

# **Welfare and Immigration Policies During the 1960s: The Bifurcated Influence of the Civil Rights Discourse**

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Contemporary Democratic states sort, monitor and address their insider population through a variety of welfare policies. At the same time, they sort, monitor and address outsiders seeking to cross the state's border through various immigration policies. What, if any, are the connections between the way a state's insiders and outsiders are treated? In other words, what are the possible relations between welfare and immigration policies? A growing interest in this subject in Europe had postulate that states with generous welfare policy tend to execute restrictive immigration policies, and vice versa, states with limited welfare policies tend to open their gates towards outsiders more easily. Plausible as this explanatory mechanism sounds, it does not resonate with the main currents of the 1960s in the US, in which both welfare and immigration policies witnessed a far-reaching expansion (The Great Society welfare program of 1964 and the Immigration Act of 1965).

Using official archival material and secondary sources, I argue that a unique exchange of discursive frames between welfare and immigration realms took place during the 60s in the US. Although the Great Society welfare program was aimed to address the specific needs of Blacks, the majority of its supporters framed poverty in colorblind terms. At the same time, the frame of "racial discrimination" was extensively used in Congressional debates on Immigration reform as the main rationale for abolishing the quota system. In essence, albeit the centrality of the Civil-Rights discourse at the time the frame "racial discrimination" was not used as a rationale for addressing poverty. On the other hand, it provided the main discursive platform in the process of homogenizing distinctions between whites from diverse ethnic and national origins. In this process, Eastern and Southern European immigrants were granted easy entry and feasible assimilation into American society.

This case questions the basic assumption of contemporary discussions on the relations between welfare and immigration policies, namely that welfare recipients or immigrants constitute a homogenized social category. Instead, it proves that social distinctions between citizens can be more important than distinctions between citizens and outsiders.

## **Introduction:**

Both welfare and immigration policies are based on some distinction of deservedness, entitlement and worthiness, although each is directed to a different eligible population. Whereas welfare rights are given or denied to those who reside within a specific geographic space, immigration rights are given or denied to those who reside

outside of it. What, if any, are the connections between the ways state's insiders and outsiders are treated? In other words, what are the possible relations between welfare and immigration policies? This project deals with the intersection of welfare and immigration policies in the US during the 1960s. Specifically, it is focused on the relations between the Great Society welfare provisions of 1964 and the Hart Celler Act, better known as the Immigration Reform Act of 1965. In light of the American case, this project expands the theoretical framework in which to discuss welfare-immigration relations in general.

### **Welfare and Immigration: Europe vs. the US:**

Although welfare and immigration policies are arguably two sides of the same coin, they are often treated in the literature as mutually exclusive realms. Given this disjuncture in the literature, it is no wonder that researchers rarely empirically examine whether the ways in which states treat their insiders (by various welfare policies) and the ways they treat outsiders (by various immigration policies) are somehow related. This is especially true in the American case. Although a lot has been written on welfare and immigration policies separately, much less is known about the potential relation between these two sets of policies.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Scholarly work discussing welfare and immigration in conjunction usually inquires into how immigrants (who already passed the state's borders) use welfare rights (Jesuit et al.: 2000, Kilty and Videl de Haymes: 2000, Fix and Passel: 1994, Blau: 1984, Jensen: 1988, Tienda and Jenson: 1986), or are denied from doing so (Adele: 2001, Swingle: 2000); how state officials or professionals react to immigrants' welfare needs (Pierson: 1994); how public opinion relates to immigrants' use of welfare rights (Armbruster et al.: 1995., Brugge: 1995, Calavita: 1996, Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1995, Mehan: 1997, Schneider: 2000) and how activists mobilize the state to restore immigrants rights to welfare (Reese and Ramirez: 2004). Less attention is given to the ways in which welfare and immigration at the level of policies interact. The only account to my knowledge in which the relations between welfare and immigration at the level of policies in the U.S. context were discussed is Carens (1988). His is not a sociological analysis of a specific intersection of these two policies but rather an ethical call for expanding welfare at the expense of restricting immigration. He summarizes his argument in the following: "I think it is reasonable to believe that unrestricted immigration, or even greatly expanded immigration, would significantly weaken the welfare state, at least in the foreseeable future" (ibid: 208).

