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Analysis of Political Language Manipulation: Changing Public Perceptions of the Poor through
the War on Poverty and Popular Literary Fiction

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Abstract

I propose to explore the rhetoric and language surrounding poor people of color both through common culture in literature and political speeches and documents of contemporary politicians between the years 1965 and 1992. I am particularly interested in the evolution of the Johnson administration's War on Poverty between the 1970s and 1990s. Additionally, the Reagan administration's tear down of the welfare system in the 1980s is another area of interest. I will specifically be examining how images of the poor have been manipulated in order to preserve the power of the elite and how portrayals of poverty shift in the given timeframe. I will be focusing on the portrayals of poor women of color. Then, through analysis of political speeches and media articles surrounding the Moynihan Report of 1965, and the elections of 1980 and 1992, I will evaluate the methods used by those in power to condemn the poor. Finally, I will discuss how literature both furthers and pushes against the changing perceptions and policies regarding poor people of color. This research will add to the knowledge of the ways governments utilize the power of language to maintain power and achieve social control and help locate the role of popular literary fiction in broader cultural debates.

Introduction

Americans in general seem to feel that people are poor because they lack intelligence, motivation, ambition, and skills. The poor, particularly black women, have been stigmatized in both politics and literature as failing for these very personal reasons despite the presence of some very real institutional discrimination and structural obstacles. Society does not, however, wish to take responsibility for people's failings regardless of discrimination or obstacles. It is far easier for politicians and the media to suggest that the poor fail because they want to fail. The poor are lazy, they wish to "milk the system" and take advantage of successful Americans. As average citizens hear this mantra daily from sources they trust (politicians/ leaders and the media), they begin to internalize the idea. Once this idea is ingrained, it becomes a belief and the belief is acted upon. The language of politicians and the media has succeeded in at least partially deceiving the American public. The public is susceptible to these lies because the truth is far harder to bear.

It is a natural question once one is in possession of this knowledge to ask how it applies in society. In what ways has the government influenced the public's opinion and for what purpose? Why is it blaming the poor for their misfortunes? How have they been able to create the stereotypical image of the lazy, unmotivated, African American man on welfare? Why has the public not recognized this ploy given the lessons from history?

In my research, I hope to answer some of these questions and gain a deeper understanding of the process of condemning the poor and its effects. In answering these deep questions I wish to grapple with the question of why we, in priding ourselves in being an enlightened and advanced society, have allowed ourselves to fall into the age old trap of manufactured truth. It is my desire that my research expands my own insight into the workings

of society and assist others in broadening their intellectual horizons. My hope for contributing to the discipline of Sociology is to provide more research into the “hows” and “whys” of “manufactured truth” through language manipulation. Specifically, I will be studying the *Moynihan Report* and the presidential election cycles of 1976, 1980, and 1992. In my examination of literature, I wish to explore how literature both supports and pushes against the political rhetoric of the times. This examination will begin to answer questions regarding the influence of literature, particularly popular texts, on culture. I will read the texts *A Raisin in the Sun*, *The Bluest Eye*, *The Color Purple*, and *Mama Day*. As a society, we can only learn from history if we are willing to be honest with ourselves about its relevance and connections today.

Literature Review

The research surrounding race and poverty from the 1960 through the 1990s is extensive and diverse. Some authors such as Gilens (1996) and Hanson (2010) focus on the variation between public perceptions of poverty and its reality. Haveman (1987) examined the gains and losses of antipoverty measures to the nonpoor. He discussed the effects of welfare on society as a whole as well as the poor. Additionally, Hicks (1978) studied economic redistribution based on corporate and union interest as well as political control while Kelly (2010) examined the concept of unequal democracy and power/ political differentiation's effect on financial redistribution. .

In his article, Gilens presented actual poverty statistics in contrast to perceived poverty statistics based on a 1991 survey by the National Race and Politics Study. For example, when asked which race best described the majority of the poor, 54% of the survey respondents chose black (Gilens, 1996). In contrast, only 24% of respondents indicated white and 31% chose "about equal" (Gilens, 1996). This is particularly remarkable given that 1990 U.S. Census statistics demonstrated that only 29% of welfare recipients were black (Gilens, 1996).

This huge gap in perception of poverty as a racial problem created a major divide in relative support or opposition to welfare spending. As Gilens (1996) found in a *CBS/ New York Times* survey in 1994, 46% of white Americans who believed African Americans to compose more than half the poor also wanted to cut welfare spending. The author was unable to attribute this relationship to sex, age, income, race, liberal/ conservative ideology, or political party identification through other statistical methods (Gilens, 1996). Instead, perceived race of the poor remained a significant predictor of desire to cut welfare spending (Gilens, 1996).

Seventy percent of respondents in the *CBS/ New York Times* 1994 survey agreed with the statement “America is the land of opportunity where everyone who works hard can get ahead” (Kluegal and Smith, 1986 as quoted in Gilens, 1996, p. 517-8). This general consensus indicated that Americans still believed in the American Dream. Consequently, if equal opportunity was available then laziness and lack of motivation were to blame for financial failure. In short, the poor were blamed for their situation. In this case, because the poor were deemed responsible for their failure, the larger society was less likely to provide assistance. Gilens provided proof for this conjecture in the form of more statistics. According to the author, when the National Opinion Research Center conducted the *General Social Survey (GSS)* in 1990 and asked respondents to rate blacks on a 7 point laziness/ hardworking scale, 47% of whites indicated that they felt blacks were lazy whereas only 17% of whites chose hardworking (Gilens, 1996).

As Gilens went on to explain, the perceptions of the majority of poor being black and black laziness are self-reinforcing as well as cyclical in nature. It also allowed whites to think that poverty was disproportionately a black problem. This created a situation in which solving poverty was impossible.

In Gilens’ (1996) study on the portrayal of race in media depictions of poverty, he found that in *Newsweek*, *Times*, and *U.S. News and World Report* poor people were represented by blacks more than half of the time. It is through the reinforcement of this sort of media outlet that the survey respondents and the larger population they represent form and support personal beliefs of the predominant blackness of poverty. Within their depictions of the poor, these media outlets used blacks to display the poor underclass 100% of the time (Gilens, 1996).

The overwhelming inclusion of blacks in groups of undeserving and generational poverty stands in sharp contrast to their portrayal in the more sympathetic poor situation of working

poverty. In the magazines, only 12% of depicted poor African Americans were portrayed as working while a startling 88% were described as not working (Gilens, 1996). In reality, according to the 1990 U.S. Census, 42% of impoverished African Americans were working leaving 58% out of work (Gilens, 1996). Comparatively, although the media outlets portrayed more than double (27%) of poor whites as working, in reality the numbers were quite similar. The 1990 statistics showed that 54% of poor whites were working (Gilens, 1996). It is clear that although working individuals of all races were severely underrepresented in media portrayals of the poor, African Americans were less than half as likely to be portrayed as belonging to the working poor. Again, this fueled the earlier demonstrated public perception of black laziness and majority black welfare recipients.

In Gilens' (1996) investigation of the reasons behind the clear media skew, he was unable to come to one clear conclusion. Instead, he posited that several factors including geographic availability, editors' implicit bias, and suitability for instant recognition contributed to the skewed results. In the geographic availability argument, previous researchers such as Herbert Gans in his 1979 work suggested that the overrepresentation of blacks in news depictions of the poor was due to the closeness between urban media offices and urban poverty pockets (Gilens, 1996).

Gilens (1996) pointed out that this is unlikely to explain most of the discrepancy because the racial composition of poverty in even urban neighborhoods with high poverty rates is similar (and less) than the discrepancies depicted in news media. The high percentage of black poverty in comparison to white poverty depicted in the media was only found in urban neighborhoods of extreme poverty which account for less than 9% of all poverty (Gilens, 1996). In these urban areas of extreme poverty, African Americans represented 60% of the poor population, however,

these neighborhoods of extreme poverty compose such a small percentage of overall poverty that they cannot account for all the media discrepancies (Gilens, 1996). As the author states, it was unlikely that journalists were exclusively visiting areas of extreme poverty and leaving out 90% of poverty situations, thus, the geographic availability argument cannot account for the disproportionate representation of poor African Americans (Gilens, 1996).

The next explanation explored by Gilens was implicit bias of editors. As he found in interviews with media editors, while the group believed that blacks comprised of a larger proportion of the poor than they do in reality, the editors' perceived statistic of 42% of the poor being black is closer to reality than the general public's perception of 50% (Gilens, 1996). Consequently, because it was clear that news photo editors were not publishing discrepancies in the racial composition of the poor in order to fulfill their own preconceived notions, Gilens (1996) posited that implicit bias may be at work. The author noted that photo editors were not making reasoned or carefully considered decisions in including some pictures but not others. Instead, editors made an instant judgement on whether to include pictures of black or white Americans to represent the poor. This judgement may have revealed an implicit feeling that African Americans reflect the face of poverty.

Closely related to the argument of implicit bias of editors was the desire to include pictures that will be instantly comprehended by viewers. Thus, Gilens (1996) stated that editors may have included a disproportionate number of pictures of the black poor as a reflection of what the public expected and would easily recognize. While it is impossible to prove either this or the point regarding implicit bias, they represent potential explanations for the discrepancies. Additionally, both explanations serve to reinforce underlying assumptions regarding African American poverty and work ethic.

Hanson also explored the tendency of Americans to blame the poor for their misfortune. She drew attention to the prevalence of the American Dream and the generalized belief that hard work would result in success (Hanson, 2010). In survey research looking at years from 1978 to 2008, Hanson found that based on *General Social Survey (GSS)* data, more than half of Americans felt that hard work was more important than luck in being successful (Hanson, 2010). This question was first instituted in the 1985 *GSS*. As demonstrated by Gilens' earlier discussed research, a strong belief in the importance of hard work to success often correlates with increased blame of the unsuccessful. This belief is strongly influenced by relative privilege of the person. If one is occupying a position of relative privilege, they are likely to validate their personal good fortune through an emphasis on their hard work and industrious natures. Consequently, when confronted with less fortunate individuals, the privileged blame the poor for their unfortunate situations.

