discourse is laden with dysphemism, the intentional use of overly negative rhetoric (i.e., the opposite of euphemism). According to the report, "a rising tide of mediocrity" in educational standards explained the nation's global economic decline relative to other countries and "threaten[ed] our very future as a Nation and a people" (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, ¶ 2). Framing an imperative for reform rooted in the

[22] Johnson, Ford, and Nixon had each commended American "greatness" in their speeches, with Johnson citing alignment of ideals and reality as the marker of national greatness, Nixon claiming "goodness" as a source of greatness, and Ford linking goodness specifically to public affirmations of, "In God we trust." In speeches at least, Reagan is the first president of this era to replace a moral basis for greatness with preeminence in international competition.

demands of modern international competition, its introduction declared: "If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war" (National Commission, 1983, ¶ 3). That the country had allowed its own standards to slip amounted to "an act of unthinking, unilateral educational disarmament" (National Commission, 1983, ¶ 3). In a context where rhetoric inciting fear had not yet become the standard fare it would be by the century's end, the report's alarmist tone attracted considerable attention.

Perhaps anticipating backlash from educators more concerned with the achievement gap in America's elementary and secondary schools than the possibility of an achievement gap between America's and other countries' students, the authors expressed a belief that a focus on excellence and reform need not supplant commitments to "the equitable treatment of our diverse populations" (National Commission, 1983, ¶ 25). Nevertheless, the report strengthened the case that had been building for years that education policy should be refocused from (disadvantaged students) to America's (best and brightest) (Berube, 1991, p. 115).

While *A Nation at Risk* led to more reform in K–12 schooling than higher education, it did implicate colleges in students' diminished performance. Moreover, it affected higher education through Reagan's appropriation of excellence rhetoric to rationalize a retreat from the strong federal role in education that Johnson had initiated with ESEA and HEA in 1965. Reagan (1984a) argued:

> Excellence does not begin in Washington. A six hundred percent increase in federal spending on education between 1960 and 1980 was accompanied by a steady decline in Scholastic Aptitude Test scores. Excellence must begin in our homes and neighborhood schools, where it's the responsibility of every parent and teacher and the right of every child.

This statement exemplifies Reagan's commitment to placing reform expectations on families and state and local schools rather than the federal government. He rationalized this limited federal role by connecting his beliefs about individual responsibility to education policy and practice. Reagan's strong focus on self-help found a footing in his view of the relationship between students, schools, government, and families. Unlike Johnson's view in which schools held primary responsibility to educate and government funding provided a support structure, or Ford's view which called for a new partnership among government, schools, and families, Reagan put the onus on students to learn and regarded parents as the critical party in the support structure for learning (Berube, 1991). At face value, it is hard to argue with the logic of either view, but that these positions were treated as mutually exclusive by the presidents reflects fundamental ideological differences between them about the proper role of government and the nature of the social compact between schools and families.

This ideological difference also played out in Reagan's approach to student aid, which kept the responsibility for college financing firmly in families' hands, regardless of their ability to pay. Policymakers did not diverge from the loan-focused direction for aid Carter initiated, and during Reagan's tenure their focus was on determining the best apparatus for aid programs' control and direction (Hearn, 1993). Reagan consistently sought to reduce the education budget, passed no new educational

programs, and worked to protect state and local autonomy in education. Although he never dismantled the Department of Education as promised, Reagan used his bully pulpit to exert strong rhetorical leadership (Berube, 1991). By adopting the alarmism of *A Nation at Risk* to bolster his case for a focus on standards, his leadership set America on a course for education policy from which we have yet to divert. Discourses of standards, accountability, and testing now firmly embedded in our educational culture have their origins in Ronald Reagan's presidency.

Conclusions

Rationales for Higher Education in Presidential Discourse

Economic rationales for investing in student financial aid similar to those Fogel (2000) and Friedman (2005) have recently promoted were clearly present in presidential discourse about higher education from 1964 to 1984. However, presidents also deployed two other types of rationales for higher education investment to drive policy during this time. They believed in education as a mechanism for realizing sociopolitical goals of equity and/or excellence, and they sought education policy that would reflect their ideological commitment to an active or limited federal government. What is more, presidents linked these rationales to one another and to the broader political and historical context in ways that previous analysis has not explicated.

Human capital justifications are related to both the sociopolitical and ideological rationales. When education was seen as an investment in the social mobility of historically oppressed groups, it was directly associated with equity-based justifications. As discussed above, equity rationales were expressed most directly by Lyndon Johnson, the only president of this period who can clearly be classified as "liberal" on the basis of both his policy and beliefs about the capacity of government. Nixon also engaged social mobility rationales for higher education but, unlike Johnson, paired them with the market-oriented ideology of Black capitalism. Beliefs about human capital formation as key to strengthening the national economy were not as explicitly expressed by presidents. Yet, by repeatedly speaking of higher education "investments" in the same breath as strengthening national economic preeminence, Ford, Carter, and Reagan each betrayed belief in human capital rationales.

