Enlightened Localism: A Narrative Account of Poverty and Education in the Great Society

William B. Cannon*

Introduction

In this article, I intend to convey a certain point of view about the "Great Society" (and about public policy and its processes) to those who know of it only through hearsay and history textbooks. I attempt to fix this point of view by reviewing the planning that went into two fundamental Great Society programs — the "War on Poverty" and educational planning. To facilitate thinking about the Great Society's legacy, I conclude with a brief analysis of what has become of its policy initiatives in poverty and education, and with a projection about what the history of those initiatives implies for the future.¹

Establishing the beginning and end points of the Great Society is a difficult task. The popularity of political labels like "the Kennedy-Johnson era" helps to blur the origin of the Great Society, and in so doing, also blurs attribution of credit for its successes and blame for its failures. The terminus of the Great Society is also hazy, in part because another political label — "the Johnson-Nixon years" — overwhelmed the national consciousness in the wake of the Viet Nam War. The end of the Great Society is blurred as well by the phasing out or incorporation of Great Society programs into other

¹ I use three kinds of evidence in this article: that based on my own observation and participation, including notes and memoranda dating back to the time when the events described took place; government numbers — primarily Census Bureau statistics — which I use as social rather than polimetric indicators; and the voices of important critics of the Great Society, whose views must be considered, if not for their own merit, then for the past, present and future integrity of social welfare policy. I make no pretense here of having read the entire canon of works dedicated to chronicling and assessing the Great Society.
Enlightened Localism

...structures, which, while apparently similar, were markedly different in motive, orientation and organization.

Despite the difficulties inherent in locating the beginning and end points of the Great Society, it would not be incorrect to mark the Great Society as a policy event that occurred between 1960 and 1970-1972. Because the Great Society was engendered in the New Deal tradition of the activist state, the belief in the social goodness of government was not, as such, a distinctive part of its contribution. The Great Society's contribution lay in its effort to extend and repair the practice of local government through new institutions such as Community Action programs and supplementary education centers. These new structures were designed to bridge the basic gaps in the national system of government between local neighborhoods and local government, and between the public and the private sectors. In this respect, the Great Society's approach differed markedly from that of the New Deal; where the New Deal employed existing units of local government to carry out its social welfare programs, the Great Society designed new institutions to encourage the participation in public affairs of individuals and groups traditionally excluded from that arena. In attempting to keep government as close to the human level as possible, the Great Society was more a throwback to an earlier society in American history than it was the post-war reincarnation of the New Deal.

If the structural innovation of the Great Society derived from its emphasis on an enlightened brand of localism, its ideology involved a modern interpretation of that age-old tenet that Americans are capable of anything if only they put their hearts and minds to the task. Some of the Great Society's assumptions about American society are suggested by the very title it assumed — "The Great Society" — derived from an essay by Professor F. Graham Wallace. As an integral part of its vision of American society, the Great Society also made certain critical assumptions about the people it attempted to help. In the context of a War on Poverty, Great Society planners assumed that the poor were worth fighting for, that the poor both could and should participate in the War on Poverty on their own behalf, and that there was widespread political support for such an approach to the pervasive social problem of poverty. These particular assumptions provided the foundation for Community Action.

---

2. See infra pp. 28-29 & 40-41.
4. See infra pp. 9-32.
While economic advancement almost always increases the chances for genuine social progress, the Great Society did not assume that economic measures such as jobs programs or direct income assistance programs provided the only means of eliminating poverty. The vision animating the Great Society held that any successful effort to root out poverty in America had to reach beyond the macroeconomic sphere into other arenas of social existence such as the community. The federal government’s role in this vision involved reaching into the communities and neighborhoods, and facilitating the creation of new forms of government to attack poverty at the local levels where it was most pervasive. Existing state and local structures of government were inadequate for the Great Society’s poverty agenda because they were typically insensitive to the nature and identities of communities, and because they inhibited participation in civic affairs. The federal government, it was thought, could facilitate the establishment of institutions at the community level, and provide them with enough resources to empower communities to develop particularized programs for combatting poverty within their respective jurisdictions. This federal-community partnership was to be versatile enough to accomplish its goals, whether in East Los Angeles, in Cheboygan, Michigan, or in the Woodlawn Community of Southside Chicago.

If the Great Society saw one way to economic and social advancement, for the poor and nonpoor alike, it was through education. Not only was increased access to a quality education likely to enhance a person’s standing in the economic marketplace and in the social and political affairs of her community; at the time, education was also considered the key to achieving racial integration in America. The Great Society envisioned a significant role for the federal government in enhancing both educational opportunity and the quality of education at the elementary, secondary and post-secondary levels. In this objective, the Great Society again posited goals at once continuous with American political ideology and disjunct in their breadth of vision and ambition. Thus it is no coincidence that I have chosen to focus this article on Community Action and education; together, these two programs comprised the centerpiece of the Great Society’s policy thrust for Americans in general, and for poor Americans in particular.

Visions do not tell the whole tale of the Great Society, however. While the Great Society was the major policy event of an era, its

---

5. See infra pp. 35-52.
Enlightened Localism

contours were disputed vigorously at the time of its conception and later implementation,⁶ and its legacy is currently in disgrace. To understand this latter phenomenon, the shunning of the Great Society, I also examine, albeit in outline form, the two distinct periods of social welfare policy that have followed the Great Society: the Nixon-Carter era of the 1970's and the Reagan era of the 1980's.⁷ In the Nixon-Carter era, the social welfare policy initiatives of the Great Society were redirected by the dismantling of those structures painstakingly developed to implement particular Great Society programs. Some of the Great Society programs survived the 1970's, but in a form that rendered impotent much of their original mandate. In contrast, the Reagan era has to date overseen both the outright termination of most Great Society programs and the blatant rejection of the assumptions and ethos that underlay the Great Society. Since we must live in the Reagan era, I offer this narrative account of the Great Society not so much as a polemic with which to advocate the reestablishment of programs already terminated, but as a document, which, in its chronicle, argues that the history of the Great Society offers a valuable approach to the still pervasive problems of poverty and inequality in American society.

I. The War on Poverty: Community Action Versus Economic Opportunity

Walter Heller, former Chairman of the Council of Economic Advisors, once said that John F. Kennedy initiated the “War on Poverty.” Whether or not Kennedy actually declared that “war,” it was Lyndon Johnson who made it a reality. Johnson, possibly against his better judgment, eventually took Kennedy’s commitment to heart and translated rhetoric into real policies and programs for the poor.⁸

If Johnson’s inspiration derived in part from Kennedy, Kennedy’s own inspiration has been attributed to many sources. Kennedy’s allegedly emotional awakening to poverty could have been triggered by any number of events including his 1960 primary campaign in the back hills of West Virginia, Dwight MacDonald’s famous New Yorker article,⁹ or perhaps most influential of all, the publication of

---

⁶ See infra pp. 17-18.
⁷ See infra pp. 21-27.
⁸ Although President Johnson nearly caused the demise of the War on Poverty during a critical Christmastime meeting in 1963, infra p. 19, he rightfully claims the War on Poverty as his own. See L. JOHNSON, THE VANTAGE POINT 71-87 (1971).
⁹ MacDonald, Our Invisible Poor, New Yorker, Jan. 19, 1963, at 82.
Michael Harrington's book *The Other America*.\(^{10}\) Combining sociology, statistics and socialism in a powerful moral and rhetorical critique of American society, Harrington's book focused the public eye on the reality of poverty in America. MacDonald's essay served similarly to attune the *New Yorker's* elite and influential readership to the plight of the poverty-stricken.

The theory that the Kennedys experienced an abrupt or book-educated awakening to the pressing issue of poverty is debatable, however. The Kennedys must have been well acquainted with areas like the Roxbury section of Boston, where poverty was every bit as evident, shaming and compelling as that of Appalachia. It is more likely that the War on Poverty originated in a decision by important government actors, both agencies and individuals, that the time was ripe to make the first efforts on behalf of the poor since the New Deal era. Even in the absence of public demand, policy-makers recognized that a solution to the poverty problem was necessary for the fair administration of government in an era marked by a rising national consciousness as to the plight of the underclasses in American society. This view is supported by a statement made by Daniel Patrick Moynihan in 1965:

> Nor did the War on Poverty come about because of any great surge of popular demand. . . . The origins of this effort simply cannot be explained in deterministic terms. It was more a rational than a political event. Men at the center of the government perceived the fact. . . . that ugliness, like poverty, is all around them and that the powers of government might eliminate it.\(^{11}\)

Whatever the origin of the Government's concern, its ignorance of the magnitude of the poverty problem was substantial. Therefore, in spring of 1963, pursuant to a request by President Kennedy, Walter Heller's staff began to compile the poverty statistics. No single, coherent definition of poverty served to organize the poverty data which the Council of Economic Advisors gathered, however. Robert Lampman, a Council Staff Member, began the task of collating the statistics in an attempt to avoid the development of egregiously contradictory and counterproductive program proposals.

It is important to recognize the operative assumption of the government actors who were in charge of the gargantuan task of mar-

\(^{10}\) M. Harrington, *The Other America* (1962).

Enlightened Localism

shaling the statistical evidence needed to launch the War on Poverty. These policy-makers assumed, for planning purposes, that the poor exhibited the same types of behavior in the same degree as similarly situated nonpoor people. Thus only “external” variables such as age and geographical distribution were considered relevant to gauging the potential impact of a particular program proposal in a particular area. Common patterns of behavior alleged to be characteristic of the poor as a whole played little or no role in the development of programming for the War on Poverty. The fact that the view of the poor as a fixed or inferior class was neither central nor victorious in conceptualizing the Great Society is important in comparing the policy approaches to poverty of the mid-1960’s with those of the 1980’s.

A. Developing a Poverty Program

Responsibility for developing an anti-poverty program was assigned to Walter Heller, Chief of the Council of Economic Advisors, Kermit Gordon, Chief of the Bureau of the Budget, and to an inter-agency task force (“Task Force”). Although Heller and Gordon were the designated leaders of the Task Force, the staffs of the Departments of Labor and Health, Education and Welfare also played important roles.

The members of the Task Force assembled in the early summer of 1963 and began to canvass for ideas. The War on Poverty was obviously going to require more than one weapon, and as a result, nearly every governmental agency became involved in the planning process. Characteristically, the suggestions and purported “poverty cures” each agency submitted both furthered and fit basic agency interests. The Department of Labor, the most ambitious of the line agencies, submitted 150 proposals: some new, some old and refurbished. HEW chose to revive certain proposals conceived decades ago, revealing both that Department’s adherence to a 1930’s-style social security vision of the Great Society and its concomitant commitment to specialized, categorical programs. The Housing and Health Finance Administration (HHFA became the Department of Housing and Urban Development in 1965) predictably proposed urban housing and community development programs.

The self-interested nature of these agency proposals came as no surprise to the central planners, who had anticipated that any War on Poverty would have to confront agency orientations and interests. The planners realized that no across-the-board poverty pro-
gram could function without the participation of these agencies, at least in the initial stages of the planning process. The first crop of proposals confirmed the intuitions both that no agency possessed a coherent, affordable and politically practicable theory of poverty from which a comprehensive program could be developed, and that each agency had its own particular theory of poverty which derived from its institutional interests.

After reviewing and refining the agency proposals, the Bureau-Council staff passed the suggestions to the White House for consideration. In the meantime, the Task Force documented the proposals in preparation for a meeting to be held in the office of Theodore Sorenson, the Special Assistant to the President, in October of 1963. The purpose of that meeting was to obtain a first rough cut of a War on Poverty. Those who convened in Sorenson’s office were confronted, however, with a jumbled mass of multi-colored spread sheets whose only claim to organization lay in the fact that the various program proposals were listed in the stub column with their estimated program costs opposite. Only one conclusion was obvious from the data presented at this meeting: the Task Force staff had not produced a coherent program that either described, organized or ranked the various proposals in such a way as to allow policy-makers to develop an effective plan of action. While the planners were not unaccustomed to problems of coordination and articulation in the federal bureaucracy, they were particularly concerned because this particular failure implicated one of President Kennedy’s highest priorities — the War on Poverty. Sorenson told the Task Force to get back to work.

The list of proposals was shortened and shortened, in the hope that in less would be found more. The revised list was presented at a second Sorenson meeting, held just before the assassination on November 22nd. Those who were present concluded, unfortunately, that editing of the spread sheets was the only thing which had been achieved in the one-month interim. Time was growing short and a program for the War on Poverty was no more tangible than it had been four months earlier.

Planning activity became groping and desultory. New planning methods and new planners were suggested. Searching intensively for a solution, bureaucrats from different agencies met to propose and discuss ideas. One such effort involved the Bureau and Council staffs in conjunction with HEW. From these discussions emerged HEW’s acceptance of a program based on incentive grants to states.
Enlightened Localism

and localities to encourage the effective coordination of welfare activities. The planners concurred with HEW's opinion that most state and local agencies were working at cross-purposes. Too many clients were being subjected to too many ministrations from too many sources, with the result that too many needy recipients were falling between agency stools.