Later in the article, Hanson (2010) discussed the perception of racial discrimination and personal fault for African Americans. Between 1995 and 2008, respondents were more than twice as likely to agree with the personal fault/ blame statement (Hanson 2010). This indicated a high level of blame being placed on African Americans for their situations. Although there was no companion survey to determine whether white failure would be more likely attributed to outside factors or personal fault, it is clear that blacks were being blamed for their poverty. It must be noted that in 2008 a four percentage point increase in the number of respondents who attributed racial discrimination to lack of success occurred. This increase is outside of the realm of this project but indicates the current recognition of still occurring racial discrimination.

Haveman (1987) studied the impacts of social welfare expenditures on both the poor and nonpoor. He indicated that in the 1960s an uptick of concern for America's poor caused the

creation of new social policy termed the “War on Poverty” by the Johnson administration. President Johnson’s anti-poverty measures included the goal of reaching a “Great Society” (Haveman, 1987). Haveman (1987) also noted that by the 1980s, the optimism regarding the eradication of poverty had been eroded. Instead, the social welfare programs were described as “satisfactory with flashes of good” at best (Haveman, 1987, p. 65). In his article, he explored the cost benefit ratio of social welfare expenditures for the nonpoor.

Haveman (1987) included increased spending on education, economic security, and leisure time as benefits shared by the nonpoor. Increased welfare funding for education clearly benefited both the poor and nonpoor. In fact, Robert Plotnick estimated that 80% of social welfare educational funding directly benefitted the nonpoor between 1965 and 1980 (Haveman, 1987). This was a huge educational benefit that was unlikely to have occurred without social welfare funding.

Next, Haveman (1987) discussed the benefits of increased economic security to the nonpoor. According to the author, welfare support in the form of education and job training greatly increased economic security. In turn, this security created a larger work force and more production. Increased production led to increased profits and profit sharing between the poor and nonpoor (Haveman, 1987). Thus, increased welfare spending indirectly resulted in financial gains for the nonpoor. Additionally, increased economic security led to crime reduction and a larger safety net for both poor and nonpoor in case of economic downturn (Haveman, 1987).

Finally, Haveman (1987) also indicated that increased social welfare expenditure created increased leisure time and well being for nonpoor individuals. For example, under social welfare programs, individuals would be able to claim more tax deductions causing greater tax benefits and more available finances (Haveman, 1987). Again, this indirectly resulted in increased

leisure time. Additionally, social welfare spending caused an increase in well being for the nonpoor. As the standard of living for the poor increased, the nonpoor were able to feel good about the society in which they live (Haveman, 1987). Haveman (1987) states that the improved sense of well being due to others' bettered circumstances is referred to as the "Pareto-optimal redistribution" in economics literature.

In direct contrast, the nonpoor also suffer some negative consequences due to increased social welfare expenditure including financial losses. The losses mentioned by Haveman (1987) focused mainly around loss of wages caused by a growing participation in the labor market and increased taxes to fund welfare programs. Together, these financial losses created a sense of squeeze on the nonpoor and contributed to support for a reduction in welfare spending (Haveman, 1987).

Hicks (1978) investigated the effect of corporate and union interest in economic redistribution. According to Kelly (2010), it was difficult for redistribution to gain political support because the poor (those who would most directly benefit), are disenfranchised and have little political power. Hicks (1978), however, found that union influence could generate significant support for redistribution. Additionally, Democratic party control of government also assisted in a focus on economic redistribution and social welfare expenditure (Hicks, 1978). In contrast, significant corporate interest blocked economic redistribution in order to benefit corporate profits (Hicks, 1978).

Finally, Kelly (2010) discussed how "unequal democracy" with the poor having fewer avenues to political influence created a cycle of inequality due to their inability to influence the system (p. 859). Kelly (2010) also examined a trend in which respondents were less likely to support social welfare funding during times of greater economic inequality. This was

exemplative of the Benabou model which stated that greater inequality caused less support for funding due to increased blame of the poor (Kelly, 2010). The Benabou model also explained how periods of inequality when paired with lack of public support for funding created a further increase in inequality (Kelly, 2010).

As a whole, the research on racial and economic inequality indicated that the public generally blames the poor for their situation. Furthermore, the population tended to incorrectly assume that the racial composition of the poor is a majority black. This tied into stereotypes of black laziness and reinforced preconceived notions. Finally, these ideas were reinforced through media representations of the poor as well as corporate and political interests.

Methods

The overarching goal of this interdisciplinary project is to examine the ways political rhetoric and popular literature view the poor, particularly poor women of color during the 1970s, 1980s, and early 1990s. I will delve into the ways news organizations and politicians frame political debates and legislation surrounding welfare and welfare reform and pay careful attention to the perceived root causes of the problem as well as to solutions. With the deep and enduring history of the American Dream, I will also examine the way its language and rhetoric is manipulated by both political parties in order to make the argument that politicians frame the the poor in specific ways in order to gain and maintain power and political advantage.

I will begin this project through background reading on the political and literary time periods. In order to further my understanding on the subject, I will also read other sociological studies conducted in this and similar areas.

Daniel Patrick Moynihan's 1965 report on the state of the African American family and Lorraine Hansberry's 1958 play, *A Raisin in the Sun*, were both written during the beginning of

a time period that would wrestle with the issues of economic and racial inequality. These texts will provide a baseline against which the others works can be compared. It is also crucial that both the report and the play were written for consumption by white audiences in order to alert them to the problems and engage them in the solutions. The other literary works that will be examined are directed more towards black Americans as a discussion of an internal identity crisis. Thus, the solutions proposed by these authors is likely to be very different from those imagined by Moynihan and Hansberry.

The analysis of Moynihan's and Hansberry's texts will be compared with the tones of popular novels written during the time period of scrutiny 1970-1992. These novels include Toni Morrison's 1970 *The Bluest Eye*, Alice Walker's 1982 *The Color Purple*, and Gloria Naylor's 1988 *Mama Day*. The authors' attitudes toward the poor and the tones of the novels will be noted. I will also emphasize the characters' volition and ability to choose. How constrained are they by their economic position? Their race? Furthermore, another focus will be the authors' conception of the problem. Are the poor to blame for their situation? To what extent are they culpable? Lastly, I will examine the authors' solutions to the problem of racial and economic inequality. Do the authors' envision legislation or social programs as being crucial parts of the solution or do they feel that the solution will come from cultural and social change within the community?

In the study of the novels, I will pay special attention to diction, tone, character development, and characters' ability to make choices. These characteristics will be used to judge whether the author is portraying poor individuals in a sympathetic, neutral/ realist, or negative light. Things such as social programs or change in characters' attitudes that would positively impact characters' lives will be noted as suggestions to enact change. These ideas will be

compared and contrasted with policy and social program solutions proposed by political figures of the time.

Literary criticism and literary and cultural movements surrounding the chosen literary texts will also be studied. In reading the texts together, an exploration of the scholarly dialogue will be used to come to a greater understanding of the perception and reaction to the ongoing social problem of economic and racial inequality. Studying the literary criticism surrounding the works will better position the texts within broader literary and cultural contexts.

In the sociological portion of the project, newspaper articles regarding political viewpoints on poverty and its solutions as well as articles addressing welfare and welfare reform from *The New York Times* as the newspaper of record will be gathered. Specifically, articles from the years 1976, 1980, and 1992 represent particular years of interest. I will sort these articles according to tone and method of discussion. Articles discussing the poor in positive, negative, and neutral tones will be separated and further categorized by their discussion of people or social programs and legislative/ welfare reform.

Each grouping of articles will be read and evaluated based on tone, word choice, general conception of the issues and causes of poverty, and the proposed solution. I will also note political party or political leaning of the discussion. This will compose the analysis portion of the project. Tone and general discussion topic will be recorded both by year and by political party. Then, I will compare the discussion of poverty and welfare across the studied years to examine the ways in which it changed and evolved depending on the political party in control. Years in which political power is gained and held by Republicans will be especially emphasized as the “war against the poor” was fought during the Reagan administration. The newspaper articles in these years will be examined for evidence of blaming the poor for their situations and

a reduction of welfare benefits. I will also note the use of American Dream rhetoric by both parties in order to connect with Americans and fulfill their political agenda.

Finally, both the sociological and literary portions of the project will be examined together and their perspectives on poverty, welfare, and potential solutions will be compared and contrasted. The differences in both perception of poverty and its solution based upon race and class of the writer (the authors are much closer to the problem as black women of color than are the white, male politicians) will be analyzed. I will make the case that politicians represent the poor in specific ways in order to gain political advantage and maintain social control because it is much more popular to blame people for their own situation. If society is at fault then it is responsible also for remedying the solution

Blaming the individual also has deep roots in the American psyche as an integral part of the American Dream story. In the story, individuals rise to wealth and power through their own ingenuity and hard work. Consequently, if an individual is unable to be successful then they are personally lacking. Their lack of wealth and relative success is due to their comparative laziness and lack of long term financial planning.

The Moynihan Report

In March 1965, then sociologist and Assistant Secretary of Labor, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, wrote a report titled “The Negro Family: The Case for National Action”. This report examined the status of race relations, poverty, and racial discrimination in the United States. It also examined possible solutions for the problems. Moynihan did not base this report on any research conducted specifically for the project but rather used his observation, experience, and existing statistics. Specifically, Moynihan’s conception of the importance of the family unit to African American success was rooted on black middle class family models. Furthermore,

Moynihan fundamentally believed that it was the government's responsibility to intervene in issues of poverty and race relations in order to promote equality.

Moynihan (1965) began his report by referencing civil rights advances of the 1960s including the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964. He noted that African Americans as well as the American public refuse to accept discrimination and unequal treatment. According to Moynihan, this meant that African Americans were moving to a new era in fighting for their rights. This new era would be categorized as fighting for social equality and equal opportunity as the previous era was focused on civil rights (Moynihan, 1965). Moynihan noted that the struggle for inequality was ongoing because racism still affected the American public. Furthermore, despite individual stories of success, Moynihan (1965) acknowledges that as a group, African Americans perform more poorly than other racial groups. He attributes this inequality to a racist past and continuing racism.

