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Farm Bill to Table: Pregnancy and the Politics of Food Assistance

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Abstract

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In the dissertation, *Farm Bill to Table: Pregnancy and the Politics of Food*, I use comparative-historical methods to examine the disparate trajectories of two U.S. food assistance programs: Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women Infants and Children (WIC). SNAP, formerly known as the Food Stamp Program, is a generally-targeted food assistance program for low-income individuals. Recipients use a debit-type card to purchase groceries with few restrictions. WIC, on the other hand, targets low-income pregnant and breastfeeding individuals and children under five years old. The program restricts the types, brands, and quantities of foods recipients can purchase. Program requirements further stipulate that participants attend nutrition education courses. The WIC program is not only uniquely restrictive, it is also uniquely durable. During times of welfare retrenchment and reform, the WIC budget and access to the program were maintained. One

simple question orients my research: Why did WIC and SNAP take divergent approaches to participant surveillance and dietary restrictions? To answer this question, I draw upon thousands of pages of documents including: congressional records, presidential records, USDA documents, publications from advocacy organizations, and media from the 1960s to present. I argue that racialized conceptions of the poor as ignorant and unable to make healthy food decisions dominated discussion about WIC and the Food Stamp Program. However, rhetoric about the WIC program also contained concerns that poor dietary choices were detrimental to fetal and infant health. I argue that pregnant women's rights were circumscribed as the government chose to act *in loco parentis*—making strides to strip WIC recipients of decision-making power otherwise granted to Food Stamp recipients. In doing so, poor pregnant women accessing the program, both then and today, have their privacy rights restricted and cannot act as autonomous consumers

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DEDICATION

For Charlie.

CHAPTER 1.

INTRODUCTION

The harsh lights of the grocery store shone down on me as I stared at a colorful assortment of juices. In my hand I held two items: an oversized check and a thin blue booklet. I was shopping with benefits from the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), a program that provides pre-approved foods to low income pregnant, breastfeeding, or recently postpartum people and children five years old and under. The check listed the quantity, volume, and items I could purchase and the booklet further specified approved brands.¹ Since the WIC's predecessor program began in 1968, the government has made these kinds of determinations about which items recipients may purchase with WIC benefits. Quantities are determined by recipients' status (pregnant, breastfeeding, infant, etc.) and the number of WIC-eligible individuals in a family. Items are determined by the government and must meet certain nutritional requirements. Brands covered by WIC are based on whether the item meets nutritional requirements as well as negotiations between states and corporations—creating some state by state variation in WIC approved brands.

I skimmed the check, then the booklet, and juices on the shelves, finally settling on Treetop apple juice. About an hour and a half after I began my shopping trip, I pulled the juice from the shelf and made my way to the register. I placed the items on the conveyer belt with the associated check. The grocery store clerk, a middle-aged woman, passed the items quickly over the scanner. The methodical beep of the scanner subsided as she set the apple juice to the side.

¹ See Appendix Figures 1.1 and 1.2 for current government approved WIC items, sample WIC check (2011), and sample WIC booklet (2011).

Looking at me with tired exasperation she quietly said, “You can’t get this.” I glanced at the line of shoppers beginning to grow—the man immediately behind me began shifting his weight impatiently from foot to foot watching with a dismissive sigh. I glanced at my check and booklet with confusion. “I don’t understand,” I said. The item met all the criteria. The clerk pointed to the label. Three small apples adorned the front of the plastic bottle. “Too fancy. THIS,” she emphasized, “is the three-apple blend. You can get the one apple kind.” I hurried back through the store for an appropriate replacement as the clerk apologized to her growing line of customers.

The following interaction was a common occurrence during the six months I participated in the WIC program. Unlike the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly the Food Stamp Program, WIC seriously restricts consumer autonomy, and requires that recipients have their bodies and diets monitored and receive nutrition education. However, the WIC program is not only uniquely restrictive—it is also uniquely durable. During times of welfare retrenchment and reform, the WIC budget and access to the program have been maintained. SNAP, on the other hand, is a generally-targeted food assistance program for low-income individuals. Recipients use a debit-type card to purchase groceries with few restrictions. Nutrition education for the SNAP program has been offered since 1988 but is not a mandated component of the program.

Within this dissertation, I examine the disparate trajectories of these two U.S. food assistance programs. One simple question orients my research: Why did WIC and SNAP take divergent approaches to participant bodily surveillance, dietary restrictions, and eligibility requirements? To answer this question, I utilize comparative historical methods and draw upon an array of primary source materials including congressional records, presidential records, USDA documents, publications from advocacy organizations, and media accounts from the

1960s to present. I also draw from secondary sources, including historical and journalistic accounts of related events, biographies, and autobiographies.²

While WIC participants experience a level of surveillance and control unprecedented in other food assistance programs, the program has largely escaped the critical eye trained on other social welfare programs such as Temporary Aid to Needy Families, Medicaid, or even SNAP. At the time of this writing, with two exceptions (see Mason 2016; Moran 2018), research on the WIC program has predominantly existed within the public health arena and focused myopically on outcomes of babies born to mothers receiving WIC. This study provides one of the first sociological analyses of the WIC program, and seeks to explain both its restrictiveness and durability. It also represents one of the first accounts of how ideas about pregnancy and motherhood status, in conjunction with race, gender, and class status, influences social welfare policy—especially as it relates to elements of surveillance and control within programs.

1.1 ARGUMENT AND ORGANIZATION OF THE DISSERTATION

I make two major arguments within the dissertation. First, I argue that ideas about pregnancy and motherhood status, particularly that of poor women of color, shape government control within programs targeted at this group. The U.S. is often thought of as a meritocracy—with opportunities available for all (McNamee and Miller 2009). Within this hegemonic framework, poverty is often viewed as the result of personal failings, as opposed to structural ones. Hunger or malnutrition is constructed in similar terms—viewed as the result of nutritional ignorance. Malnourished individuals are blamed for eating too much of the “wrong” foods or too

² See Appendix Table 1.1 for a list of archival sites visited.

little of the “right” foods. Pregnant women and mothers experiencing hunger and malnutrition are considered particularly problematic, because their nutritional ignorance has potential consequences for the children they gestate and raise. Concerns about the decision-making capacities of poor pregnant women and mothers justifies state control and supervision. Further, because pregnant women’s and infants’ bodies have become highly medicalized sites, the collection of health and biological information from these groups is viewed as an unproblematic requirement of receiving aid. Poor pregnant women and children desiring to access social services are thus more vulnerable than other groups to the politics inherent in restrictive programs.

Second, researchers examining U.S. social welfare programs have frequently conceptualized surveillance, eligibility requirements, and reductions in funding as characteristics of “punitive” welfare policies. Punitive welfare policies are frequently viewed as guided by similar logics—programs often heighten surveillance, restrict eligibility, and reduce funding in tandem. Explanations for these shifting programmatic features, such as neoliberalism, rarely consider cases in which eligibility or funding remain unaltered even when surveillance and social control are high. This oversight might be a result of a large number of influential single-program studies focusing on the transition from Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) to Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF) during welfare reform—a program which saw increases in surveillance and social control along with reduced eligibility and funding. Examining WIC offers other insights. The program has a high degree of surveillance and control, and yet has been buffered from reductions in funding and eligibility that have plagued other social welfare programs. Here, I contend that while pregnancy and motherhood status have made WIC recipients more susceptible to control and surveillance, it is the uniquely restrictive nature

of the WIC program that has buffered it from the claims of fraud, abuse, or irresponsibility that other programs have experienced.

These overarching arguments are woven throughout the manuscript, which proceeds in five parts. In the remainder of this chapter, I place the current work in discussion with the literature and describe the guiding methodological approach. The current research draws on two related literatures—one from the social welfare field and the second within law and society. The first literature considers anti-poverty programs as a type of “poverty governance” aimed at monitoring and managing the poor. This research frequently focuses on the extent to which the race, class, and gender statuses of recipients shape punitive welfare policies and the consequences of these policies. The second, socio-legal literature examines the interplay between pregnancy, law, and politics within the United States. I also identify some areas where work on pregnancy, motherhood, and the law have begun to converge with social welfare literature. I then explain the use of comparative historical methods for this project and how these methods informed case selection and identify the primary sources used.

The first empirical chapter of the dissertation examines how hunger came to be one of the most pressing policy issues of the 1960s. Within this chapter, I also provide critical background information regarding the politics of food assistance, including the role of the USDA and agricultural interests. The three remaining chapters examine three separate, but distinct aspects of the WIC and Food Stamp Program: determinations of foods included in the programs (Chapter Three), surveillance of recipients’ bodies and diets (Chapter Four), and the programs’ eligibility standards (Chapter Five). As mentioned previously, WIC recipients are subject to more purchasing restrictions than Food Stamp recipients. In Chapter Three, I show that ideas about pregnancy and motherhood status in conjunction with other statuses made it possible for the

government to intervene into the lives of WIC recipients in ways that were particularly restrictive. Because the government took on the responsibility of selecting the foods that recipients could purchase with WIC benefits, agricultural and multinational food corporations used their political and lobbying power to shape which foods were offered by the program. Thus, recipients find themselves unable to make their own food decisions and uniquely vulnerable to agricultural interests. The fourth chapter examines the rise of bodily surveillance and nutrition education within the WIC program. I analyze how the medicalization of pregnancy and rise of nutrition science played a role in defining the problem of hunger and dictating potential policy solutions. Program components, such as operating out of health clinics, reinforced the idea that WIC was both food program and health program. Participants were constructed as medicalized bodies and their receipt of aid was tied to bodily surveillance and nutrition education. While Chapters Three and Four examine government control, regulation, and surveillance of participants, Chapter Five examines how the Food Stamp Program restricted eligibility while WIC continued to serve groups otherwise deemed “unworthy” of aid. It is tempting to argue that pregnancy status also drives eligibility. However, I argue here that the restrictiveness of the program, in addition to the perceived status of the participants, made it less vulnerable to attacks launched at the Food Stamp Program and Aid to Families with Dependent Children. Taken together, this dissertation provides one of the first critical examinations of how pregnancy and motherhood statuses have influenced social welfare policy.³

³ See Appendix Figure 1.3 for a timeline for critical moments in the Food Stamp Program and WIC.

1.2 THE LITERATURE

1.2.1 *Surveilling and Managing the Poor*

U.S. social welfare programs that target low-income individuals, also referred to as means-tested programs, provide critical support to those experiencing poverty. However, the extension of such benefits often comes with a shifting set of government stipulations and expectations. The government determines the type of benefit (e.g. food, medical, cash) and structures rules around its use. Determinations about eligibility often necessitate exposing personal details, and the receipt of benefits is premised on meeting program requirements—nutrition education, regular medical evaluation, drug testing, and participation work programs, just to name a few. As a result, many scholars have argued that the patchwork of US social welfare programs offers little real relief from poverty. Rather, they function as a sort of “poverty governance” aimed at monitoring and managing the poor (Eubanks 2018; Piven and Cloward 1971; Soss, Fording, and Schram 2011; Wacquant 2009).

Anti-poverty programs within the United States utilize a variety of tools and practices to manage the people who rely upon those programs. Assumptions about individuals experiencing poverty shapes anti-poverty policy (Bridges 2011; Fraser 1987; Steensland 2006). Within the United States, poverty is frequently attributed to personal deficiencies and immorality (Bridges 2017; Fraser 1987; Gans 1995). Andrew Polsky (1991) argues that U.S. social welfare programs take a “therapeutic approach.” The approach relies on the assumption that those in socially marginal positions have personal defects that are treatable with the appropriate set of services. The therapeutic process attempts to “normalize” or manage the targeted individuals, bringing them in line with societal expectations. Legal scholars have long noted that such approaches to

social welfare programming encroach on the rights of the poor (Bridges 2017; Polsky 1991; Reich 1964; Roberts 2014).

In 1964, Charles Reich observed that two complementary views drive the relationship between state aid and the rights of people receiving aid. First, Reich notes that welfare is often viewed as a “gratuity” bestowed on an individual by the government and therefore the government can dictate both how the aid is spent and the stipulations attached to it. A similar view emphasizes welfare as a public expenditure and therefore the public, writ large, can hold recipients accountable for how the benefit is spent (Reich 1964). However, social welfare eligibility requirements, regulations, and rules are often at odds with constitutional protections and basic privacy rights (Bridges 2017; Reich 1964). Where the most invasive policies exist, people accessing means-tested welfare programs are subject to uniquely high levels of state surveillance and control (Bridges 2011, 2017; Reich 1964; Roberts 2014). This level of surveillance further opens participants in anti-poverty programs to opportunities for additional system involvement (Roberts 2011).

1.2.2 *Policy Targets and Program Components*

While means-tested welfare programs thus often entail surveillance and control, the degree to which this is true varies both by time and by program. Examining how government actors view the perceived targets of social welfare policy provides useful insight into program variation. Political scientists Schneider and Ingram (1993) argue that policies have target populations which are defined by a set of shared characteristics that are socially meaningful and informed by stereotypes that come from culture, media, etc. The perceived target of a policy is viewed either positively or negatively; politicians also consider the power of the target

population. Power in this case might stem from influential voting blocs, wealth, or ability to mobilize. However, the power of a group also depends on whether the group has powerful allies or might be viewed sympathetically by others with power. Schneider and Ingram (1993) suggest that positive or negative construction of a group and the power of a target population and allies combine to create four categories of target groups: advantaged, dependents, contenders, and deviants. Those with little political power, such as the poor, might be positively constructed (dependents) or negatively constructed (deviants). Those perceived negatively are more likely to be exposed to policies that undersubscribe benefits and oversubscribe burdens compared to their similarly positioned but positively constructed counterparts. The social construction of policy targets can shift over time (Josephson 2000; Schneider and Ingram 1993). Yet, within the U.S. statuses such as race/ethnicity and gender have retained a remarkably stable role when it comes to the ascription of benefits and burdens within social welfare programs.

1.2.3 *Race, Ethnicity, Gender, and Social Welfare Policy*

Race, ethnicity, and gender influence the distribution of resources—playing an important role in the disproportionate makeup of women and people of color within means-tested social welfare programs—and influence “punitive” programmatic elements (Gordon 2012). Research examining the importance of race, ethnicity, and gender in punitive policy development have noted the significance of historical racial and gender dynamics to social welfare programming (Abramovitz 1988; Quadagno 1994; Reese 2005), the influence of contemporary racial attitudes (Gilens 1996, 1999), political rhetoric (Hancock 2004; Sparks 2003), and media reporting (Brown 2013b, 2013a; Gilens 1999; Sparks 2003). In recent decades, much of this literature has explored how intersecting statuses such as race, gender, and class, influence welfare policy. Yet,

the potential importance of pregnancy and motherhood statuses to the creation of welfare policy remains underacknowledged.