This realization presented a comparatively great intellectual leap on the part of policy-makers, but the idea was shelved when they decided that the only imaginable mechanism of coordination would be ideologically unacceptable. That is, in order to achieve its goals, this poverty program would have to provide the equivalent of one social worker for every poor family to serve as a guide through the maze of complementary welfare jurisdictions. The paternalism inevitably involved in such a scheme was politically unacceptable. This proposal was also flawed in that it failed to address the other prong of the poverty problem: how to provide the proper resources in the proper amounts. The general theory behind this approach, however, with its emphasis on localism, responded to the fundamental question of how to provide resources. This ultimately provided the lynchpin to the theory and practice of Community Action.

After President Kennedy's assassination on November 22, 1963, Lyndon Johnson delivered a special message to Congress which emphasized the importance of continuity in government policies between his administration and that of his predecessor. More specifically, Johnson's message reflected, at least rhetorically, a continuing commitment to developing a War on Poverty. It was understood by government insiders, however, that a Christmas meeting scheduled to convene in Johnson City, Texas, would in fact decide the extent of the new President's commitment.

By early December, the Task Force had yet to deliver plans for a workable poverty program into the hands of Johnson administration officials. On December 12, however, the Bureau of the Budget in concert with the Council of Economic Advisors, HEW and the Justice Department's Juvenile Delinquency staff, issued a proposal in the form of a memorandum. The Bureau had two reasons for calling upon the Juvenile Delinquency staff for assistance in preparing the memorandum. First, the staff members, under the leadership of Robert Kennedy's long-time associate David Hackett, had experience in the area of local youth programs, an issue to which the Kennedy Administration had accorded high priority. Second, the Juvenile Delinquency staff, operating out of Robert Kennedy's Jus-
tice Department, had employed localism as a successful organizing principle in developing and implementing an anti-delinquency program in urban communities. The experience of the Juvenile Delinquency staff thus provided a rare and valuable addition to the Bureau-Council effort, offering support in both theory and practice. In addition, the fact that the Juvenile Delinquency staff could function as a direct pipeline to the Attorney General's office proved useful both before and after the assassination.\(^1\)

The Bureau-Council-Juvenile Delinquency memorandum ("the Memorandum") outlined, for the first time, the features of a comprehensive, community action approach to poverty. It presented the proposals of the various federal agencies in an organized fashion and in a way which served to crystallize the diffuse thinking of the Executive Branch. In sum, the document proposed a coherent and workable program.

B. The Concept of Community

At the heart of the Memorandum was a proposal for legislation authorizing state and local governments to establish local "Development Corporations." Funds channeled to these corporations would be used to subsidize local attacks on poverty. These institutions would be given statutory authority to operate across the whole range of community poverty issues and to use a variety of different techniques to achieve their objectives. At bottom, the idea involved setting up a single local agency empowered to develop and finance programs proposed by various local agencies. The new bodies, these development corporations, would be authorized to undertake almost any type of remedial action with the exception of major building construction. General supervisory authority would be vested in the President, who would also have the power to divert funds from existing programs to local development corporations and to waive existing restrictions on the use of these funds.\(^2\)

\(^{12}\) See infra pp. 25-26.
\(^{13}\) This waiver power ultimately evolved into the Preference Clause of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, Pub. L. No. 88-452, 78 Stat. 508, 529, 42 U.S.C. § 2942(h), repealed by Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1981, Pub. L. No. 97-35, § 683(a), 95 Stat. 357, 519, 42 U.S.C. § 9912(a) (1982). The Preference Clause, a much watered-down version of the President's power as proposed in the Memorandum, required existing federal agencies to allocate their own funds in such a way as to "prefer" poverty programs. The political necessity of this delegation of the ultimate locus of discretion from the President back to the agencies was revealed at the time in Labor Secretary Willard Wirtz's observation that were the President to have unbridled authority to dispense the funds of the Department of Labor, the Secretary might not have much left to do.
Enlightened Localism

In order to build a poverty program around localities, any plan predicated on community action had to ensure that as much of the local community as possible was committed to combatting poverty. The Memorandum indicated that the new approach to poverty demanded consultation with and participation of the poor in the planning process. Participation, however, was not intended to be limited to the poor; nor was the local program to represent only the ideas of the professional community. The program called for the participation of the poor, along with others, in recognition of the fact that communities run by the poor alone would not be genuinely democratic. In this way community action would do what states and municipalities had failed to do, namely to provide adequate incentives and assistance to the poor by bringing the poor and the rest of the community together in a shared effort to defeat poverty at the local level.  

The basic theme of the Memorandum was that many approaches were possible in dealing with the problem of poverty. Because no single, determinative description of either the origin or the magnitude of poverty in America was available, neither were there any obvious responses to the problem. In the absence of concrete solutions at this stage in the planning process, the Memorandum recommended that the Government concentrate on developing a method of combatting poverty. This procedural approach did not, of course, preclude targeting for immediate attention those substantive areas such as housing and education that possessed an identifiable and relatively noncontroversial relationship to the presence of poverty in American society. Yet by elevating procedure over substance, at least initially, the Memorandum's authors were able to break the policy stalemate and at the same time to preserve enough flexibility to accommodate both old and new programs in developing a War on Poverty.

C. The Appeal of Localism

The specific programming recommended by the Memorandum was consistent with the general mood to "go local," a mood that had

---

14. It is difficult to see what this theory of community action misunderstood. The only major question at the time was whether communities in fact existed as we had conceived them, and, if they did not, whether they could be created. Despite the claim of detractors, see D. MOYNIHAN, MAXIMUM FEASIBLE MISUNDERSTANDING: COMMUNITY ACTION IN THE WAR ON POVERTY 10-11 (1969), the idea of community was a concrete concept which was defined in each case by discrete geographic, demographic and cultural parameters.
considerable practical advantage as well as rhetorical appeal. By providing grants to localities, it was possible to bypass certain state and municipal structures, particularly those in the South, and thus to prevent them from interposing themselves between the federal government and the poor. In this way localities would be left free to launch a comprehensive and coordinated attack on poverty — an attack involving various health, education, labor and other weapons — in a defined geographical area. Such a plan also appealed to the Government's desire to foster a sense of community responsibility in implementing a War on Poverty.

The existing federal agencies were receptive to the Memorandum for a number of reasons. They had learned, some through experience, that despite the need for certain established public assistance programs such as Aid to Families with Dependent Children, these programs could be faulted for treating the poor as mere objects at the end of a delivery system. The agencies were therefore receptive to the Memorandum's insight that a new approach to poverty demanded consultation with and participation of the poor. By viewing the poor simply as recipients of aid programs, the agencies had been unable to bridge the gap between what the recipient truly needed and what was actually supplied.

The agencies were therefore eager, at least in theory, to solicit the advice of the poor in the program-planning process and thereby to benefit from whatever insights the poor were able to supply. It was also thought that such an approach might provide incentives for those consulted to find a way out of poverty through participation and education. The agencies were also attracted, or at least neutralized, by the political appeal of localism, an idea which has long held an august place in the American political tradition. If there was a motivating force behind agency acceptance of the Memorandum's approach, it was predicated on the tradition of localism and not on any particular attachment to an abstract quest for community. Acceptance of a plan for a War on Poverty based on local community action sat well with key departments such as HUD, HEW and Agriculture, which in the past had made extensive use of both state and local institutions for administrative purposes.

Finally, the Memorandum found favor in some quarters because it articulated a desire to lighten the paternalistic hand that govern-

15. While at this stage of development the term "locality" referred primarily to local governments, the definition was later expanded to include sub-local communities such as Harlem and neighborhoods as well.
Enlightened Localism

ment laid upon the poor. Many thought that the paternalism and stigma associated with government relief might be reduced by involving the poor in planning local approaches to poverty and by treating them as equals in the process.

D. Community Action as an Innovative Concept

The outline of a War on Poverty based on the idea of community action ("Community Action") was heralded by some as portending a major new form of political and social organization. No one involved in those early planning sessions, however, suggested that the purpose of Community Action was to create or promote a radical new political structure. On the contrary, Community Action was viewed by its creators as either a supplement or an alternative to traditional governmental programs, depending on the nature of the existing structure of government in a particular area.

In Chicago, for instance, the supplemental aspects of the program would be emphasized. In responding to the federal initiative, Mayor Daley explicitly stated his intent to incorporate the Community Action Program into his city's structure. Daley also made it clear, however, that while he welcomed the plan and the resources it would bring to Chicago, and while he would defer to the principle of local participation, he would not allow the federal program to compete with local government. That position determined the history of Community Action in Chicago.

In criticizing Community Action in 1969, Daniel Patrick Moynihan emphasized the alternative structure option to the virtual exclusion of the supplementary option and thus misrepresented the range of possibilities Community Action afforded. What Mr. Moynihan and his colleagues failed to see was that Community Action was a democratic and protean concept flexible enough to accommodate all varieties of local governmental structures. These critics interpreted Community Action as advocating, without qualification, a federally run alternative to local government, instead of as providing, in some instances, a mere supplement to entrenched local programs. Having seized upon this doomsday scenario, critics failed to recognize the more conservative supplementary function that Community Action allowed. Misunderstanding both the concept of Community Action and the variety of possible ways of implementing the program, they characterized it as a radical move that would promote hostility towards established political institutions.

E. Moving Towards Implementation

Considerations of political theory aside, the Community Action proposal was intended to meet immediately pressing practical concerns, namely the Administration’s need for a coherent and workable approach to the War on Poverty. The December 12th Memorandum made the rounds of the federal bureaucracy. The Bureau of the Budget and the Council of Economic Advisors promoted the Memorandum as the central feature of the poverty program. Heller included a revised version of the Council’s work in a memorandum addressed to Sorenson. Entitled “A Coordinated Community Action Program,” this memo recommended that Community Action become the key component of the Administration’s attack on poverty. In response, Sorenson invited representatives from the Bureau, the Council and various Departments (Labor, Commerce and HEW) to discuss the proposal. Although Labor decried the program as a band-aid solution because it did not advocate the costly jobs program Labor had vigorously promoted as the centerpiece of any War on Poverty, HUD and HEW supported it. Those present at the meeting at least agreed that they had a coherent proposal before them for the first time. The Memorandum’s supporters eventually won the day. An inter-agency group of policy people, in conjunction with lawyers from HEW, HHFA and Agriculture, set about drafting a Community Action bill.

The specifications for the bill were drawn up quickly. Because each department was consulted during the drafting process, each feature of the program, including Community Action, was thoroughly scrutinized through the lens of agency self-interest. While the agencies did not suggest any major changes, they did voice specific objections. These objections stemmed from a variety of considerations including concern that communities did not possess adequate leadership resources to develop and execute a Community Action plan, that local leadership would prevent the development and execution of such a plan, or more cynically, that the delays which would inevitably accompany the establishment of a comprehensive and coordinated local plan would defer politically crucial results until after the 1964 elections. December and January found Community Action the subject of exhaustive inquiry and debate.

One such discussion overshadowed all others, however. Walter Heller and Kermit Gordon were scheduled to travel to Johnson City, Texas, during the Christmas holidays to inform, instruct and ultimately persuade President Johnson to lend total support to a
Enlightened Localism

War on Poverty in general, and to Community Action in particular. The mission was not going to be easy. Rumors abounded that the President was doubting the efficacy of the War on Poverty and Community Action. He was said to be concerned both about the relative haste with which the program had been developed and about its reception by Congress and the public. More specifically, while President Johnson concurred with the Department of Labor over the importance of a jobs program, he feared that launching an employment program of sufficient magnitude to combat poverty would wreak havoc with the budget.

During the Christmas meetings with Heller and Gordon, President Johnson apparently vacillated between rejecting and accepting the Community Action Program. I have been told that one night he overruled Heller and Gordon and voiced his intent to scratch the program; the next morning, however, he heeded their plea to reconsider. In the end, President Johnson decided that there would be a poverty program, and that Community Action would be its centerpiece. The fact that President Johnson regarded Community Action as an extension of the American political tradition of localism, rather than as vehicle for proletarian revolution, was in part responsible for his ultimate acceptance of the concept.17

The Johnson City Christmas episode accelerated the drafting process, and the momentum built to submit a bill to the Congress. Now that there was greater certainty among policy-makers about the possibility of translating policies into programs, the War on Poverty and Community Action became the object of intensive review in the Executive Branch.

Because the Government had to reorganize existing housing, welfare, health, education, and labor programs in order to wage an effective War on Poverty, the structure of the undertaking merited particular attention. Since it was administratively and politically impossible to create a new Department of Poverty to encompass all the federal programs then bearing on poverty, a different mechanism for coordination was needed. Community Action and the principle of localism provided the solution, at least in theory, to the coordination problem by implying that the federal programs be coordinated from the bottom up, with local institutions serving as filters for the federal programs. The first step in the effort to solve the coordination problem would thus involve creating local agencies to coordi-

17. See L. Johnson, The Vantage Point 74-75 (1971).
nate the various federal programs dealing with health, jobs, housing and the like, at the local level.