Moynihan (1965) goes on to discuss that the economic disparity between whites and African Americans was growing despite recent civil rights advances. He notes that this may be hard for some whites to comprehend but that it is the truth. Moynihan attributes the growing economic disparity to family structure and cultural attitudes of African Americans with its roots in slavery.

In the next section of his report, Moynihan goes on to explain the origins of the Civil Rights Movement in an awed and appreciative tone. He states, "the Negroes themselves organized as a mass movement...[which] has been in some ways better disciplined and better led than any in our history" (Moynihan, 1965, p. 3). While the phrase "Negroes themselves" (Moynihan, 1965, p. 3) perhaps indicates some surprise that they were capable of mass organization, it also conveys a message of awe. It was impressive that African Americans were

able to organize in such a massive and powerful way. Moynihan also compliments the movement by saying that it was better organized than many other movement. Again, this denotes respect for the movement and for its leadership. In this, Moynihan is pushing back against stereotypes portraying African Americans as lazy or unintelligent. However, this phrase still creates a sense of “othering” in which Moynihan is clearly separating African Americans from other racial groups particularly white Americans.

In the first chapter of the report, Moynihan (1965) points out that African Americans are engaged in a struggle deeper than a fight for liberty. Instead, they are fighting for equality of group achievements with whites (Moynihan, 1965). This is a much loftier goal according to Moynihan (1965).

The second chapter more fully addresses the “deterioration of the Negro family [as] a fundamental source of weakness” (Moynihan, 1965, p. 7). This statement provides insight into Moynihan’s view of the root of the problem of inequality suffered by African Americans. Just as later Republican candidates such as George H. W. Bush would do, Moynihan points toward the family as the basic unit of societal structure. Consequently, if the family unit is weak then the community also suffers. Moynihan (1965) specifically points toward the near breakdown of African American families and households in poor urban centers as the crux of the problem.

The report notes a growing social and economic distance between middle and lower class African Americans (Moynihan, 1965). It describes middle class African Americans as stable and growing increasingly more successful due to strong family ties (Moynihan, 1965). Moynihan cautions readers that the relative success of the African American middle class is not indicative of the group as a whole. Consequently, due to the fact that these middle class individuals are not the norm for African Americans, Moynihan (1965) insists that change must be enacted.

Moynihan goes on to elaborate on the statistics of urban disorganization. He states that roughly a quarter of African American women ever married are living separate from their husbands due to divorce, separation, or having an absent husband (Moynihan, 1965). This is in contrast to a white population where around 10% of women are living without their husbands. Additionally, Moynihan states that illegitimacy rates are rising among African American children at an alarming rate. For example, in 1940, the illegitimacy rate of African American children was 16.8% but had grown to 23.6% by 1963. During the same period, the white illegitimacy rate grew only 1%. Moynihan points out that these statistics are skewed as some African American children within the timeframe were technically illegitimate but still grew up in stable households.

As is perhaps expected by the marriage and illegitimacy statistics, Moynihan (1965) states that nearly a quarter of African American families are single parent families headed by women. Again, this would be expected if one took into account the earlier statistics that about a quarter of married women are living separately from their husbands and are having illegitimate children. Moynihan points to weak black males as well as a matriarchal cultural structure being to blame for the increasing social disorganization among African Americans.

Moynihan (1965) traces the roots of African American matriarchy to slave times in which many slave families were split up. As a result, many families were headed by women. After slavery, Moynihan (1965) notes that African Americans were given “liberty but not equality” (p. 11). This lack of equality was at the heart of Jim Crow, policies that according to Moynihan affected men much more than women. Moynihan posits that requiring black male submission in public was a major humiliation and broke down black male pride. This further contributed to the relative power of the black female figure in family structure.

Next, Moynihan (1965) cites statistics regarding growing African American unemployment and their economic roots. The relative welfare of the economy strongly influenced unemployment rates which in turn affected poverty, divorce, and welfare rates. He also indicates that the matriarchal structure of many African American families contributes to failure of black men.

In a discussion on matriarchy in the family, Moynihan (1965) mentions that in African American households with two or more earners the man is generally not the primary earner. Coupled with high unemployment rates, this creates a sense of lack of empowerment and hopelessness for black men that discourages them from working and competing successfully with their white peers. Furthermore, young black men grow up without the positive male image to model a productive life (Moynihan, 1965). They see only productive and strong women or weak and unemployed men. As a result, they grow up without serious ambition and continue the cycle.

At the end of the report, Moynihan (1965) indicates that “the cycle can be broken only if these distortions are set right” (p. 28). Interestingly enough, although Moynihan’s cultural arguments are later used by conservatives as a way to argue against increased social programming, within the context of the report, Moynihan (1965) argues for increased programming. He recognizes that the familial disorganization is a structural problem that is widespread rather than an isolated individual problem. Consequently, he proposes that broad based social legislation is necessary to adequately address the issue. Specifically, Moynihan wanted to address legislation that would directly or indirectly contribute to increased stability and resources of African American families.

Many of Moynihan's ideas were not original but rather built upon W. E. B. DuBois's depiction of the Philadelphia negro. DuBois wrote that the Philadelphia negro was embroiled in poverty, racism, and crime (Burbridge, n. d.). Specifically, DuBois notes the substantial number of female headed homes and low employment rates of black males. Although he was writing in 1899, DuBois rejected earlier Darwinian arguments and instead insisted that racism was at the root of the problems faced by African Americans (Burbridge, n. d.). Moynihan closely echoes this sentiment in his report by advocating for a government response to poverty.

A Raisin in the Sun

Lorraine Hansberry's 1958 play, *A Raisin in the Sun* functions much as the *Moynihan Report* does in portraying the issues of race and poverty. Although written before the report, it portrays many of the same ideas. Walter Lee represents the downtrodden and emasculated man Moynihan describes. Additionally, his wife Ruth and mother Mamma depict powerful women in the family. Finally, Mama's dream to buy a house in a white neighborhood explores the struggles and benefits of assimilation while gaining the sympathy of a white audience.

Walter Lee Younger suffers from a lack of hope and control. He works as chauffeur for a white family (Hansberry, 1958). As a service job, chauffeuring places him in the position of subordination to whites. While Walter had hoped that the insurance money from his father's death could be invested to give the family financial security, his mother, sister, and wife all veto the idea saying that is is improper and not constructive to invest in a liquor store (Hansberry, 1958). This lack of control over family finances and financial decisions places Walter in a place of weakness and the women of the family in positions of power.

Ruth, Walter's wife, exerts her power over both her husband and son through nagging. She wakes them up in the morning, exhorts them to hurry over getting ready, and nags each out

the door (Hansberry, 1958). It is clear that in the marriage, Ruth has much more control than Walter does. When she announces she is pregnant and considering abortion (because they cannot afford another child), Walter remains silent (Hansberry, 1958). His silence indicates that the abortion would be her choice although it intimately involves him as well.

Mama is the true matriarch of the family. It is ultimately her decision to put a down payment on a house in a white neighborhood in order to fulfill her dreams (Hansberry, 1958). She wants to move the family out so they can grow. She sees buying a house as partaking in the American Dream, something for which her family has worked very hard. This is a very understandable and relatable dream to the white audience. They can all identify and sympathize with Mama as she tries to pay for a house to watch her family grow. Because the apartment is extremely cramped with Ruth and Walter Lee sleeping in the living room, it is Mama's belief that living in a house would have prevented Ruth from considering an abortion because there would be room for the baby. It conveys the message that these individuals are part of the sympathetic poor. They work extremely hard for what they have and want to buy a house to fulfill their American Dream just as white families do.

Later on in the play, Walter Lee blossoms as a character when he is given control over the insurance money (Hansberry, 1958). The responsibility gives him pride based on financial control and social standing that he had never previously experienced. The money allows him to go to his friend to invest in the liquor store as an equal, something which he is extremely proud of (Hansberry, 1958). Finally, he is taking actions to better the family rather than follow the lead of his wife and mother.

Walter's moment of true rebirth occurs when the owner of the housing development comes to visit the Youngers in an attempt to buy the house from them and keep their

neighborhood exclusively white (Hansberry, 1958). Despite the exceptionally degrading goal of this visit, Walter finds the courage to stand up to him and refuse to sell him the house. He asserts that they have as much right to live in that house as any other person and intend to exercise that right (Hansberry, 1958). Eventually, the housing development owner leaves. The play ends with the family nervous but excited to be moving. They are finally making a change. The change, however, may bring some discomfort but the risk is worth what they are leaving behind.

A Raisin in the Sun sets the stage for the discussion on race and poverty for the next few decades. Like Senator Moynihan's 1965 report, it establishes some of the problems associated with African American poverty to be linked to racism and discrimination as well as cultural problems such as emasculated men. It is interesting to note, however, that Walter's weakness disappears as soon as he is given real financial responsibility and financial potential. Thus, the play works well alongside the report as it advocates for increased spending on social welfare programming. Increased funding for job opportunities may lead men like Walter Lee into higher paying jobs where they make more money. The increased pay will create increased opportunities for them and their families.

The Bluest Eye

Toni Morrison's 1970 novel, *The Bluest Eye* tells the story of a young African American girl's descent to madness following her inability to connect to her community in a meaningful way. Morrison (1970) wishes to implicate the reader and all community members in Pecola's downfall in order that readers be "moved not touched" (p. 211). This feeling would encourage readers to make an active change in their lives rather than be purged of their guilt from witnessing to the tragedy. The criticism surrounding *The Bluest Eye* focuses around the

multi narrator approach to telling the story as well as the issue of assimilation and how to resist racism.

Firstly, Jerome Bump (2010) addresses *The Bluest Eye* by assigning it to a new grouping of literary criticism namely ethical emotive criticism. Bump (2010) defines ethical emotive criticism as desiring to have a real and lasting impact on the reader. This very clearly falls in line with Morrison's desire for readers to be moved to action (Morrison, 1970). Bump (2010) addresses Morrison's goal as having the readers experience "compassionate grief" (p. 151) at the end of the novel. This compassionate grief would result from the reader being implicated in the tragedy of Pecola's descent to madness. Additionally, it would differ from the normal experience of grief in that it would take hold of the reader and not allow them to purge their guilt. In this way, the compassionate grief is much more powerful and much more lasting.