In contrast, recent work by European scholars had started to analyze the relations between these two policies, both on an empirical and on a theoretical level. Bommers and Geddes (2000), for example, link welfare and immigration policies using the distinction between “expansive” and “liberal” welfare states. In expansive welfare states, they argue, welfare is a universal social right. It serves not only to aid the needy but also as a tool by which the state transforms a given population into a loyal community. In other words, expansive welfare states distribute rights in return for the loyalty of those who are defined as legitimate welfare recipients. Under this framework, ongoing immigration flows are perceived as threats to the allegedly fixed boundaries of this legitimate community. Expansive welfare states, then, tend to limit immigration (Geddes: 2000, Wimmer: 2002, Cohen: 1985, Storey: 1984). Expansive welfare states may have open immigration regimes only if access to welfare is denied to newly arrived immigrants (Wimmer: 2002).<sup>2</sup>

Liberal welfare states, on the other hand, start with a weaker social commitment. In this framework, welfare rights are not distributed on a universal basis, but rather on the basis of need. Because the limited distribution of social rights does not play a great role in the definition of their national community (Bommers: 2000, Ryner: 2000), liberal welfare states tend to develop less restrictive immigration policies (Faist: 1985).

Although the formula of “extensive welfare, restrictive immigration” versus “liberal welfare, open immigration”<sup>3</sup> may make sense intuitively, it appears inadequate

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<sup>2</sup> This is not only a matter of limited resources, but also derives from the inner logic of welfare provision. Welfare policy is based on transforming only a given population of insiders into a national loyal community.

<sup>3</sup> Nowhere else in the literature did I find the phrase “formula” to describe the way in which mainly European scholars conceptualize the connection between welfare and immigration policies. The literature about this connection even in Europe is relatively scarce (Faist 1985, Wimmer: 2002) and by no means developed into a well-established theoretical tradition. I use the word “formula” both as a semantic and as a

when applied to the specific case at hand. Specifically, the relations between welfare and immigration policies during the 1960s deviate from the prediction that expansive welfare provisions correlate with restrictive immigration policy. The generous welfare provisions of the Great Society during the 1960s were not followed by a restrictive immigration policy. Quite the opposite, one year after the Great Society welfare program was signed into law, one of the most far-reaching immigration reforms was passed. The 1965 Immigration Reform Act abolished the previous quota system and resulted in profound changes in immigration rates and composition. Although the dramatic consequences of this reform were unintended, policy makers did take a purposeful role in liberating the very criteria by which immigrants were sorted. In the following, I sketch the main characteristics of each policy and then present my alternative argument as to their connection.

**Case Description:**

The Economic Opportunity Act (EOA) of 1964, the first major Johnson legislation to be passed by Congress, had the declared purpose of eliminating poverty by giving all Americans opportunities for work, for education and training and for the chance to live in “decency and dignity”. Often equated with the Social Security Act of the 1930s, the Economic Opportunity Act or the War on Poverty was innovative in two crucial ways. First, as opposed to the passive, ill formed liberalism of the 1930s this plan aimed to undo the racial legacy of the New Deal. This time, instead of excluding blacks from the major social provisions, the policy intended to directly address their needs.

Second, the Economic opportunity Act was intended to redistribute opportunity rather

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theoretical device by which I can more clearly criticize the taken for granted assumptions of the European scholars as to why and in what ways welfare and immigration policies interact, and point at the main issues I think should be incorporated into the study of welfare-immigration intersections.

than money, through provision of educational, social and employment training services that would enable individuals to take advantage of economic opportunities or would compensate for undeserved economic losses. Money was not allocated directly to individuals on a basis of a fixed eligibility criteria, but to a new agency, the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) located in the executive office of the president. The anti poverty program, to be supervised by the director of the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO), was authorized for 3 years. The Office of Economic Opportunity initiated the War on Poverty, by granting funds directly to public or private non-profit organizations and to localities based on what was called “maximum feasible participation”, or the belief that the citizens of each locality, especially those who were themselves suffering poverty, would best know what particular ways of using federal funds would most effectively meet local problems (Williams, 2003: 133)<sup>4</sup>.

About one year after the Economic Opportunity Act took off, L. B. Johnson signed into law what would later be known as a watershed in the development of American immigration policy- the 1965 Immigration law<sup>5</sup>. This law abolished the

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<sup>4</sup> The core antipoverty action of the Office of Economic Opportunity delegated responsibility to Community Action Agencies (CAAs), which established neighborhood health centers, emergency food and medical services, job and literacy training, counseling for alcoholics, drug rehabilitation and other assistance efforts (Quadagno 1994: 33). The central idea of CAAs was that each city and rural area would devise its own “community action program,” to be planned and carried out by agencies in which the poor themselves played an active role (Williams: *ibid*).

Other than these programs, the Office of Economic Opportunity initiated work-training programs and loan programs. The Job Corps, Neighborhood Youth, and Work Study program were aimed to help men and women in different ages to develop their skills and to advance their chances to escape unemployment. The rural loan programs aimed to help low-income rural families and migrant workers to escape severe economic hardship.