Furthermore, since the War on Poverty would operate largely outside the sphere of the traditional agencies, it was going to require firm, centralized direction. How that control was to be structured was the subject of some debate within the Executive Branch. There were two feasible approaches: either vest control with existing organizations supplemented by conventional coordinating mechanisms, or create a new agency with a new form of inter-agency directorate. The first option was supported by Labor and HEW; the latter by HHFA (HUD), Agriculture and Commerce. The issue was resolved by the end of January when the Bureau, the Council and the line agencies met in Sorensen’s office and decided to create a new agency. This option was favored at least in part because it would preserve the institutional interests of existing federal agencies.

Once this decision was made, the planners began drafting a bill which located the War on Poverty and the Community Action Program in a new, independent agency that would coordinate the poverty programs of other agencies.\(^\text{18}\) In order to finance the program through the annual budget process, $700-800 million was to be commandeered from existing budgets and pending programs. In addition, the President intended to request from the Congress approximately $500 million in new appropriations for the Community Action Program. Five hundred million dollars was considered a feasible figure, both fiscally and politically, on which to base a request for appropriations, especially given the program value these monies would buy.\(^\text{19}\)

At the President’s request, John Kenneth Galbraith had previously written an eloquent draft message to Congress advocating support for the War on Poverty and Community Action. Galbraith’s draft was too general, however; it did not adequately reflect the particular program proposal that would be sent to the Hill. On January 28, 1964, the Bureau and Council staffs translated Galbraith’s draft into a more specific Presidential message. The Bureau-Council

\(^{18}\) This new federal agency vested with special coordinating functions would eventually become the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO). See infra pp. 28-29.

\(^{19}\) The $500 million figure was considered by some agencies, particularly the Department of Labor, as insufficient to finance a full-scale War on Poverty. See supra p. 18. This objection was based, however, on a theory which the President ultimately rejected, namely that a true War on Poverty must be based on a massive jobs program. See supra p. 19.
Enlightened Localism
draft set forth a general theory of Community Action for Congressional consideration which asserted the following:

1) Because existing categorical programs isolated elements in the complex structure of poverty, little progress was being made in the effort to dismantle the structure itself. The categorical programs currently operating out of a score of different federal agencies were not useless; they did, however, need to be coordinated and focused before a comprehensive attack on poverty could be implemented.

2) In addition, new programs were needed to address the poverty problem. While these new programs would differ markedly from their categorical predecessors, it was still necessary to target for attention broad program areas such as housing and education. This would give substantive content to the War on Poverty without tying the government to ultra-specific program commitments at this early stage.

3) A successful War on Poverty could only begin at the community level. Because poverty fundamentally affects the fabric of community life, any forceful effort to eradicate poverty would necessarily have an impact on the community. Because a community's relative autonomy is thereby implicated, the community should have a strong voice in developing and implementing programs intended to eliminate poverty at the local level. Therefore, the federal government's role should be limited to that of an energetic, facilitating and friendly overseer who would provide ongoing support for the community's efforts to combat poverty.

4) Poverty was a community phenomenon, not a macro-economic phenomenon. Hence poverty would not respond well to general fiscal measures initiated at the national level.

This draft message was sent to the White House for review. The message and the draft bill were scheduled to go to the Hill during the first or second week of February.

F. New Leadership for the War on Poverty

On Saturday, February 1, 1964, the President surprised the planning staffs of the Bureau and the Council by placing R. Sargent Shriver, his Special Assistant, in charge of programming for the War on Poverty.\textsuperscript{20} While Shriver's job was going to be difficult — he had

\textsuperscript{20} Shriver would eventually become the Director of the Office of Economic Opportunity, the central coordinating agency of the War on Poverty. \textit{See infra} pp. 28-29.
to first inform and then convince Congress — at the time no one knew which direction he intended to steer the War on Poverty.

In order to ascertain Shriver’s position, Kermit Gordon arranged a meeting with him the next day and invited many of the key planners, including myself.21 Gordon began the meeting by extolling the virtues of the Community Action concept as both a feasible and laudable way of approaching the poverty problem. In promoting Community Action, Gordon clearly refused to define Community Action as a mere tool of federal management, and emphasized instead the appropriateness of local initiative in attempting to solve what was at bottom as much a cultural as an economic problem.

During the course of the meeting, however, it became evident that Shriver was skeptical of Community Action in large part because he questioned its amenability to the three objectives he had already identified as critical to the success of a revised War on Poverty: public visibility, effectiveness and speed.22 More specifically, Shriver argued that the Community Action Program promised sufficient power to achieve his stated ends only if the Budget Bureau would enforce what Gordon could not promise: a requirement that line agencies spend and administer their programs at Shriver’s direction.23

As we had conceived it, however, Community Action was not to be either located in or constituted solely from existing federal agencies. Rather, Community Action was intended to provide a separate funding mechanism which directed federal funding to localities for the purpose of combating poverty from the bottom up. Shriver’s demand at once demonstrated his unwillingness to assimilate the program outlines we had sketched and his naivete with regard to agency politics.

It was difficult not to despair. After months of effort which, in our

21. Besides Gordon, Shriver and myself, Heller, Charles Schultz (Assistant Director, Budget Bureau), William Capron (Staff Economist, Council of Economic Advisors), Gardner Ackley (Member, Council of Economic Advisors), and Meyer Feldman (Counsel to the President) attended this February 2nd meeting. With Shriver were Adam Yarmolinsky (Department of Defense), Frank Mankiewicz (Public Information Officer, Peace Corps), Warren Wiggins (Assistant Director, Peace Corps), and William Josephson (Attorney, Office of Counsel, Peace Corps).

22. In Shriver’s eyes, the three elements of visibility, effectiveness and speed were as necessary for a successful War on Poverty as for a successful Peace Corps, of which he was Director from 1961-1966. I wondered at the time whether or not these two programs were appropriate for comparison, given the radically different contexts in which each was required to operate.

23. I locate the politically problematic nature of this demand more precisely elsewhere. See supra note 13.
Enlightened Localism

collective estimation, had resulted in a coherent and workable program, the Administration thrust a significant obstacle in the path of the War on Poverty by placing Shriver in command. Because he had not participated in the planning sessions, we feared that Shriver would feel less bound by our conclusions as to the appropriateness and feasibility of localism as the organizing principle of a successful War on Poverty, especially given his apparent hostility to the idea of Community Action. This development could not have happened at a worse juncture: now was the time to sell the poverty program to Congress.

During the course of this first fateful meeting, we attempted to convince Shriver of the utility of a War on Poverty predicated upon Community Action as we had conceived it by making promises which stretched the limits of our credibility. We claimed, for instance, that programs could begin immediately in twenty-five urban centers. Shriver was skeptical. He was convinced that governors, mayors and other state and local officials would obstruct any effort to wage a War on Poverty from the local barricades. The answer to anticipated local resistance was instead, according to Shriver, a direct national program.

We could not completely deny Shriver's skepticism. Because Community Action had been conceived as a method of combatting poverty rather than as a substantive solution in and of itself, it was difficult to predict the immediate or even long-term effects of such an approach in any given community. In addition, the spectre of local resistance to the civil rights movement loomed large in the background as a visible standard against which to measure poverty initiatives coordinated through and focused on localities. Shriver's claim, however, that Community Action was an inherently conservative concept which would operate to protect unenlightened aggregations of local power was as one-sided as Moynihan's position in Maximum Feasible Misunderstanding that interpreted Commu-


25. In retrospect, perhaps the major threat to Community Action in both the Executive Branch and the Congress was the fact that some viewed it as a program which could potentially play into the hands of those opposed to the Civil Rights Movement by concentrating even more power in the hands of local racists. Much of the language of Title II of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, Pub. L. No. 88-452, 78 Stat. 508, 516-524, 42 U.S.C. §§ 2781-2837, repealed by Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1981, Pub. L. No. 97-35, Title VI, § 683(a), 95 Stat. 357, 519, 42 U.S.C. § 9912 (1982) [hereinafter cited as EOA, Title II], the statutory incarnation of Community Action, was manipulated to avoid this threat.
nity Action as inherently destructive of cherished local autonomy. 26 To our mind Community Action would not lead inevitably to either of these results; and with careful legislative drafting, we would ensure that it did not.

To counter Shriver's insistence on a direct federal program, we relied on the Administration's position. The White House staff had acknowledged that local responsibility and local action would better the chances of the program's acceptance by Congress. In addition, Shriver had been cautioned against seeking authorization for an autonomous federal program that would operate within localities. We interpreted the position of the White House staff as directing Shriver to begin developing a set of local relationships which, even if they would not achieve the Administration's objectives as efficiently as would a direct federal program, would both provide federal control without the impression of dominance and enlist and attract local resources and experience. Stressing that such criteria were politically indispensable to a successful War on Poverty, we argued that Community Action was a thoughtfully designed policy which had the approval of the Executive Branch.

Despite our best efforts at persuasion, however, Shriver remained unconvinced. We left the meeting disheartened: it appeared that Community Action did not accord with Shriver's objectives. Shriver now faced the task of piecing together his own program from the shards of our work and whatever raw material he could find elsewhere in the policy-making community.

G. The Shriver Task Force Makes Revisions

Immediately after meeting with us, Shriver assembled a working group composed of reporters, business leaders, labor leaders, professors and mayors, to begin the search for a new approach to the War on Poverty. 27 From the outset, the Shriver Task Force rejected Community Action as the organizing principle for their War on Poverty; it was criticized as too elusive a concept for an "action-oriented" group. The local thrust of Community Action even made

27. The key participants in the Shriver Task Force were Adam Yarmolinsky, Defense Department; Frank Mankiewicz, general aide to Shriver and Yarmolinsky; Daniel Patrick Moynihan and Eric Tolmach, Department of Labor; James Sundquist, Department of Agriculture; Paul Ylvisaker, Ford Foundation; Paul Jacobs, Center for the Study of Democratic Ideas; Michael Harrington, author; Wilbur Cohen and Harold Horowitz, Department of Health, Education and Welfare; Andrew Brimmer, James Adler and Gerald Holton, Department of Commerce; and William Capron, staff member of the Council of Economic Advisors.
enlightened localism

Enemies of its natural friends, Michael Harrington and Paul Jacobs, who believed that only massive direct federal efforts would have any effect on the poverty problem. Of all the members of the Shriver Task Force, only Paul Ylvisaker of the Ford Foundation supported the Community Action Program.  

By mid-February, 1964, the Shriver Task Force had surveyed the landscape (as well as could be expected in two weeks), and had considered and discarded hundreds of ideas. The Task Force was both inclined and under pressure to settle on a few specific and innovative proposals. Yarmolinsky instructed me to review existing federal programs which might be commandeered for the War on Poverty, and to estimate the cost of an over-inclusive list of proposed programs, including, after pleas by Ylvisaker, Horowitz and me, a proposal for a limited Community Action Program. Yarmolinsky and Moynihan actively campaigned for a jobs program which Moynihan saw as the means for reconstructing the Negro family; Harrington and Jacobs proposed programs possible only under a different government in a different society. 

The Shriver Task Force remained hostile to the concept of Community Action. In order to soften the resistance, I turned for help to David Hackett, head of the Justice Department’s Juvenile Delinquency Program and close friend and assistant to Attorney General Robert Kennedy. To this day I consider the fact that Hackett prevailed upon Attorney General Kennedy to intercede with Shriver on behalf of Community Action to be the proximate cause of the survival and ultimate inclusion of Community Action in the Economic...
Opportunity Act of 1964.\textsuperscript{33}

It is perhaps instructive to pause here and consider various explanations which have been proposed for the ultimate amenability of the federal government and particularly the Executive Branch to the concept of Community Action. Some commentators have cited the influence of professional social reformers as crucial to the conception and acceptance of Community Action.\textsuperscript{34} The history of the origins of Community Action as I witnessed it and have attempted to describe herein, however, indicates that the connection between these reformers and the actual program was obscure at best. The contribution of Hackett’s Juvenile Delinquency staff,\textsuperscript{35} though important, was not determinative; the concept of Community Action eventually expanded far beyond the insights afforded by the Juvenile Delinquency experience to encompass elements necessary for government-wide acceptance and nationwide application.