Bump (2010) notes that it is Morrison's narrative technique that fully implicates the reader in the story and its events. Linda Dittmar (1990) more fully explores the narrative techniques utilized in the novel. According to Dittmar (1990), the hesitation of narrator Claudia to impart the story at the beginning of the novel serves to more fully engage the reader and draw them in. This is important because the story is a difficult one to read and the reader must be fully invested in it in order to continue. Dittmar (1990) states that this hesitation creates the notion that the story is a secret. The secretive nature of the story makes it all the more compelling for the reader.

As the novel continues, Morrison makes use of a multi-narrator perspective (Dittmar, 1990). Some of the narrations are told in first person by various characters while others are narrated by an omniscient third person narrator. The multiplicity of perspectives points toward the multifaceted nature of truth (Dittmar, 1990). As in all stories, this one has as many different

sides and perspectives as it does characters. The sections narrated in different voices give the reader a deeper understanding of the wide array of characters. This understanding contributes to a greater sense of connection and empathy with the characters and their difficult situations. Additionally, according to Dittmar (1990), the varying narrators also point towards the broad scope of blame for Pecola's madness. All the narrators and by extension the reader are to blame.

The next critics, Douglass (2006) and Roye (2012) focus on ways characters respond to racism and discrimination in their communities. Douglass focuses his article on Geraldine and her family. Geraldine is a black woman with fairly light skin. In order avoid discrimination, she seeks to assimilate as closely as possible to white ideals of living. As a result, she exerts strict control over herself and her family. Morrison (1980) writes that these type of women try "to get rid of the funkiness. The dreadful funkiness of passion, the funkiness of nature, the funkiness of the wide range of human emotions" (p. 82-3). In disposing of their "funkiness" Geraldine and her peers are embracing whiteness while rejecting their own bodies and culture (Douglass, 2006).

As Morrison (1970) goes on to describe, maintaining this charade of whiteness is as unnatural as it is time consuming. Geraldine's son Junior longs for a real experience of blackness in a primal and sexual way.

Junior used to long to play with the black boys. More than anything in the world he wanted to play King of the Mountain and have them push him down the mound of dirt and roll over him. He wanted to feel their hardness pressing on him, smell their wild blackness, and say "Fuck you" with that lovely casualness. He wanted to sit with them on curbstones and compare the sharpness of jackknives, the distance and arcs of spitting.

In the toilet he wanted to share with them the laurels of being able to pee far and long.
(Morrison, 1970, p.87)

Geraldine does not allow Junior to befriend black boys because of their “wildness” and lack of sophistication. They would ruin the pretense of whiteness she so carefully built for herself and her son. As a result, Junior continues to long for contact with real blackness without seeing his dream realized. His struggle raises the question of whether culture can overcome biology (Douglass, 2006)

Through Junior’s dissatisfaction with his white styled life and Geraldine’s lack of freedom within her carefully constructed world, it can be inferred that Morrison is not endorsing this type of extreme assimilation as a method of avoiding discrimination (Douglass, 2006). Rather, Morrison seems to feel pity for those who do not embrace their heritage and culture as beautiful and unique.

Douglass (2006) briefly mentions that Morrison does depict Claudia’s family the MacTeers as comfortable in their status as African Americans. In addition to providing contrast to Geraldine’s way of living, the MacTeers also seem to represent the most natural and comfortable mode of existence explored in the novel. While they do not seem to struggle against discrimination, their upright and matter of fact style of life succeeds in raising two children who remain relatively unscathed throughout their childhoods.

Roye (2012) explores more deeply the response of Claudia and her sister Frieda to discrimination. As she explains, the girls seek to assert themselves angrily in the face of racism rather than submit to it as Pecola does (Roye, 2012). For example, both girls fight their next door neighbor, a lighter skinned girl when she taunts them. This rage is built on the neighbor’s assumption that the sisters are inferior based on their darker skin tone. It seeks to validate their

identities and demonstrate their strength. Claudia also breaks white baby dolls in order to assert herself against white ideals. According to Roye (2012) the white baby doll represents the white ideal of beauty (blonde hair, blue eyes, and light skin). Claudia destroys the baby in rejection of these white ideals and in assertion of her own worth and beauty. This fosters the development of a healthy sense of self-worth and positive identity in Claudia and Frieda.

Pecola by contrast internalizes white ideals of beauty and white norms just as Geraldine does. Because Pecola's skin is too dark to assimilate as Geraldine does, she instead internalizes feelings of worthlessness and ugliness. Without blue eyes, Pecola feels that she will continue to be victimized by her family and her community. Her inability to embrace her self worth and beauty ultimately cause her descent to madness as she becomes consumed by her desire to obtain blue eyes.

Through the positive achievements of Claudia and Frieda, it can be inferred that they represent Morrison's preferred method of fighting racism and discrimination (Roye, 2012). According to Roye (2012), Morrison shared their anger as a black girl growing up with few African American role models. Thus, she became an author to fill a void in the literary community and address the relevant issues of race and discrimination (Roye, 2012). Additionally, although Morrison seems to identify most clearly with the MacTeer girls in the novel, it is also clear that their friendship was not enough to save Pecola. Consequently, something else, perhaps an increased sense of community and cultural interconnectedness would need to be in place to prevent others from suffering as Pecola did.

1976 Presidential Election

In the presidential election cycle of 1976, issues of welfare and poverty formed an important piece of the discussion. Then California Governor Ronald Reagan took a highly

conservative and vocal stance on welfare fraud and the need for welfare reduction. More moderate conservatives focused on keeping welfare systems within the states rather than creating a federal system. Liberals took the stance that the existing welfare system was reaching a crisis point and required immediate intervention. Some advocated for a new system whereas others such as Jimmy Carter worked towards reforming the existing system. Due to the focus on welfare and welfare reform, it is clear that both parties agreed that reform was necessary. Their disagreements arose from the best way to fix the system.

The conservative viewpoint in 1976 was focused strongly upon streamlining the welfare system and eliminating welfare fraud. This is perhaps best depicted in California Governor Reagan's depiction of the "welfare queen" and her story. The liberals in contrast, viewed rising economic inequality as a call for the federal government to assume many welfare costs while nationalizing the system. Throughout the year and the political campaigns, these fundamental ideological differences shaped the argument over what to do with the "welfare mess".

California Governor Reagan's "welfare queen" first appears in the *New York Times* on February 15, 1976. The journalist discusses how Reagan begins many of his welfare speeches with "there is a woman in Chicago" ("Welfare Queen", 1976) and cites her as having 80 names, 30 addresses, 12 social security cards, and veterans' benefits from 4 nonexistent deceased husbands. According to Reagan, this "welfare queen" receives \$150,000 in tax free income in government assistance and represents everything that is wrong with the system ("Welfare Queen", 1976).

While these stories certainly garnered substantial support for Reagan's initiative to cut welfare spending dramatically they are not, according to the article strictly true. The article notes that Reagan's welfare queen was based in reality on a 47 year old Chicago woman named

Linda Taylor (“Welfare Queen”, 1976). Taylor was named the “welfare queen” by newspapers following Illinois Senator Moore’s disclosure of the investigation into her abuse of the system (“Welfare Queen”, 1976). According to the journalist, however, Reagan’s story was grossly exaggerated as Taylor was being prosecuted for using four aliases rather than 80 and receiving \$8,000 instead of \$150,000 in government aid (“Welfare Queen”, 1976).

According to an August *New York Times* book review on Reagan, the governor firmly believed that like Taylor, all welfare recipients were abusing the system and simply lacked the desire to work (Nelson, 1976). If people wanted to make money then they should simply get a job according to Reagan (Nelson, 1976). This forms the basis for Reagan’s expansive welfare reduction legislation exacted both as governor of California and later as president.

Reagan’s position on welfare represented a minority in the Republican mindset. His views were more conservative and extreme than the views of the majority of Republicans. In a *New York Times* report on the Republican party platform, the party states that it exists in order to protect individual freedoms and finances in opposition to Democratic overspending (“Excerpt from Platform...Republican”, 1976). In addition, the Republican party insists in opposition to the Democratic party that the government should not create jobs as job creation should be the work of the private sector (“Excerpt from Platform...Republican”, 1976).

With regard to welfare, the Republican party platform called for five major reforms. First, they advocated for housing for the truly needy (“Excerpt from Platform...Republican”, 1976). Next, Republicans called for an end to welfare fraud and the strengthening of work requirements for welfare recipients (“Excerpts from Platform...Republican”, 1976). Additionally, they wanted to provide education and job training to recipients and keep welfare at

the state level in opposition to the Democratic desire to federalize the welfare system (“Excerpts from the Platform...Republican”, 1976).

These desired reforms would allow Republican candidates to address the welfare crisis while remaining distinctly separate from the Democrats appeal for more federal funding for welfare. President Ford, the incumbent Republican presidential candidate, proposed a moderate cut in welfare spending in support of his belief that Americans wanted “to get the government off its back and out of its pockets” (Reinhold, 1976 & Silk, 1976). This catchphrase played on Republicans belief in protecting the personal finances of Americans and maintain the status quo (Shannon, 1976 & “Excerpt from Platform...Republican”, 1976).

The Republican mindset in 1976 regarding welfare and welfare reform differed drastically from the agenda of the Democrats. In a *New York Times* report on the Democrat party platform, the party stated that minimum wage should also be a living wage in addition to calling for universal minimum health care coverage (“Excerpt from Platform...Democrat”, 1976). The party also called for three major welfare reforms including replacing the existing system, increased job training programs, and requiring work for recipients that are able (“Excerpt from Platform...Democrat”, 1976). These measures were intended to reduce poverty and streamline the welfare system.