Equity and excellence aims for educational investments, while prominent in Johnson and Reagan's discourses respectively, are not mutually exclusive. Johnson explicitly linked achievement of equality with national greatness, for example, and in his first inaugural speech Nixon presented "excellence in education" as one of his goals. Aside from rhetoric about excellence early in this period, any substantive shift from equity to excellence rationales that occurred seems to reflect a deeper transformation in political ideology. Yet policy researchers should beware that casting political ideology as a simple liberal–conservative dichotomy veils

meaningful differences among the presidents in core beliefs about the government's responsibilities and how they situated education in the larger policy context. While the trend over the period is from Johnson's liberalism to Reagan's neoconservatism, no president during the 1970s proved to be singularly liberal or conservative when both their higher education policies and political ideologies are considered (see Table 5 for a comparison). Indeed, reviewing educational histories and presidential rhetoric shows that the political revolution typically attributed to Reagan was a much longer process that began with Richard Nixon's 1968 election and unfolded throughout the 1970s.

Foucauldian Perspectives on 1970s Educational Politics

Notions of who and what was liberal and conservative about 1970s educational politics are much more complicated than political party's and history's conventional wisdom suggest. This conclusion is consistent with Foucault's claim that categorization of all sorts is an essentially modernist, presentist project that strips complicated realities of the discontinuities in which deeper meanings reside (McNicol Jardine, 2005). However, discourse analysis privileges ideological interpretations and postmodernism eschews clean-cut meta-narratives; therefore, the extent to which inquiry is framed by these assumptions necessarily circumscribes what one is likely to find. While Johnson and Reagan conform to conventional images of liberal and conservative political leadership, respectively, Nixon, Ford, and Carter defy such clear categorization. As actors involved in changing what counts as liberal and conservative, their discourse, ideology, and policies may appear as a fragmented, internally inconsistent, self-contradictory pastiche – yet this is perhaps what is most meaningful about their administrations. The ideological and policy inconsistencies of each administration in the 1970s may themselves provide a framework for understanding the origins of what we remember as Reagan's revolution. In the sense that "[r]evolutions are never more than moments of consciousness" (Foucault, 1972, p. 12), the revolution was not the political change unfolding across the 1970s, but the realization in the early 1980s that a change had occurred. This perspective may help explain the predominant interpretations of this period's educational policy to date, offered by scholars actively involved in framing, making, and evaluating that policy.

Critical and postmodern views of power offer another interpretation of the decade long neoconservative consolidation. Political revolutions do not happen overnight or even over a single presidency because power in a democratic republic does not operate hierarchically – as a possession solely of elected officials – but in a network, an ever-shifting web of influences and as a force in its own right (Foucault, 1980; Giroux, 1983). Power springs simultaneously and alternately not just from the ground-up and top-down, but also from the outside-in and inside-out. For example, activists of the Black freedom struggle influenced the substance and discourse of Great Society legislation, even as Johnson's task force approach to policymaking

Table 5 Comparison of presidents' political ideologies and higher education policies, 1964–1984

President	Ideology	Policy	Other notes
Lyndon Johnson	– "Freedom is not enough" – Policies & programs for social progress – "Education is the answer for all our prob lems, for all the problems of the world"	– ESEA & Head Start – Higher Education Act – Executive Order 11246	– Great Society policies developed by task forces, in secret
Richard Nixon	– "Black capitalism"	– Education Amendments	– Consistently called for welfare reform; deemed it "a monstrous, consuming outrage"
	– "Benign neglect" – "Silent majority" – "Structure of peace"	– Pell Grants – Expansion of GSL – HBCU/Tribal college support – Executive Order 11478	– Democratic majorities in Congress
Gerald Ford	– "New realism"	– Proposed caps and decreases each year on student aid (Congress thwarted these efforts each time)	– College enrollment gap across race and SES closes among high school graduates in 1975
	– Govt. has been "indulgent parent" – Federal budget "has taken on a life of its own"		
	– Self-reliance, not on government	– Increased spending on academic research (more than inflation rate)	
	– Foreign policy rationales for decreased domestic spending		
Jimmy Carter	– Confidence and morality linked – "Jobs and training" offered as means of social mobility "especially for minority youth"	– Middle Income Student Assistance Act – Vocational Education Act	– Notable Supreme Court Cases – *Adams* (1977) desegregates six Southern college/university systems
		– US Department of Education created	– *Bakke* (1978) affirms, but places limits on, affirmative action
Ronald Reagan	– International competition rationalizes education reform for "excellence"	– Pell grant purchasing power declines	– Wanted to dismantle Department of Education
	– Focus on "best and brightest" instead of "disadvantaged"	– Total loan expenditures increase	
	– Reagan Democrats = Nixon's silent majority	– Pushed welfare reform and wars on drugs and crime	– No new education programs or policies advanced