Historical scholarship often examines how racial dynamics shaped the creation of federal programs and the enduring legacy of these decisions for welfare programming today (Abramovitz 1988; Quadagno 1994; Reese 2005). During the early twentieth century the country was divided into an industrialized North and a non-industrialized South which relied on cheap agricultural labor. Federal relief programs, if extended to poor Black Americans in the South, had the potential to disrupt the economy and interfere with the “racial order” of the South. The New Deal was thus filled with attempts to pander to the South—including allowing states to determine program eligibility and excluding certain classes of workers from coverage in universal social welfare programs (Abramovitz 1988; Quadagno 1994). As sociologist Jill Quadagno points out, these decisions continue to have an effect on welfare policy today.

In the 1960s, the Civil Rights Movement and Welfare Rights Movement demanded that Black Americans and other people of color gain access to entitlement programs from which they had been systematically barred (Abramovitz 1988; Collins 1998; Quadagno 1994). The number of women receiving social programs such as Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) increased. In 1950, Black families made up 31 percent of the AFDC caseloads. By 1961, that number had increased to nearly 48 percent (Abramovitz 1988: 321). Just as women of color began to gain access to welfare programs, however, political support for the programs declined. As Patricia Hill Collins writes (1998: 34), “In an era of formal desegregation, African-American women confront a new politics of containment.” This new politics includes intensive surveillance within the public sectors from which women of color were formerly excluded and disinvestment in the programs more generally. However, whether an increase of women of color

in welfare programs led to retrenchment is debated. Josephson (2000) finds that in times of austerity, groups previously thought of as deserving are reconstructed as deviant to help accomplish goals to decrease program funding. Misrepresentations in the media that strengthened the link between African Americans and poverty (Gilens 1999), the racial framing of policy debates (Brown 2013a; Hancock 2004), and racialized policy spill-over effects (Brown 2013b) stoked racial animus and lead to more punitive policy development.

Social welfare literature focusing on the intersection of race, gender, and class often analyzes how policy targets were framed during welfare reform. Racialized and gendered constructions of policy targets as “welfare queens” taking advantage of government largesse predominated (Abramovitz 2006; Hancock 2004; Kohler-Hausmann 2017; Reese 2005). These constructions were used by politicians and media to blame welfare recipients for their poverty while simultaneously discounting it. The negative construction of welfare recipients also excluded welfare recipients from the public debate about welfare reform. Individuals receiving welfare were so maligned by politicians and the media that few came forward to participate in the political process. For those who did, the negative construction of recipients allowed legislators to disregard or ignore their testimony (Sparks 2003).

While this broad interdisciplinary literature thus highlights the critical role that the perceived race, gender, and class of social welfare recipients plays in the construction of policy targets as dependent or deviant, it only peripherally incorporates the role of pregnancy and motherhood status. This omission is surprising when one considers that pregnant and mothering bodies are a site of intense political and cultural conflict.

1.2.4 *The Importance of Pregnancy*

Within a legal setting, scholars have documented how the rights of pregnant people are often treated as secondary to concerns for the fetus. The past two decades, have seen pregnant individuals in the U.S. subjected to court-ordered medical procedures, civil lawsuits, and criminal charges when their actions are deemed at-odds with fetal welfare (Fentiman 2017). Feminist and legal scholars argue that such cases are egregious abuses of state power and thinly veiled attempts to undermine the right to abortion established by *Roe v. Wade*. Further, scholars and advocates have also pointed to “... a vast array of legislation has been enacted that aims to undercut, if not overturn, *Roe* or seeks, outside the abortion context, to redefine the fetus as a “person” who can claim constitutional protection and other legal rights” (Fentiman 2017:105). I argue that social welfare programming is an underexplored area in which pregnant people’s rights are impinged upon. A lack of research in the area stems from two features of social welfare programming. First, social welfare programs are frequently viewed as the “soft side” of the state—unlike the more visibly punitive criminal justice system and therefore is a less obvious site from which to examine a loss of rights. Second, unlike lawsuits or criminal charges which clearly establish a conflictual relationship between the pregnant person and the fetus, social welfare programs are frequently seen as mutually beneficial. Only recently has scholarship begun to center the experiences of poor pregnant women accessing social welfare services and exposed the fault in this line of thought.

Legal scholar, Khiarra Bridges, argues that poor pregnant women, in particular, are deemed appropriate subjects of state regulation because they are viewed as behaviorally flawed and a potential threat to the children they gestate (Bridges 2017). Further, because women experiencing poverty rely upon public goods, they are subject to various government programs

that regulate and surveil their bodies, their lives, and the lives of their family members. Studies of both pregnant women accessing Medicaid (Bridges 2011) and WIC (Mason 2016) suggest that women are subject to an array of highly medicalized, surveilling, and disciplinary forces.

Pregnant women accessing prenatal services with the use of Medicaid, for example, face a level of surveillance that far exceeds that of women with private health insurance. They might, for example, be asked to provide the names of their sexual partners. Further, their participation in one program opens them to other disciplinary government apparatuses, such as child protective services (Bridges 2011).

While these studies highlight the degree of surveillance and social control experienced by pregnant people, they do not examine how the programs on which they depend might differ from other social welfare programs. So, whether pregnant women and mothers are exposed to more surveillance and social control within social welfare programs compared to those who are not pregnant or mothering is unclear. Nor do these studies account for the political and cultural forces that created these programs. As a result, how pregnancy and motherhood status shapes program components is also uncertain.

I address these two issues by comparing two social welfare programs: one targeted at pregnant and mothering people and one that is generally-targeted. As I address in the methods section, I focus on executive and congressional records to better understand how advocates, stakeholders, and lawmakers' views about pregnancy and motherhood may have influenced the programs disparate trajectories.

1.3 THEORETICAL APPROACH: THE POLITICS OF NEED INTERPRETATION

My analysis of executive and congressional records is guided by Nancy Fraser's "politics of needs interpretation" approach. Fraser argues that one often overlooked element of social welfare programming is the construction and interpretation of policy targets' needs. In the development of social welfare policy, politicians, stakeholders, advocates, and sometimes the target of policy engage in a description of their needs. Sometimes needs definitions are consistent across groups, but often they are not. When they are not, "...needs talk appears as a site of struggle where groups with unequal discursive (and nondiscursive) resources compete to establish as hegemonic their respective interpretations of legitimate social needs" (Fraser 1989:166). In these cases, it is the groups with the greatest institutional power and who are most legible to the system that set the dominant needs framing.

Policymakers interpret social welfare recipients' needs. Recognizing these as interpretations leads to important questions about a) who is defining the need; b) how it is being defined; c) and the reason for its use. Fraser suggests that closely examining constructions of needs uncovers the ideological aspects of welfare programming. The politics of need interpretation is discussed primarily as a top-down process in which politicians and the welfare system tend "to translate political issues concerning the interpretation of people's needs into legal, administrative, and/or therapeutic matters" (113) and these matters are the programs served by welfare bureaucrats. However, I also focus on a second process in which those running the programs interpret needs and present them to politicians in ways that reflect the professional interests of welfare bureaucrats. For example, nutrition scientists and dieticians

defended their own involvement in the program by emphasizing the need for need for nutritional education.

History provides a number of examples in which experts framed the problem facing people experiencing poverty and offered solutions that relied upon their expertise. For example, in the 20th century, charity organizations and social workers advocated for the expansion of cash-aid as opposed to in-kind assistance. Social workers argued that cash could rehabilitate a family and allow for independence. However, social workers and others simultaneously viewed the poor as “incompetent spenders.” What the poor needed was to receive cash *and* be taught how to use it. Social workers established themselves as experts in budgetary practices and required that recipients submit to intense scrutiny of their purchases (Zelizer 1997). In this case, social workers defined the needs of recipients in ways that justified social workers importance to the program and reinforced social work as a profession.

1.4 COMPARATIVE HISTORICAL METHODS

In the remainder of the dissertation, I utilize comparative historical methods to examine why SNAP and WIC have taken divergent approaches to surveillance and social control. Comparative historical analyses have an extensive tradition in sociology. However, the method experienced a decline and only began to reemerge with vigor in the 1970s (Mahoney and Rueschemeyer 2003). The result of this resurgence has been a substantively and methodologically diverse body of research that falls under the heading of “comparative historical methods.” While the line distinguishing comparative historical methods and other historical methods is sometimes fuzzy, comparative historical studies often have three distinguishing

characteristics. First, they are concerned with identifying the cause of certain phenomena. Second, they are concerned with the timing of events and consider timing as an important feature of the analyses. Finally, they rely on “systematic and contextualized comparisons” of cases (Mahoney and Rueschemeyer 2003).

In recent decades, comparative historical methods have gained an exceptional amount of purchase within the welfare state literature, especially the cross-national welfare state literature, where they are used to better understand the uneven adoption of social welfare policies (see Esping-Andersen 1990; Orloff 1993). In these studies, social welfare scholars have frequently focused on multiple countries or cases. However, a second strand of research has used similar methods to examine differences between adoption of social welfare policies between two U.S. states (see Brown 2013b, 2013a) or the influence of political, institutional, and cultural pressures on the adoption of welfare policies (see Brown and Best 2016) using a comprehensive description of similar cases with divergent outcomes.

I borrow from this rich tradition of comparative historical work to examine the political and cultural moments in which two food assistance programs developed. As mentioned previously, case selection is a critical building block upon which historical comparative analysis is premised (Mahoney and Rueschemeyer 2003; Seawright and Gerring 2008). Unlike traditional survey methods or other large-N research, comparative historical methods often rely on very few cases. Therefore, cases must be carefully selected, and in many instances, they are also chosen for what they represent. For example, in the current study, WIC and the Food Stamp Program were selected because they vary in their restrictiveness and surveillance—with WIC being a more restrictive and surveilling program (but also more immune to political attacks) than the Food Stamp Program. In the dissertation, I make the argument that these features of WIC stem

from the fact that the program was targeted at pregnant women and mothers of young children. I suggest that these cases can provide a broader understanding of how pregnancy status contributes to social welfare policy creation.

Selecting WIC and the Food Stamp Program utilizes a “most similar” approach to case selection—using cases that are similar in all but one “independent variable” but with different values on the “dependent variable” (Seawright and Gerring 2008). However, this type of controlled case comparison is frequently unattainable, since few cases differ on only one dimension. Process tracing has emerged as a methodological strategy that leverages the richness and breadth of historical data with comparative approaches—therefore bypassing some of the strict requirements of controlled case comparison. Process tracing methods encourage descriptive within case analysis across time in addition to between case analysis to better understand causal processes (Seawright and Gerring 2008). Because case selection is critical to comparative methods and process tracing, it is important to understand some of the ways that the two cases being compared are similar and their key differences.

1.4.1 *The Cases: WIC and the Food Stamp Program*

A number of food assistance programs emerged in the 1960s, including the School Lunch Program, Food Stamp Program, and Supplemental Feeding Program for Mothers and Infants. The latter two programs are the focus of this study because they are similar in a variety of regards that may influence policy. For example, the programs emerged around the same time. The Food Stamp pilot program was established in 1961 as President John F. Kennedy’s first executive order and was given permanent program status in 1964. The Supplemental Feeding Program for Women and Infants, which would later become the WIC program, was established

in 1968, although the WIC program, as we recognize it today, did not gain status as a pilot program until 1972 and became a permanent program three years later. Both programs were responding to the same social problem —hunger in “the land of plenty” — and therefore had the support of similar advocacy organizations. Like other food assistance programs, they were (and remain) administered by the USDA and are therefore subject to similar institutional and political forces. One other important feature distinguishes these two food assistance programs from other domestic food assistance programs, such as the School Lunch Program. WIC and the Food Stamp Program both focus on delivering food to eligible individuals for use within their homes, as opposed to programs that distribute aid through schools, daycare centers, or other institutional contexts.

While the programs have many similarities, they also differ in ways that are critical to this study. The most important dimension upon which these two programs vary is the perceived target of the policy. The Food Stamp Program was, and remains, a generally-targeted means-tested program. The program focuses on supporting individuals and families who experience poverty and subsequent food insecurity. The WIC program, on the other hand, provides benefits to pregnant women and/or the fetus, infants, and young children who are not yet eligible for participation in the School Lunch Program. As I will show, this group was deemed a “high risk” group, as it was widely accepted that hunger and malnutrition experienced during pregnancy, infancy, and childhood could result in long-term developmental consequences for children.

Other distinctions between the programs are worth mentioning as well. Today, both the size and the budgets of the programs differ dramatically. In 2018, for example, SNAP served 39.7 million individuals. WIC, on the other hand, because of its smaller target demographic

served about 7 million. SNAP is also an entitlement program,⁴ meaning that the government is obligated by law to serve all eligible individuals attempting to access the program. WIC has its budget set annually and is not an entitlement program. In practice, this means that people attempting to access the WIC program may be turned away if funds for the year have already been used. This has been an issue at various times throughout the program history.⁵

It is important to treat the larger argument addressing the role of pregnancy and motherhood status in shaping social welfare policy with caution. The cases within this manuscript are U.S. food assistance programs and therefore the applicability of these findings to other types of social welfare programs is unclear. Moreover, food assistance programs are unique for a few reasons. As others have noted (Poppendieck 2014), concerns regarding hunger have the potential to threaten capitalism, as hunger in the United States is frequently viewed as an uncomfortable paradox. As Janet Poppendieck writes in her thorough rendering of the establishment of U.S. food assistance programs, “People were angry about the juxtaposition of waste and want, and the paradox led many to question the wisdom of an economic system that could permit people to go hungry in the midst of such abundance” (2014:xix). Widespread hunger, such as that experienced during The Great Depression and other economic downturns, led some to question capitalism more broadly. Beyond its paradoxical nature, hunger is also considered deeply troublesome to Americans and, as a result, anti-hunger efforts may find greater support than more nebulous anti-poverty efforts (King 2000; Poppendieck 2014). Finally, food assistance programs are both institutionally and politically tied to agricultural policy. The result of this marriage has, at times, hindered a shift toward more liberalized food programs. On

⁴ The Food Stamp Program did not become an entitlement program until the mid-1970s.

⁵ For other differences between the WIC and SNAP Program, see Table 1.2 in the appendix.

the other hand, it has also been responsible for buffering food programs from punitive welfare reforms (King 2000).

1.4.2 *Primary Source Data*

Over the course of two years, I collected primary data from sources including congressional records, newspapers, advocacy organizations, USDA materials, and records from presidential libraries. Each of these sources provided important information about the WIC and Food Stamp Program. I was able to access some of these records online. For example, I accessed all congressional records using ProQuest Congressional and all newspaper articles using ProQuest Newspapers.⁶ Some items from presidential libraries were also available online. In addition to these online resources, I made six archival research trips between 2018 and 2019. I conducted two week-long trips to the National Archives in College Park, Maryland, which housed much of the records from the United States Department of Agriculture. I also visited the Agricultural Library in Beltsville, Maryland. Unlike the National Archives which contains records from the USDA, the Agricultural Library houses official publications and reports. I also visited three presidential libraries: Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library, Nixon Presidential Library, and Carter Presidential Library. I accessed other online records from the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and the Ford Presidential Library.⁷ I scanned relevant primary source data from archives using Scanner Pro. Online resources and archival resources were organized and stored in Atlas.ti.⁸ At both the National Archives and Presidential Libraries, I relied on saturation to determine when I had collected enough information about a particular

⁶ One exception to this is media collected about the San Francisco WIC program, which I address below.