<sup>5</sup> During the first half of the 1960 the call for ending the “unfair competition by importation of nearly half a million contract-laborers’ via the Bracero Program” (Tichenor, 2002: 208) resulted in Kennedy’s termination of the Bracero Program (with the massive support of the CIO-AFL). Kennedy was not successful in passing any other immigration reform and until the end of 1963 no immigration sub-committee held any hearing regarding Kennedy’s immigration Bill. Since this project deals only with one presidential administration for each welfare-immigration intersection, the termination of the Bracero program will not be dealt with directly in this context.

national origin quota system and established a new admission policy, based on family reunion, technical and professional needs of the country, asylum claims and foreign policy interests. Instead of separate quotas to different nationalities, the new law imposed an annual ceiling of 170,000 visas on all the nations of the Eastern Hemisphere combined (Briggs, 1984: 63). As opposed to the previous national origin quota system in which the Western Hemisphere was exempted from any quota consideration, 1965 Act imposed a ceiling of 120,000 on the number of immigrants from this region of the world. The preference categories and the labor certification provisions of the law did not apply to Western Hemisphere nations. Persons from nations in this region had only to comply with the total hemisphere ceiling (Briggs, 1984: 64).

These two policies were discussed and decided upon at a very close temporality. The House committee on Education and Labor Discussed bill 10440, “a bill to mobilize the human and financial resources of the nation to combat poverty in the United States”, the War on Poverty Program from the March 14 until April 28, 1964. The Committee on the Judiciary discussed bill 7700, “to amend the immigration and nationality act”, the 1965 Immigration Reform, from June 11 until August 5, 1964.

**Main argument:**

Both the War on Poverty of 1964 and the Immigration Reform of 1965 stand out as efforts to correct different kinds of discriminations, caused by previous policies. As opposed to the exclusion of Blacks from the main provisions of the New Deal, the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 aimed to provide them with an equal opportunity to participate in the American economy. Similarly, the Immigration Act of 1965 abolished the mechanism, which sorted and admitted immigrants according to their national origin.

Although the relations between these two policies were never empirically studied in the American historiography, it is fairly taken for granted that both policies were intimately related to the civil rights discourse of the era. In other words, the civil resistance during the 1960s called for the elimination of discriminatory policies in voting, educational and employment rights, and was one of the forces in facilitating the Economic Opportunity Act and the war against poverty in general. Just as discriminatory practices were not tolerated against insiders, they became less legitimate in sorting and admitting outsiders.

Did the anti-discrimination rationale indeed travel from the field of welfare to the field of immigration? The actual analysis of this era does not support this intuitive explanation. In the following I will argue that the civil discourse of this era and the awareness it raised for the evils of discrimination was a major factor in both the welfare and the immigration reforms. But as opposed to the common sensual explanation according to which this discourse played a similar role in both welfare and immigration fields (in other words, it erased discriminatory policies both regarding insiders and outsiders in a similar way) I hold that it played very different roles in the field of welfare and the field of immigration.

Although the racial unrest of the 1960s, and the anti-discrimination discourse it initiated, aimed first and foremost at equalizing Black-White relations, it had very limited results in the field of welfare. Both Johnson and his exceptionally liberal administration were hesitant in discussing the connection between race and poverty in the US and specifically in dealing with racial problems through welfare policies. The only weapon by which they were willing to fight the correlation between race and poverty was formal civil rights. Other, and more profound policies, including redistribution or affirmative

actions were never considered. The War Against Poverty delivered limited practical results to the African-American community, and, contrary to its intention, it even facilitated a liberal justification for Blacks' ever-continuing isolation and disenfranchisement. The faith of the Great Society program not only ensured the re-marginalization of the African-American community, it also justified it in liberal terms. It created a strong opposition to any effort to provide Blacks with more than formal civil equality.

While the civil rights discourse failed to translate into an actual welfare policy towards Blacks, I maintain that it provided a compelling discursive frame that was then used by social actors whose interests were tied with those of Eastern and Southern Europeans. The main beneficiaries from this discursive frame were Eastern and Southern Europeans, who were previously excluded on the basis of their un-Anglo-Saxon origin but by the 1960s had become part of the 'White' society. The utilization of this discourse did not serve a genuine will to deal with the discriminatory features of the quota system, but rather the belief that the new system will manage to protect the existing ethnic and racial composition of the US. If the civil rights discourse de-legitimized the upfront discriminatory features of the quota system, it was eventually used to protect one specific group of immigrants from discrimination: Southern and Eastern Europeans. Only when this law was perceived, both by Republicans and Democrats, as potentially able to protect Southern and Eastern Europeans, it became appealing.