Most interesting in the Democrats’ discussion of welfare is the replacement of the existing system. The party envisioned a simplified federal system with an income floor replacing the existing systems (“Excerpt from Platform...Democrat”, 1976). The new system while being extremely expensive to implement would ensure that states received equal federal funding according to need as well as provide a national uniform minimum of support for needy recipients (Reinhold, 1976). Democrats also hoped that a single, federal system would be more

efficient in weeding out people who did not require assistance. This was especially important in the light of 1972 data that suggested that half of welfare aid went to people and families above the poverty line while one third of needy families went without any aid (Reinhold, 1976).

In July, Reinhold (1976) and King (1976), both reporters for the *New York Times*, wrote that the National Governor's Conference of 1976 called for the establishment of a uniform national minimum payment for welfare recipients in addition to nationalizing welfare standards and federal support. Reinhold (1976) noted that two solutions were being proposed by Democrats. The first solution involved massive government expansion and a combination of existing welfare systems to create one federal system (Reinhold, 1976). Reinhold (1976) explained that this would be extremely expensive although it would certainly address welfare discrepancies among states. More moderate and fiscally conservative Democrats supported piecemeal reforms to the existing welfare system. According to Reinhold (1976), this solution offers the promise of change with recognition and concern for the difficult economic times.

During his presidential campaign, Jimmy Carter's response to the welfare mess fell in line with the more moderate Democrat solution. According to Shannon (1976), Carter endorsed introducing "competence" into existing welfare programs as well as government reorganization, rebudgeting, and additional welfare reforms. Carter also focused on patriotism (helping fellow Americans) and strengthening families and neighborhoods through social programming and work ethic (job training and education) (Reinhold, 1976). While critics worried this would lose Carter the support of hard line Democrats, supporters admired his appeal to conservative values and conservative voters (Reinhold, 1976).

In November of 1976, Carter won the presidential election against the Republican presidential incumbent Ford. For the last two months of 1976, President-elect Carter was vocal

on issues of welfare reform and economic problems. Democratic governors also united and called for change to the existing welfare system. On November 15th, Salpukas (1976) of the *New York Times* reported on a panel of northeast governors' call for federal action regarding welfare. The seven liberal governors called for reforms that would increase federal aid and regional superagency, both measures supported by President-elect Carter (Salpukas, 1976). According to the liberal panel, increasing federal welfare aid to 75-90% from 50% and setting up benefits based on income rather than family composition would dramatically reduce the burden welfare costs placed on the state (Salpukas, 1976). The panel also advocated for measures to reduce unemployment and stimulate the economy, both on Carter's political agenda according to Salpukas (1976).

Nine days later, president-elect Carter responded to the concerns presented by the governors' panel setting lofty economic goals for 1977 according to *New York Times* reporter, Shabecoff (1976). Shabecoff (1976) reported that Carter hoped to see economic growth of 6% and a 1.5% reduction in unemployment in 1977. Carter proposed to enact these changes through job creation programs in housing and a possible tax reduction (Shabecoff, 1976). A better economy would have the dual benefits of increasing the amount of available funds for welfare spending in addition to reducing the number of people that required welfare assistance.

1980 Presidential Election

The 1980 Presidential election pitted California Representative Ronald Reagan against Democratic incumbent President Jimmy Carter. Although the reality of the problem of welfare was growing, the campaigns of both individuals focused more strongly on foreign policy and specifically on the threat of Communism. Due to this, there were not many articles speaking about welfare, welfare reform, or poverty in the *New York Times* during this year. Democrats

were also much more vocal than their Republican counterparts about the welfare issue during 1980. Republicans were far more concerned with foreign policy. Additionally, many voters were disillusioned that Carter had been unable to fulfill all of his poverty reduction promises due to lack of time and funding. Reagan offered voters a popular alternative to the current president.

One of the earliest 1980 *New York Times* pieces that discussed welfare was written in August. It noted that welfare and welfare reform was a huge issue in the 1976 election but steeply dropped in popularity (“Tale of Welfare”, 1980). It seems that most national attention is focus on foreign policy during the 1980 election cycle which is unfortunate because, as the unnamed author states, three quarters of welfare recipients are worse off in 1980 then they were in 1973 (“Tale of Welfare”, 1980).

The article attributes increasing poverty among welfare recipients to rising inflation without accompanying adjustments in welfare assistance (“Tale of Welfare”, 1980). This means that families receiving benefits are having to spend more for amenities without receiving more money which effectively makes them poorer. Additionally, states cut some relief in order to meet budget goals (“Tale of Welfare”, 1980). This meant that fewer families were receiving assistance. The article notes that President Carter had many good ideas for addressing the welfare crisis but was unable to implement them due to the recession and concerns with the deficit. Consequently, the poor have suffered. The author entreats the government to employ relief and focus more on the new welfare emergency (“Tale of Welfare”, 1980).

The one *New York Times* piece that discusses conservative views on welfare in 1980 was published in December. The unnamed author discussed the impossibility of the Republican desire to support employment of the needy without the government being involved in job creation (“Welfare to Work”, 1980). As the article stated, it would be difficult to stimulate the

private sector to employ long term welfare recipients because many of them are unskilled and have never held a job for an extended amount of time (“Welfare to Work”, 1980).

Consequently, to fill the job void created by the private sector’s lack of employment of long term welfare recipients, Democrats created the Comprehensive Employment Training Act (CETA) to pay recipients for subsidized jobs and allow them to become less dependent on welfare assistance (“Welfare to Work”, 1980). Conservatives felt that CETA is wasting government funds.

Supporters of CETA, however, would like to see the program expanded due to its positive actions. According to the author, CETA employs recipients who are otherwise unemployable and reduces their need for welfare benefits such as food stamps (“Welfare to Work”, 1980). This makes funding the program cheaper than paying full benefits to unemployed welfare recipients. Consequently, liberals argue that CETA offers the dual benefit of providing work to long term welfare recipients in addition to being cheaper than other methods of support.

In addition to defending programs such as CETA, Democrats were also occupied with defending welfare itself from cuts. According to Shabecoff (1980), the National Advisory Council on Economic Opportunity warned that attacking welfare and reducing benefits would lead to a new “crisis in poverty” (p. 1). Shabecoff (1980) also quoted chairman of the council, Arthur Blaustein as saying he would be worried for the poor if Reagan was elected president due to his priority of cutting welfare spending.

Shabecoff (1980) points towards the War on Poverty and increased social programming as being directly responsible for the 11 million person reduction in poverty achieved since 1964. He states that without social programming, the abolishment of poverty is a lie and impossible to reach. Additionally, private sector stimulation has done little since the 1960s to create jobs that

will lift the poor out of poverty (Shabecoff, 1980). This goes directly against the Republican view that the government should not be involved in job creation.

Since the private sector seems unwilling or unable to employ the poor, Shabecoff (1980) states that it is necessary to refocus on issues of poverty with “an ethic of fairness and compassion” (p. 2). According to the author, this will regalanize the public on the issue of welfare reform despite disillusionment in Carter’s inability to fulfill his promises. Furthermore, Shabecoff (1980) notes that increased social insurance and income transfer payments may be useful in further poverty alleviation as they have proved effective in the past. These methods have given welfare recipients more security and more savings and have allowed them to more easily transition off of welfare.

One familiar Democratic face still discussing welfare was New York Senator Moynihan. Rule (1980) writes that Senator Moynihan partnered with Republican Senator Javits to urge the National Urban League to support welfare reform during their attendance at the League’s 70th annual conference. Moynihan noted that the system was failing but was no longer a political priority (as proven by its lack of discussion in a presidential election year) (Rule, 1980). Rule (1980) cites Census Bureau data that estimates that half of all children born in 1979 would live in a household dependent on welfare at some point before their eighteenth birthdays. This represents a huge portion of children and families and demonstrates the fact fact poverty is an increasing problem.

Senator Javits stated that welfare was criticised heavily due to allegations of fraud including Reagan’s famous “woman in Chicago” story (Rule, 1980). He called for an increase in employment through increased support of education and job training. Additionally, Javits noted that job creation would also be crucial to lifting the poor out of poverty.

Senator Moynihan also discussed welfare issues due to improper distribution. He cited National Urban League data stating that 70% of unemployed blacks never received federal assistance (Rule, 1980). This was a problem that Carter had promised to address as president. Due to the president's lack of success on this issue, the public began to become disillusioned with welfare and welfare fraud.

Additionally, Dr. Billingsley, chairman of the league advisory committee, noted that the welfare program was not designed to reach the truly needy but instead to work exclusively with broken families (Rule, 1980). While single parent and dysfunctional families are an important piece of welfare reform, they do not represent the only group in need or even the group most in need. Consequently, reform is needed to ensure that official discretion does not result in discrimination and that those in need are helped regardless of race (Rule, 1980).

It is interesting that Dr. Hill, who helped write the report on welfare for the National Urban League also explores ways in which the African American community helps its members (Rule, 1980). For example, Hill notes that if blacks are unable to receive assistance from the government then they often move in with relatives or friends to cut expenses (Rule, 1980). According to Rule (1980), family members or other members of the African American community will extend personal loans to the needy members in order to help them survive. Hill says, "when one [in the community] is in dire need, others help" (p. 2). While this does not excuse the government's ambivalence to African American hardship, it does recognize the strength and resilience of the African American community. This is a topic more fully explored in many of the literary pieces also a part of this project.

Reagan won the 1980 presidential election by a landslide. It can be inferred by this outcome that his earlier speeches promising welfare cuts captivated and swayed his audience.

Additionally, due to Carter's inability to fulfill all his campaign promises regarding introducing competence into the welfare system and reducing poverty created widespread disillusion among Democrats and Republicans alike. This disillusion caused the candidates (particularly Reagan) to focus almost exclusively on issues of foreign policy. The welfare issue was left out of the campaign almost entirely.

The Color Purple

When Alice Walker published her famous novel, *The Color Purple*, in 1982 she may not have expected that it would be as influential as it was. In context, the novel examines powerful racial and gender divides as well as the power of individual actions, relationships, and choices. *The Color Purple's* strong female characters and portrayal of strength of female relationships demonstrates Walker's pushback against the *Moynihan Report's* assertion that matriarchy results in social disorganization.