⁷ For a list of sites visited see Table 1 in the appendix

⁸ I did not use Atlas.ti to analyze documents, because of its limited utility when dealing with PDF documents.

topic. Saturation is a term borrowed from grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 2009) and typically refers to the point at which data collected in qualitative interviews or ethnographic observations begin to repeat and new information is limited. When working in the archives, I used this approach to determine when I was ready to begin finding information on a different topic.

While records in archives are often perceived as objective, it is important to note how institutional record keeping practices and the selection of the archives themselves may influence the narratives included in this manuscript (see Lerner 2010). First, my focus on government and newspaper records means that the voices of those who experienced the programs as well as the frontline workers administering the programs are notably absent from my telling of the programs' histories. These voices undoubtedly reveal important information about the programs' from the individuals' most affected by political decision making. However, the purpose of this project is to first identify how cultural, political, and institutional dynamics shaped the trajectories of the Food Stamp Program and WIC. In a future project, I plan to unpack how these decisions influence those receiving the programs. Second, the archives that I accessed are subject to decisions made by "invisible actors." These actors determine which documents are included and how they are processed and stored. Each of these decisions had consequences for my research, some of which I describe below.

First, for all forms of archival data (newspaper articles, Presidential library materials, and Congressional materials), contained more documents for the Food Stamp Program than the WIC program. At Presidential Libraries and the National Archives, there were large quantities of materials related to the Food Stamp Program. However, there was comparatively minimal information about the WIC program. Some of this discrepancy is likely related to the budgetary

sizes of the programs, the actual sizes of the programs, and that the WIC program ran for almost seven years before becoming a program with permanent appropriations and was referenced by a variety of names during the early years of the program. Since the WIC program has received little scholarly attention, these files were also not requested frequently and therefore were not a priority for archival processing. For example, at the National Archives, most of the documents I retrieved relating to WIC were in their original large brown cardboard boxes and the records were, for the most part, not organized by archivists. Both the limited amount of information related to WIC and the quantity of unprocessed materials made gathering the data a challenge. It also left gaps in the story of WIC. To address these shortcomings, I relied on other sources. For example, letters to the USDA from organizations or individuals running the early WIC program, which I found in the National Archives, led me to smaller newspaper outlets which reported on changes to the program. Presidential libraries also varied in the amount of materials within the archive and proportion of the materials released for public use. The Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library, for example, had many materials on food assistance programs available for researchers. The Nixon Library, on the other hand, had far fewer processed materials.⁹ This means that the earlier era, particularly of the Food Stamp Program, has both a greater quantity of materials and breadth of perspectives represented within those materials. For example, Johnson's Secretary of Agriculture, Orville Freeman, donated his daily dictated diary to the Johnson Presidential Library. The diary provided a wealth of information and supplemented other documents. On the other hand, the Secretary of Agriculture with the longest tenure under Nixon, Earl Butz, did not donate a journal. In addition, the Secretary of Agriculture files at the Nixon

⁹ Following Richard Nixon's impeachment, all White House materials were legally required to be kept in the Washington D.C. area. Therefore, while the Lyndon B. Johnson library was established during LBJ's presidency, the Nixon Library did not move to its current location in Yorba Linda until much later.

Library were unprocessed and therefore unavailable to researchers. These types of asymmetries increase the reliance on secondary data and alternate primary data sources to create a more comprehensive picture of the programs over time.

1.5 CONCLUSION

While there are some drawbacks to the data, it is also expansive and rich. Within the dissertation, I draw upon the multiple perspectives present within the data to help understand the forces that shaped the unique trajectories of WIC and the Food Stamp Program. In the next chapter, I lay the groundwork for the remainder of the dissertation by highlighting how hunger became one of the most pressing domestic issues during the 1960s.

CHAPTER 2.

THE POLITICS OF HUNGER IN THE CIVIL RIGHTS ERA

2.1 INTRODUCTION: "...MISSISSIPPI WILL BE THE SELMA, ALABAMA OF 1966"

On January 31, 1966 a light snow covered the ground during an unseasonably cold winter in Mississippi. Thirty five Black civilians entered the recently deactivated Greenville Airforce Base, which stood on the western-most edge of the Mississippi Delta region, and took up residence in one of the main buildings.¹⁰ A statement released from the group read, "We are here because we are hungry and cold and have no jobs or land... We are at the Greenville Air Force Base because it is federal property and there are hundreds of empty houses and buildings."¹¹ Over the course of two days, the group, which identified themselves as part of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party was joined by families and members of civil rights groups. In total, around 100 individuals occupied the barracks over two days. The protesters published a list of grievances, which highlighted insufficiencies in federal anti-poverty programs—particularly food assistance programs. The *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* both reported that among the groups' concerns were a lack of food options within the commodity distribution program, that commodity foods were often plagued with pests, and were insufficient in quelling hunger. The group further noted that promises of additional federal food from the Office of

¹⁰ "35 Hungry Negroes Invade Abandoned Airforce Base" *The Washington Post (1923-1995)*; Washington D.C. February 1, 1966.

¹¹ "Why We Are At the Greenville Airforce Base" Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party; Freedom Summer Collection 1965-1971; Wisconsin Historical Society. n.d.

Economic Opportunity (OEO) had not arrived and many, publicly and privately, posited that the white political elites of Mississippi were trying to force the recently enfranchised Black population out of the state by making life unbearable.

Life, particularly in the Delta region of Mississippi, was unbearable for many of the rural poor, and particularly poor Black residents. Three major changes to agriculture within the region—the mechanization of farming practices, the use of pesticides, and falling agricultural prices—had caused massive unemployment amongst farm workers (Meacham 2018). Further, federal programs which emerged, or were being reengineered, as part of Johnson’s War on Poverty were not reaching the neediest within the Delta region.

Yet, despite the Greenville protests, the extent of poverty, hunger, and malnutrition in the region was inconceivable to most Americans. In 1967, during a Senate Subcommittee Hearing on Employment, Manpower, and Poverty, Marian Wright, a young Black Mississippi lawyer and civil rights activist testified to the inadequacies of the Johnson administration’s Great Society Programs. She painted the Senators a bleak picture of life for poor Mississippians—particularly Black Americans—one rife with poverty, lack of opportunity, discrimination, and hunger. “The single largest problem facing all of us in Mississippi right now is how can people eat during the winter,” she testified. “The begging, the meetings that we’re holding where numbers of people come and almost nobody in that meeting of hundreds have jobs, or have any hopes of getting jobs. This is an urgent situation, which must be looked into and must be met.”¹² When asked by Democratic Senator Joseph Clark of Pennsylvania, chair of the committee, what was being done to address the situation. Wright pointed to the ways that federal programs had lost purchase on

¹² Testimony by Marian Wright before the Senate Subcommittee on Employment, Manpower, and Poverty of Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, March 13, 1967.

reaching those most in need as Federal efforts to help were rejected, or operationally canceled each other out.

The Food Stamp Program began as a pilot program in 1961 and became a permanent fixture in 1964, supplanting the Commodity Surplus Distribution Program in many counties within Mississippi and across the country. The Commodity Surplus Distribution Program had served as a conduit between agricultural producers and the hungry, supporting the former with government purchases of agricultural surpluses distributed to the latter. The government purchase of surplus items was designed to keep agricultural prices from falling and support farmer incomes. Surplus distribution to the hungry was a secondary function, a fact that was sometimes made obvious by the lack of nutritional benefit provided from the surplus foods. The Food Stamp Program, which was slowly replacing the Commodity Surplus Distribution Program across the country allowed poor families to shop in grocery stores using stamps. The program gave consumers greater flexibility to purchase the items they needed and quelled grocers' concerns of government competition in food sales (Coppock 1947; MacDonald 1977). However, the new food stamp program required recipients to purchase a portion of the stamps. Those with incomes of ten dollars a month or below would still have to purchase two dollars of stamps to receive the additional stamp allotment. The portion of stamps recipients were required to pay increased with income. This was problematic for many would-be food stamp recipients. People and families experiencing extreme poverty could not make the initial purchase. In addition, even those with slightly higher incomes were forced, in some cases, to spend as much as 50 percent of their income on the stamps. Not only did this leave families with little room to spend their money on other necessities (e.g. housing, medical expenses, etc.) but the additional food stamps did not even raise the family to what the federal government saw as a necessary level of food to assure

an adequate diet (King 2000; Kotz 1969). Since the Food Stamp Program and its predecessor could not operate simultaneously in the same counties, the poorest people had access to neither food stamps nor the surplus commodities that had previously been available. In addition, because residents were not entitled to food assistance, some counties opted to forgo any food assistance programs as a result of concerns about price, negative feelings toward the federal government, or discriminatory attitudes toward the poor. The Citizens' Crusade Against Poverty's Board of Inquiry on Hunger and Malnutrition in the U.S.A. issued a report in 1967 suggesting that "In 283 of the poorest counties in 15 states, 93 had neither program operating in March of this year, thus leaving one million poor people with no access to either food stamps or free commodities."¹³

Other federal safety-net programs established during the 1930s New Deal legislation were also failing. Cash assistance via Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) restricted eligibility if the family had an able-bodied male head of household—even if that household member could not find employment. Unemployment across the South had risen sharply as the modernization of agriculture practices and falling agricultural prices made previous forms of low-wage agricultural work nearly obsolete (Meacham 2018). Unemployment insurance and social security insurance, which could have saved families from deep destitution, overwhelmingly excluded agricultural and domestic workers, who were disproportionately Black and concentrated in the South (Quadagno 1994). At the time of Roosevelt's New Deal legislation, NAACP lawyer Charles Hamilton Houston famously referred to the newly established safety net as "... a sieve with holes just big enough for the majority of Negroes to fall through" (Boris 2008). Much to the chagrin of civil rights activists, the Johnson administration

¹³ Citizens' Crusade Against Poverty Report "The Hungry Americans," 1967, Accession No. UR000576, Box 9, Wayne State University Labor History Archives.

with their Great Society Programs had proved unable, or unwilling, to patch those holes in the New Deal legislation.

On the other hand, strong welfare rights and civil rights advocacy had some success in expanding access to cash welfare for families. The Johnson administration expanded access to AFDC and standardized eligibility criteria—thereby limiting state control. Prior to this shift, many states, particularly those in the South, set eligibility criteria that in effect disqualified Black women from means-tested programs or temporarily removed women from the program during harvest times (Abramovitz 1988; Quadagno 1994). Moreover, women who were able to access the program were subjected to intensive surveillance and subjective criteria. “Suitable home” clauses, for example, gave social workers the opportunity to remove otherwise eligible individuals from receiving aid when homes were considered unkempt or otherwise unsuitable. The clause was widely used throughout the 1960s (Abramovitz 1988; Roberts 2014). While aid was set below the lowest wages in all areas, this meant particularly meager benefits for those in the South where wages were lower than other parts of the country (Piven and Cloward 1971; Quadagno 1990, 1994; Soss, Fording, and S. Schram 2011).

Even with newly expanded access to social welfare programs, however, reports circulated that welfare programs were administered selectively and discriminatorily. Physicians sent by the Field Foundation to assess the conditions of Black children in Mississippi in the Spring of 1967 reported that “welfare and food programs are in the hands of people who use them selectively, politically, and with obvious racial consideration in mind. What is a human need, a human right, becomes a favor or a refusal...”¹⁴ The report, which was publicized by newspapers across the country, echoed a deeply held belief on the part of many congressional representatives, civil

¹⁴ Nelson, Jack. “Hunger, Ills of Negro Mississippi Youth Told: Thousands of Children Facing ‘Grim, Premature Deaths,’ Physicians Report.” *Los Angeles Times (1923-1995); Los Angeles, Calif.* June 25, 1967, sec. A.

rights workers, and Southern residents, who believed that the Mississippi white political power structure was intentionally attempting to starve the Black population, which represented a potentially significant voting bloc, forcing them out of the state. Mississippi Senators referred to the claims as “gross libel and slander.”¹⁵

The year prior to the protests in Greenville, Mississippi, civil rights activism in Selma, Alabama brought attention to the political and economic exclusion of Black residents. Across the South, Black residents were frequently denied their right to vote by requiring literacy and civic tests. In early 1965, only 2 percent of Selma’s Black residents were registered to vote. The extent of voter suppression and brutality of local law enforcement made Selma an ideal location from which to launch protests and potentially gain national attention. The protests, which began in January of 1965 and continued until the widely publicized march from Selma to Montgomery in March of 1965, gained broad scale national attention. The brutal beating of protestors on March 7th as they attempted to cross to the Edmund Pittus Bridge in Selma was filmed by media crews and played across the news (Martin Luther King Jr. Institute). The event and brutal attack on marchers became known as “Bloody Sunday.” While the Johnson administration ultimately sent federal troops to the area to protect the marchers, the administration was widely criticized for not intervening at an earlier point.¹⁶

The events in Selma, Alabama and other civil rights efforts across the South were on the mind of the administration, as they attempted to address the Greenville protestors a year later. The protests at the Greenville Airforce Base initially drew jurisdictional confusion, as it was not

¹⁵ Robertson, Nan. “Severe Hunger Found in Mississippi.” *New York Times*. 1967.

¹⁶ For example see: Giese, Frank S. “Troops to Alabama?” *New York Times (1923-current)* Op-Ed; New York, N.Y. March 23th, 1965.

clear whether the land that the protestors occupied was under federal, state, or local control.¹⁷ However, after just 24 hours, 100 Airforce members were deployed to the base with instructions to remove the protestors. From a media standpoint, the removal was a relatively benign event. Newspapers documented only one arrest and the remainder of the protestors were carried off the land with little physical violence. Yet, Johnson's Attorney General, Nicholas Katzenbach, believed that the Greenville "live-in" was indicative of a potentially volatile situation in the Mississippi Delta. In a memo to the President two weeks later, the Attorney General underscored the importance of immediate federal action in the form of aid, describing the situation in Mississippi as "potentially explosive",¹⁸

As a result of mechanization and reduced cotton allotments, many thousands of poor Negro agricultural workers are losing their jobs, and in many instances, their homes, as well. This has created acute discontent throughout the Delta region and is being exploited by leftist elements of the civil rights movement...

Further, the Attorney General noted that federal aid administered through local offices, such as Food Stamps, Welfare, and other programs were mired by the white communities' unwillingness to deliver aid—leading to substantial delays and inaction. The Attorney General commented, "I think it is essential that we deal with this problem expeditiously and directly through surplus food distribution, crash employment programs, and as many poverty programs as we can fund. If we do not do this," he cautioned, "there is a real possibility that Mississippi will be the Selma, Alabama of 1966."