And so, the 'anti-discrimination' discourse of this era played a very different role in welfare and immigration policies. Although it was initiated to erase discriminatory policies against Blacks, it somehow managed to have more practical results for Eastern



and Southern Europeans. The field of welfare was characterized by an effort to hide the fact that the correlation between race and poverty was one of the main incentives of the war against poverty. The correlation between race and poverty was not only downplayed in Congressional discussions. The War Against Poverty did not deal in any direct way with the legal discrimination against blacks that still existed at the time of the passage of the War Against Poverty bill. This program presented poverty as a completely separate problem from race. In immigration, on the other hand, where the initial incentive to abolish the quota system had very little to do with a genuine concern about discrimination, the 'anti-discrimination' discourse was very critical in justifying the reform. The evils of racial discrimination became the most central rationale on which the effort to abolish the quota system were based. Although the quota system was practically not working, its abolishment was not justified on a practical ground. The 'racial discrimination' frame was so powerful in immigration discussions, as if race, rather than country of origin, were the basis of the quota system.

### **Data and Methods:**

The analysis traces the relations between welfare and immigration policies based on two major components. First, a comparison of the ways in which distinctions between worthy/non worthy insiders and welcome/non welcome outsiders were justified in this welfare-immigration intersection. This component was analyzed by looking at the discursive dimension of policy making: the ways in which policies were justified and legitimized, as well as the ideas and rationales used by policy makers and those who tried to influence the policy making process. The second component involves the political and institutional dimension of policy making. This component was addressed by looking

at the level of real actors, interests, resources, institutional surroundings, and specific coalitions that played a role in this welfare-immigration intersection.

I relied on two different sources to get at the various dimensions of policy-making: Congressional Hearings and Secondary literature. Congressional Hearings are discussion of the proposed bills by Congressional committees before they reached the House floor. Actual congressional hearings contain the debates preceding each set of policies. They were a suitable source from which I could learn about how policies were justified and legitimized, and how distinctions between worthy and not worthy welfare recipients, and welcome and not welcome immigrants, were constructed. These hearing also present the different actors who took part in each policy making process and their specific opinions about how and in what directions policies should be changed. For secondary literature I used books and articles in which either welfare or immigration policies were a primary topic of discussion. These sources were used in order to learn more about the actual interests of these actors and the ‘behind the scenes’ interactions between them. Since secondary literature about U.S. welfare and immigration (in separation) is extensive, it provided valuable information about different actors and their interests, institutional surroundings of policy making processes, and potential alliances and rivalries between actors in the field of welfare and immigration. They were essential in understanding the specific background of the main political actors in both welfare and immigration fields, and provided some clues on actual connections between actors and organizations in these two spheres of policy making could be revealed.

The distinction between the discursive and political components of policy making is obviously merely an analytic one. Conceptions and interests, ideas and real actors,

rationales and power relations can only be neatly distinguished as words on paper. In reality, ideas and rationales are used as resources that actors choose to employ or dismiss depending on their goals, interests and contexts. In the analysis to follow, thus, ideas/rationales and actors/interests are not separately discussed. If discourse and politics are inherently inseparable then the purpose of the analysis to follow is not to simply reveal the “out there” rationales that were used to justify policies, but to inform the question of why specific rationales were more or less successful in specific moments in time.<sup>6</sup> The different parts of the data are not presented in the order in which they were analyzed (discursive/political dimensions), but as a relatively coherent story of the relations between welfare and immigration policies in the 1960s.

### **Analysis:**

#### **1. Background:**

Although these two bills were signed into law in very close proximity, each followed a different trajectory in reaching its final passage. The 1960s were a period of general prosperity and no special need to revise the welfare system was acknowledged until 1964 (Gillon, 2000). Kennedy’s initial efforts to raise the issue of poverty in the beginning of the 1960s were largely unnoticed, both by the public and by most of his own administration (Levitan, 1969: 12-16). It was not until the rise and the growing influence of the Civil Rights Movement that poverty and its correspondence with racial discrimination became a difficult subject to ignore (Levitan, 1969: 14, Hamilton: 190, Piven and Cloward, 1979, Gettleman and Mermelstein, 1967: 175). The public awareness

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<sup>6</sup> As an analytical tool, this distinction was practically helpful. I started the analysis by looking at disputes and debates that had preceded each legislation by mapping the different rationales used to justify different policy directions. I then identified the different carriers of each kind of justification, and the interests, power resources and concerns that might explain the prevalence of one set of ideas over others.

to the evils of racial discrimination, accompanied by Kennedy's genuine motivation to deal with racial issues, had initiated a public as well as political process aiming to find a more significant solution to the alarming correlation between poverty and race.