Nor was Community Action a mere reflection of or appendage to the Civil Rights Movement, the fate of which was by no means certain by the time the Community Action Program was enacted. Indeed, the Civil Rights Movement probably impeded acceptance of Community Action within key segments of the Executive Branch precisely because of the program’s localist orientation.\textsuperscript{36}

There is a school of thought with which I would also like to take issue which alleges that a certain historical determinism drove Community Action forward to its predictable pinnacle as one of the centerpieces of the Economic Opportunity Act.\textsuperscript{37} For a variety of reasons, it is difficult to conclude that Community Action was in any way inevitable. First, from a politically pragmatic perspective, if Community Action had surfaced as an organizing principle for the War on Poverty before Kennedy’s assassination, President Johnson might have been more reluctant to make it a focus of his anti-poverty program. Second, Shriver’s appointment to the helm of the poverty program was a not insignificant obstacle to the acceptance of Community Action.\textsuperscript{38} Third, it was sheer luck that ultimate responsibility for drafting the anti-poverty legislation was vested in the Justice Department and not in HEW; Community Action had a

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{33} EOA, Title II.
\item \textsuperscript{34} See generally D. MOYNIHAN, supra note 14.
\item \textsuperscript{35} See supra p. 14.
\item \textsuperscript{36} See supra note 25.
\item \textsuperscript{37} I consider Daniel Patrick Moynihan and Robert Nisbet as leaders of this particular school of thought.
\item \textsuperscript{38} See supra pp. 21-25.
\end{itemize}
friend in Robert Kennedy. In the final analysis, I believe that Community Action’s inclusion in the final outline of the Johnson Administration’s War on Poverty was due in part to luck, and in part to its resonance with the American political mythos of local autonomy.

H. The War on Poverty Takes Legislative Form

Even though it had been decided that Community Action was to be included in the poverty bill, there remained the task of drafting the legislation. Yarmolinsky, Shriver’s deputy, originally assigned the drafting job to HEW, but later transferred the task to the Justice Department on the theory that a department comprised of lawyers would draft a better bill.

Assistant Attorney General Norbert Schlie led the group drafting the bill. We began drafting the legislation on a weekend in the second half of February, building on both agency and non-agency documents. The bill we produced over that long weekend was never significantly changed by either the Executive Branch or Congress. Particularly immune to alteration was Title II of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, which provided for Community Action.

During the drafting process, we resolved some problems that had plagued us throughout the planning stages, while making fundamental decisions about the substantive outline of a War on Poverty. In sifting through the proposed programs to identify those we thought most appropriate for legislative consideration, we had to be selective. For instance, while the Jobs Corps and the Neighborhood Youth Corps were included, the Mississippi “latifundia” program was not.

Both the Jobs Corps and the Neighborhood Youth Corps Programs had their roots in the youth and works programs of the New Deal: the National Youth Administration and the Civilian Conservation Corps. For some time, Senator, and later Vice President, Hubert Humphrey had been calling for the resuscitation of such programs. Humphrey was now vigorously supported on this issue by Sargent Shriver and Labor Secretary Wirtz, who thought that programs modeled on the New Deal example were a politically attractive means of dealing with two critical factors in the poverty equation, namely youth and employment. Not only were these New

39. EOA, Title II.
40. Proposed by the Department of Agriculture, the Mississippi “latifundia” program was intended to provide assistance to the abject poor of the Mississippi delta region through the repurchasing and redistribution of land.
Deal programs resurrected in the poverty bill, they were also emphasized in the text by making the Jobs Corps, with its objective of facilitating non-urban employment for ghetto youth, the first title of the proposed Economic Opportunity Act.  

In drafting that section of the bill, Title II, pertaining to Community Action, we searched for statutory language that would make concrete our intent to encourage participation of the poor in forming local solutions to the poverty problem. HEW's Harold Horowitz provided the words which eventually appeared in the statute: Community Action was to be run with the "maximum feasible participation of the residents of the areas." These words best conveyed our firm conviction that the poor were as able as anyone else to plan and implement programs which affected them most directly, that their participation would make the programs more effective, and that only through this participation could the paternalism characteristic of earlier poverty programs be eliminated.

After the bill was drafted, it was distributed to the various federal agencies for their consideration. At a large meeting held at the end of February and run by Shriver, the bill was discussed and approved by agency representatives.

The Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 sailed through the Congress on August 20th. Meanwhile, Shriver was hard at work assembling a new implementing agency, the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO), which would fill in the details of the War on Poverty. Basic programs built on the conceptual foundation of Community Action, such as the Neighborhood Health Centers Program, the Legal Services Program, Headstart and Upward Bound, were already in the implementation stage. By the time the bill had passed, the agency was ready to move.

The OEO soon established working relationships around the country with local institutions, both governmental and non-governmental, which were to assume development and implementation functions. As we had both anticipated and encouraged, the structure of local participation varied according to the needs and resources of different communities. Some cities and towns were neither eager


42. EOA, Title II.

nor able to run their own Community Action Program. These localities that opted for federal direction as well as sponsorship of Community Action typically possessed only a part-time legislative body and a city manager who was already responsible for a downtown renewal project. Community Action enabled such towns and cities to establish non-profit, non-governmental agencies to administer the poverty programs in their jurisdictions. Because Community Action provided an flexible approach for combatting poverty, it was able to do what had never been done before: facilitate an assault on poverty at every local level, including the neighborhood level, regardless of the locality's particular resource structure.\(^4\)

J. Community Action Under Fire

These and more independent community liaisons developed throughout the fall and winter of 1964 and into 1965; eventually more than 900 Community Action agencies were established at the local level. Before these agencies could begin their initial organizing activities, however, powerful figures within the Administration launched a major attack on Community Action in an attempt to vitiate its influence in the War on Poverty. The source of much of the criticism was the Department of Labor, which, despite the prominence of the Jobs Corps in the Economic Opportunity Act, remained threatened by the potential power of the Community Action concept.

First, some argued that the Community Action Program would function to spread "New York City's brand of ethnic socialism" throughout the country.\(^4\) Second, and more compelling in the view of the White House, was the claim that Community Action would result in the creation of a political party that would compete with the Democratic Party for constituents. The implicit conclusion was that the Johnson Administration was financing the destruction of the Democratic Party by promoting the Economic Opportunity legislation. These arguments may have had an effect on President Johnson himself, who was quoted as saying that we had made a "boo-boo" by including Community Action in the War on Poverty legislation.\(^6\)

As the War on Poverty, and necessarily Community Action, got

\(^{44}\) For a more pessimistic view of the possibilities of Community Action, see generally D. MOYNIHAN, supra note 14.
\(^{45}\) Daniel Patrick Moynihan characterized Community Action this way in a conversation with me in late 1964.
\(^{46}\) Charles Schultz, then Director of the Budget Bureau, reported this as the President's comment.
under way, the opposition branched out. Certain academic policymakers mounted a continual attack on Community Action by means of university seminars held in Boston and Washington, designed to “monitor” and “evaluate” the Community Action Programs. Whenever Congressional hearings were held on OEO authorizing legislation, these critics presented their seminar reports as “impartial data” to assist legislative evaluation of Community Action’s track record.\textsuperscript{47} Attacks on Community Action were also mounted from other quarters. Some big-city mayors launched one line of attack by charging Community Action with the political crime of organizing an internal civic enemy. Other opponents argued that Community Action was the source of the mid-sixties riots. Community Action was even labelled by some as the self-interested invention of academic reformers who sought to line their own pockets at the expense of the poor.

Community Action was attacked at the level of theory as well. Some critics charged that Community Action was theoretically deficient because it was grounded on what they said were empirically uninformed propositions that the poor were capable of participating in government, and that their participation would benefit society.\textsuperscript{48}

These relentless attacks on both the program and the poor were made not only in the Executive Branch and the policy-making community, but in the Congress as well. Legislative opposition translated into budget restraints in the form of multiplied restrictions on funds allocated to and categorized for the Community Action Program.\textsuperscript{49}

The criticism, growing in strength and effect, continued to the end of the Johnson Administration and provided adequate support for Richard Nixon’s strong stance against both the War on Poverty and Community Action. By the time Nixon assumed office in 1969

\textsuperscript{47} Daniel Patrick Moynihan and his students at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology orchestrated this particular critical effort.

\textsuperscript{48} Moynihan was again a visible spokesperson for this kind of criticism: It may be that the poor are never “ready” to assume power in an advanced society: the exercise of power in an effective manner is an ability acquired through apprenticeship and seasoning. Thrust on an individual or group, the results are often painful to observe. . . . [T]he power of the weak [is] the power to disrupt, to embarrass, to provoke, to goad to punitive rage. . . . D. MOYNIHAN, supra note 14, at 136-37.

\textsuperscript{49} Representative Edith Green (D-Oregon) and Representative Albert Quie (R-Minnesota) led the congressional opposition. An example of the kind of crippling restrictions the Green-Quie faction managed to impose on Community Action was the requirement that the programs originate in and be subject to the control of existing municipal governments.
Enlightened Localism

and appointed a staff that included advisors from the anti-Community Action faction within the Johnson Administration, Community Action was, for all intents and purposes, a dead letter. The formal demise of Community Action was delayed by its conversion in 1976 into a mere service delivery mechanism under the aegis of the Community Services Administration; Community Action received a nearly fatal blow in 1981 when the Community Services Administration itself was terminated.\(^5^0\)

K. Some Reflections on Community Action

If the rhetorical theme of the Great Society was economic opportunity, as the title of the War on Poverty legislation suggests, its more profound theme rested on faith in a utopian yet realizable form of localism represented by Community Action. To be sure, certain programs established by the Economic Opportunity Act such as the Jobs Corps, the Neighborhood Youth Corps, basic education for adults and work experience programs, were explicitly intended to promote economic opportunity for members of low-income groups. The same was true of the efforts to enhance certain sectors of the established social welfare program structure including Aid to Families with Dependent Children and Social Security.

As I have tried to show in this section of the article, however, Community Action was different in kind from these War on Poverty programs devoted to the American ethos of economic opportunity. Community Action sought to go beyond simple economic assistance in both principle and operation to achieve a new organization of political life in this country. The Community Action Program was much less important as an instrument of direct economic empowerment than as a new approach to the organization of federal and state activities in the field of social welfare programming. With its emphasis on “cooperation from the bottom up” and “maximum feasible participation” of local residents in combatting the poverty problem, Community Action brought an old idea about government into the

modern era of the bureaucratic state. Politics, writ both large and small, prevented Community Action from fully realizing its potential as a new approach to government; in so doing, it also, and perhaps more tragically, prevented the political empowerment of the poor in American society.

II. Innovation in Educational Policy: Equality of Opportunity and Educational Quality

Just as the concept of Community Action marked a distinct break with previous federal efforts directed at poverty, so too the educational programming of the Great Society was disjunctive in both degree and kind with what had gone before. In order to place the Great Society's achievements on the educational front in perspective, it is instructive to review briefly the role played by the federal government in educating its citizenry in the decades that preceded the Johnson initiative.

A. The Federal Government's Role in Education Before the Great Society

With the exception of the World War II and Korean Conflict GI Bills, federal involvement in education was relatively limited prior to the years of the Great Society. During that period, the only federal educational programs were the Land Grant Colleges program of the Lincoln Administration, the small vocational education and training program which developed in the wake of World War I, the agricultural research and education programs, and

52. Because my perspective derives from having participated in and observed executive decision-making during the Johnson Administration, my account of federal involvement in education is necessarily skewed towards the Executive Branch. I do not mean to de-emphasize judicial efforts on this front, especially Brown v. Board of Education, 347 U.S. 483 (1954) and its progeny, that materialized in the aftermath of World War II. These significant judicial contributions to enhanced educational opportunity are forever in the background of (and in some sense provide the backbone for) my account.

32
Enlightened Localism

the Impact Aid Program\textsuperscript{56} that provided financial aid to local school districts burdened by the World War II military build-up. No federal initiative rivaled the educational vision of the Founders\textsuperscript{57} until the National Science Foundation Act was passed in 1950.\textsuperscript{58}

During the 1950's, government began to devote more attention to education\textsuperscript{59} from two not always complementary perspectives: one focused on the cost and means of federal involvement in education; the other on educational quality. While local school districts were chronically in need of additional funding during this period, they did not actively seek aid for education at the federal level, in part because federal aid implied federal control. Proponents of federal aid to local school districts advocated funding and financing techniques designed to procure federal monies while avoiding direct federal interference with local educational activity.\textsuperscript{60}

The funding needs of local school districts became even more critical in the wake of the Sputnik launching in 1957. While the Sputnik episode generated massive public concern over the state of science and math instruction, the National Defense Education Act of 1958\textsuperscript{61} was the principal resulting federal legislation, and it was directed primarily at higher rather than elementary and secondary schooling. In addition, federal efforts made in response to international incidents were oriented towards increasing educational performance in those subject areas likely to be the locus of future Superpower competition.