Walker's main character, Celie, is first introduced as an ugly black girl who has been repeatedly sexually abused by the man she believes to be her father (Walker, 1982). He describes her as ugly, stupid, and inclined to lie to the man to whom she marries her. Celie's only relief in her miserable home and married life is her picture of Shug Avery. Shug represents a freedom and liberation that Celie is unable to fully comprehend. Shug is described as wearing make up, furs, and other luxury clothing items but with serious and sad eyes (Walker, 1982). Immediately, Shug and the liberation she represents grab hold of Celie, she says, "An now when I dream, I dream of Shug Avery. She be dress to kill, whirling and laughing" (Walker, 1982, p. 7). While Shug outwardly represents freedom that Celie does not have, Celie most identifies with her sad eyes.

The first truly strong female character introduced in the novel is Sophia. She is Celie's daughter in law and is constantly spoken about in masculine terms. Although Celie describes her as beautiful she also notes that Sophia fights her husband Harpo like a man (Walker, 1982). In a memorable passage, Sophia tells Celie that she used to hunt game with a bow and arrow and if Harpo keeps trying to beat her then she will kill him (Walker, 1982). Her strength and apparent masculinity dominate the scene as well as her marriage. Harpo's efforts to "tame" Sophia through beating generally end up with him being more injured than her.

The other strong female character is Shug. She is a singer who travels as she wants, has lovers as she desires, and generally creates her own rules. She was a former lover of Celie's husband, Albert but moved away and ended the relationship (Walker, 1982). This volition gives her freedom and independence but also isolation and loneliness. When Celie also leaves Albert to join Shug, it is Shug who stands up to Albert and is in clear control of the situation (Walker, 1982).

Jenkins (2002) describes Walker's inclusion of strong women such as Sophia as a way of demonstrating non-patriarchal feelings. The strength and relative masculinity of Sophia stands in sharp contrast to her husband Harpo's weakness and relative femininity. This juxtaposition serves to support women's strength rather than critique it as Moynihan does. In other novels such as in Morrison's 1970 *The Bluest Eye*, the same non-patriarchal sentiment is revealed through the complete absence of functional men in the novel.

Jenkins (2002) also explores Shug's relationships with Albert and Celie. At the end of the novel, Celie and Albert are sewing together, companionably performing women's work while discussing what they love most about Shug (Walker, 1982). Albert says,

Shug act more manly than most men. I mean she upright, honest. Speak her mind and the devil take the hindmost...you know Shug will fight...just like Sophia. She bound to live her life and be herself no matter what. (Walker, 1982, p. 276)

In an insightful and telling comment, Celie responds, “But Harpo not like this...You not like this. What Shug got is womanly it seem like to me. Specially since she and Sophia the ones got it” (Walker, 1982, p. 276). This reversal of gender roles and identities gives credence to Jenkins’ (2002) argument that Walker’s novel is pushing against the idea that patriarchy is the best option for black families and communities.

Both Daniel Ross (1988) and Kevin Quashie (2001) expand upon similar arguments regarding the use of feminism and womanism in *The Color Purple’s* discussion of female freedom and equality. Ross (1988) interprets Celie’s journey to selfhood as as a reclaiming of her identity. He views Celie’s switch from writing letters to God to writing letters to her sister Nettie as indicative of her journey (Ross, 1988). Rather than writing to God, a man, who is unable to respond to Celie or her problems, Nettie is a real (although distant) person who can respond and provide input. Writing to Nettie allows Celie to expand the community of women that support her.

Ross (1988) also explores Celie and Shug’s relationship in the context of Lacan and other psychologists’ theory of the looking glass self. Lacan felt that children go through a series of stages in order to develop a sense of selfhood. Celie begins in the first stage of development in learning to recognize others (Ross, 1988). In her relationship with Shug, Celie is able to progress to the mirror stage. In this stage of psychological development, Celie recognizes Shug as the ideal woman and works to fuse herself to Shug in a close friendship (Ross, 1988). This

close friendship is Celie's attempt to exert ownership over her perception of ideal womanhood in order to begin constructing an identity and a sense of self.

Shug also encourages Celie to explore her body and her sexuality through a full body examination and masturbation (Walker, 1982). This creates a sense of self worth and sexual pride in Celie that carries her to a true identity and independence. Celie's newfound sense of self worth is expanded through her first pleasurable sexual encounter with Shug. This leads to Celie loving herself and gaining true independence from Albert.

After Celie leaves Albert, she begins sewing pants for both men and women. According to Ross (1988), this act brings both men and women together as well as validating the importance of what is traditionally women's work. This type of sewing is more than just clothes creation. Celie is creating her pants with specific people in mind. In this way, she is using her newfound presence to give others personalized items. This is significant because Celie's journey to selfhood was begun when Shug composed a song inspired by Celie. By creating pants to embody specific people, Celie is playing the same role for others that Shug played for her at the beginning of the novel.

Quashie (2001) expands Ross's (1988) argument by including a discussion of womanism. According to Quashie (2001), womanism differs from feminism in that it exerts the importance of female identities and relationships within the context of a patriarchal society. Whereas feminism strives for equality with men, womanism celebrates women's strength within a traditional African American community (Quashie, 2001). Within the context of womanism in *The Color Purple*, Quashie examines Celie's relationship with Shug as contact between girlfriends.

Quashie (1988) defines girlfriends within an African American cultural sense. In this usage, girlfriends are two women who are physically and emotionally close (Quashie, 1988). They may be best friends, sisters, or lovers (Quashie, 1988). The emotional closeness and understanding among girlfriends forms a network of relationships and a strong support system for a woman in need. Shug is Celie's first girlfriend in all senses of the word. They share the bond of sisters although not related by blood and are inextricably linked in each other's physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing. Celie nurses Shug back to physical health. Shug in turn leads Celie to a healthier mental place and assists her in developing a true sense of self and a liberated sexuality. Finally, the two also share a physical attraction and sexual bond.

In this relationship with a girlfriend, Celie develops herself more than she ever has. As mentioned above this leads to her sexual and psychological liberation. At the end of the novel, Shug has left Celie for a fling with a young man (Walker, 1982). Celie is examining herself naked in a full length mirror wondering what would physically attract and keep Shug's attention. Although she notes that she is not especially beautiful or special, Celie is taking ownership of her body in a way that she did not before (Quashie, 1982). Previously, Celie avoided looking at her nakedness because it symbolized her physical violation by men.

After her relationship with Shug, Celie is able to take ownership of her appearance and body and look at herself clearly. Although Celie does not see anything to attract or hold Shug, she is at peace with herself. Without the need for Shug's self-esteem boosts, Celie has finally graduated to self-fulfillment and personal liberation.

Christopher Lewis's (2012) article discusses blackness as an experience the characters have rather than a state of being they must endure. To this end, he explains Celie's eventual ownership of her "ugly blackness" as support for blackness as an experience. As Celie's shifting

experience and perspective illustrates, her status of being poor, ugly, and black is not defining her way of life. Rather, Celie chooses to define her life based upon her relationship with Shug.

Lewis (2012) explains that Celie's rejection of the conventionally acceptable heterosexual relationship pushes against societal norms while setting a new standard. This new black lesbian shamelessness rejects the traditional mode of preserving the sexual integrity of the community. Instead, their selfish sexual relationship creates the perfect environment for Celie to develop psychologically.

According to Lewis (2012), their relationship deepens their selfhood which in turn contributes to their communities. Previously, Celie did not have much to contribute to society other than taking care of her family. Following her close friendship with Shug, however, Celie was able to become a productive member of society through creation of pants for men and women. Her new productive endeavor seeks to unite men and women in ways unknown in their community.

Moynihan's report describes the relative power of women as degrading men and weakening families. In *The Color Purple*, the strength of the female characters actually serves to bring their families and communities closer together. As demonstrated through Celie's newfound productiveness and strength following her close relationship with Shug, the experience enhanced both her life and the life of her community.

Mama Day

Gloria Naylor's 1988 novel, *Mama Day*, explores a unique perception of poverty as well as a creative solution to the problem. As depicted in the novel, the characters' true poverty is more closely related to their cultural and historical richness rather than their economic status. Consequently, Willow Springs and its inhabitants possess a wealth that George, the main

character, Cocoa's husband, is unable to understand or attain. This cultural lack and inability to submit to its power is the ultimate cause of George's death.

Although Willow Springs is clearly a community that survives based on subsistence activities such as farming and limited production of material goods, it is always depicted as possessing a wealth that city dweller, George, envies. When he first enters Willow Springs, George privately describes even the word "paradise" as lacking in fully describing the community (Naylor, 1988, p. 175). Instead, he queries, "how do I describe air that thickens so that it seems as solid as the water, colors and sounds and textures to actually float on it?" and reaches the conclusion, "I would have said that it smelled like forever" (Naylor, 1988, p. 175). Unconsciously, George is recognizing the cultural significance of Willow Springs. He is attempting to express the feeling of being immersed in cultural memories and a new and more traditional African American way of living. For the first time in his life, orphaned George is experiencing a cultural home.

Critics describe Willow Springs as a cultural stronghold of African American traditions of matriarchal societies and herbal and conjure healing methods. Hayes (2004) notes that all the female characters in *Mama Day* are at some point connected to maternal duties such as breastfeeding, childbirth, and pregnancy. Even Cocoa, a liberated woman, has conversations with George revolving around having children. This embracing of the traditionally maternal indicates the matriarchal structure of Willow Springs as the women are not trapped in these traditional roles. Instead, the female role as mother and caretaker gives women power to influence future generations.

In the novel, Naylor (1988) also designates specific physical spaces for her female characters to own. Hayes (2004) points out that the Other place is owned exclusively by the next

generation of Days. This ensures that the Days' line must continue and places great emphasis on the procreative capabilities of Day women. Cocoa's marriage and desire to have children becomes much more important in this context as it is her children that will inherit the Other place. The Other place also physically embodies the women who own it. Naylor (1988) writes that the Other place is full of gardens, flowers, and herbal remedies, all traditionally associated with women's domestic work. The celebration and ownership of these acts in a physically feminine space as well as its history and memory gives the Other place power.