Kennedy's administration, accompanied by a small group of professional reformers, was the real force behind the initial stages of the war against poverty (Ginzberg and Solow, 195) and the revolutionary assumption that poverty is not an individual problem but a social one, and that a real change must include the involvement of the poor themselves in fighting poverty.

As opposed to the irrelevance of welfare reform until the mid 1960s, efforts to abolish the Quota system were constantly at play since the early 1950s. These decade-long efforts met a strong opposition in the Congress and were as "useless as trying to make a tiger eat grass or a cow eat meat" (Gillon, 2000: 64). Although Kennedy was a strong supporter of revising the immigration system on a national scale, his efforts in this direction did not accommodate any practical results until the mid 1960s. The House Immigration Committee was persistent in its long and systematic opposition to a new immigration agenda.

Kennedy's assassination took place in the midst of these welfare and immigration policy developments. L.B. Johnson, who then passed both welfare and immigration major laws, was never so radical or even innovative when it came to racial questions, both regarding insiders and outsiders. A long time politician from Texas, he acted typically in his first 17 years in the Congress. He strongly supported the 1952 immigration act, which left the main features of the quota system intact and constantly voted with the southern block on Civil Rights issues. Although noticeably not a strong believer in one genuine

and well-defined ideology, Johnson was often characterized as a “political wizard” due to his pragmatic and practical political abilities (Levitan, 1969, Gillon, 2000). The historic assassination of Kennedy, coupled with the growing influence of Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights Movements, made it clear, especially to Johnson’s political sensitivity, that his ancestor’s footsteps left a too dramatic influence in the public image to be ignored or radically change direction.

Given the heightened importance of the equality debate<sup>7</sup>, and maybe more, the fear of an upcoming rebellion (Raskin, 1965, Piven and Cloward, 1979, Gettleman and Mermelstein, 1967: 175) Johnson was anxious to address the then still embryonic welfare program in his first State of the Union speech in January 1964 (Gillon, 62). The fact that the infamous concept of “maximum feasible participation” of the poor themselves in the program was still not clear, even to the staff behind the welfare initiatives, did not stop Johnson from giving it a special centrality. Although the idea of allying with the poor in order to fight inequality was very different from what Johnson initially had in mind, he declared, two days after he took office, that the (still underdeveloped) welfare initiatives were: “my kind of program” (Gillon 62). In his first State of the Union, Johnson made community action the leading section of the new program and used a language that translated the relatively small program into a moral crusade (Gillon, 63).

The political arena in the field of welfare was easy to defeat. The preparations for the Great Society bill were so focused on the administrative branch, that the exact Congressional committee to discuss the law was not decided upon until the very last moment (Levitan, 1969: 38-39). Out of four optional candidates, the House committee on Education and Labor was eventually chosen. This committee did not participate in any of

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<sup>7</sup> The closeness of the voting act to the war on poverty (Ginzberg and Solow, 190)

the prior stages of preparing the law and was declared as an ‘ad-hoc’ committee. This committee was composed of 12 Republicans and 18 Democrats. Out of 69 witnesses, only 9 opposed the bill, and none of them came with any alternative option.

As opposed to the easy political conditions in the field of welfare, Johnson’s efforts to pass the immigration reforms met a much stronger opposition. Although the general world atmosphere made the racially based criteria on which the quota system was based difficult to justify, the quota system was still largely supported by the American public. No similar civil effort to erase discrimination policies in the field of immigration was taking place, and both the House and the Senate committee were controlled by Republicans. The House immigration committee was composed of 20 Republicans and 14 Democrats. Johnson’s political wizard-ness was much more in need here; and indeed most of the effort of Johnson and his administration were geared towards winning the political battle.

## **2. Congressional Debates:**

Albeit the exceptional public and political climate of the 1960s, and the relatively scarce ability of Republicans to make changes in the administration’s welfare bill, congressional discussions were characterized by a systematic effort to present poverty and race as two unrelated issues and to downplay the role of race as a source of poverty or as a relevant component of dealing with it. Given the close proximity of the voting act and the extensive influence of the Civil Rights movement on the public debate in 1964, the vast majority of the War on Poverty supporters thoroughly refused to use the racial discrimination frame in discussing poverty in 1964 US. Surprisingly, in the immigration field, the situation was almost the opposite. In clear contrast, the frame of ‘racial

discrimination' was constantly mentioned by all supporters of the Immigration Reform, and was extensively used as a major rationale for changing the existing policy. Although the quota system discriminated on the basis of national origin, the rationale for abolishing it was based on eliminating racial discrimination. Although in practice the quota system was not working (in 1964, for example, more than a third of the authorized quota for Western European countries went unused), this fact was rarely used as a rationale for eliminating it.