Thus, the 1950's yielded little in the way of concrete federal initiatives at the elementary and secondary levels. It remained for Presi-

\textsuperscript{57} This vision of the nation's founders regarding education is illustrated by their proposal for a national university. See Washington, Farewell Address, in DOCUMENTS OF AMERICAN HISTORY 169, 173 (H.S. Commager ed. 1948).
\textsuperscript{58} The National Science Foundation Act of 1950, Pub. L. No. 81-507, 64 Stat. 149 (1950), was designed to promote the development of a coherent national policy with respect to science, to foster research and education in the sciences, to promote the international exchange of scientific information and to facilitate the federal government's own scientific inquiries.
\textsuperscript{59} This increased attention is attributable in part to population increases and to Cold War propagandizing that led to growing public demand for better education in the form of more highly qualified teachers and more attention to science and math courses, for example.
\textsuperscript{60} One such technique involved requesting federal appropriations for building construction instead of classroom operation. This type of scheme was limited in its usefulness, however, to districts that anticipated a pattern of structural expansion over a period of years, and did not fulfill other funding needs characteristic of the great majority of localities.
dent Kennedy to launch the first cohesive federal initiative directed at the earlier, and in many respects more critical, years in the educational cycle. While the Kennedy initiative ultimately failed, it merits attention because it provided the foundation for the Johnson Administration's more successful efforts.

For elementary and secondary schools, the Kennedy Administration attempted to secure unrestricted or "general" federal aid from Congress. Most local school officials had been clamoring for general aid because they believed it posed the least threat of direct federal interference with day-to-day school operations. The general aid package had to be structured in such a way as to maximize local budgetary control over federal monies in order to ensure its political acceptability. It could take many different forms including, for example, funds for teacher salary support or building construction.

Elementary and secondary school legislation providing for general aid was proposed and reproposed by the Kennedy Administration.62 These legislative initiatives were repeatedly thwarted by a combination of forces, the most persistent and seemingly insoluble of which was the church-state issue. Catholic school supporters opposed Protestants over the question whether federal aid to education should be distributed to parochial schools. The prominence of the church-state battle should not overshadow other intransigent forces, however, the most conspicuous of which was Southern opposition to federal aid for black schools.63 These socio-political realities only aggravated Executive efforts to ensure local control of federal education funds. In the eleventh hour before anticipated legislative ratification of a general aid bill proposed by the Kennedy Administration in the spring of 1962, telegrams and letters in opposition from public schools and religious organizations flooded the Congress and blocked the bill's passage.

Opposition was not nearly as fierce over federal aid to higher education, especially given the link in the national consciousness between scientific inferiority and international power. A positive consequence of this Cold War mentality was the successful passage of additional aid to higher education in 1963.64 The aid demon-

63. At the time, Chairman of the House Education and Labor Committee Adam Clayton Powell provided a visible and insistent voice against this Southern opposition.
Enlightened Localism

strated the Kennedy Administration's commitment to higher education, even if at this point the commitment was only a domestic reflection of Superpower politics. The scope of this aid, however, was limited. It remained for the Great Society to realize the potential for enhanced educational opportunity implicit in the Kennedy Administration's policies.

B. The Great Society's Contribution to Educational Opportunity

By mid-1963, educational planning had been slowed by the failure of general aid legislation in the Congress. Efforts were renewed, however, when policy-makers involved in planning the War on Poverty thought that associating the lack of educational opportunities with the presence of poverty might neutralize the opposition to federal aid to elementary and secondary education. Other factors contributed to a climate of renewed effort on the education front. Public pressure for improvements in education and educational opportunity was mounting. The atmosphere of international competition created by the Sputnik incident intensified public awareness of education's role in America's future, an awareness made all the more acute by the Government's announcement in 1963 of its "Moon Shot" objective. Furthermore, a sense of general deficiency pervaded the post-assassination national mood. Most importantly, however, an activist Johnson Administration possessed a powerful vision of a Great Society in which education played a central role. The time was clearly ripe for broadening and deepening the national commitment to education. Obstacles, however, remained.

As I have tried to show above, local educators were generally apprehensive about federal influence in local educational activities. They sought to avoid or prevent federal control whenever possible. Local educational officials conceived of improvement in educational quality as a mere function of externalities such as funding and teacher credentials. They therefore believed that the role of the federal government in elementary and secondary education should be limited to providing these externalities.

Another vision of the federal government's role in elementary and secondary education would strengthen rather than weaken local communities, however. This vision was predicated on the belief that federal aid could be structured to improve local educational structures ("internalities" if you will) by creating alternative programs, institu-

66. Supra pp. 33, 34.
tions and consortia to focus the local community's efforts on the nature of and solution to its particular educational needs. Like Community Action, this structural approach would likely lead to broader and deeper participation of local people in the affairs of their communities.

While by 1963 no one had publicly articulated this kind of structural approach to federal educational policy, the Great Society pushed the federal government in this very, perhaps even radical, different direction. A review of the two major planning exercises which shaped the bulk of the Johnson Administration's educational programming, the 1964 and 1967 President's Task Forces on Education, demonstrates the extent of the Great Society's commitment to the enhancement of both opportunity and quality in education.

1. The 1964 Task Force

In the late spring of 1964, President Johnson appointed a White House Task Force on Education. This group deliberated into the late fall, at which time it issued a report that advocated making the poor the focus of an aid package for elementary and secondary education. Focus on the poor was considered appropriate for a variety of reasons, not the least of which was the desire to avoid the religious-Southern coalition that had defeated President Kennedy's general aid bill.67

In choosing the Task Force's members, President Johnson sought to offset political contradictions with intellectual competence, thereby to recreate on a lesser scale the diversity of opinion which would greet any proposal for federal legislation. Influential representatives of religious organizations, civil rights groups, business interests, the local control-no federal influence constituency, and the federal control camp comprised the Task Force. In this way President Johnson made certain that the Task Force possessed sufficient diversity to ensure respect for any consensus it might reach or any proposal it might make. At the same time, this diversity rendered problematic reaching a consensus with respect to key issues. That the Task Force was able to reach a consensus is a testament both to its abilities and to the pressing nature of the issue with which it was faced.

John W. Gardner, psychologist and President of the Carnegie Corporation, chaired the 1964 Task Force. As Task Force Chair, Gardner attempted to instill in his colleagues the ethos of innovation as the motivating principle for their collective effort. By em-

67. Supra p. 34.
Enlightened Localism

phasizing innovation, Gardner meant to imply not a technical or scientific definition of the term, but rather a more enlightened and socio-culturally based concept.

Two other Task Force members, Edwin Land and Jerrold Zacharias, were physical scientists; their presence was at least in part a testament to the prestigious position science had attained since the National Science Foundation had launched its campaign in the 1950's to promote the "new math" and the "new science." Both Land and Zacharias were amenable to Gardner's emphasis on innovation in educational planning: Land, the businessman-scientist, was a gifted inventor; Zacharias was a university scientist intent on implementing innovative curricula in math and science at the elementary and secondary levels.

Two other members of the Task Force, Ralph Tyler and David Reisman, were social scientists. Tyler, a specialist in educational research, was cautious and analytic while at the same time committed to the Gardnerian variety of innovation. Reisman, a leading figure in the social sciences, was intent upon determining the political limits of the Task Force's proposals. While President Johnson had charged the Task Force to proceed with unconstrained imagination, at Reisman's urging, "constrained creativity" became another of the Task Force's prominent motifs. The other eight Task Force members represented the many different constituencies concerned about educational policy.68 The Task Force was also assisted and influenced by some people not formally members such as Francis Keppel, former Dean of the Harvard School of Education and then Commissioner of Education. Various staff members of the Budget Bureau and other federal agencies also assisted the Task Force in carrying out its mandate. In addition, the Task Force called upon people around the country to submit ideas and program proposals for consideration.

The energy generated by and around the Task Force ultimately translated into concrete proposals that, were they carried out, would have involved massive federal intervention into the elementary and

---

68. State educational interests were represented by James Allen, Jr., one of the few chief state school officials in the country genuinely concerned about educational quality. The Reverend Paul C. Reinert, a Roman Catholic priest, represented one side of the church-state issue. Raymond Tucker was the representative big-city mayor. Stephen Wright was a university official, and Sidney Marland was a big-city public school superintendent. Hedley Donovan, editor of a national news magazine, represented the civic-minded yet business-oriented constituency. Harold Gores represented no identifiable interests but did possess a strong background in educational issues. Clark Kerr, the last member of the Task Force, was a university president.
secondary educational systems. While the idea of federal participation carried with it certain political liabilities, it also possessed the potential to impose uniform educational standards, to improve educational quality nationwide, and most importantly, to improve educational opportunities for the poor. This latter objective became the centerpiece of the Task Force's program of innovation.

Before considering substantive solutions, the Task Force had to outline an approach to the problems it had identified; in particular, it had to meet the objections likely to be voiced by the opponents of general federal aid. In its Report, issued November 14, 1964, the Task Force supported general federal aid as the best means of assuring innovation and qualitative improvement in education. The Task Force recognized, however, that political realities might retard acceptance of its proposals:

The Task Force favors general Federal aid to the public schools.... It is not a part of our assignment to weigh questions of political feasibility. But we believe it is of crucial importance that other forms of aid—such as the major programs dealt with elsewhere in this report—not be held up while we go through one more agonizing tug-of-war over the church-state issues.

The Task Force was careful not to exhibit an intransigent attachment to the notion of general federal aid. Had the Task Force expressed such an unqualified commitment, it would probably have fanned the fires of the church-state question beyond repair and rendered impotent the Johnson initiative.

Having successfully avoided the general aid pitfall, at least rhetorically, the Task Force Report went on to make a strong case for orienting the federal effort in elementary and secondary education towards increasing educational opportunities for the poor. The

---

69. The 1964 Task Force afforded less attention and a lower priority to issues of higher education.
    71. Chapter II of the Task Force Report, entitled "Opportunity to Learn," detailed this rationale for federal aid to elementary and secondary education:

The American school system is designed to provide a common and adequate education for millions of children, and it has not done that for children who do not fall into common categories — at the fortunate end of the spectrum, the exceptionally talented; at the less fortunate end, the poor child, the physically or mentally handicapped, indeed all of those who for various reasons fall behind their peers.

In recent years the nation has begun to provide better opportunities for exceptionally talented children. These efforts must not slacken (indeed we must do far more). But we must now make a comparable effort on behalf of less fortunate children.

...Theoretically, a child in rags should be as teachable as a child in tweeds. But most poor children are to be found in our rural and urban slums, and these slums breed conditions that do in fact diminish the teachability of the child. The child
Enlightened Localism

Task Force members thought they might thereby achieve a crucial educational reform while simultaneously neutralizing some of the more vocal opposition to federal aid. The Task Force call for aid to poor children was a useful political and moral imperative; the category of poverty cut across and embraced most other interest group identities. Poor children were rural, urban, white, black, Catholic and Protestant. In addition, it was thought that aid to poor children, by setting a significant precedent in terms of a large-scale, categorical grant program, would facilitate the eventual emergence of general federal aid to education. Thus, the idea of a poverty-centered proposal was clearly a compromise measure that fell short of general aid; at this point, however, it was also an idea with the potential to unite the country, as it had the Task Force, behind the federal initiative.

And unite the country it did. National compassion for poor children both transcended and confounded the opposition to federal involvement. Lobbyists for religious organizations found the position of trading off poor children for their own special interests an especially difficult one to sustain. Neither Catholics nor Protestants could protest too loudly. Where Protestants found it difficult to maintain a strict separation-of-church-and-state stance in the face of a call for federal aid to increase educational opportunities for the nation's poor, neither could Roman Catholics espouse an intransigent "us or nothing" attitude. As it turned out, the public was even willing to risk subsidizing Catholic schools through the aid to poor school children legislation, insofar as some poor Catholic schools were likely to be beneficiaries under this part of the legislative scheme.

The Task Force recommendation for a federal education program based on aid to poor school children was eventually translated by the budgetary and legislative process into a large-scale formula grant program to the states. Under Title I of the Elementary and

---

finds little in his family or neighborhood environment to encourage intellectual growth. The schools are very probably inferior in quality, and it is not easy for them to attract good teachers. Thus in those areas where children need more intensive educational services than other children, they often get less. For too many of the poor, educational experience has been a series of failures, each failure reinforcing the lesson of failure so that education is for them an habituation to despair, to lack of self-confidence and selfrespect, and to a sense of barriers not passed.  
Id. at 6-7 (emphasis in original). This chapter of the 1964 Task Force Report provided the foundation for what later became Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, Pub. L. No. 89-10, 79 Stat. 27 (current version at 20 U.S.C. § 236 (1965)) [hereinafter cited as ESEA, Title I].

---
Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA),\textsuperscript{72} every school district in America with a sufficient number of poor children (as defined by the legislation) was eligible for the federal monies.\textsuperscript{73}

While the Task Force believed that aid to the poor could provide an effective way of initiating meaningful federal involvement in elementary and secondary education, it preferred not to stake its entire program on a then unproven intuition. Religious and other opposition forces could still subvert the legislative process by arranging closet conversations with congressmen, inserting complex qualifications and reservations into drafts of legislation, and haggling over program details. The Task Force sought to avoid this kind of indirect obstructionism by proposing an affirmative corollary to the poverty-directed aid in the form of "supplementary education centers."\textsuperscript{74}

The Task Force conceived the supplementary centers as institutions that would reinforce and enhance existing educational programs in elementary and secondary schools around the country. These centers were intended neither to substitute for ongoing programs nor to add superfluous programming. Their availability was not limited to slum schools. Thus, supplementary education centers could even be employed to help parochial schools remedy their educational deficiencies in the sciences.