¹⁷ "35 Hungry Negroes Invade Abandoned Air Force Base: An Advance Party 'Not Represented.'" *The Washington Post, Times Herald (1959-1973)*; Washington, D.C. February 1, 1966.

¹⁸ Memo "Civil Rights—Mississippi" from Attorney General to President Lyndon B. Johnson. February 14th, 1966, In File HU2/ ST 24 12/1/64-2/14/66. Box 27. Human Rights. Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library.

2.2 HUNGER IN THE MISSISSIPPI DELTA

The events in Greenville did draw some national attention. Yet it would take the next two years, national coverage of hunger and malnutrition, and mounting public concern to force significant changes in federal food programs. In the interim, the federal reaction to Greenville, by many standards, was anemic. Federal aid which had been tied-up in the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) began to slowly trickle into Mississippi.¹⁹ The Department of Agriculture, which was responsible for food aid, began to distribute commodity foods to counties which had neither a food stamp nor a federal commodity distribution program. Yet, direct federal aid that bypassed the local white power structure drew the ire and resistance of some Southern politicians. John Stennis, Republican Senator from Mississippi, sent a telegram to President Johnson. He remarked that the Mississippi residents disliked federal involvement and oversight in all forms. Further, he challenged that the need in Mississippi was not as great as it appeared and that it was being dramatized for political reasons.²⁰ This would become a line regularly used by many politicians in Mississippi when referencing civil rights issues.

However, if there was initial skepticism that people in Mississippi were hungry and malnourished, that was all about to change in the Spring of 1967. One year after the Greenville live-in, Marion Wright testified before the Senate Subcommittee on Employment, Manpower, and Poverty. She highlighted the failings of safety net programs that made hunger and malnutrition a reality for many in the South. “Last year, in the last couple of years, one has had a

¹⁹ Letter from Thomas Hughes (Department of Agriculture) to Marvin Watson (Special Assistant to the President. “Response to Rep. Adam Clayton”. November 3, 1965. File 6/1/65- .White House Central Files: Agriculture. Box 10. Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library.

²⁰ Telegram from John Stennis to President Lyndon B. Johnson, April 7th, 1966. In File HU2/ ST 24 12/1/64-2/14/66. Box 27. Human Rights. Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library.

free commodity distribution plan. One sees an increasing trend in Mississippi toward food stamps. This is causing a major crisis just in meeting the hunger problem,” Wright testified. “As a result of this, one finds, say...that in Jones County for instance, participation dropped from about 17,500 people who were on food commodities to a little under 4,700 in March.”²¹ Further, Wright pointed out that stingy benefits in AFDC and racial discrimination meant that for the very poor, there was no meaningful federal safety net. “Take one example of the woman in Leflore County with six children absolutely no income,” Wright argued, “she has not worked, she was cut off welfare—and we think illegally—she simply cannot feed her kids because she was totally dependent on food commodities for that existence. She cannot afford the minimal amount for food stamps.”²²

Although she was among many individuals testifying, Marian Wright was one of only two who even mentioned the word “hunger.” Even Richard Boone, who as the head of the Citizens’ Crusade Against Poverty would spend the next year working with CCAP to explore the issue of hunger in the South, and whose group would author the scathing report *Hunger, USA*, did not address the issue on that day. One month later, Senator Clark and the Subcommittee on Employment, Manpower, and Poverty held public hearings at the Hotel Heidelberg in Jackson, Mississippi. The hearings were the first of ten that the subcommittee would hold across the United States. As Senator Clark described at the outset of the first hearing, the hearings were intended to assess how well the War on Poverty programs were doing in addressing basic human needs.²³ Again, Marian Wright was invited to testify and spoke of profound hunger, calling the

²¹ Testimony by Marian Wright before the Senate Subcommittee on Employment, Manpower, and Poverty of Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, March 13, 1967, p. 158.

²² Testimony by Marian Wright before the Senate Subcommittee on Employment, Manpower, and Poverty of Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, March 13, 1967, p. 158.

²³ Opening Statement by Senator Joseph S. Clark of Pennsylvania, Chairman of Senate Subcommittee on Employment, Manpower, and Poverty of Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, March 13, 1967.

Senators to see for themselves the devastating conditions that many poor, and especially Black, Mississippians experienced.²⁴ Following the hearings in Jackson, Senators Joseph Clark and Bobby Kennedy, with about a dozen reporters in tow, set out across the Mississippi Delta.

The trip across the Delta allowed the Senators to demonstrate their commitment to investigating what was happening with federal poverty programs and connect directly with those receiving the programs. Journalist Ellen Meacham (2018), in her thorough rendering of their trip across the Delta, documented the Senators' visits to families who lived in dirt-floor shacks dotting the cotton-rich region. Senators Kennedy and Clark met families living in extreme isolation and poverty, asking them along the way what they had eaten that day. The Senators found children and families who were hungry, lethargic, and scraping by with only the cheapest and most basic food items. They were often malnourished, unable to pay the two dollars a month to participate in the Food Stamp Program. National newspapers reported on the Senators journey across the South, sometimes recounting the difficult economic circumstances of the families the Senators met. The *Los Angeles Times* wrote:

*The Senators heard much of the problem here from Mrs. Annie White, mother of seven, whose only current source of subsistence is bulk foods left over from the Agriculture Department's surplus commodity program. Mrs. White received no welfare payments and has not worked since her last child was born Jan. 11. One room in her weather-board house is entirely empty. The only furniture in another room was two double beds. But Mrs. White said they "make out" on rice, pinto beans and an occasional chicken.*²⁵

²⁴ Testimony by Marian Wright before the Senate Subcommittee on Employment, Manpower, and Poverty of Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, April 10, 1967 p. 158. Jackson, Mississippi.

²⁵ Irwin, Don. "Senators Visit Poor in Rural Mississippi" *LA Times*. April 12, 1967.

The deep destitution and hopelessness of families in the Delta, particularly the children, deeply affected Kennedy. His family and friends described him as changed by the experience (Meacham 2018). The Senator, like many in the middle and upper class of America, had considered hunger in the United States largely eradicated. As it turned out, while the U.S. had been focusing on delivering large amounts of food aid to India, people in the United States had been quietly suffering.

The trip across the Delta, while well publicized, did not capture the extent of the problem of hunger in the United States. Nor was the coverage so extensive as to grab the attention of large swaths of the American public. It did, however, catch the attention of advocacy organizations, such as the Field Foundation and CCAP, and urged them to pursue the issue of hunger and malnutrition as part of their agendas. Leslie Dunbar, President of the Field Foundation, after reading of the Mississippi trip organized a team of four doctors to visit Mississippi (Meacham 2018). The Field Foundation, as an organization focused on the welfare of children, were primarily concerned with the effects of malnutrition on infants and children. In their report, published two months after the Kennedy and Clark returned from the Delta, the doctors noted the existence of extreme poverty, severe malnutrition, and the presence of diseases that many believed were eradicated. They wrote of the conditions for children in Mississippi,

In sum, we saw children who are hungry and who are sick—children for whom hunger is a daily fact of life and sickness, in many forms, an inevitability. We do not want to quibble over words, but “malnutrition” is not quite what we found; the boys and girls we saw were hungry—weak, in pain, sick; their lives are being shortened; they are, in fact, visibly and predictably losing their health, their energy, their spirits. They are suffering from hunger

*and disease and directly or indirectly they are dying from them—which is exactly what “starvation” means.*²⁶

The doctors’ report garnered additional publicity, but it also gave credence to what the Senators had seen by supplementing their stories with medical observations. With activists armed with this new information, it would be much harder for politicians and others to deny the existence of hunger.

In the meantime, following their trip to the Delta, Clark, Kennedy, and other members of the Senate Committee began the burdensome task of prompting executive and congressional action. One of their first stops upon their return to Washington D.C. was a meeting with the Secretary of Agriculture, Orville Freeman. Freeman was a former three-term Democratic Governor from Minnesota who had been the Secretary of Agriculture under John F. Kennedy. Freeman had a close relationship with Kennedy, and during Kennedy’s run for the Democratic ticket, Freeman was considered a strong contender for the Vice President position. Following Kennedy’s death, Lyndon Johnson requested that Freeman stay on as Secretary of Agriculture.²⁷ However, Johnson and Freeman were often at odds. In his diaries, Freeman wrote frequently of his irritation with the President. While he respected the work Johnson had accomplished on the domestic front, he found the President difficult to read and hard to please.²⁸ Bobby Kennedy, while not a friend, was on good terms with the Secretary of Agriculture and would, on occasion, invite Freeman and his wife out to his family property. And even when frustrated with how Freeman handled food assistance programs, Kennedy believed that Freeman was a good

²⁶ Report: “Hungry Children”. Southern Regional Council. In file: CM/Food 1/1/67-6/20/67. White House Central Files. Commodities. Box 4. Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library.

²⁷ Transcript, Orville Freeman Oral History Interview I, 2/14/69, by T.H. Baker, Internet Copy, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library.

²⁸ Diary. Personal Papers of Orville Freeman. Boxes 10, 11, and 12. Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library.

person.²⁹ While Freeman and Bobby Kennedy got along, Freeman once wrote of his interaction with Kennedy, "... One feels that he is kind of looking down his nose at you a bit. Or, if that's not right that you really don't know how to communicate with him and it's a little bit tense and uncertain."³⁰

When Kennedy and Clark visited Freeman in his office the day after returning to D.C., they recounted to Freeman the suffering they had seen in the Mississippi Delta. The meeting was frustrating to Kennedy, who could not understand why the Secretary of Agriculture was not making efforts to move food quickly into the region (Kotz 1969; Meacham 2018). From his own vantage point, Freeman was puzzled by the Delta situation that had been described to him, "It's hard to tell what the situation really is," he wrote. "Some of the welfare people and some of the red hots are demanding that we no longer require the people to spend in order to get Food Stamps as much as they have hereto been spending for food." He then adds his appreciation that Kennedy and Clarks' visit might mean that they can move ahead on more liberalized food assistance. Yet, he also notes, "Actually Mississippi has the most advanced feeding program of any State in the nation. We have some—every single county there has a direct distribution or Food Stamp Program."³¹ Freeman's uncertainty about what was happening in the Delta prompted him to send two of his aides, Howard Davis and Bill Seaborn, to the Delta to confirm what Clark and Kennedy had found. However, Freeman was also concerned about the political ramifications of getting food into the Delta. Joe Califano, Johnson's chief domestic advisor, followed up with Freeman regarding the Mississippi Delta situation. In a letter to the President, Califano reports of his meeting:

²⁹ Transcript, Peter Edelman Oral History Interview, Internet Copy, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library.

³⁰ April 17th, 1967. Diary. Personal Papers of Orville Freeman. Box 11. Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library.

³¹ April 15th, 1967. Diary. Personal Papers of Orville Freeman. Box 11. Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library.

*Freeman says the Food Program is in a little trouble in Congress, particularly with Jamie Whitten. Freeman does not want to upset the entire program by either giving free food to these negroes in the delta or by lowering the amount of money they have to pay for food stamps until he has the food stamp program through Congress.*³²

Aid to the hungry in the Delta, it seemed, was being held-up by agricultural politics.

2.3 THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND THE POLITICS OF FOOD ASSISTANCE

The Department of Agriculture's role in food assistance put the Secretary of Agriculture in a particularly tenuous position. On one hand, the Secretary was responsible for agricultural policy. On the other hand, with the passage of Food Stamp legislation, Child Nutrition programs and international food assistance in the 1960s, the Secretary was taking on a greater role in food distribution to the needy. As Freeman realized, neither farmers nor consumers were particularly happy with this division of labor. North Dakota Governor, William Guy, captured this discontent in a letter that circulated around the White House. Governor Guy wrote, "Today, it appears that the USDA is the department of food, rather than the department of agriculture. Today, it seems that as though the USDA is the department for the consumer rather than the producer. Today, the USDA seems to be the department for the farm rather than the department for the farmer."³³ The letter went on to suggest the creation of a new cabinet position for the consumer to be housed outside of the Department of Agriculture. Over the next year, similar complaints would come

³² Letter. Joe Califano to President Johnson. April 17th, 1967. In file: WE 9 4-8-67 – 4-19-67. White House Central Files. Welfare. Box 29. Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library.

³³ "Governor Guy Correspondence" Secretary Orville Freeman to President Johnson. White House Central Files. Federal Government 999. Box 429. Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library.

from consumer and anti-hunger activists. CCAP's report *Hunger, USA* and the CBS documentary *Hunger in America* both argued that food assistance programs should be untethered from the Department of Agriculture, whose interests lay primarily with the farmer and not the consumer.³⁴

Tensions between farmer interests and consumer interests were not new to the Department of Agriculture, which had been responsible for commodity distribution since late 1935. Direct government food distribution to the poor had begun in 1933 and was the indirect result of the Great Depression. Farmers had been particularly hard-hit by the Great Depression. A surplus of agricultural commodities in the early 1930s, along with the economic depression, caused the price of agricultural products to drop dramatically—out-pacing drops of other goods and services. The creation of the Agricultural Adjustment Administration (AAA) and the passing of the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933 were attempts to alleviate the impact of low agricultural prices on farmers (Gilbert and Howe 1991; Libecap 1997; Rasmussen, Baker, and Ward 1976). The Agricultural Adjustment Act focused on increasing agricultural prices by decreasing surplus and allowing the government to purchase surplus foods. Decreasing surplus was accomplished through various measures, including government subsidies to farmers for letting fields go unplanted. In addition, the federal government began to buy and store excess agricultural goods (Libecap 1997; Rasmussen et al. 1976).

Yet, the government really became involved in surplus distribution to the needy in response to the infamous slaughter of piglets. As Janet Poppendieck (2014) describes in her book, *Breadlines, Knee Deep in Wheat*, in the midst of widespread hunger, the government,

³⁴ CBS reports (Television program), and CBS News. *Hunger in America*. CBS, 1968. Citizens' Board of Inquiry into Hunger and Malnutrition in the United States. *Hunger, U.S.A.: A Report by the Citizens' Board of Inquiry into Hunger and Malnutrition in the United States*. Washington: New Community Press, 1968.

concerned about the falling prices of a variety of commodities were paying farmers to plow-over nearly matured crops. Late during the summer of 1933, the same principles informing the plowing of fields were used in the slaughter of millions of piglets and sows. Pork prices had been dropping and were on track to dive even further. In an attempt to stabilize the price of pork, the Administration recommended that the government pay farmers for their piglets and pregnant sows, which they would then slaughter—keeping the excess pork from reaching the market. The problem with this strategy became apparent almost immediately. Farmers rushed to sell their pigs to the government, overwhelming the slaughter houses. Further, the piglets, too small for processing, were being turned into liquid fertilizer and stored in large vats. Yet, the overwhelming response from farmers meant that there was more fertilizer than was usable. So, filled vats sat, as more and more piglets were brought in for slaughter and fewer vats were available for storage. The chaotic chain of events created a mounting public relations problem for the Roosevelt administration. The episode, as Poppendieck (2014) writes, highlighted the contradiction of want in the land of plenty and opened the government to public scrutiny. While people were going hungry—with many families having not eaten meat in years—the government was actively involved in the slaughter of millions of pigs. The public outrage was enough to pressure the administration to develop an alternative way to reduce federal surplus.