The overwhelming feminine power of the Other place make it hard for George to enter the space. After being abandoned by his mother as an infant, George is distinctly uncomfortable with traditional and irrational female power associated with conjure. This manifests in his discomfort reaching out to Mama Day at the Other place to save Cocoa in addition to his episode in the hen house. According to Hayes (2004), hens are traditionally associated with femininity due to their link with eggs and new life. In his quest dictated by Mama Day, George is unable to return and face her after coming up empty handed in the hen house. Because the hen so intimidated George, he became a "madman" (Naylor, 1988, p. 301) and killed all the hens in an ultimate rejection of the feminine authority and wisdom of Willow Springs. In the end, doing it "his way" resulted in George overexerting himself and dying following a heart attack.

According to Hayes (2004), "no" of the male patriarch in the female headed Willow Springs leads to the demise of the man. In the novel, Bascombe Wade is killed by Sapphira according to legend because he refused to let her leave (Naylor, 1988). This is mirrored by George's death when he is unable to submit to Mama Day and her method of saving Cocoa. Ultimately, the death of the male reasserts the power of the woman in the matriarchy of Willow Springs.

Eckard (1995) similarly describes Willow Springs and particularly the Other place as a stronghold of memory and cultural tradition. As defined in *Mama Day*, the past is available to be examined and ultimately understood in new ways based on current experiences (Eckard, 1995). In this way, the experience of the present informs an understanding of the past as well as the reverse. Additionally, Eckard (1995) expands Hayes' (2004) argument regarding the Other Place as being the center of matriarchal power and the heart of conjure in the community. It is the connection with the other and cultural memory through *Mama Day* and the Other Place that gives Willow Springs its extreme resilience even during natural disasters and personal tragedy.

The Other Place also serves as the point of connection between the community and its cultural past. According to Eckard (1995), this is evident through Naylor's use of multiple narrators. The varying perspectives demonstrate the community's knowledge of the cultural past and of its power. The depth of communal cultural memory is made clear through the omniscient voice used to convey the actions and thoughts of those in Willow Springs.

The omniscient narrator and its full cultural knowledge provides sharp contrast to the voice of George. As an orphan without a family history or knowledge of his last name, George exhibits a clear lack of cultural and family history. This provides a sharp contrast to Cocoa and the other inhabitants of Willow Springs because unlike the community members George is not tied to a traditional African American community and traditional cultural practices. Instead, he has been socialized into a white society. George clearly recognizes this lack and the weakness it represents in his jealousy of Cocoa's history and rootedness in Willow Springs (Naylor, 1988). Consequently, George immerses himself in the life of Willow Springs in an attempt to learn from its cultural richness. He discovers that his life experiences in the city and his upbringing in a

white patriarchal system have done little to prepare him for interactions with Mama Day and the rest of the community.

Willow Springs represents a return to a system of a powerful matriarchy with women healers and conjure artists. While this seems irrational to George, the true struggle is to recognize that the non-rational powers of Mama Day are not as irrational as they seem. Instead, they represent an alternate and traditional way of existence. This tradition informs current action and gives strength to face unknown obstacles.

As George enters into the discourse of island life, he uses the only frame of reference he has access to: patriarchy. As a result, he falls into the trap of work set by Mama Day and her sister, Abigail. He willingly and with masculine pride beats out rugs, paints hen houses, and general stays busy with work (Naylor, 1988). As Mama Day notes, he thinks he is doing them a favor and that he is helping them out of his own accord when in actuality, the women are subtly manipulating him (Naylor, 1988). This should have proved a lesson to George in situations later in the novel although he does not heed the signs.

Later in the novel, during Cocoa's sickness, George must go on Mama Day's quest and return empty handed. His empty hands at the end of his quest would represent him submitting to her female matriarchal authority and wisdom. George balks at the idea of returning to the Other Place without anything to give Mama Day, however. Rather than being humbled by her wisdom and foresight, George feels cheated, used, and insulted. He accuses Mama Day of speaking "mumbo jumbo" (Naylor, 1988, p. 195) and completes the task his way rather than hers. His inability to embrace the cultural traditions of the island ,or rather George's personal lack of cultural memory and strength, results in his death.

George's death represents an act of both fear, pride, and supreme love. Firstly, George is afraid for Cocoa's life. He also does not entirely trust Mama Day and her unexplained powers due to his personal lack of spiritual and cultural groundedness. He does not have a cultural space of memory from which to draw strength. Additionally, he is lacking in an example of powerful spiritual healer women in his experience. Consequently, he is unable to trust in Mama Day's powers as an herbalist and conjure artist. This leads to an action of pride. George judges that Mama Day's method of saving Cocoa is "mumbo jumbo" (Naylor, 1988, p. 195) because it is non-rational. He assumes that his rational way (crossing over to the mainland to see a doctor) will heal her. Thus, in pride, George decides that his way is best. Finally, George's decision is made out of love, concern, and utter dedication to Cocoa. It is this portion that allows her to recover. Mama Day speaks of the power of the mind and of love as being more powerful than hate (Naylor, 1988). Thus, George's ultimate sacrifice of love is able to save Cocoa from Ruby's hate and jealousy. It is his final effort to save Cocoa that enters George into the cultural memory and history of Willow Springs.

A large piece of what George is unable to embrace in Willow Springs is the use and history of conjure. Tucker (1994) notes that many different types of conjure with varying degrees of credibility are explored within the story. These types of conjure represent stereotypes and traditional modes of conjure within the African American community. First, George meets Dr. Buzzard, the typical conjure con artist. He is described initially as "a little strange" (Naylor, 1988, p. 174) to George who questions the truthfulness of the statement as he first takes in Dr. Buzzard's name, chicken feather adorned hat, and bone necklace. The "doctor" turns out to be a fairly standard trickster according to Tucker (1994). According to other characters in the novel, it is expected that Dr. Buzzard cheats at cards and sells phony tonics remedies. It is, however,

well tolerated in the community because Dr. Buzzards' lack of credibility and non malicious intent are common knowledge.

Mama Day represents the type of conjure artist frequently misrepresented in other texts (Tucker, 1994). She is truly in touch with the natural world and with nature. Thus, many of her seemingly superhuman abilities such as weather prediction actually stem from an acute sensitivity to natural signs. She combines this sensitivity with a knowledge of medicinal herbs passed down from her ancestors. In order to emphasize Mama Day's validity as a medical practitioner, Naylor (1988) emphasizes that a true medical doctor from the mainland recognizes her talents. This gives her a true validity that Dr. Buzzard does not have.

The last type of conjure described by the novel is a traditional and certainly more sinister type practiced by Ruby. Ruby is described as harnessing the powers of poison and hatred and killing two people as well as attempting to kill Cocoa. Ruby's conjure is given validity in the form of the powerful sickness it exerts over Cocoa. This sickness is deeper than just the poison hemlock she braided into Cocoa's hair. Mama Day recognizes that part of Ruby's art is of hatred. Hatred and its corrosive nature have just as much of a toxic effect on Cocoa as does the poison. As Tucker (1994) notes, this type of conjure is not as demystified as the other types described in the novel.

While the novel itself seems to suggest that a deeper connection with African American culture and traditions will help to enrich and strengthen impoverished blacks, in an interview with Ashford (2005), Naylor suggests that political action is necessary for true and lasting social change to take place. Naylor lists some of the problems facing the black community as including poverty, teen pregnancy, geographic isolation, and lack of organized social and cultural structure in children's lives (Ashford, 2005). Naylor states in the interview that the novel offers a sense of

positivity in its creation of a cultural and spiritual stronghold (Ashford, 2005). This sense of memory and history offers freedom to African Americans in the ways they frame the story as well as providing a well of strength to be drawn upon in times of difficulty.

While critics interpret the novel to emphasize of the necessity of cultural memory for alleviation of problems for African Americans, it is made clear in the interview that Naylor views political action as necessary as well. It would be fair to state that both pieces are required in order to solve the issues of poverty and racial inequality. *Mama Day* provides an example for the black community of the power of cultural memory and tradition as well as presenting the ideal black community according to Naylor (Ashford, 2005). This provides a starting point for African Americans to re-engage with a rich cultural past to hopefully find strength in storytelling and history in order to face the trials of the present and future in enacting political change.

1992 Presidential Election

The 1992 Presidential election featured incumbent Republican President George H. W. Bush and former Arkansas Democratic Governor Bill Clinton. President Bush did not discuss issues of welfare until very late in the campaign. Clinton, in contrast, campaigned with a focus on how to help the poor while also helping the middle class. As in the election of 1980, welfare fraud and dependency were popular topics to address.

In particular, welfare became an issue during the campaign due to a drastically increased number of welfare recipients due to the poor economy. This made it increasingly important for the candidates to address welfare reform. According to Senator Moynihan, thirty years after President Johnson's War on Poverty began 22% of children born in the late 1960s spent at least one year in a family on welfare before their eighteenth birthday (Toner, 1992). Additionally,

72% of African American children in the same age group would spend a year in a family on welfare in the same timeframe (Toner, 1992).

These extreme statistics demanded a response from the candidates especially as the public was ready to spend more on poverty reduction. According to a *New York Times/ CBS* news poll, two thirds of respondents felt that too little money was being spent on the poor (Toner, 1992). However, when the question was reworded to ask how respondents felt about the amount of welfare spending, only 23% of respondents felt that too little money was being spent.

Coupled with another question regarding welfare dependency in which three quarters of respondents indicated that they felt the majority of recipients were completely dependent on the system, this indicated that the public was disillusioned with the current welfare system. Consequently, a new system would likely find support in order to provide real help to the growing number of welfare recipients. As was perhaps expected, both Bush and Clinton took different approaches to welfare reform.