The theory motivating the supplementary centers proposal resembled the philosophy behind the Community Action Program in that both sought to provide a flexible institutional structure which

\textsuperscript{72} ESEA, Title I.

\textsuperscript{73} Because the program's reach was so broad, the legislation required large appropriations from the outset to effectuate its goals. Even in the early years of the program, its cost approached the one billion dollar plus mark. \textit{See, e.g.}, \textit{H.R. Rep. No. 1814, 89th Cong., 2nd Sess. 1}, \textit{reprinted in} 1966 \textit{U.S. Code & Admin. News} 3844, 3844.

Despite the apparent extent of congressional commitment to appropriations for the program, the federal funds were never either sufficient or sufficiently focused on poor children to achieve the Task Force objectives. While appropriations under Title I currently hover at the $3.5 billion level, \textit{Office of Management and Budget, Executive Office of the President, Appendix to Budget of the United States Government for Fiscal Year 1986 I-I(1)}, the Task Force estimated that by the mid to late 1970's, spending under Title I would total $6-10 billion in 1967 dollars.

In addition, the extent to which the funds have benefited poor children directly, as opposed to local school districts in general, is an open question. The automatic formula grant program mechanism is at least partly to blame for this ambiguity. The Office of Education may have also undermined the legislative mandate by promulgating regulations which did not require the states to ensure that poor schoolchildren be the direct beneficiaries of the aid, even though the Commissioner had the authority to ensure this result. \textit{See, e.g.}, \textit{ESEA, Title I, §§ 201-202.}

\textsuperscript{74} This Task Force proposal subsequently became Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, \textit{Pub. L. No. 89-10, 79 Stat. 27, 39} (repealed by 20 \textit{U.S.C.}§ 841 (1978)) [hereinafter cited as \textit{ESEA, Title III}].
Enlightened Localism

would facilitate local organization and action, and to achieve desirable social advances by establishing the infrastructure necessary for resolving debilitating political contradictions. While the educational centers were intended only to supplement and not to replace the existing national school system, they would function as parallel institutions which, in addition to providing needed services, would compete with and thereby improve the quality of elementary and secondary schools.\textsuperscript{75} In this way it was hoped that the centers would both remedy existing deficiencies in elementary and secondary education, and unite public opinion in the call for more fundamental changes in the future.

To implement the supplementary education centers proposal, both the Task Force Report and the subsequent legislation recommended a project grant approach as opposed to the automatic formula grant mechanism employed in the aid to poor children program.\textsuperscript{76} Under a project grant regime, the supplementary centers program would function like a private foundation located within government, authorized to make large-scale grants to improve the national educational system.

In the eyes of many interested observers, however, the project grant approach, by vesting authority in the Office of Education to determine which school districts would receive funding, was inherently suspect. Such an approach, it was argued, would lead inevitably to that most dreaded result: federal control of elementary and secondary schools. Moreover, many local school officials saw the project grant implementation mechanism of the supplementary center proposal as facilitating general aid. Because aid from the supplementary centers program would not be limited to poor children or slum schools, large-scale aid was not precluded under the program.

\textsuperscript{75} Although the Task Force did not emphasize the relationship between the supplementary centers concept and the idea of a "parallel school system," the latter was surely an intellectual progenitor of the former. While establishment of a parallel school system funded by the federal government would have been politically unpalatable, the supplementary centers concept retained certain of the advantages posed by an alternative system, while at the same time emphasizing more traditional supplementary functions such as language or science program enhancement.

\textsuperscript{76} Formula grants are general eligibility grants for states and localities. For instance, a formula grant for supplementary education centers would have provided funding based upon the percentage of poor children in a particular school district. Project grants, on the other hand, require application and explanation for why the money is needed and to what end. Using project grants to determine funding for supplementary centers allowed for the selection of the highest quality projects, and thus for choosing among competing projects.
Given the broad federal authority incorporated into the supplementary education centers program and the possibility that such authority could translate into direct federal control, it is surprising that Title III of the ESEA was either enacted or administered. Nevertheless, at the time the Task Force issued its report in the fall of 1964, a number of factors favored the program’s acceptance. First, blanket ideological opposition to federal involvement in elementary and secondary education had weakened considerably since the days of the Kennedy Administration’s failed initiative. In addition, the Task Force incorporated the principle of local control into the supplementary education centers proposal in an effort to mitigate anticipated opposition, and Congress followed suit by conditioning federal funds on the reinforcement and extension of the local control principle. Furthermore, the program’s emphasis on quality education appealed to the Budget Bureau because it carried the promise of extracting the maximum effect per federal dollar invested, unlike formula grant-based programs.

Most importantly, however, the supplementary education centers program resolved the political problem of aid to parochial schools. Legislative articulation of the supplementary centers program preserved ownership and control of supplementary facilities and programs in the local schools while requiring that they share both resources and programming with other institutions in the community, including Community Action agencies, libraries, universities, museums and private schools. Such a consortium, it was hoped, would both develop a sense of corporate and cooperative identity and enhance educational quality and opportunity within the community. In addition, the establishment of an interdependent community consortium through the supplementary education centers would create a satisfactory political (and constitutional) vehicle for aid to private schools.

After resolving the issues of federal control and parochial participation, at least at the planning stage, the Task Force still faced the

---


78. The supplementary centers provided an important and effective form of aid to Roman Catholic children under conditions that most people could accept and even endorse. While the centers, in effect, provided some parochial schoolchildren with a public school education, the corporate and somewhat indirect nature of the enterprise made this result tolerable.
major issue of federal aid to predominantly black schools. The key to resolving this problem lay in a two-pronged appeal to Southern sensibilities: federal aid to elementary and secondary schools would benefit poor white children as well as poor black children, and it would help relieve the strain on state taxing and spending programs. To be sure, the fact that Adam Clayton Powell was the Chairman of the House Education and Labor Committee at the time helped assure passage of this part of the Task Force's program. National public opinion on the poverty issue, mounting concern over educational opportunity and quality, and the sympathetic presence of a Southern President were also important in tempering Southern opposition.

If aid to poor schoolchildren and supplementary education centers were the principal elements of a program designed to persuade the President and the Congress to enact educational legislation, other proposals also figured prominently in the Task Force Report. Of particular importance were the proposals to establish regional research and demonstration laboratories, and to subsidize state departments of education and textbook purchases. The research laboratory proposal was designed as a forum for the innovation and dissemination of advanced educational techniques, and reflected the Task Force's commitment to its intellectual and academic constituency. The laboratory idea was a favorite of the Budget Bureau, reflecting that agency's persistent advocacy of measures designed to improve educational quality. The subsidy proposals were intended as a fairly blatant appeal to school budgeteers, and, in the case of textbooks, as further financial aid to parochial schools.

The Task Force also contributed somewhat to the federal role in advancing opportunity in higher education, especially with respect to financing the college education of low-income students. Because the focus of the Task Force was on elementary and secondary education, however, the primary initiatives in this area derived from other sources, namely the Budget Bureau's work-study program, the White House's guaranteed student loan program, and Congress' low-income student grant program.

There was no political battle in Congress over the legislation drafted to implement the Task Force's proposals. The Administration's bill sailed through the Congress relatively unscathed, owing in part both to the President's insistence and to the legislative adroitness of Wilbur Cohen and Francis Keppel.79 I believe the suc-

79. Commissioner Keppel's legislative strategy was particularly important in antici-
cess of this legislative initiative can be attributed, more generally, to the fact that the approach to federal aid to elementary and secondary education derived from the executive branch.

Thus the initial foray of the Great Society into the arena of education was an overwhelming success, especially in the crucial and controversial area of elementary and secondary education. Although aid to the poor was a central objective of the Task Force, victory on this count was achieved only because aid to poor schoolchildren was perceived as a means of achieving other, more politically pressing objectives. In higher education programs as well as in those instituted at the elementary and secondary levels, the Great Society began to reveal itself as not only seeking to enhance educational opportunity, but also to equalize education; that is, to increase the educational achievement and status of the entire population. The emphasis on equality of education, or quality education for all, manifested itself in the second major educational initiative of the Great Society, the President’s Task Force on Education appointed in 1966 and reporting on June 30, 1967.

2. The 1967 Task Force

This second Task Force was appointed at a time when the Great Society, with strong Presidential backing and widespread public acceptance, seemed capable of further development. This atmosphere of optimism, together with the administrative need for systematic annual planning for renewing and extending the President’s legislative program, led to the second convocation of major policy-making figures and educational experts.80

80. In the interim between the 1964 and the 1967 Task Forces, planning exercises of a different caliber, aimed at the bureaucracy and the Congress, had been conducted. Because these efforts were oriented towards managing and extending existing programs, their goals were more modest and their successes were less notable from the standpoint of national educational policy. In addition, while there would be other Presidential Task Forces on Education after 1967, the waning fortunes of the Johnson Administration rendered these efforts fruitless. See infra p. 51.
Enlightened Localism

The White House staff, in consultation with inside and outside advisors, selected the members of this second Task Force in much the same way it had chosen the 1964 Task Force. Particularly influential in the selection process were John Gardner, then Secretary of HEW, and Harold Howe, the new Commissioner of Education who succeeded Francis Keppel.

Chaired by William K. Friday, President of the University of North Carolina, the 1967 Task Force\(^8\)\(^1\) gave extended attention to the proposals for the education of poor children at the elementary, secondary and post-secondary levels. Where the Gardner Task Force had opened the door to equality of educational opportunity, the Friday Task Force moved towards equality in education.\(^8\)\(^2\)

The Report of the Friday Task Force essentially claimed that equality of opportunity was a norm without substance unless it was implemented within a context of equal (here meaning equal quality) educational institutions and practices.\(^8\)\(^3\) From there, it required lit-

---

81. I served as the Executive Secretary of the 1967 Task Force.

82. Moving from an emphasis on equal opportunity to an emphasis on equalization in education constituted a radical step in the history of American social welfare policy, and, consequently, attempts to implement this goal were hesitant and partial. See infra pp. 47-49, 51. Nevertheless, it was an important move both because it revealed an outer limit of the Great Society, at least during those last troubled years of the Johnson Administration, and because it provides a valuable blueprint for future innovation in educational policy.

83. The Report of the 1967 Task Force stressed the origin and nature of its commitment to equality in education in its first pages:

This report reflects the conviction of this Task Force that major steps should now be taken to extend the quality of opportunity for learning and to advance the quality of education at all levels. . . . The Task Force wants all children to have an even chance for a good education. Right now too many do not. Most of these are poor children. The richer your family the better education you will get. . . .

If you live in the city, the education offered to you will be of a lower grade than in many of its suburbs. But, even so, the chances are you will get a better education than if you live in a rural community. If you live in a Southern rural hamlet, you have practically no chance to learn what most children learn in other parts of the country.

It seems to us that where you live or how poor your parents are should not be a bar to getting a decent education. Therefore, this Task Force stresses "equalization of opportunity" and "quality." We do not recommend an "equalization" that reduces everyone to the same level (emphasis in original). Our aim is to raise those below standard—whoever or wherever they are in this country—to up to at least a minimum standard. For example:

* Poor children, wherever they live and whatever their race or ethnic origin, should have an opportunity for education at least equal in extent and quality to that of most nonpoor children.

* City children should have an opportunity for an education equivalent at least to that offered in its better suburbs.

* Southern children should be enabled to do at least as well as those in some other regions.

* Children from minority groups should receive an education which places them on a parity with other children in the same school district or governmental jurisdictions.
tle effort to conclude that equality of education meant, in addition
to equality of "inputs," equality of "outputs" or equality of re-
results.\textsuperscript{84} Having thus claimed this new ground for the poor, the Task
Force recommended that the federal government once again make
education of the poor its first priority.\textsuperscript{85} To implement this objec-
tive, the Task Force proposed that the federal government:

1) Double the amount of appropriations under Title I of the
ESEA.\textsuperscript{86} This would have meant an increase to approximately $2.5
billion.

2) Increase Title I expenditures annually so that total program
expenditures would fall between $6 and 10 billion, as measured in
1967 dollars, by the mid-1970's.

3) Provide incentives for mixing low and middle-income chil-
dren in schools, and make Title I funds available to middle and up-
ner middle-class school districts on the condition that poor children
be included within their school populations.