In 1933, the Federal Surplus Relief Corporation (FSRC), which would buy surplus commodities, deliver them to the states, who would then distribute them to the poor, was created. The FSRC served two purposes, functioning as both a relief agency and a surplus removal agency. Yet, the initial staffing of the group with relief-minded individuals meant that there was a great deal of attention paid first and foremost to the needs of the hungry (Poppendieck 2014). However, after two years, the organization became subsumed under the Department of

Agriculture and renamed the Federal Surplus Commodity Corporation (FSCC). The name change symbolized what was to come: the organization, now housed under the USDA, would shift from a focus on relief to function more as a surplus outlet.

The change in organizational location and function, according to Poppendieck (2014), was the result of multiple factors. First, prior to the organizational location shift, there was a mass firing of individuals within the FSRC—many of whom were the most fervent supporters of the poor and may have been resistant to the organization’s transfer to the USDA. Second, Poppendieck notes ideological changes in society and within the Roosevelt administration toward relief for the poor. The Roosevelt administration was beginning to distinguish between the “unemployable poor” and the “employable poor”. The administration was moving to maintain federal responsibility for the unemployable poor, while shifting responsibility for the employable poor back to states and local relief organizations. The Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA), under which the FSRC had been primarily functioning, therefore needed to rid itself of federal direct relief, including food commodity distribution. Yet, agriculture still needed an outlet for surplus commodities to avoid the public relations issues of the past. These factors worked in tandem to facilitate the uneventful transfer of the FSRC to the Department of Agriculture (Poppendieck 2014).

While the transfer to the USDA caused little upheaval, the consequences of that transfer for food assistance delivery and the future of food assistance programs were immense (King 2000; Poppendieck 2014). Once subsumed under the Department of Agriculture, the focus of the now FSCC began to mirror those of agriculture. The primary concern of the organization became one of relieving surplus, not of establishing a balanced and adequate diet for poor people and families. Further, legislation would have to pass through agricultural congressional committees,

which were often staffed with representatives from rural areas who were primarily concerned with farming interests, particularly those from the South with ties to tobacco and cotton that would not benefit from the relief function of food programs (King 2000).

Even with these drawbacks, the USDA did demonstrate its ability to establish aid for the poor in 1939, when the department created the first food stamp program. The program only lasted a mere four years before it was discontinued due to a limited surplus during wartime and a strengthening economy. However, during these years, the food stamp program served nearly four million people per year (MacDonald 1977; Rasmussen et al. 1976). The initial program used a two stamp system: orange stamps and blue stamps. Orange stamps were purchased by the individual at real value. The orange stamps reflected the amount that an individual would normally pay for food in a given month. Blue stamps were then given to food stamp participants for free. The orange stamps could purchase any food, while the blue stamps could purchase surplus foods. During the four years that the program operated, 20 items were listed as surplus foods, with no more than 18 of those foods being listed at any given time (Coppock 1947).

The program had bi-partisan support. Conservative farmers and retailers appreciated the ability of the program to stabilize the price of food items while not directly competing with retailers. On the other hand, while humanitarian groups appreciated the relief aspect of the program (Coppock 1947). However, because of its ties to surplus distribution and the USDA's nearly singular focus on benefits to commercial farmers, the early food stamp program was particularly vulnerable to changes in surplus availability. In 1943, the program was dismantled as surpluses began to dwindle and as the economy improved—even as need continued to persist (Poppendieck 2014). It would be nearly twenty years before the program would reemerge.

In the 1960s, after limited activity in its relief function, the Department of Agriculture again began to expand food assistance programs. In 1961, John F. Kennedy established a pilot food assistance program modeled after the program of the late 1930s and early 1940s. Kennedy used executive action and Section 32 funds, which were largely shielded from congressional action because they did not require approval of appropriation or agricultural committees. Section 32 funds were established in 1935 as a permanent appropriation³⁵ with funds of 30% of annual customs receipts (King 2000; Monke 2016; Poppendieck 2014). The establishment of section 32 funds, importantly, gave the Secretary of Agriculture great discretion in how to use the funds as long as they fell into one of three categories focused on helping farmers: “(1) encourage the export of farm products through producer payments or other means; (2) encourage the domestic consumption of farm products by diverting surpluses from normal channels or increasing their use by low-income groups; and (3) re-establish farmers’ purchasing power” (Monke 2016). Therefore, the funds were, historically, used to purchase and distribute surplus farm commodities and had the benefit of increasing the market price of those commodities.

However, as the early Food Stamp Program expanded, it was clear that the use of Section 32 funds, while they did not require congressional approval, were budgetarily limited and their exclusive use would impede expansion of the Food Stamp Program. The administration, looking to expand the Food Stamp Program, needed to pass new legislation. However, in early 1964 food stamp legislation was being held up by the House Agriculture Committee. Its passage was only the result of a great deal of, what Ronald King referred to as, “mutual hostage taking”. King (2000:48) writes of the 1964 food stamp bill:

³⁵ This was the first permanent appropriation in U.S. history.

The bill was saved only as the product of ‘mutual hostage taking’ among Democratic factions in Congress. Nutrition advocates delayed a tobacco research bill in the Rules Committee until Agriculture reported the food stamp bill. They then traded votes on cotton and wheat price supports for guaranteed passage on the House floor and protections in conference.

In 1964, following a great deal of political maneuvering, the Food Stamp Act passed, thereby making the Food Stamp Program a permanent program with its own budget. As a permanent program, however, the Food Stamp Program was now subject to budgetary appropriations and therefore the congressional agricultural appropriations committees. In 1967, after Kennedy and Clark visited Freeman in his office, the Food Stamp Program extension was being considered and the power of southern agricultural interests and Jamie Whitten were on Secretary Freeman’s mind (King 2000; Kotz 1969). Because of food assistance programs’ unique relationships with the USDA and Agricultural Committees, anti-hunger advocates had a particularly challenging road to reaching federal and executive support for a food safety net.

2.4 THE POWER OF AGRICULTURAL INTERESTS IN CONGRESS

Jamie Whitten, because of his position as Chair of the House Agricultural Appropriations Committee since 1941, was one of the most powerful politicians when it came to agricultural legislation. Within Washington D.C., Whitten was often regarded as the “permanent Secretary of Agriculture” (Kotz 1969:84). In 1969, Christopher Demuth a young Nixon administration member working on the Subcommittee of Food and Nutrition, wrote of the power of Whitten in a memo to Daniel P. Moynihan, Nixon’s Assistant for Domestic Policy,

It is the contention of many- most- of those who have studied the problem of that the desires and intentions of the Secretary of Agriculture are of little consequence in developing an effective food program... And there is, operationally, little separation of- powers between the branches; USDA staffers consider Jamie Whitten to be their boss far more than whoever is the current occupant of the Secretaries office.³⁶

As chairman of the House Agriculture Subcommittee within Appropriations, Whitten had great sway over the agricultural budget and therefore agricultural policy. The committee controlled the agricultural purse strings and Whitten was known as exceptionally hawkish and opposed to anything resembling social welfare—particularly if it could disrupt the racial order of the South (Kotz 1969; Meacham 2018). Since the remainder seven member Whitten committee had similar orientations to farm and social welfare policies, they generally towed Whitten’s line (Kotz 1969). Agricultural policy, aside from the use of Section 32 funds, had no real way around the Whitten Committee. While Section 32 funds allowed the Secretary of Agriculture to bypass congressional committees, their use could generate political backlash from the Agricultural Committees.

Whitten and his Committee’s power stemmed from various forces. Legally, the House Agricultural Appropriations Subcommittee controls the Department of Agriculture’s budget. The Committee had the power to keep legislation from ever reaching the House floor and Whitten’s committee repeatedly proved its willingness to use that power in the past. One of the consequences was that the Administration was forced to review its proposals with Whitten *before* ever being brought forward (Kotz 1969; Meacham 2018). The Committee was also subject to less scrutiny than other Committees because farm policies were frequently considered dull and complicated. Three other committees, one in the House and two in the Senate, also held

³⁶ Memo from Christopher Demuth to Daniel P. Moynihan. White House Central Files, Health Box 13. Folder Executive HE3-1 “Hunger and Malnutrition.” Nixon Presidential Library.

a great deal of power when it came to agricultural policy and these Committees were also chaired by representatives of Southern Agricultural interests.³⁷ Yet, the culture of House, in which House members were less willing to vote against each other, was less prevalent in the Senate—and therefore Senate Agricultural Committees held less power than their counterparts in the House (Kotz 1969).

In addition, Jamie Whitten represented the Mississippi Delta—the precise area where Kennedy and Clarke had “discovered” hunger. Whitten would not take kindly, Freeman believed, to northern Senators poking around in his backyard and telling him what ought to be done in Mississippi. The Secretary of Agriculture knew that Whitten could wage a quiet war against all of Freeman’s own interests which was deeply concerning to Freeman. In his diary Freeman wrote,

I am anxious to try and get that Food Stamp bill on the Floor of the House and see if we can't get it out of the way before I have to make some difficult decisions, one of which may be to directly oppose Whitten in this matter, which I'll do if I have to but want to avoid if I can do it. He'll hit back in many subtle ways and hamper the things that I want which do not have any real appeal...³⁸

As Freeman obfuscated, the pressure from the Clark and Kennedy Subcommittee began to mount. By 1968, anti-hunger activists would gain significant momentum as two major pieces of reporting on hunger applied substantial pressure to Congress and the Administration.

³⁷ In 1967, William R. Poage a Democratic House Representative from Texas chaired the House Committee on Agriculture and in the Senate Allen Ellender a Democratic Senator from Louisiana chaired the Senate Agricultural and Forestry Committee while Democratic Senator Spessard Holland of Florida chaired the Senate Agriculture Subcommittee within Appropriations.

³⁸ May 6, 1967. Diary. Personal Papers of Orville Freeman. Box 11. Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library.

2.5 “A PROBLEM FOR THE MOTHER... A TRAGEDY FOR HER BABY”: PUBLIC PRESSURE MOUNTS

While Bobby Kennedy and Joseph Clarks’ trip across the Mississippi Delta and the Field Foundation study had brought hunger and malnutrition into the national spotlight in the spring and summer of 1967, two very influential pieces of reporting the following year sparked broad public outrage and put additional pressure on the White House and Congress to respond more fully to the issue of hunger. In April of 1968, a report titled *Hunger, U.S.A.*, commissioned by CCAP’s Board of Inquiry on Hunger and Malnutrition was published. The report, replete with pictures, documented hunger and malnutrition across the United States. The report was based on approximately one year of work, and drew on public hearings in at least five different geographical areas of the U.S., field visits, and documents from federal government agencies.³⁹

The following month, CBS ran a documentary on hunger called *Hunger in America*—which opened with a shocking scene of a small infant dying. A doctor gives CPR to an emaciated and listless infant as the narrator says, “This baby is dying of starvation. He was an American. He is now dead.”⁴⁰ The CBS documentary and *Hunger, USA* both focused a great deal of attention on the problems of hunger for infants and young children. Scenes of premature or very small infants in incubators connected to a variety of tubes dotted the documentary, while the narrator explains that, “Because of malnutrition the wards for premature babies are also constantly filled. Malnutrition, a problem for the mother, can become a tragedy for her baby.”

³⁹ According to the report, hearings were conducted in: Hazard, Kentucky, southern West Virginia, San Antonio, Texas, Columbia, South Carolina, Birmingham, Alabama. Field trips were conducted in: east Kentucky, San Antonio area, two areas in Mississippi, Navajo reservation of Arizona, reservation in South Dakota, migrant labor camps in south Florida, Boston, Washington D.C., and New York City.

⁴⁰ CBS reports (Television program), and CBS News. *Hunger in America*. CBS, 1968.

The documentary goes on to describe links between improper nutrition for pregnant women and problematic fetal outcomes.⁴¹ The focus on children and infants, in conjunction with the paradox of want in a land of abundance, struck a chord with the public and politicians. Thousands of letters and telegrams flooded into the Office of the President and the Department of Agriculture expressing horror and calling for immediate federal response. “I have just witnessed CBS reports on hunger in this country,” one telegram read, “Immediate emergency steps must be taken by our government to end this appalling tragedy no committee meetings no conferences just action.”⁴²

The reporting extended well beyond the Mississippi Delta and identified hunger as a national problem. It also identified Freeman and the USDA as being responsible for failing to feed the poorest Americans, arguing that the Department of Agriculture was more concerned with protecting the livelihood of farmers than hungry Americans. This view was shared, at least partially, by White House staff, who also believed that the Department of Agriculture had botched their response to the reports of hunger. In a memo sent from Joseph Califano Jr., Johnson’s chief domestic advisor, to Charles Murphy the President’s Counselor, Califano stated bluntly, “My own view is that Agriculture is the worst Department you could pick to handle food problems. It is hard to think how they could have been handled in a less compassionate manner than the bureaucrats over there have handled them in the past.” While many within the White House saw Freeman as exempt from personal attack, they saw the department as run by farming interests. Califano continues, “While I realize that Freeman is personally is okay on this, his subalterns are basically owned by farmers...”⁴³ Others within the administration noted the

⁴¹ CBS reports (Television program), and CBS News. *Hunger in America*. CBS, 1968.

⁴² Telegram to the President “Hunger in America”. Folder: CM/Food 6/21/67 to date. White House Central Files. CM/Food. Box 4. Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library.

⁴³ Memo from Joseph Califano to Charles Murphy regarding the National Nutrition Council. October 5th, 1968. Federal Government 999, Box X, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library.

complication of responding to the reporting, suggesting that the Johnson administration had not done enough to end hunger. In a memo to the President, DeVier Peirson, Deputy Special Council to the President who worked on agricultural issues, wrote:⁴⁴

...we shouldn't fool ourselves into thinking that we will win a public debate on this problem. The extent of the need may well be exaggerated. The existence of unmet need simply can't be denied. The plain fact is that we have never given this social problem—specifically, the food stamp program—sufficient priority, funds, no administrative push to create a nation-wide effort that we can point to with pride.

Yet, despite the insistence from Johnson aids that more should be done, Johnson himself seemed unwilling to significantly expand food assistance, creating some tension between Johnson and Secretary Freeman. Johnson was more focused on a balanced budget and a great deal of resources were already being spent on the war in Vietnam. At the same time, Freeman was interested in carrying out the President's agenda, but was the target of much of the reporting. Johnson aids described Freeman as "sore as hell."⁴⁵ Political scientist Ronald King writes that Freeman found himself in a bind.