President Bush first began addressing the increasing welfare crisis when his pollsters discovered that welfare was a popular topic among his constituents (Rosenthal, 1992). Since that discovery, Bush focused primarily on two popular Republican topics: welfare fraud and keeping welfare at the state level. In the welfare fraud issue, Bush focused primarily on the problem of “deadbeat dads” (Eckholm, “Deadbeat Dads”, 1992). According to Eckholm’s “Deadbeat Dads” (1992) *New York Times* article, Bush viewed these fathers as prosperous divorcees interesting in dodging paternity to avoid paying child support. Bush wanted states to experiment with programs that would make child support payments more universal. In his thinking, getting the dads to pay child support would mean fewer costs incurred by the state as more single parent families would be supported by non-welfare finances (Eckhold “Deadbeat Dads”, 1992).

In reality, President Bush's view of the "deadbeat dads" was incorrect. Rather than being prosperous men avoiding the system, these dads were often low skilled and poorly educated men that were out of work (Eckholm "Deadbeat Dads", 1992). Additionally, according to Eckholm ("Deadbeat Dads", 1992), these men frequently had spotty work histories, issues with substance abuse, and criminal records. Combined, these factors made it difficult for these men to obtain and hold jobs that would allow them to pay child support.

As part of this new trend in addressing welfare dads rather than moms, the town of Wyoming, Michigan began a program called Parents' Fair Share (Eckholm "Deadbeat Dads", 1992). This program was aimed at providing job training, education, and job search assistance to men who incurred large child support debts. According to Eckholm ("Deadbeat Dads", 1992), child support payments would be suspended during the training period as an incentive for men to enroll. Additionally, program staff would help the men petition the court to reduce their payments if required. Technically, although the program says that it is optional, in reality men must attend the program or go to jail due to their incurred child support debts.

Once enrolled in Parents' Fair Share and other programs like it, dads could expect to receive classroom sessions on self-esteem building, and resume and interview assistance after acknowledging paternity of their children. Next, they would begin applying to jobs. If attendees had not been called for an interview within a certain time frame then they also had the option of attending job training classes or completing their education (Eckholm "Deadbeat Dads", 1992). Once the dad had obtained a job, his child support payment would be taken out of his check to ensure that the child and his or her mother received the support. The hope was that with consistent child support payments single parent families would not also need welfare assistance (Eckholm "Deadbeat Dads", 1992).

The personal stories of the dads who had received help as part of job search programs were powerful. For example, Enrique Garcia enrolled in the Parents' Fair Share program early in its development after accruing more than \$10,000 in back payments for child support of his three children (Eckhold "Deadbeat Dads", 1992). Garcia was laid off from his automotive mechanic's job three years before enrolling in the program. His prospects were looking up, however, as the program helped him get a job as a machinist with on the job training. In order to encourage his employer, federal money covered nearly half of Garcia's \$6 per hour pay for his first six weeks of employment (Eckholm "Deadbeat Dads", 1992). Although disappointed by the low wage level, Garcia eagerly embraced his new job as a way to stay close to his children while playing a key role in supporting them financially.

As Parents' Fair Share dictates, Garcia's child support payment of \$70 per week was withheld from his paycheck (Eckholm "Deadbeat Dads" 1992). Only \$50 per month, however, reached the mother of his children under federal law. According to Eckholm ("Deadbeat Dads", 1992), the rest of the payment went toward offsetting the cost of the mother's welfare aid and chipping away at Garcia's child support debts.

Unfortunately, the overall results of programs aimed at helping dads find jobs were not all that promising. According to Eckholm ("Deadbeat Dads", 1992), about a quarter of those referred to training programs by the court actually showed up and just a third of those found jobs through the program. Thus, President Bush's focus on "deadbeat dads" was not unwarranted.

The second prong in his typical Republican approach to welfare included incentives for the states to try new programs. As did other Republicans, Bush wanted to keep welfare systems on the state level. Additionally, because neither Bush nor anyone else had an answer to solving welfare dependency, he proposed small state level experimental programs (Eckhold "Solutions",

1992). According to Eckhold (“Solutions”, 1992) Bush critics argued that these “carrot and stick” (p. 1) programs offered little in the way of positive assistance to the poor. On a more positive note, these small changes were unlikely to negatively affect a large number of people either. In short, Bush’s policies regarding welfare were primarily focused on maintaining the status quo while appearing to enact change. This approach mirrors the Republican standpoint for the entire duration of this project.

Clinton, in contrast, proposed a radical welfare system reform. He presented the realist face of the Democrat’s welfare reform agenda in that he recognized the problems presented by chronic welfare dependency. Clinton stated that welfare should be “a second chance not a way of life” (Toner, 1992, para. 1). In order to achieve this goal, Clinton advocated for two year term limits for most welfare recipients. Under these limits, Clinton stated that recipients would lose benefits after two years of receiving them with certain exceptions (Toner, 1992). DeParle (“Cutting Welfare Rolls”, 1992) noted that required job training and community service for welfare mothers would make them “twice as busy but just as poor” (p. 1) although this was the only way they would be able to keep their welfare benefits beyond the term limit. According to Toner (1992), these term limits would reduce dependency by motivating recipients to move off welfare before their benefits ran out.

The second part of Clinton’s welfare reform plan was to further support job and education programming in the “welfare to work” initiative started by Senator Moynihan (D) of New York in his 1988 Family Support Act (Toner, 1992). This was based on the 1976 Democratic party platform which stated that increased jobs and a better economy would assist in poverty reduction (Toner, 1992). Therefore, supporting these types of programs would enable Clinton to reduce spending on welfare assistance. This was hugely important because one of the

problems of increasing welfare funding was expense. According to Toner (1992), this was one of the reasons the “welfare to work” initiative had not received a lot of support in 1988.

In holding with the Democratic party platform, Clinton also advocated for national health care and increased economic growth (DeParle “Help the Middle Class”, 1992). These classic Democrat values gained him votes while keeping spending in check. According to DeParle (“Help the Middle Class”, 1992), Clinton’s cognizance of the federal deficit and the issue of welfare dependency caught the attention of more moderate voters.

In the end, Vice President Dan Quayle’s statement that America was suffering from “a poverty of values” (“Fictitious World”, 1992) and President Bush’s assertion that “we need to say, get a job or get off the dole” (DeParle “Help the Middle Class”, 1992) did not win over the American public and Clinton won the 1992 presidential election.

Conclusion

Tracing the story of poverty and welfare reform through politics and popular fiction is not an easy or straightforward task. The goal of this project became to compare the perceptions and solutions regarding poverty put forth by the two main political parties and popular female authors of color. It was expected that the politicians would put forth political and legislative solutions and the authors would suggest cultural and individual change due to the nature of the medium. Politicians of course can only enact change in their realm of power, politics. Novels and plays are much more conducive to self examination and affirmation of culture than even the best social policies and legislation.

In looking at the journey as a unique whole, it is clear that in earlier political years namely 1965 and 1976, politicians were full of new ideas for fixing (or replacing) the welfare system to make it more equitable and encourage employment. Both Republicans and Democrats pointed towards the need to enact social change. Senator Moynihan was unique among politicians in voicing the view that poverty was a cultural issue related to the matriarchal structure of African American families. It is interesting to note, however, that unlike modern conservatives that use that line to cut welfare (they have to figure out their own problems), Moynihan was calling for an increase in social welfare spending. This increased programming would help African American men obtain their pride and be able to compete successfully with their white peers.

In the early literature pieces, particularly Hansberry's play and Morrison's novel, the authors are exploring means of dealing with poverty and discrimination. *A Raisin in the Sun* depicts an African American family's attempt to integrate into a white neighborhood. Their white neighbors resisted but the family persisted in order to attain their American Dream. This mode is utilized mainly to gain support for African Americans among white audience members as well as to promote change.

The Bluest Eye is an early novel by Morrison written as she wrestled with the appropriate response to poverty and discrimination. While she does not appear to fully answer her own question in the novel, it is clear that Morrison is not comfortable with the idea of full assimilation. Her character Geraldine is portrayed as stunted and unfulfilled. In context of the Black Arts movement, Geraldine needs to embrace her inner black beauty. It can be inferred from the societal implications of Pecola's madness that society as a whole needs to change.

Additionally, it is clear that no amount of welfare aid would have created a stable family structure for Pecola and prevented her mental down spiral.

While the 1980 presidential election did not much mention welfare, its absence in the news is just as telling as its inclusion. It is true that the public was concerned with the threat of communism. Additionally, however, they were disillusioned with Carter's unfulfilled promises. Resultantly, Reagan was elected. He quietly began his task of cutting welfare programs in order to balance the budget. Without much news coverage, this agenda took was hidden behind other policies and issues.

The next two novels by Walker and Naylor demonstrate that the literary community has come of age regarding race and poverty issues. Now, both authors are writing with purpose to influence change culturally as politics ignores the issue. In *The Color Purple*, Walker demonstrates the positive effect on self realization that a close relationship can have. Celie's growth to independence portrays the power of a community of women and asserts the positivity of powerful women. This is in direct opposition to Moynihan's point of view and is a unique reclaiming of African American cultural traditions.

Mama Day follows a similar trajectory in that it praises the matriarchal system of Willow Springs. Cocoa finds leadership and strength in the timeless community of cultural memory. Naylor seems to be stressing the importance of having a place of cultural memory, tradition, and heritage to give strength during difficult times. At times, the novel seems to answer the uncertainty in *The Bluest Eye*. Pecola lacked a true cultural connection and support system. Naylor seems to be suggesting that if Pecola and others like her had a Willow Springs and a Mama Day then they would be functional and productive members of society.

The 1992 Presidential election represented a switch back to a focus on welfare reform. This time, the candidates focused on reducing welfare fraud and turning welfare into true transitional assistance. The public had renewed interest in assisting the poor but were skeptical of the welfare system. Clinton was elected on his promise to help the poor while also assisting the middle class.

The conversation regarding welfare reform and poverty has not ended. It will continue as long as inequity exists leaving this field open to much further research. Future projects might benefit from expanding the scope of this project to include the initial declaration of the War on Poverty by President Johnson, key policies and news articles occurring during each administration, and a case study of New York state's ongoing welfare crisis. Each of these further ideas would expand the conversation and add to current understanding of the politics of the welfare system. Future research should also include articles from newspapers outside of the *New York Times*, a limitation of this study due to lack of access.

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