In the following I provide evidence for the discursive rationale used by three groups of actors: administration representatives, politicians and public representatives in supporting reforms in welfare and in immigration.

### **2.1. Administration:**

The rationale for welfare and immigration reforms was presented by the administration in very different ways. In welfare discussions the issue of race and its correlation with poverty was either ignored or vaguely presented. The poor were presented as those who were "caught in the web" of poverty, "misfortunate" and simply unable to develop their full potential. Racial discrimination towards Blacks was mentioned only briefly (once) and even then was not discussed as a major contributor to the state of poverty in the American society. Among the administration's witnesses, the word 'discrimination' was only mentioned once and in most testimonies, the administration's representatives maintained a racially vague picture in describing the main beneficiaries of the plan. In the immigration field, the situation was almost the opposite. The administration's representatives constantly used the word 'discrimination' and were specific regarding both the groups who suffered from the previous system and

the groups to whom the system will be able to pay back. The following table summarizes this trend:

	Welfare	Immigration
General Frame for supporting the reform: Administration	Albeit our country's great achievement and its general high standard of living, one fifth of our people have not shared in our general prosperity. These people are lacking the skills to raise themselves from poverty. They need an opportunity to regain the required skills to be successful in today's economy and to develop their full potential.	The current immigration system is unfair; it discriminates against both immigrants and citizens on the basis of race and place of birth. This stands against the basic principles on which the American society is based.

It is worth mentioning here the testimonies of Willard Wirtz, the secretary of Labor, on these two policies. In describing the social characteristics of the main beneficiaries from the welfare plan he remains as vague as possible. Specifically, he says: "Those who have not shared in the successes, which have distinguished us throughout the world (189)". When he turns to explain his rationale for supporting the welfare plan he makes another vague note of civil rights by saying:

*If I had to talk about one right today it would not be the right to freedom of speech and it would not be any of the rights we have been talking about so long; it would be the right to be ready. We are denying today the right to be ready to too many of the children in this country (192).*

These sentences exemplify the vague reference to civil rights debates when poverty was concerned. Fighting poverty is not related to "the right to freedom of speech" or to any of the civil rights "we have been talking about so long". Rather, it is related to a very vague type of right, namely the "right to be ready". This right is not only vague, in and of itself, but also the group that was deprived from this right is presented in blurred and neutralized terms, namely "too many children in this country".



When Wirtz testifies in front of the immigration committee, he makes a much clearer reference both to the Civil Rights Act and to the discriminatory features of the excising immigration system. The following quote exemplifies that:

*[This] bill [is] designed basically to eliminate the discriminatory national origin system from our immigration law...The historic Civil Right Act of 1964 brings one part of our law in line with the dictate of our conscience that discrimination has no place in a free and democratic society... the discriminatory features of the national origins quota system, still a part of our immigration laws, is inconsistent with this vital principle (439-440).*

In summary, administration representatives were very hesitant when it came to identify the poor or the relations between race and poverty. In clear opposition, they used the frame of racial discrimination as the major rationale for supporting the elimination of the Quota immigration system.

## **2.2. Congressmen:**

The testimonies of Congress members followed the same general tendency: again racial discrimination was vaguely mentioned in welfare discussions, and was a major component of all immigration discussions. In presenting the rationale for the reforms, members of Congress were much more willing to use the ‘racial discrimination’ frame when it came to immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe, and avoided this language in supporting the war against poverty. The word ‘discrimination’ was central to the supporters of the immigration bill, while it was almost fully absent from the welfare discourse. In answering the “what” question—what are the things the policy should fix—congressmen who supported the immigration reform related to “the present discriminatory system” while in supporting the welfare reform they placed the “poor” and

not any traits of the system itself as needing to be fixed<sup>8</sup>. These are the words both supporters used in order to answer this question:

Immigration	Welfare
Injustice, Shame, Discriminatory features	Misfits, family circumstances, disadvantage, deprivation, lack of education, unsteady employment, caught in a web of interwoven disadvantage, forgotten and ignored, lack of skills due to automation, lack of luck

When I coded the evidence for when specific groups were mentioned, it was clear that Congress representatives tended to not present the Black population by any specific name, where as in the immigration fields Congress representatives tended to be clear about the groups they are talking about. Amongst all Congress representatives, the African-American population was mentioned by any specific name only 4 times. In two of the incidents, the naming was used only after a cross examination of the witness by some of the members of the committee (usually Republicans) who suspected that the witness refers to this group and deliberately avoiding its naming. The following quote exemplify this tendency. After a cross examination by the Republican members of the committee, Mr. Landrum (Dem. Georgia) insists on presenting poverty as a colorblind issue:

*I would say for the record that Negroes are not the only poor people in the world. I have been associated with this condition of poverty and I know many, many white people who have been associated with it. To the extent that the Negro is involved as a direct subject of this disease of poverty, I want it clearly understood that I am going to do everything I can to help relieve that situation, because I think it is a blight on the American scene. Likewise, where the white person is involved, I shall do everything I can to relieve them.*

### **2.3. Non-Governmental Representatives:**

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<sup>8</sup> This is true with only one exception.