The secretary had been proud of the incremental expansion of the food stamp program, achieved without angering powerful southern conservatives, without threatening racial or labor relations, and without disturbing agriculture department support for producer interests. This had won him no friends from the ideological right. Yet he now also faced strident criticism from the left, complaining that he was more concerned with political

⁴⁴ Memo from DeVier Peirson to President Johnson regarding Orville Freeman and the CBS Documentary. May 27th, 1968. Folder: CM/Food 6/21/67 to date. White House Central Files. CM/Food. Box 4. Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library.

⁴⁵ Memo from DeVier Peirson to President Johnson regarding Orville Freeman and the CBS Documentary. May 27th, 1968. Folder: CM/Food 6/21/67 to date. White House Central Files. CM/Food. Box 4. Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library.

accommodation than with ensuring nutritional sufficiency for all Americans (King 2000: 51).

Freeman reflexively fought back. He penned a letter to CBS President Frank Stanton, which he then released publicly, arguing that the CBS reporting was biased, threatened to undermine food assistance, and disputed claims that the department was more concerned with farm policy than hunger.⁴⁶

The response drew additional critics. In a letter to the editor of the *New York Times*, Dr. Jean Mayer, a Harvard nutrition professor who was part of the CCAP Board, publicly questioned Freeman's nutrition policies, describing them as unscientific and focused on benefiting lobbyists. "The Secretary of Agriculture should consider himself as being first of all the guarantor of the sound nutrition of the American people, and it is only when his decision and his statements do not conflict with this responsibility that he can allow himself to be an official lobbyist for special farming groups," Mayer wrote.⁴⁷

The conflict generated a more targeted response from Freeman to Mayer one month later. In another letter to the editor, Freeman disputed some of Mayer's previous claims and added specific approaches being taken by the Department of Agriculture to address malnutrition and hunger. Among them was "...a special supplemental package of foods geared to the needs of infants, pre-school children and pregnant women."⁴⁸ The proposed program would become the precursor to the Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC).

⁴⁶ "Freeman Disputes CBS 'Hunger' Special." *Los Angeles Times (1923-1995); Los Angeles, Calif.* May 29, 1968.

⁴⁷ Mayer, Jean. "Freeman Criticized on Nutrition." *New York Times*. June 9, 1968.

⁴⁸ Freeman, Orville. "Federal Food Programs." *New York Times*. July 7, 1968.

2.6 CONCLUSION

Anti-hunger advocacy and media reporting brought attention to the issue of widespread domestic hunger which, in the three decades leading up to the mid-1960s, had seldom been discussed at the national level. The attention exerted pressure on the Johnson administration to respond. Johnson, trying to pass a difficult tax bill, was reluctant to advance domestic feeding programs. Further, domestic food assistance programs proved politically cumbersome. The USDA, which was oriented toward serving the farmer first and the consumer second, was responsible for food assistance programs, and legislation to create or expand food assistance programs had to pass through unsympathetic congressional committees with strong ties to Southern agricultural interests. However, public outrage about hunger in a land of abundance was so powerful that both an expansion of the Food Stamp Program and the creation of new programs suddenly appeared politically feasible. In this pivotal moment, Congress and the Johnson administration were poised to make changes to domestic food policy. However, which pre-existing food assistance programs would expand, how the programs might be structured (i.e. included foods, eligibility requirements, educational components), and which, if any, new food assistance programs would emerge, was unclear. It is in this moment that what would later become the WIC program was born and major revisions to the Food Stamp Program were pursued.

In the next chapter, I examine why two of our largest domestic food assistance programs—WIC and the Food Stamp Program—adopted such divergent approaches to the provision of food aid. I examine congressional responses to the issue of hunger in the late 1960s and early 1970s, as this time-period was a critical juncture for the programs. In the following chapter, I argue that cultural views of the poor as uneducated consumers were common. Yet,

ignorance was viewed as most “dangerous” to fetuses, infants, and young children. These concerns, along with the force of agricultural interests, led the government to seriously restrict the purchasing of pregnant women and mothers using WIC benefits.

CHAPTER 3.

HOW PREGNANCY, POVERTY AND RACE SHAPED ACCESS TO FOOD

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In early 2018, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) came under intense criticism after it released a proposal to convert a portion of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits from a debit-type card used in grocery stores to a government-issued “Harvest Box.” Likened to the popular home delivery grocery service, Blue Apron, the proposal suggested that the government would deliver half of SNAP benefits to recipients in government-created food boxes containing canned fruits and vegetables and other non-perishable items. The proposal drew a wide range of critics who were swift and harsh in their opposition. “Can we please not call Trump’s proposed food stamps change ‘Blue Apron for SNAP?’” sniped *New York Times* op-ed columnist Bryce Covert. “With Blue Apron, you get to pick your meals and decide when they come. And it gives you all the ingredients you need to complete it. Under Trump’s plan, the government decides what you get and when you get it. You have no say”.⁴⁹ Retailers were also concerned. The CEO of IGA, a large grocery chain, speculated that IGA stood to lose \$2.7 billion of its \$8 billion in annual sales if the change went into effect.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Covert, Bryce, Twitter post, February 12, 2018, <https://twitter.com/brycecovert/status/963172309992394752>.

⁵⁰ Dewey, Caitlin, “Trump Wants to Slash Food Stamps and Replace them with a ‘Blue Apron-type Program’”, *The Washington Post*. February 12, 2018.

While critics conjured images of United States surplus commodity distribution in the form of Depression-era bread lines or government cheese distribution of the 1980s, there was no mention of an even more restrictive USDA program that has been operating with bi-partisan support for over forty years—WIC. In the last chapter, I traced the WIC program’s origins to a 1968 commodity food distribution program called, at various times the “special commodity program” or “special food program for pregnant women and children.” The program emerged on the heels of reporting which identified widespread hunger in the United States—particularly in the South and Southwest—and critiqued the Department of Agriculture’s food assistance programs for failing to help the most needy. The early WIC program distributed government-selected foods to eligible participants through healthcare centers. While distribution practices within WIC have shifted over the years, the program maintains considerable consistency in limiting recipients’ consumer autonomy. For example, the government dictates the quantity, brand and type of food recipients can purchase each month. Thus, while WIC and SNAP recipients today use benefits to shop at grocery stores, only WIC recipients have such severe restrictions on what they can purchase.

It would be inaccurate to suggest that the WIC program is the only federal food assistance program to limit access to certain foods. The government also determines which foods or, more accurately, which nutrients will appear in School Lunch Program, for example. However, the School Lunch Program is recognized as acting *in loco parentis*—in place of parents—when children are at school. While “the school lunch menu” appeared to be “fair game,” writes sociologist Janet Poppendieck, “changing what people feed their children at home, however, strikes many observers as beyond the pale of public policy” (Poppendieck 2010:85). Yet, constraining WIC recipients’ decisions by limiting what they can purchase with their

benefits does exactly that. This chapter explores the following question: why are WIC recipients considered appropriate targets of what, in other circumstances, may appear like obvious government overreach?

I argue that poor individuals, particularly poor people of color, were frequently constructed by politicians and stakeholders as ignorant consumers whose malnutrition and hunger was, in part, the result of their lack of education. One would expect that these ideas might lead to purchasing restrictions for both programs. However, by the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Food Stamp Program was expanding rapidly and gave consumers broad purchasing discretion. Simultaneously, the newly developed program for pregnant women and mothers was treated as a prescription program for government-created boxes and later, a voucher program for certain pre-approved foods. I argue that the early WIC program's more restrictive approach was the result of ideological and political pressures that reflected widespread concern about the impact of poor women's choices on fetal, neonatal, and child well-being. Congressional representatives, stakeholders, and others voiced concerns that poor dietary choices were particularly detrimental to fetal and infant health. The discussion of hunger in relation to pregnant women, infants, and young children belied anxieties about the ability of poor mothers to care for the children they gestated and raised—making government intervention seem like a reasonable approach to food distribution for this group.

Politically, this approach was widely accepted. As a commodity distribution program specifically intended for a very sympathetic “high risk” group, it placated anti-hunger advocates and moderates who were particularly disturbed by childhood hunger. The program also gave the Secretary of Agriculture an opportunity to expand the list of surplus commodity foods and maintain an outlet for satisfying agricultural interests who were invested in maintaining

commodity surplus distribution. The government chose to act *in loco parentis*, taking strides to limit the decision-making power otherwise granted to Food Stamp recipients. In acting in this manner the government restricted the rights of poor pregnant women and mothers while expanding benefits to powerful agricultural interests.

These decisions continue to have long-lasting implications. Pregnant people and mothers experiencing poverty who access the program, both then and today, are unable to act as autonomous consumers. I argue that dominant cultural views of poor pregnant women and mothers, especially women of color, are critical to understanding how government control of diets has become an essential component of domestic food assistance programs.

3.2 BACKGROUND: CONGRESS RESPONDS

In the month following the release of *Hunger, USA* and *Hunger in America*, there was a flurry of congressional activity. The House of Representatives' Committee on Education and Welfare convened hearings on hunger and malnutrition on the same day as the airing of the CBS documentary. The Senate Subcommittee on Labor and Public Welfare resumed similar hearings, and the Senate Committee on Government Operations also met to consider whether the USDA should remain responsible for food assistance programs. The problem of hunger could no longer be overlooked, and yet four major points of contention animated congressional hearings and debates about hunger: 1) the definition of hunger, 2) the scope of the problem, 3) the causes of hunger, and 4) the consequences of hunger. First, congressional representatives frequently disagreed about the scope of hunger. Second, related to the scope of the hunger problem, were debates over differences between hunger, malnutrition, and starvation—which not only fed into the discussions about the scope of the problem but also allowed hair-splitting over the potential

severity of the issue. It was widely accepted that starvation, such as was seen in countries experiencing war or famine, was egregious, but how concerned should we be about hunger or malnutrition? Further, the causes and consequences of malnutrition and hunger were not well understood. As I will point out in this chapter, causes often became linked to nutritional ignorance—albeit for different political reasons. The consequences of malnutrition and hunger in both media reporting and hearings frequently centered on the impact of hunger on infants and young children. I address how these foci, along with political calculations, framed the problem and dictated the policy solutions.

The analysis presented in this chapter is guided by social welfare scholar Nancy Fraser’s “politics of need interpretation” approach (1987). Fraser calls for a “meaning-oriented sort of inquiry, one of which considers welfare programs as, among other things, institutionalized patterns of interpretation” (1987: 104). Fraser suggests that taking such an approach allows researchers and others to better identify the structural processes or “underlying norms and assumptions which lend a measure of coherence to diverse programs and practices” (Fraser 1987: 104). The approach also helps to uncover the ideological aspects of welfare programming. I use Nancy Fraser’s concept of “needs interpretation” to help identify how policy targets and their needs were framed by politicians and others within the congressional debates, how their needs were understood, and to critically consider the reasons for their use. As discussed previously, Fraser discusses the politics of need interpretation as a top-down process in which politicians and the welfare system translate recipients’ perceived needs into program components by, for example, determining which foods are available to program participants. In this chapter, I center my attention on the framing of potential policy targets by analyzing congressional

hearings. However, I also incorporate some documents from presidential archives to examine which foods were selected for the WIC program and interrogate the reasons for their inclusion.

3.3 THE SCOPE AND DEFINITION OF HUNGER

CBS reporting estimated that the number of hungry people in the United States was around 10 million, which was consistent with the Johnson administrations' own Interagency Task Force on Nutrition and Adequate Diets' estimates.⁵¹ These figures were accepted by congressional representatives looking to allocate more money food assistance programs. However, not everyone agreed about the extent of hunger. The Johnson administration, in opposition to their own task force, suggested that the number of hungry individuals was much lower. The administration was under pressure to pass a tax bill and rein in spending. Johnson believed that an extension of hunger programs would disrupt tax bill negotiations (King 2000; Kotz 1969).

Some congressional representatives were also hoping to discount *Hunger USA* and the CBS documentary *Hunger in America*. Bob Poage of Texas, Chairman of the House Agricultural Committee, submitted surveys to county health officials in the 256 counties identified by *Hunger, USA* as "emergency hunger counties." The results of the survey, he claimed, indicated no issue of widespread hunger. Further, Jamie Whitten, the Southern Democrat from the Mississippi Delta, used the FBI to retrace the steps of the reporters responsible for *Hunger, USA* and *Hunger in America*. The FBI interviewed poor people who had come forward to reporters with their stories of struggle as well as the photographer who documented the scenes of hunger

⁵¹ Task Force Report on Nutrition and Adequate Diets. 1966. Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library.

(Kotz 1969). Concerns about intimidation of the poor were rampant. Attempts to discount reports of hunger made one thing abundantly clear: the scope of hunger in the United States was neither well-documented nor well-understood.

The authors of *Hunger, USA* had found only 30 prior studies that examined diets and malnutrition among the poor in the United States.⁵² Testimonies of nutritionists further underscored the lack of knowledge about the nutrition of U.S. residents. Dr. Frederick J. Stare, a Professor of Nutrition at Harvard University, suggested that nutritionists were much more focused on the role of certain foods in coronary heart disease or dietary problems in other countries. However, there were few scientific studies that examined hunger and malnutrition for those living in poverty in the U.S.. According to Dr. Stare, “We have participated, off and on, in nutrition surveys sponsored by our Government in Taiwan, Vietnam, Lebanon, Columbia, and maybe two or three other places.... We have not participated in any studies of that type in this country because they haven’t been done.”⁵³ His colleague, Dr. William Henry Sebrell Jr., Professor of Public Health Nutrition at Columbia University, testifying the same day, also expressed concern about a lack of knowledge about hunger stating that, “...we need a national nutrition policy and a coordinated Federal attack on the problem. Effective action cannot be taken until we can determine what the problem is, how serious it is, and where it is located.”⁵⁴ While advocates and the media exposed the issue of hunger and exerted substantial pressure on Congress and the Administration to act, initially, skepticism about the problem was widespread.

⁵² Citizens’ Board of Inquiry into Hunger and Malnutrition in the United States. *Hunger, U.S.A.: A Report by the Citizens’ Board of Inquiry into Hunger and Malnutrition in the United States*. Washington: New Community Press, 1968.

⁵³ Testimony of Dr. Frederick J. Stare. “Malnutrition and Federal Food Service Programs” Hearings before the Committee on Education and Labor, House of Representatives, 90th Congress, 2nd Session, May 23, 1968. p. 222.

⁵⁴ Testimony of Dr. William Henry Sebrell Jr. “Malnutrition and Federal Food Service Programs” Hearings before the Committee on Education and Labor, House of Representatives, 90th Congress, 2nd Session, May 23, 1968. p. 184.

3.4 CAUSES OF HUNGER: CONSTRUCTING THE IGNORANT CONSUMER

Once there was agreement that hunger—no matter the extent—existed, another point of contention emerged: the causes of hunger. While many popular media sources and advocates portrayed hunger as primarily a structural and political problem, it was also framed as the result of racialized personal failings in hearings. Foregrounding personal failings allowed the Johnson administration and congressional representatives some political cover from addressing the institutional causes of hunger and malnutrition. It also allowed more conservative elements to attack the Food Stamp Program and potentially keep it from expanding, while supporting more restrictive programs that had greater benefits to agriculture such as the Surplus Commodity Distribution Program.