4) Conduct a massive "moon shot" effort through better curric-
ula and higher-quality teaching to improve the overall level of in-
struction afforded poor children. The Gardner Task Force's
laboratory of educational innovation concept was thus to be ex-
tended and expanded upon.\textsuperscript{87}

5) Institute a "Metropolitan School" system to develop quality
educational programming which would initially funnel $25 million
to each of fifty large metropolitan areas serving a mixture of race
and income classes. Five major metropolitan areas would also re-
cieve additional funding to experiment with techniques designed to
create and maintain a favorable racial and economic mix in their
schools. Funding for the target metropolitan schools program was
to come from federal and other monies available under urban re-
newal and other programs.\textsuperscript{88}

Although it is possible to interpret the Friday Task Force propos-
als, especially the "moon shot" and the metropolitan school pro-
grams, as mere extensions of the 1964 Task Force initiatives,\textsuperscript{89} I

\textsuperscript{84} The Friday Task Force formulation differed markedly in this respect from that of
the Office of Education's 1966 Report, J. Coleman, E. Campbell, C. Hobson, J.
McPortland, A. Mood, F. Weinfeld & R. York, Equality of Educational Opportu-

\textsuperscript{85} 1967 Task Force Report, supra note 83, at 1-46.

\textsuperscript{86} ESEA, Title I.

\textsuperscript{87} See supra p. 43.

\textsuperscript{88} 1967 Task Force Report, supra note 83, at 1-46.

\textsuperscript{89} See supra pp. 36-44.
Enlightened Localism

believe the Friday Task Force extended those initiatives to the point where they embodied new ideas about the appropriate role of the federal government in elementary and secondary education. While both Task Forces aimed largely at the same objective—providing the nation’s children with 1) an equal opportunity for 2) a high quality education, the Friday Task Force directed its attention towards implementing the second and more difficult part of the equation.

Through the metropolitan school program, the Friday Task Force sought to focus the first Task Force’s proposals more specifically by enhancing the education of poor and poorly educated urban children. Through the “moon shot” program, it sought to maximize the impetus behind the regional laboratory and supplementary center ideas of the Gardner Task Force by implementing these reforms on a technical and resource scale comparable to that afforded the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA).

In addition, both these programs were locally oriented in the spirit of Community Action. Localism was particularly important to the conception of the metropolitan school program which provided strong federal incentives to major cities (as opposed to states) to build stellar new school systems. The Friday Task Force developed the Community Action principle even further by enlisting the aid of locally oriented programs like urban renewal.

Perhaps most important, however, was the Friday Task Force’s willingness to tackle the overwhelming reality of racial and economic segregation in elementary and secondary education by means of the metropolitan school program. The fact that it felt free to posit such far-reaching objectives which touched the root of inequality in American society marked a significant departure from the days of the first Task Force when even broad, unfocused aid for poor schoolchildren was considered politically problematic, especially in the South. Thus, in retrospect, I think it fair to assert that the metropolitan school proposal reflects the highest point reached to date in the history of the federal government’s commitment to equality in education.


The notion of equal education for all was not readily accepted. The government itself had erected a particularly important obstacle in the form of a study commissioned in 1965 that was later used by

---

90. Focusing federal funds on specific geographical areas was legally possible under Title I of the ESEA, but the Office of Education effectively blocked this approach to the disbursement of funds.
certain policy-makers to justify refusing to implement programs which sought to equalize education. The report, *Equality of Educational Opportunity* (also known as "The Coleman Report" after Professor James S. Coleman of Harvard),\(^9\) derived from a requirement in the 1964 Civil Rights Act that a study be made of the availability of equal educational opportunities for minorities and other groups.\(^9\) The Office of Education assumed the task of conducting a study, and toward this end, assembled an analytic research group headed by Professor Coleman.

This research group undertook a landmark "hard data" scientific study that employed both survey research and analytic mathematical techniques. The original purpose of the study called for data collection with regard to the current availability of educational resources or "inputs" (i.e. physical facilities and teachers) to disadvantaged social groups in order to create a factual basis for legislation and appropriations directed towards equalizing those resources. Disregarding this objective, however, the study focused on educational "outputs."\(^9\)

The Office of Education Report is significant in this story of the Great Society's contribution to educational policy for at least three reasons. First, it embodied rather directly the ethics, social biases and intellectual inner-directedness typical of the Office of Education. Second, the Report illustrated a glaring weakness of the Johnson Administration: its inability to communicate effectively with the academic political base. Third, and most importantly, despite the fact that those involved in compiling the Report had little if any experience with Title I,\(^9\) the Coleman Report provided the intellec-

\(^91\) See *The Coleman Report*, *supra* note 84 and accompanying text.

\(^92\) The Commissioner shall conduct a survey and make a report to the President and the Congress, within two years of the enactment of this title, concerning the lack of availability of equal educational opportunities for individuals by reason of race, color, religion, or national origin in public educational institutions at all levels in the United States. . . .


\(^94\) Elsewhere Coleman has acknowledged his explicit rejection at the time of input analysis in favor of output analysis:

"The study would have been celebrated for its careful accuracy, its measurement of inequality, and its irrelevance would have gone unnoticed, as policy-makers busily worked to eradicate those irrelevant inequalities. . . ."

"[B]y selective attention to one of the definitions of equality of opportunity, that is, equality of inputs [the Report would have failed in] its major impact in shifting policy attention from its traditional focus on comparison of inputs . . . to a focus on outputs, and the effectiveness of inputs for bringing about changes in outputs."


\(^94\) ESEA, Title I.
tual justification for the Nixon Administration’s refusal to implement the Friday Task Force Report by asserting that equalization of inputs of resources and money to improve educational opportunity and quality for poor children would not work.

When the Friday Task Force began its work in 1966, its members were fully aware of the Office of Education Report, and sought to demonstrate their opinion of it by explicitly rejecting its central finding. The Task Force was convinced, both from principle and from practice, that the availability of institutional educational resources could make a decisive difference in educating the poor. It adduced its own evidence to demonstrate that resources were substantially unequal around the nation. Moreover, the Task Force was quite frank in arguing that it would cost more to achieve equality of opportunity and a quality education for poor children, a point which the Coleman Report did not adequately address.

I believe it fair to say that the Task Force interpreted the Office of Education Report as more of a political-tactical threat than as an intellectual challenge. Because most of the members of the Friday Task Force were academics themselves, they tended to view the Coleman Report as just another social science study, perhaps more interesting but certainly no more valid than most. The Task Force members felt no need to refute the Coleman Report on its own terms in the form of a countervailing study because they were confident, from their own research and experience in the field of education, that both the methodology and the conclusions of the Coleman Report were misguided. They were concerned, however, that it would be seized upon as definitive scientific “truth” and thus transformed into a potent political weapon. This, in fact, is what occurred.

95. Thus, the Friday Task Force concluded:

. . . [T]he teachers, the curriculum, the facilities and equipment play a key role. The Task Force challenges interpretations made by some recent studies that school facilities, curriculum, and teachers, or compensatory education programs have an equivocal and uncertain effect at best, on school achievement. These interpretations have been used against programs such as Title I [of the ESEA], which assume that an increase in educational achievement will result from an increase of inputs of educational resources. But this Task Force simply does not accept them. They are not based on any assessment of Title I or large-scale long-term compensation programs. Judicious or larger inputs are bound to have a major effect on learning. Better curricula, by themselves, can have a significant effect.


98. Mosteller & Moynihan, supra note 93, at 6-10.

99. See supra p. 48.
b. **Higher Education**

Because the 1967 Task Force was more concerned than its 1964 predecessor with higher education, it made a number of significant recommendations for federal financing of higher education that were designed to improve the quality of both undergraduate and graduate level education. Whereas the first Task Force concentrated its efforts on improving equality of opportunity in elementary and secondary education, the second Task Force was explicit about according a higher priority to higher education in general and to federal financing of higher education in particular. After much discussion, the Friday Task Force developed a formula for aid to universities and colleges that centered on grants for facility construction, research, graduate education and basic unrestricted aid.

Perhaps more important than the specifics of the financing scheme was the Friday Task Force's articulation of an important and path-breaking education policy objective: "We recommend that the Federal Government take as a conscious objective assuring that all qualified graduates—and that over the next five years more than two-thirds of our high school graduates—receive post-secondary education." At this time while approximately one-half of all high school graduates received a post-secondary education, it was estimated that perhaps 75 to 80% of all high school graduates could meet general college entrance requirements. Based on these projections, the Task Force sought to bring the level of participation in post-secondary education up from one-half to two-thirds after a five-year period of intensive programming combining aid and incentives.

The Task Force sought to implement this proposal by recommending a combination of institutional financing and expansion of existing student aid programs. More specifically, the Task Force proposed that the federal government increase the amount of aid available to students at the graduate level and make accompanying payments to graduate institutions. Another proposal involved providing funds and expertise to assist high schools in developing special programs such as compensatory education programs to prepare

---

100. 1967 Task Force Report, supra note 83, at 8-10 (emphasis added).
102. The accuracy of the Friday Task Force projections are borne out by the fact that, in 1980, approximately 63% of all high school seniors entered post-secondary educational institutions. National Center for Education Statistics, High School and Beyond, Two Years After High School: A Capsule Description of 1980 Seniors 7 (1982).
Enlightened Localism

low-income students for college.\textsuperscript{103}

c. \textit{The Effects of the Friday Task Force}

Most of the proposals of the Friday Task Force never reached fruition. The incorporation of the Task Force's proposals into the President's program proposals to Congress would have occurred in connection with the submission of the 1968 budget. When the Task Force reported in June of 1967, however, the time for proposing and achieving major changes had passed: the escalation of the Vietnam War was heralding the long twilight of the Johnson Administration. Some of the Task Force's more secondary and less controversial proposals, such as the expansion of existing student aid programs, were enacted in part.\textsuperscript{104} The key Task Force programs — the "moon shot" and metropolitan school programs, optimum access to and sound financing of higher education — barely surfaced in post-1967 consideration of educational policy. These program concepts, while still inchoate, nevertheless remain an important Great Society legacy which future generations of policymakers concerned about educational quality as well as educational opportunity will undoubtably find relevant.

Although the 1967 Task Force reported in the waning days of the Johnson Administration, it represented the pinnacle of the aspirations and expectations engendered by the Great Society. The Task Force's program, dedicated as it was to \textit{equalizing education} as well as to enhancing educational opportunity, was self-consciously ambitious and expensive. It laudably sought to better the social and economic status of Americans not born to privilege by increasing their access to quality educational resources, a concern which is today shared neither by educational policy-makers nor by the national electorate.

C. \textit{Some Reflections on Educational Policy in the Great Society}

The educational programming of the Great Society was founded, at bottom, on a basic belief in the efficacy of educational power in a democracy. The Jeffersonian formula of equality of educational opportunity was essential to this conception of the relationship between learning and political participation. Perhaps more than other social welfare programs, the educational vision of the Great Society was consonant with an ideological and historical heritage that

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{103} 1967 \textit{Task Force Report}, \textit{supra} note 83, at 88.
  \item \textsuperscript{104} Pertinent examples include the creation of the Pell Grant Program and the extension of the Graduate Student Loan Program.
\end{itemize}
posed education as the consummate means of individual advancement.

Yet much of the form of Great Society educational programming was directed at providing economic power to the nation's educationally underprivileged who were also, in large part, the nation's poor. Programs that enhanced educational opportunity and quality for the poor, however, also enhanced them for middle-class children, white children and Catholic children. Thus the educational vision of the Great Society cannot be faulted for focusing narrowly on a specific segment of the population; benefits that flowed disproportionately to the poor not only helped other groups as well, but were also sustainable on the theory that it required more resources to enable underprivileged persons to participate fully in the economic and political affairs of American life. The only tragedy of this vision lay in the ultimate susceptibility of its most important elements to the winds of political fortune.

III. Opportunity and Equality After the Great Society

It is my firm belief that three distinct societies have existed in America since the early 1960's. The first, the Great Society, lasted from about 1962 until about 1970; the second, the Nixon-Carter society, occupied the 1970's; and the third, the Reagan society, commenced with the 1980 election, has lasted to the present and possesses an indefinite claim on the future.

The Great Society both adopted and promoted an innovative set of policies and programs in the social welfare context, as I have attempted to show in my accounts of Community Action and educational planning. For the first time since the New Deal, the federal government directly addressed the pervasive problem of poverty in American society, and the people in power were of largely one mind in their conviction that the problem was capable of solution. The architects of the Great Society oriented their quest for solutions around the principle of localism, a principle which both harkened back to an earlier era in the American political tradition and beckoned forward to a future in which communities would have a real and powerful voice in those public affairs which affected them most directly. Localism pervaded Great Society efforts on the poverty and education fronts, and thus marked a departure from the federal-

105. But see supra notes 91-95 and accompanying text.
Enlightened Localism

izing, centralizing and nationalizing nature of the New Deal programs.