The testimonies of non-governmental organization not only stay “loyal” to the same line of argument, but also manifest it more clearly. Out of the 23 witnesses who testified in front of the Immigration Committee, 20 were using the discrimination frame very clearly. The following are but three testimonies to illustrate this general tendency:

*I think time has proven that people should be judged as people, regardless of their nationality or light skin or their eyes may be different than the eyes of some other individuals... the best interests of this country are not defined in terms of skin or race, but it is the quality of the man who seeks admission (Dr. Robert A. Cook, National Association of Evangelicals, 619)*

*The method of choosing immigrants primarily on the basis of their national origin, with larger quotas for countries of Northern Europe and smaller quotas for countries of Southern Europe is... utterly unworthy of our traditions and ideals (John Ottaviano, Jr. Supreme Venerable Order Sons of Italy in America, 823)*

*The seeming arbitrariness of the number of annual quota admissions and the discriminatory character of the national origin basis of selection appear to be in sharp contradiction to our claims of championing the equality and dignity of all men... (Donald E. Anderson, Director, Lutheran Immigration Service, 751)*

It seemed like the “anti discrimination” frame was so central in immigration discussions that half of the witnesses who *opposed* the elimination of the quota system grounded their opposition also based on a discrimination frame of reference. In other words, half of the witnesses that opposed the elimination of the quota system expressed their support for continuing sorting immigrants according to their country of origin by using an anti discrimination frame. The following exemplifies that:

*[The “first come first served” basis of the new bill] will discriminate in favor of the immigrants from the overpopulated, socially and economically deprived countries such as China, India, and Africa... ( Mrs. W. C. Frame, Executive Director, Doorstep, Savannah, Inc. 664)*

*This bill, if pass, will discriminate against American Citizens... Will we not be exercising discrimination against our own afflicted citizens by opening our doors*

*to those poor unfortunates from abroad?... (Mrs. Cornelia S. Chapin, The Greenwich Women's Republican Club, Greenwich, 817-8)*

As opposed to this picture, the 'discrimination' frame appeared by non-governmental witnesses in the welfare discussion only five times (out of 33 evidences). The following is a telling example of the way in which the specific conditions of black poverty were mentioned. In his testimony, Whitney Young Jr. of the Urban League talks about black poverty and specifically on the fact that civil rights alone will not be able to fight it. Upon mentioning the race-poverty connection in such blunt way, he is immediately interrupted and being almost forced to rephrased his support in colorblind terms:

*The Urban League endorses wholeheartedly all of the titles of this legislation... in the light of the massive problem of unemployment, particularly that the Negro citizen faces, and the problem of under education... and inferior vocational education, housing and what have you... What I am describing to you for the Negro is not a recession, an inconvenience; it is a catastrophe, a disaster... We... have no illusion that the civil rights bill will in and of itself address itself to this problem that we are talking about... We are afraid that we will end up here with a mouthful of civil rights and an empty stomach... Mr. Landrum: [but...] the problem we are attacking here must be and it is colorblind. Do you agree that the bill proposed to assist people of all races wherever they appear and whatever the condition of poverty that may be affecting them? Mr. Young: I agree 100% percent.*

### **Summary:**

Although the war against poverty was originated by the racial unrest of this era, the correlations between race and poverty did not manage to become a central part how this program was discussed and decided upon. Was this merely a strategic decision? to some extent, by presenting the war against poverty in moral terms the administration was able to curtail strong Republican opposition. I argue, however, that this state of affairs represents much more than a mere strategic decision.

Albeit its revolutionary promises, most of the Great Society poverty programs did not deviate from American classic liberalism: they held that poverty could not be eliminated by changing the economic and political system, but merely by relying on individuals' efforts and skills. Both the administration and most liberal supporters of the bill constantly argued that the main merit of this bill lays in its ability "help the poor help themselves" (Levitan, 1969:10). Both in public speeches and in the committee discussions, they maintained that this bill is not a regular welfare bill, and its ultimate success will be manifested in reducing welfare expenditures.

I argue, thus, that even this liberal administration was not willing to address the role of the economic and political system in the systematic correlation between race and poverty. They genuinely made a case according to which by merely equipping the poor with the right skills they will be able to overcome poverty. During the committee discussion the issue of increasing social security payments and minimum wage was raised several times, but largely ignored.