Within hearings, some administration officials, stakeholders, and congressional representatives seized on the idea that malnutrition centered around individuals not getting the proper set of foods or nutrients, which frequently became rhetorically linked to a lack of education and ignorance. Dr. Sebrell, testifying before the House Committee on Education and Labor states that, “The cause of malnutrition is not simple, either. It is not only because the impoverished are unable to afford an adequate diet. Ignorance of the importance of certain foods may be an important factor, or cultural patterns which influence the selection of food of low nutrition value, or even alcoholism and negligence.”⁵⁵ Dr. Margaret Gutelius, a pediatrician and Children’s Hospital in Washington D.C. echoed some of these sentiments when asked specifically whether she believed education, income, or budgeting practices that were most to

⁵⁵ Testimony of Dr. William Henry Sebrell Jr. “Malnutrition and Federal Food Service Programs” Hearings before the Committee on Education and Labor, House of Representatives, 90th Congress, 2nd Session, May 23, 1968. p. 186

blame for inadequate diets. The doctor responded in the following, “In the ghettos of the large northern cities I would put lack of education first. But low income is a very close second... There are plenty of hardcore families as we call them, who don’t care, who have given up hope and don’t try to obtain the best they know of for their family.”⁵⁶

While the primary importance of education was often emphasized, it served two competing political purposes. First, it was used by more conservative elements to support abandoning the food stamp program for a slightly revised commodity distribution program. However, it also served to discredit the commodity distribution program in favor of the food stamp program with investment in nutrition education programming run by poor people for poor people.

One of the criticisms of the Food Stamp Program, launched by more conservative elements, was the program’s allowance for purchasing of a wide range of foods. During the Hearings on Hunger and Malnutrition, Representative Charles Goodell (R-NY) commented,

*I see many deficiencies in the food stamp program approach toward reaching all the malnourished in this country. In the first place, food stamps, by definition, leave the entire selection of what is purchased to the individual.... If we give them food stamps we may very well find that a large portion of these families will buy the starchy foods that they habitually eat in larger quantities that are not meeting the nutritional needs of children.*⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Testimony of Dr. Margaret Gutelius, “Malnutrition and Federal Food Service Programs” Hearings before the Committee on Education and Labor, House of Representatives, 90th Congress, 2nd Session, June 3, 1968. p. 719

⁵⁷ Representative Charles Goodell (R-NY). “Malnutrition and Federal Food Service Programs” Hearings before the Committee on Education and Labor, House of Representatives, 90th Congress, 2nd Session, May 27, 1968. p. 316-318.

Dr. Leslie Dunbar, head of the Field Foundation, and Dr. James Carter, a member of CCAP's Board of Inquiry into Hunger and Malnutrition, responding to Goodell, notably reinforce many of the claims regarding the poor being uneducated consumers. However, Dr. Dunbar does so in part as a way of challenging the commodity distribution program. When describing his work as a physician with the Field Foundation, Dr. Dunbar notes the inability of the poor to use commodity foods appropriately—particularly the “Mexican” and “Negro.” However, even Dr. Carter reinforces these same ideas, noting that the “... food stamp program without a nutrition education program is not going to succeed.”

Across the ideological spectrum, assertions of nutritional ignorance among the poor were widespread. These assessments were also frequently linked to racially marginalized groups. In particular, the diets of Mexican Americans and Black individuals were under attack. Sometimes these references were direct. For example, Dr. Dunbar referenced the inability of “Mexican Americans” and “Negros” to use commodity foods. However, more frequently, food assistance programs provided a unique discursive opportunity for politicians, media, and stakeholders to construct policy targets in racially coded ways. For example, Charles Goodell, suggests that individuals accessing the food stamp program may not benefit from nutrition education because they are unlikely to follow the advice of nutritionists. He says, “You can tell people over and over in general terms what they ought to eat but if they come from a background where they have been brought up to like certain types of food, and they have eating habits just as all the rest of us do, then they tend to go right along that same route.” However, it is unclear who he believes these unbending policy targets are until he offers,

This is why I think we need to apply some imagination, and innovation, and get some of the things in a form that they will eat and which will also provide the

nutrition necessary. For instance, if they like grits or want to eat just cornmeal, we now have the technology with fish concentrates and things of this nature, to sprinkle in a little tasteless powder, and this mixed in with the things they are used to eating will provide the nutrients they need. It seems to me that this is what we should be doing."⁵⁸

Goodell's specification of "grits" and "cornmeal" can be interpreted as a racially coded reference to the diets of Southern Blacks. The specification of certain foods and diets were therefore one way that politicians in discussion of food assistance programs constructed racialized images of policy targets.

3.5 PREGNANCY, MOTHERHOOD, AND MALNUTRITION

Pregnant women and mothers of young children, particularly women of color, were especially susceptible to charges of nutritional ignorance because their under-consumption of foods or consumption of the "wrong" foods were viewed as a critical cause of hunger and malnutrition among children. Reporting on hunger had focused a great deal of attention on fetal outcomes and child malnutrition. The Field Foundation report on hunger, for example, had focused attention on the problem of hunger and malnutrition for infants and children. The image of an infant dying, which was broadcast on CBS before the Committee of Education and Labor hearings had shocked and outraged the American public. While this reporting focused on how structural and institutional conditions led to malnutrition for children, anxieties about

⁵⁸ Comments by Charles Goodell (R-NY). "Malnutrition and Federal Food Service Programs" Hearings before the Committee on Education and Labor, House of Representatives, 90th Congress, 2nd Session, May 27, 1968. p. 316-318.

malnutrition during pregnancy and early childhood often centered on the inability of women to properly feed their children. In fact, their perceived ignorance was viewed as particularly harmful because it affected the welfare of young children.

The committee addressed a point expressed best by Representative Graham Purcell, a Democratic Representative from Texas, “We can have stacks of food available and unless the mother, the pregnant mother or the mother of a small child, feeds that child or herself adequately, she is going to either produce a malnourished child or at the least take the chance of having a less completing functioning child.”⁵⁹ The assertion that pregnant women and mothers, particularly women of color, were not capable of properly feeding their children, highlights how politicians and stakeholders viewed pregnant women and mothers’ limited capabilities as consumers.

Statements from local officials responsible for running food programs also typified, particularly, mothers of color as ignorant consumers whose decision-making, not poverty, caused harm to their children. Wallace H. Kuralt, the director of Mecklenburg County Department of Public Welfare in Charlotte, North Carolina said in his prepared statement to the House Committee on Education and Labor says,

*Knowledge of nutritional values is generally lacking in families living in poverty. There is also considerable resistance from these families to learn about nutrition. There is also further resistance to change dietary patterns. Consequently it is not uncommon to find anemia in pregnant mothers and young children from poor families.*⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Comments by Graham Purcell (D-TX). “Malnutrition and Federal Food Service Programs” Hearings before the Committee on Education and Labor, House of Representatives, 90th Congress, 2nd Session, May 23, 1968.

⁶⁰ Prepared statement of Wallace Kuralt, Director, Mecklenburg County Department of Public Welfare, Charlotte, N.C. “Malnutrition and Federal Food Service Programs” Hearings before the Committee on Education and Labor, House of Representatives, 90th Congress, 2nd Session, May 1968. p. 554.

As Kuralt notes, his belief is that ignorance and inflexibility are responsible for anemia during pregnancy and nutritional problems with children.

Other examples of local officials blaming mothers for child malnutrition came from local Texas newspapers which published statements made by Burton Hackney, Texas commissioner of the Department of Public Welfare, who had testified before the House Committee on Education and Labor in May of 1968. The Commissioner, after visiting some of the “hunger counties” in Texas identified by *Hunger, USA* reportedly said,

*"I went to Corpus Christi Wednesday and visited the homes of the worst cases. I also went to the Driscoll Foundation Children's Hospital in Corpus Christi and talked to the chief pediatrician. He said there is malnutrition but not because of poverty but because of ignorance," Hackney said. "He quoted the Corpus Christi pediatrician as saying there was widespread ignorance among Mexican-American women in the area about proper nutrition. "If a Mexican woman had a bushel of money she would still feed those kids tortillas and beans," he said he was told.*⁶¹

The Commissioner further explained that the pediatrician also pointed to a cultural shift in breastfeeding, in which the pediatrician believed that Mexican-American mothers were no longer breastfeeding their infants, “but they don’t’ know how to fix a bottle or what to put in it.”

The comments drew the criticism of hunger advocates, Catholic charities, and others. Vincente Ximenes, chairman of the Interagency Committee on Mexican American Affairs and Commissioner of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission notably brought the

⁶¹ Newspaper reports submitted by Vincente Ximenes “Malnutrition and Federal Food Service Programs” Hearings before the Committee on Education and Labor, House of Representatives, 90th Congress, 2nd Session, May 1968.

newspaper article to the attention of the Committee on Education and Labor—calling for the removal of Hackney from his position. While many saw Hackney’s comments as deplorable and prejudiced, others wrote to the committee in support of Hackney and his statements.

While the Hackney comments typify a view that was rarely openly expressed—that ignorance was linked to ethnicity and was fully to blame for nutritional problems. Hackney believed that local government was functioning exactly as it should to bring food to the poor. During hearings most stakeholders and congressional representatives struck a balance between emphasizing the important links between inadequate diet and ignorance, while simultaneously acknowledging that government food assistance programs could be improved. The creation of new programs, such as the pre-WIC program, were influenced by these discussions, including an emphasis put on the consequences of hunger for infants, children, and pregnant women.

3.6 THE CONSEQUENCES OF MALNUTRITION

In addition to debates about the scope and cause of hunger, there was also concern about the consequences of hunger. The consequences of malnutrition and hunger were often described as most severe for infants and young children below five years old. These groups considered the most susceptible to long-term consequences of inadequate diets, since early childhood presented a time of unparalleled brain growth. Further, it was acknowledged that children during this developmental time period were not covered by the school lunch program—a federal program offering free or reduced-price lunches to school-aged children in their schools. Dr. Stare, Professor of Nutrition at Harvard University, described the importance of this developmental time-period and underscored the need for a federal program that would cover children at this time:

...during periods of rapid growth, any organism has its greatest need for food nutrition. This means from infancy until perhaps 3 years of age ...the brain is growing mighty fast, particularly during the first days, the first months, the first 1 or 2 years, and then growth slows off from about 3 years of age up until adolescence. During adolescence, we have a second rapid period of growth. So, on that basis, which is factual, the time that nutrition is of most importance is from early in life until about 3 years of age, 3 or 4, somewhere around there, and then during adolescence. That is why in my testimony some place I mentioned that we must devise some way of getting the equivalent of the school lunch or the school breakfast program to the children who are not in school.⁶²

Pregnant women were also identified as an important demographic with special dietary needs—although concerns about pregnant individuals were often framed secondary to that of the fetus. Anxieties about the role of hunger on the development of infants, and young children dominated congressional hearings.

Medical professionals and nutritionists testifying in hearings related to hunger identified a plethora of ways in which malnutrition could cause long-term damage to infants and children. Included in this litany were mortality, improper development, and poor cognitive functioning in later life. Multiple articles citing the potential implications of malnutrition in the first few years of life were entered in the Congressional record. One article entered by Barbara McGarry of the American Parents Committee and written by Nevin S. Scrimshaw head of the Department of Nutrition and Food Science at MIT titled, “Infant Malnutrition and Adult Learning” noted the potential long-term implications of malnutrition in the first three years of life. The article

⁶² Testimony of Dr. Frederick J. Stare. “Malnutrition and Federal Food Service Programs” Hearings before the Committee on Education and Labor, House of Representatives, 90th Congress, 2nd Session, May 23, 1968. p. 205

acknowledged a lack of research in the area but drew from animal studies to suggest that the effects of malnutrition in early years might lead to permanent physical and psychological damage.⁶³ There was widespread agreement that malnutrition during infancy and early childhood might have potential long term implications but some were cautious of the science surrounding these assertions. In his testimony, Dr. Stare noted,

*I would say there is inadequate evidence that it would interfere. It may very well, but we just don't know. I don't know a single study that is any good that really proves the point that a child that is poorly nourished from, let's say, 1 to 4 years of age or 1 to 3, is going to have impaired learning capacity mental retardation, whatever you want to think of or whatever you refer to it as.*⁶⁴

Yet, Dr. Stare did believe that the dietary needs of pregnant women, infants, and young children should be addressed quickly, suggesting that while inadequate, the science did seem to indicate a need for action. Perhaps even less understood, and less of a focus in the hearings, was the relationship between inadequate nutrition during pregnancy and infant outcomes. It was believed that poor nutrition during pregnancy might take a toll on fetal development and birth outcomes—especially premature birth and low birthweight—but this area was also poorly studied.

While the majority of the hearings focused on the physical ramifications of hunger, some also believed that hunger could manifest as social and economic ills. Dr. Robert Coles, one of the four doctors who went to Mississippi with the Field Foundation in 1967, wrote that hunger could also lead to social conflict. This statement, presented as evidence in Malnutrition and Federal

⁶³ Article “Infant Malnutrition and Adult Learning” by Nevin S. Scrimshaw, head of the Department of Nutrition and Food Science at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Included by Mrs. Barbara McGarry, American Parents Committee in her testimony to House of Representatives Committee on Education and Labor. June 4th, 1968.

⁶⁴ Testimony of Dr. Frederick J. Stare. “Malnutrition and Federal Food Service Programs” Hearings before the Committee on Education and Labor, House of Representatives, 90th Congress, 2nd Session, May 23, 1968. p. 202.

Food Assistance hearings likely provoked a sense of fear given the urban uprisings of the mid to late 1960s. Coles wrote:

*If you don't get fed when hungry, if you don't get alleviation of pain when you suffer, you develop a basic mistrust, a fear of adults which in later life is very difficult to correct. By not feeding children adequately, we may be creating the problems for the future. Many of these children grow up distrusting society and in conflict with it. They are psychological cripples.*⁶⁵

Aside from psychological issues, there were concerns about the potential damage that hunger might do to the United States workforce—a concern that had a long-history in the United States (Moran 2018).