appears antidemocratic. A silent majority exerted their political influence to elect Nixon, but because of a Democrat-controlled Congress, Nixon was unable to pass many of the policies on which he campaigned and actually enacted financial aid and affirmative action policies that appeared more generous than Johnson's. There appears likewise to have been real power in the visceral public distrust of government and so-called national malaise following the Nixon administration – power that worked from the inside-out to create a psychological context for rationalizing policies of "new realism" that ushered in Carter and Reagan's diminished role for the federal government. Carter's policy was clearly a function of middle-class pressure for inclusion in the federal equal opportunity largesse. Reagan may have deployed global economic competition (power that influenced from the outside-in) as a deceptive rationale for cutting the education budget, but paired with very real threats from Iran and Afghanistan, it appeared not only acceptable but wise and natural. Thus, while presidents clearly wield disproportionate discursive and political power, the constantly shifting loci of political power means we should expect, not be surprised by, discontinuity between politicians' espoused positions and the actual policies that history attributes to them.

Directions for Policy Discourse

A New Consensus and Coalition for Higher Education

Another strain of discontinuity throughout this period – the changing way that the language of equal opportunity was appropriated – may help illuminate directions for contemporary education policy discourse. Treating discontinuity as "an instrument and an object of research" (Foucault, 1972, p. 37) motivates analysis of the discontinuities in equal opportunity's definitions across this 20-year span. This analysis also reveals equal opportunity's historical contingency. The crumbling of consensus around equal educational opportunity in the mid-1970s left behind a fragmented field of parties who all shared an interest in the state of, and access to, higher education, albeit without a common ground (Gladieux and Wolanin, 1976; Hearn and Holdsworth, 2004; Parsons, 2005). Rather than bemoan the loss of consensus that occurred a full generation ago, Parsons suggests a major project for higher education advocates of all political affiliations and motivations should be to develop rationales for higher education that apply across constituencies. Given the vested interest all Americans now have in making college opportunities accessible, these rationales "might build small islands of common ground from which to advocate for broader support of higher education" (Parsons, 2005, p. 141). In this task, a purely postmodern approach would present advantages and disadvantages: It would minimize the overly simplistic and sometimes divisive effects of traditional political labels, but it would also remove the moral basis for claims to access and equity. Retention of critical theory's moral claims would serve education policy framers well as they evaluate the needs of our current context.

Human Capital Rationales' Adequacy

One clear implication of this review for future discourse about federal investment relates to the adequacy of human capital rationales. Noted economic historians Friedman (2005) and Fogel (2000) propose that the future of social equality and economic development depend on substantial reinvestments in student aid. In proposing a twenty-first-century economic policy for America, Friedman (2005) concludes that human capital formation through providing college financial aid will be key to national economic growth, and that a fortuitous byproduct of that investment would be upward mobility among lower-income families. Reinvesting in Pell Grants is critical to Friedman's proposal. Fogel (2000), while optimistic about the future of education and broader social prospects for all groups of Americans, sees equitable opportunity for gaining human capital as a major element of the newer "postmodern egalitarian" movement that has taken shape since the mid-1970s. However, this movement, affiliated with the fourth Great Awakening in evangelicalism, has not established state support for education and antipoverty measures as part of its agenda – at least not yet.

In a funding context where Title IV programs must compete with other discretionary programs as domestic earmarks control an increasing proportion of the federal budget, human capital rationales for higher education provide a critical dimension of the case for reinvigorated federal investment in aid. Indeed, federal financial aid programs have become "firmly entrenched in the human capital paradigm" (St. John and Elliott, 1994, p. 162). Yet, the challenge of equality in the twenty-first century is much more complicated than crafting a new economic rationale for investing more. In part because of its underlying assumptions, human capital theory provides only one component of a balanced argument for protecting middle-income families' access to college while also ensuring financial access for low-income families.

As tends to happen within research paradigms, scholars have rarely questioned the assumptions and consequences of human capital's tenets, and this inattention adds to its entrenchment in our thinking. Slaughter (1991) thus offered an important contribution to the literature through her textured deconstruction of human capital theory as explicated by college and university presidents in testimony before Congress. She finds the presidents deployed human capital thinking in the 1980s not only as an economic theory, but also as a metaphor for the relationship of people to physical capital and the relationship of education to economic systems.[23] Consequently, the presidents focused on competition in the global marketplace and individualism to the detriment of assessing social rates of return from education other than those derived through economic benefits. Slaughter also notes how the narrow, utilitarian vision promulgated by human capital discourse ironically blinds us from education's

[23] According to Slaughter (1991), human capital is a metaphor that "likens the education system to the economic system, resting on the premise that education heightens men's and women's abilities to contribute to the production of wealth in the same way that capitalist entrepreneurs transform raw materials into profit" (p. 72).