The heart of the administration's war against poverty was the community action part of the law and the infamous concept of 'maximum feasible participation' on which it was based. The ability of the new welfare recipients to take advantage of community action programs depended on the ongoing consent and cooperation of the larger society, but the 'readiness' of the public to support such programs was never discussed or accounted for not while preparing the law and nor during its actual application. Indeed, the most revolutionary part of this welfare program, when it came to Black-White relations, was adopted almost by mistake and passed the Congress approval almost without being noticed. In reality, community action programs in Black areas did fuel a

growing racial resentment from the public at large. This backlash hindered the ability of Blacks to actually take advantage of the programs offered by the Great Society, and practically ended the main educational and training programs. The administration was not prepared to deal with this backlash—ignoring its potential from the outset, the administration was not willing to defend community programs against resentful racial opposition (Quadango: 1994, Liberman: 1998).

The way poverty was presented, only loosely coupled with race, benefited not only Southerners and civil rights opponents but also other actors, namely Liberal Whites and Public officials. If Liberal Whites were excluded from participating, let alone leading, the Civil Rights movement struggle because it was portrayed exclusively in terms of color, they could much easily and “naturally” lead a colorblind war against poverty. These were not only liberal members of the Congress, but also professional social revolutionaries (Gettleman and Mermelstein, 1967: 227). Second, the growing racial unrest in the cities threatened the authority of public officials in major cities in a very direct way. Being able to establish direct connections with the federal government and obtain actual financial aid to programs in their area strengthened the image of them being in control and actually “doing something” on the matter.

As much as the ‘racial discrimination’ rationale did not appear to be a central discursive frame in discussions of poverty, it became the first and foremost frame through which Immigration reform was discussed. I argue that the struggle of the Black population contributed to this process: the civil rights discourse of the 1960s provided the main frame of thought, or the main frame of reference around which the efforts to change the immigration system were made. By no means do I argue that the 1965 Immigration

Act was actually passed because a genuine concern with the evils of discrimination in general. The anti-discrimination frame succeeded to be translated into a radical immigration reform only because it was conceived (by both Republicans and Democrats) as something that will mainly influence the immigration from Eastern and Southern Europe. Not accidentally, this reform was passed in the first Congress that was controlled by Roman Catholics.

If distinction between whites were central to the quota system, the intersection of welfare and immigration reforms during the 1960s symbolizes their decreasing importance. Together, the welfare and immigration laws ultimately marked the color line around as opposed to within Europe and facilitated the lingering distinct social destinies for Whites and Blacks. Towards Eastern Europeans, the change was the most far reaching. All differences between Eastern and Western Europeans turned to be completely irrelevant. This momentous intersection of welfare and immigration reforms captures the full completion of process by which race turned to be a color thing (relevant mainly to Blacks) whereas all the other differences became merely 'ethnic' or 'cultural' ones.

### **Conclusions:**

The intersection between welfare and immigration during the 1960s presents both an empirical and a theoretical challenge to existing literature on the subject. Empirically, although the 1960s were a momentous period in welfare and immigration policy-making, the actual relations between the Great Society welfare reform of 1964 and the Immigration reform of 1965 are yet empirically understudied. Theoretically, the mere fact that the expansion of welfare policies during the 1960s was not accompanied by a

restrictive immigration pulse but on the contrary, by a far reaching expansion of American immigration policy, challenge the main predictions of European scholars with regards to the general relations between welfare and immigration policies.

Using official archival material (mainly Congressional hearings) and secondary sources I argued that a unique exchange of discursive frames between welfare and immigration realms took place during the 60s in the US. Although the Great Society welfare program was born at the peak of the Civil Right Movement's political activity, and was aimed to address the specific needs of Blacks, most supporters of the program framed the problem of poverty in colorblind terms. At the same time, the anti discrimination discourse had occupied most of the immigration discussion in Congress. Discrimination against Eastern and Southern Europeans was depicted as an evil remainder of early times and was used as the main rational for abolishing the quota system. In essence, albeit the centrality of the civil rights discourse at the time in the public arena, it was not used as a rational for addressing poverty. On the other hand, it provided the main discursive platform in the process of homogenizing distinctions between whites from diverse ethnic and national origins. In this process, Eastern and Southern European immigrants were granted easy entry and feasible assimilation into American society.

The American intersection of welfare and immigration during the 1960s casts major criticism on the way European literature frames the relations between these two policies. It questions the assumption that welfare recipients or immigrants constitute a homogenized social category. Contrary to the predictions of this literature, the American case proves that boundaries between citizens were more important than distinctions



between citizens and outsiders. In light of the American case, this project also expands the theoretical framework in which to discuss welfare-immigration relations in general.

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