The succeeding society of Nixon, Ford and Carter was discontinuous with the Great Society. Rather than directly expanding or eliminating the programs of its predecessor society, however, the Nixon-Carter society either incorporated Great Society programs into indifferent or hostile line agencies or weakened these programs by affording them a low priority in the governmental bureaucracy. A consummate example of the seemingly innocuous yet wholly debilitating Nixon-Carter approach to the social welfare legacy of the Great Society was provided by the incorporation of Community Action into the Community Services Administration, which transformed the innovative program into a mere service delivery mechanism.106

The Reagan society, in contrast to the Nixon-Carter society, has chosen to disavow directly the social welfare policies of the Great Society. This opposition has manifested itself through frontal attacks on both the theory and practice of Great Society programs, through hostile ideological tracts, and through manipulations of the budget process to reduce severely the amount of funds available for line agency operations. Thus, for the present society there is no poverty problem at all: the poor are poor of their own free will, market forces should substitute for government in the arena of social welfare, and the individual rather than the community should be the focus of any analysis of the feasibility or desirability of social welfare programs. Whether these intellectual apologetics for laissez-faire capitalism will continue to their logical conclusion, namely the actual relinquishment of federal power in the social welfare context, remains to be seen.

Much proof exists in the aggregate social indicators of the last two decades that legitimates my tripartite analysis. These indicators demonstrate both the passivity of the Nixon-Carter society and the outright hostility of the present society to the advances made by the Great Society. To illustrate this movement away from Great Society objectives and programs, I will focus on data relevant to measuring poverty, and opportunity and quality in education.107 Examination of these aggregate statistics indicate that not only have the Great Society’s Community Action and education programs been termi-

106. See supra note 50 and accompanying text.
107. Other areas where statistics bear out the successor societies’ turning away from the Great Society include civil rights, housing, and health care (particularly the slowing decline in infant mortality rates).
nated, but that its commitment to finding a solution to the poverty problem and to mitigating the effects of the unequal distribution of educational opportunities and resources has likewise been abandoned.

A. The War on Poverty

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poverty Population in Millions</td>
<td>39.9</td>
<td>28.5</td>
<td>25.4</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>29.3</td>
<td>33.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty Population as Percentage of Total Population</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>14.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Great Society planners employed programs such as Community Action to combat the problem of poverty, and hoped that such programs would eliminate poverty as a pervasive social problem in American society. The above figures demonstrate, however, that in the Nixon-Carter era, the numbers of people classified as poor began to rise. The government of the present society is presiding over an even more rapid increase in the poverty levels: while the figure for the poverty population as a percent of the total population fell 9.6% from 1960 to 1970, it rose 0.4% from 1970 to 1980, and has risen an additional 1.5% in only the first four years of the 1980's. These figures could reflect a waning government commitment to solving the poverty problem during the Nixon-Carter era and direct renunciation of the same during the Reagan era. While the Great Society successfully lessened the burden of poverty through Community Action and other War on Poverty programs, the present society's increasing poverty rolls point not to a lack of means for solving the problem, but rather to a political stance opposed to solutions.

As noted above, this shift in political priorities translated directly into indifferent and antagonistic responses on the part of successor societies towards Great Society programs. Besides overseeing the transformation of Community Action into a mere service delivery system, the Nixon-Carter society relocated the Office of Economic Opportunity outside the Executive Branch and instigated the ab-

Enlightened Localism

sorption of other Great Society social welfare programs by the line agencies where they were stripped of their innovative elements.

Indeed, the Reagan era assault on the theory and practice of the Great Society was clearly facilitated by the subterranean nature of the Nixon-Carter transformation. The Nixon-Carter transformation effectively prevented the Great Society programs from becoming an established part of the identity of American government in the twentieth century, a role the Great Society planners had envisioned for their brand of enlightened localism. As a consequence, the Reagan society, eager as an ideological matter to end government's involvement in social welfare programs, has been able to employ deficit fears and an emphasis on defense spending to force deep cuts in agency budgets. Because the programs of the Great Society were prevented from establishing themselves as integrated parts of independent local entities as originally conceived, and were transformed instead into mere line items in agency budgets, the Reagan society's troublesome trade-off went unopposed by any politically powerful constituency and unaccompanied by any broad public debate.

B. Education

| TABLE 2 |
|-------|------|------|------|------|
| Average Expenditure Per Pupil in Constant Dollars, 1982|
| 1512  | 1928 | 2380 | 3020 | 2900 |

| TABLE 3 |
|-------|------|------|------|
| Federal Funding as a Percentage of Total Elementary and Secondary School Budgets |
| 3.9   | 7.4  | 8.7  | 6.7  |

While the Great Society placed a primary emphasis on improving education, the above figures show that the successor societies clearly abandoned that goal. Average expenditures per pupil in public and


private schools nationwide rose 57% during the 1960's, only 27% during the 1970's, and fell 4% from 1980 to 1982. Similarly, and even more dramatically, federal disbursements to public and private schools as a percent of total elementary and secondary school expenditures rose 90% during the 1960's, only 18% during the 1970's, and fell 23% in the period from 1980-1983. As with the aggregate poverty data, the severe leveling off of expenditures during the Nixon-Carter period reflects that society's general indifference and even mild hostility towards federal spending for education. Likewise, the precipitous decline in spending during the Reagan era is evidence of that society's open aversion to such spending, particularly when the primary target of federal aid to education is poor schoolchildren, who, it is argued, should be able to pull themselves up by their own bootstraps and repair any inequality of inputs through their own resourcefulness.

This lack of commitment towards improving education, and especially towards improving education for the poor, has characterized the administration of Great Society education programs in the 1970's and 1980's. Political and administrative constraints required the Great Society planners to cede their new education programs to an old line agency, the Department of Health, Education and Welfare. While the planners were in power, they were able to resist the natural tendency of the bureaucracy to convert the education programs into simple general aid packages. In the Nixon-Carter society, however, the bureaucracy reasserted itself and began converting the programs into general aid programs. With the opening of the Reagan era, even these general aid to education programs, like the poverty programs, were caught in the squeeze between military spending and budget cutting, with the result that total spending for educational programming experienced a marked decline.

IV. **Looking Ahead at Policy**

By analyzing the successor societies' treatment of the Great Society initiatives in poverty and education, I have attempted to show the impossibility of extending into the future either the policies or the forms of the Great Society in a direct or continuous way. This impossibility derives at least in part from the fact that the successor societies have effectively dismantled the ideological and structural foundations on which the Great Society was erected. Poverty, the political emargination of the poor, inequality of educational oppor-
Enlightened Localism
tunity, and the unequal distribution of educational resources still pervade the American experience. Instead of trying to recreate social welfare policy in the image of the Great Society, however, would-be policy-makers must invent new ways of approaching these old problems.

Because the assumptions that characterized the Great Society’s perspective on American polity and society have been subordinated to the normative agenda of the successor societies, any effort to resurrect successfully a dignified and feasible poverty policy must take this change of world-view into account. For example, I believe an effective poverty policy could be organized on the assumption that, unlike during the period of the Great Society, politics is now class-based, and consequently, poverty is now a class issue rather than simply an income or economic issue. Were this line of policy development pursued, the conception and implementation of social welfare programs would rest on an analysis of their implications for either maintaining or dismantling the class structure of American society.

In the 1980’s, raising public consciousness about poverty in America to the level of concern, and beyond concern, to the level of action, will be no easy task. As I see it, at least three approaches to this problem of public concern and the concomitant problem of political feasibility are possible, two of which involve direct appeals to the existence of a class structure in a nation whose political mythology obscures that structure through the twin ideologies of classlessness and social mobility. First, public consciousness might be raised by an effective appeal to collective social responsibility; a forceful argument might be made that a commitment to human dignity and decency demands a comprehensive effort to eliminate poverty in our society. A second tactic involves the claim that the existence of a substantial and dependent underclass threatens national economic aspirations of growth and prosperity. Third is the argument that the presence of the poor undermines faith in a political ideology of classlessness. This last argument demands either that we revise our political ideology or eliminate the underclass.

111. An alternative, and perhaps socially more enlightened, approach to a new poverty policy might be predicated upon a commitment to equality as opposed to an understanding of class. I do not emphasize this approach here for the simple reason that a poverty policy predicated upon equality must value equality of ends as well as means in order to be effective. The inconsistency with the American political tradition of a conception of equality that values position over opportunity is patent, and in this era, conclusive, with regard to its political viability.
The obvious difficulty with the collective social responsibility approach is that it relies on the ability of existing political processes to foster a sense of responsibility for poor people in an era when the middle classes perceive themselves as the principal victims of the economic downturn of the last decade. The strength of the second and third approaches lies in the implicit and explicit hypocrisy of adhering to a political mythology of equal opportunity in a society where the underclass is large and growing, and is largely permanent. For the vast majority of poor people in America today there is no exit from poverty, either for themselves or for their children, and they are beginning to recognize the permanent nature of this status. For these people, the American myths of social mobility and economic opportunity are wearing thin.

Perhaps because the gap between the ideal and the real in American political mythology has widened to the point where the legitimacy of the ideal is seriously threatened, it might be possible to galvanize public support for a new poverty offensive around the threat such a gap poses to time-honored beliefs. In this way it might be possible to avoid posing the issue as one which demands that the middle classes give up something tangible and material to preserve the lives of poor people, and which instead ties the fate and well-being of the middle classes to the fate and well-being of the poor. For the middle classes, such an approach can bring ideological salvation; for the poor, perhaps a way out of poverty.

An approach to poverty policy through an understanding of class would be neither easy to achieve nor to implement, given both the resistance to such a conception inherent in the political ideology itself and the potential such a conception possesses for radical social change. Nevertheless, such an approach has much to offer the poor in terms of an escape from outmoded and obsolete social appeals. Arguing for the poor from the perspective of class would allow policy-makers to portray the problem of poverty as a structural rather than as a behavioral issue. In this way, economic policies formulated to alleviate poverty might be “marketed” in the political arena as a means of eliminating a dead weight on the national economic system. Such an approach has the added virtue of appealing to a broad spectrum of political interests: liberal, left, and conservative alike. Exactly what these economic policies might be I do not know, except that I am convinced that simple job training would not be a sufficient response to poverty in the context of a class analysis. Other possible economic programs formulated in response to view-
Enlightened Localism

Viewing poverty as a class phenomenon might include restructuring the current scheme for distributing family allowance payments, and increasing dependent tax exemptions for the poor and the nonpoor alike with an eye towards rearranging the economic power configuration within the underclass family.

Viewing poverty as a structural phenomenon will also likely lead policy-makers back to the formative institution of education, and lead them to investigate more closely the ways in which inequalities are created and maintained by the existing educational system, with its three-track structure of academic, general and vocational programs. While I think that developmental approaches to education at the elementary levels should be emphasized, I remain convinced that more critical attention should be paid to secondary education in general and high school education in particular as breeding grounds of inequalities. More specifically, policy-makers need to examine the vocational training and general education programs in American high schools — areas to which none of the recent education commissions have paid much attention. I suspect that a strong correlation exists between the inadequacy of financial and educational resources devoted to general and vocational education programs (as compared with that devoted to academic programs), and the low level of job skills attained by the vast majority of workers from the underclass. While part of the problem results from the quantitative fact that not enough vocational education exists to serve the relevant constituency of high school students, another part surely involves the failure of educational pedagogy and theory to take vocational education seriously as an intellectual matter. Because education is so vital to the perpetuation of a democracy, I believe that informed reorganization of the educational system in America could radically transform and empower the underclass.

In addition, I remain convinced that the underclass is socially and politically educable and that the key to tapping this vast reserve of human resources lies in action at the community level. Government must facilitate the self-education of the poor and the disempowered, and it must begin this task with as great a concern for how the underclass perceives itself as with how the nonpoor majority perceives the underclass. While a concerted effort to eradicate poverty in America must direct itself to many fronts at once, including housing, health and education, policy-makers should not neglect the importance of cultural elements in the poverty equation. While efforts to foster a greater sense of dignity and self-worth among the under-
class might go far towards engendering in the poor that consciousness of the public good necessary for effective participation in the public arena, such an approach may have the added benefit of making traditional social welfare programs more effective and perhaps even superfluous. A class-based approach to the poverty problem in America thus has the potential to move us beyond the current deprecatory view of the underclass to a conception of the poor that emphasizes its heretofore untapped and underutilized potential.

Facing the policy-makers of this era is the challenge of developing social welfare programs as appropriate for the times as were those of the Great Society. While the social welfare programs of the Great Society were predicated on a vision of American society which saw poverty as a temporary and transitional phenomenon, that vision must be replaced by one that acknowledges the current permanence of the underclass, and that recognizes the underclass to be a class and membership in the underclass to be a status. I believe that policy-makers can take this discouraging social reality and build new programs and formulate new policies in an effort to transform this reality into a different and more enlightened one. Instead of striving to recreate America of the 1980's in the image of the Great Society, however, planners must examine the intellectual and political history of the Great Society so as to inform their policy decisions. The faith in an affirmative role for localism which characterized Great Society initiatives in both poverty and education policy remains a valuable approach to the conception and implementation of social welfare programs. As a tool of social welfare planning, localism both reflects an important myth in the American political tradition and provides the only feasible avenue of empowerment for the poor. A debate may soon begin over the next wave of policy-making devoted to the eradication of poverty in America. I believe that the Great Society's commitment to an enlightened localism provides an important point of departure for that debate.