"human" value. In addition to serving as theory and metaphor, human capital rationales perpetuate the myth that America successfully operates as a meritocracy. While not explicitly denying merit's social construction, the assumptions of human capital downplay the need to consider whether and/or how gender, race, class, and resource monopolies may influence opportunity. By assuming that an equal playing field exists, Slaughter (1991) found that university presidents concentrated on developing the same population of students as President Reagan, the "bright young minds" and the "thin stream of the extremely talented" (p. 74). Slaughter's (1991) critique must be juxtaposed with decades of evidence validating human capital formation's claims of producing economic benefits to individuals and larger economies, however. While human capital clearly has a role in justifying aid reinvestment today, an assessment of its assumptions and consequences reveals that it cannot be the sole basis for a new rationale. Ideological and sociopolitical rationales must also be considered.

Indeed, all policy, including today's financial aid system, has ideological roots in the beliefs of those who developed, advocated, and implemented it. HEA reflected Johnson's seemingly unwavering faith in education as a mechanism for social change and government as an arbiter of education's funding and administration. We also see ideological influence from a backlash to the civil rights era in which politicians like Nixon won votes among Northern whites by suggesting civil rights policies would ultimately harm their chance at equal opportunities. This logic laid the groundwork for policies like MISAA that redefined equal opportunity (Orfield and Eaton, 1996; Giroux and Giroux, 2004). Economic rationales cannot cut through either ideology, which Fogel (2000) regards as separate egalitarian agendas with competing priorities. Fogel nonetheless holds out hope that erasing inequality does not have to come at the cost of ensuring opportunity for the majority. However, for this to happen it seems we will need a new vision of equal opportunity for this generation. Such a vision would neither privilege the privileged nor dismiss persistent disparities as passé. However, equal opportunity in the twenty-first century must also acknowledge the realities that nearly *all* Americans now benefit from some postsecondary education and college costs are rising for all.

Issues for Reconstructing a Case for Federal Investment

In reconstructing a case for federal investment in higher education, the need to account for individuals' and groups' beliefs and values is inevitable. "Moral framing precedes policy" (Lakoff, 2008, p. 68), and not simply as a matter of selling that policy. Absent the possibility of perfect objectivity, it becomes even more critical that those who participate in policy research articulate and examine the assumptions embedded in various rationales, as well as their own assumptions. Furthermore, based on this review, several issues are raised for future policy researchers to consider in reconstructing an argument relevant to the early twenty-first-century context:

1. *What is the structure of opportunity and privilege that higher education access policies are intended to address? What are the important intersections of race*

and class in America today? Race and class still intersect in powerful ways to shape life experiences and opportunities; thus, an important task is to understand the deeper structures of privilege in society that construct the effect we have attributed to the socially constructed category of race. While institutions may be constrained from accounting for the power of racial stereotypes to influence individual achievement, they may reconstruct access arguments (including financial aid awards and admissions policies) for the twenty-first century through a constellation of variables that may include family income, high school/district resources, and urban/rural/suburban geography. This type of effort is clearly different than that of the Democratic and Republican parties in the mid- and late-1960s, respectively, who sought to downplay racial rhetoric instead of seeking to address underlying structures.

2. *Can policy address the perception that equal opportunity has been replaced by a zero-sum game of competing priorities and diminishing resources? If so, how?* The perception that working-class Whites, recent immigrants, and people of color from urban areas compete for precious resources has become a major stumbling block to both material equity and deeper social equality. Apart from the confounding influence of race in the equation, this review also shows the origins of struggle between middle- and working-class interests in accessing federal aid. In building a new coalition for college affordability, two major challenges are cultivating appreciation of (a) common needs and a collective future across diverse constituencies and (b) the possibility that educational opportunity need not be the zero-sum game that the 1970s politics of aid and admissions made it out to be.
3. *What social and political ends from education are sought today? How does financial aid policy serve these ends?* Given the inherent instability of ideological rationales and the consequences of solely economic rationales, a multidimensional argument for federal investment in higher education is needed. Previous generations sought a combination of social equity and national excellence. In addition to grappling with the place of these aims in today's context, policy researchers should actively debate organizing principles uniquely relevant to the challenges we face as a society. For, as this review showed, we are as much responsible for initiating and supporting change in this democracy as the president is capable of facilitating it.

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