3.7 POLITICAL CALCULATIONS AND COMMODITY FOODS

The view that a lack of education and nutritional ignorance was a main force behind malnutrition—leveled most frequently at poor people of color—and the preoccupation with the consequences of malnutrition for the fetus, infants, and children set the stage for a more restrictive food assistance program for these groups. Yet, government intervention into the lives of poor pregnant women and mothers was also driven by politics. The early WIC program acted as a concession to both agriculture and anti-hunger advocates. The program used Section 32 funds, which were intended to benefit farmers by removing surplus commodities from the market, thereby stabilizing market prices. However, in 1968 the Johnson administration was criticized for “returning” Section 32 funds to the Treasury Department. Reports suggested that

⁶⁵ Evidence included by Dr. Raymond Wheeler, “Malnutrition and Federal Food Service Programs” Hearings before the Committee on Education and Labor, House of Representatives, 90th Congress, 2nd Session, May 23, 1968.p. 251.

during his tenure, Secretary Freeman had returned over 664 million dollars of the funds to the treasury. Further, in the midst of reporting on widespread hunger, the Secretary was expected to, again, return over 200 million more funds.⁶⁶ In May 1968, Secretary Freeman responded to questions about why he was not using his authority as Secretary of Agriculture to use Section 32 funds in the battle against hunger. During hearings held by the House Committee on Education and Labor, Al Quie a Republican Representative from Minnesota commented about the availability of Section 32 funds, “I believe we have laws to reach and to assist these poor people. Something ought to be done.” Freeman responded by suggesting that he had used the funds to the extent possible with current programs, “If you have any suggestions in terms of programs that can be funded under section 32 moneys, unused, to reach people we are not reaching now, I would welcome those suggestions. I have tried to think about them.”⁶⁷

One month later, it appeared that the Department of Agriculture had come up with a plan to use some of the funds. On June 10th, Rodney Leonard, Deputy Secretary of Agriculture, indicated to the House Committee on Employment, Manpower, and Poverty that the Commodity Distribution Program would be expanded to include a wider range of foods and would also include fortified commodity food items that were to focus specifically on the needs of pregnant women, infants, and preschool-aged children. In particular, the Department of Agriculture was working to purchase evaporated milk, corn syrup blend, and a quick cooking cereal fortified with iron, vitamins, and farina to increase the caloric and nutrient-based content of foods. Leonard told the committee,

⁶⁶ CBS reports (Television program), and CBS News. *Hunger in America*. CBS, 1968.

⁶⁷ Testimony by Orville Freeman before the House Committee on Employment, Manpower, and Poverty of Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, May 22, 1968 p. 102.

*Now the new foods also may serve a specific purpose of trying to focus the commodity distribution program down into cases of more special need because the new foods will put special emphasis on needs of infants, preschool children, and pregnant women. This is a group that for dietary deficiencies do have more serious consequences. The canned milk and corn syrup, for example, will make about as good a corn meal mixture as you can get.*⁶⁸

The administration, it appeared, was attempting to address the needs of groups that they, themselves, had identified as underserved as early as 1966.

In 1966, following the Greenville Protests, the Johnson administration convened the Interagency Task Force on Nutrition and Human Needs. The task force was an attempt to identify problems with the current food assistance programs and address areas of potential expansion. Early on the task force identified pregnant women, infants, and children as an important and overlooked demographic. Notes on meetings held by the Task Force suggest that Deputy Secretary of Agriculture, Rodney Leonard, was formulating ideas about the early WIC program. The notes read, “Real problem: how to get children not in programs. Consider giving doctors food stamps to give to poor.”⁶⁹ However, concrete recommendations remained absent in the final report. The Bureau of the Budget, wrote a memo commenting on the recommendations of the Task Force,

There remains in Federal food programs a major gap which the Task Force discussed, but for which it was unable to come up with a recommended solution.

⁶⁸ Testimony by Rodney Leonard before the House Committee on Employment, Manpower, and Poverty of the Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, June X, 1968 p. 1110.

⁶⁹Notes from meeting on November 21, 1966 with Leonard, Lee, Swartz, Scherl, North, Levinson, Califano, Gaither included in Task Force Report on Nutrition and Adequate Diets. 1966. Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library. p. 23.

*Many infants and small children who are not typically in group situations away from home apparently suffer from serious malnutrition problems. There is no federal program, however, aimed specifically at them, and the Task Force does not make any recommendation to deal with this problem directly.*⁷⁰

The following year the task force was convened again, and this time they came up with a more substantial proposal to address the special needs of pregnant women, lactating women, infants, and children. In 1967, hemmed in by budget restraints, the task force was asked by Joe Califano, Johnson's head of domestic affairs, to list its priorities and potential costs. The Task Force committed to the expansion of the Food Stamp Program wrote that:

*...the task force believes that the food stamp program offers the most attractive possibilities for improving the income position of families in poverty, improving nutrition for all age groups, and for permitting a greater degree of freedom to choose foods which are both varied and palatable.*⁷¹

The report went on to suggest that some groups would remain inadequately served by family feeding programs because of their increased dietary needs and might need additional programmatic support. However, these programmatic suggestions were considered a secondary priority.

Although the task force believes that the family feeding programs will prove to be the most effective generally, there will remain the problem of special groups

⁷⁰ Memo from Jim Springfield, Resources and Civil Works Division, Executive Office of the President of Bureau of the Budget to The Director. Included in the Task Force Report on Nutrition and Adequate Diets. 1966. Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library, p. 17.

⁷¹ Final Report. Task Force Report on Nutrition and Adequate Diets. 1967. Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library, p. 20.

*requiring more than the average dietary level. These groups are pregnant and nursing mothers, infants and pre-Headstart children, and the elderly. It is among these groups that our present delivery systems are the most deficient. The task force has assigned a high, but secondary, priority to the nutrition needs and the public responsibility of these persons.*⁷²

The Task Force goes on to recommend legislation to alter to the Food Stamp Program and allow for additional stamps or vouchers to individuals needing extra nutritional support. In January 1968, this suggestion again appeared on the desk of the President, when Joe Califano requested that the President approve the voucher concept. The President's response is not documented, but the voucher program was not implemented under Johnson. Rather, a secondary idea presented by the 1967 Task Force appeared poised to succeed. Rather than issuing vouchers, the government would distribute certain commodity foods to individuals needing extra nutritional support. The foods would be delivered by medical personnel via health clinics. As part of this approach, the committee made recommendations that the President "direct the Secretary of Agriculture to begin immediately on a pilot basis a series of direct distribution programs which include various new combinations of commodities and fortified foods."⁷³ Thus, by June 1968 when Deputy Assistant Secretary Rodney Leonard gave his testimony, efforts to acquire the expanded list of commodities and fortify existing commodities was already under way.

The political benefit of using commodities, as opposed to the proposed vouchers, were obvious. First, most federal food assistance programs begin with the use of Section 32 funds. The use of Section 32 funds does not require congressional approval. Therefore, the administration

⁷² Final Report. Task Force Report on Nutrition and Adequate Diets. 1967. Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library, p. 20.

⁷³ Final Report. Task Force Report on Nutrition and Adequate Diets. 1967. Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library, p. 21.

could establish a trial program without protracted political battle. Any changes to the Food Stamp Program, on the other hand, would require new legislation and potential battles with Southern Democrats. Second, Johnson was concerned about the budget and a voucher program would likely cost more money than a commodity distribution program. The task force initially suggested that a voucher program would cost approximately 20 million dollars, while the early WIC direct distribution program would cost nearly 50 million. Yet, the commodity distribution program would provide clear benefits to agriculture. By summer of 1968, it was obvious that the Food Stamp Program would continue to replace the Commodity Distribution Program. As mentioned previously, this shift concerned congressional representatives with ties to agriculture—particularly those whose interest were well-served by the commodity distribution program. The program for women, infants, and children, was a small concession to these interests and simultaneously gave cover to the Department of Agriculture, which had been under fire for the potential return of Section 32 funds to the Treasury.

Yet, one obstacle still existed. A primary critique of the Surplus Commodity Distribution Programs was that they were nutritionally inadequate—dominated by starches with few fresh fruits, vegetables, or protein-rich foods. At the same time, vitamin and protein-rich foods were considered critical to pregnant and lactating women and young children. To address this issue, Freeman expanded the list of surplus foods available to pregnant women, infants, and children. This expanded list included shelf-stable items such as: nonfat dry milk, evaporated milk, canned chicken, scrambled egg mix, fruit juice, peanut butter, canned chopped meat. In addition the Department of Agriculture was beginning to experiment with fortification processes, which were not yet widely used in commercially available foods. Young children, it was determined, would

also receive “quick-cook breakfast cereal, fortified dehydrated milk drink” and infants were to receive: “extra evaporated milk, extra corn syrup.”⁷⁴

Appreciation that the government was expanding food assistance programs in conjunction with prevailing views about poverty, pregnancy, and motherhood seemed to silence any potential critics. The program was a small victory from the perspectives of anti-hunger advocates. However, the program was also a victory for others as well—namely agriculture, which would benefit from government purchases of surplus foods. While the law suggested that commodities should be purchased with Section 32 funds only when their abundance might disrupt farmer incomes, it was reported that their selection was often political. In 1969, journalist Nick Kotz (1969: 71), writing about food assistance programs, reported that Rodney Leonard, Deputy Secretary of Agricultural stated, “Surplus foods are what the lawyers say they are. We begin buying off commodities from whatever commodity group has enough muscle to get included.” The expanded set of commodity foods, particularly milk, peanuts, and poultry had especially strong representation in congress—particularly among Southern Democrats.

Only a few months following the hearing, the federal government would roll-out what would later become the WIC program—using community health centers to distribute government foods to pregnant women, infants, and young children. By 1972, the program was operating in approximately 300 locations.⁷⁵ The Food Stamp Program would also continue its expansion, recipients, however would maintain broad discretion over their purchases. The early

⁷⁴ Memo from Orville Freeman to President Johnson. June 29, 1968. Folder: “Food Assistance”. Devier Pierson’s White House Aide Files. Box 7. Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library.

⁷⁵ Memo from Richard Lyng, Assistant Secretary of Agriculture, to Richard Nathan, Assistant Director, Office of Management and Budget. “Cashing Out Food Stamps Under FAP and the Adult Categories”. Folder: Folder WE 10-4 Food Stamp Program 1/1/71-12/72. Box 60. White House Central Files: Welfare. Richard M. Nixon Presidential Library.

WIC program faced logistical problems similar to those faced by the Commodity Distribution Programs of the past, making it difficult to administer. Government foods were available to certain localities, but those localities were responsible for the costs associated with storage and distribution—and where the money would come from was often unclear. A shift toward a voucher system seemed inevitable.

3.8 WIC, NIXON, AND THE FREE MARKET

Nixon had come into the White House with a promise to end hunger, a disdain for government bureaucracy, and a predilection for the “free market.” He believed that the government was too entrenched in farm aid, especially the subsidization of major commodities. He also held a deep commitment to public-private partnerships, which was evident by his first White House Conference on Food and Nutrition, in which approximately a third of attendees were from the private sector. The existence of direct commodity programs, such as the pre-WIC program, must have irked Nixon. The program both purchased major commodities and bypassed the “free market.” Only five months after taking office, Nixon was looking to shift the pre-WIC program away from its direct distribution origins toward a voucher program.

In May of 1969, Nixon delivered a speech to Congress suggesting such a change and noting complications in the delivery of the program:

The program has encountered logistical problems which have severely limited its success. I am therefore directing that a substantial portion of the Fiscal Year 1970 budget for this program be used to establish pilot programs that make use of the private food market. Under these programs, needy pregnant women and mothers of infants will be issued vouchers, redeemable at food and drug stores for infant formulas and other highly nutritious special foods. If such a program seems

workable, and the administrative problems are resolved, the program will be expanded later on the basis of that experience.

The voucher program, as Nixon conceived it, would maintain control of recipients' diets while simultaneously moving the government away from a direct distribution model. However, there appeared no political will to give recipients of the new pilot project greater choice in what they purchased.

Instead, the early WIC program, the pilot program established by Nixon, the subsequent WIC pilot program drafted by Democratic Congressional Representatives, and the bill that gave WIC permanent program status all maintained a strict control over the diets of recipients that remains intact today. After the program was untethered from the direct commodity distribution model, a second shift occurred: the WIC program began to dictate the brands which could be included in WIC packages. However, it is not clear when and how this shift occurred. Nor is it clear why some brands are included in the program while others are excluded. Yet, at some point after the WIC moved to a voucher program, this shift began. In the next section I examine how brands jockey for participation in the program, the benefits to corporations, and the potential consequences for the recipient.

3.9 THE VALUE OF THE WIC CONSUMER TO CORPORATIONS

The value of the WIC consumer to corporations whose brands are included in the packages should not be underestimated. In 1991, the Wall Street Journal reported that Welch's estimated annual losses of approximately one million dollars after its grape juice was dropped

from New York State’s WIC food package.⁷⁶ While companies see a benefit to participating in WIC via immediate profits, WIC also poses an opportunity to establish brand loyalty among a very sought-after demographic—children. Companies vie for the *attention* of pregnant women and mothers of young children who often determine what their children consume in the early years of life. If a company can catch individuals at this important timepoint, they have the potential of creating early brand loyalty (Nestle 2013). Children raised on Cheerios, for example, are more likely to purchase Cheerios when they are adults.

Further, companies see pregnancy as a critical time in which consumer habits are malleable. It is a time directly before individuals begin purchasing items they have previously never purchased. For example, new parents might purchase infant formula or baby foods. Companies’ interest in capitalizing on this time-period is best exemplified by a controversy surrounding predictive advertising practices by the retail store, Target. In the spring of 2012, *New York Times*⁷⁷ and other media outlets reported that Target was collecting a massive amount of data on shoppers attached to individual IDs. Data collection involved tracking purchases that data scientists identified as common during the second trimester of pregnancy and used this data to predict whether a customer might be pregnant. Target would then send directed advertisements, coupons, or other incentives to potentially pregnant shoppers for baby items.

3.10 THE CONSEQUENCE OF LIMITED CHOICE

Since the WIC program forces consumption of a limited number of brands, companies included in the packages not only gain financially, but they also gain unfettered access to a

⁷⁶ Gibson, Richard. “U.S. Aid Plan for Poor Helps Big Food Firms” *The Wall Street Journal*. March 29, 1991.

⁷⁷ Duhigg, Charles. “How Companies Learn Your Secrets” *The New York Times Magazine*. February 16, 2012.

critical demographic group. The WIC consumer, on the other hand, is not a free consumer. The WIC consumer is hemmed-in by a limited set of items and a limited set of brands. One of the many consequences of limited choice, is the inability to respond to personal and cultural preferences. The WIC program has frequently been accused of pushing a white, middle-class understanding of proper nutrition and foods on individuals. WIC recipients also have a more difficult time responding to dietary restrictions, personal preferences, and potential food safety threats. In 2018 and 2019, the Environmental Working Group (EWG), a non-profit group focused on human and environmental health, released studies identifying, what it considered, higher than appropriate levels of glyphosate⁷⁸ in various General Mills and Quaker cereals⁷⁹—including some brands in the WIC package. The Food and Drug Administration declared the identified levels as safe for human consumption, however some consumers disagreed. While SNAP recipients, because of the lack of restrictions within the program, can make decisions to avoid purchasing items that pose potential threats to health, WIC consumers must rely on the federal governments’ determinations about food safety.

3.11 CONCLUSION

This chapter has examined the Congressional response to the problem of hunger. I contend that the consequences of malnutrition were deemed most problematic for fetal, infant, and child development. Hunger and malnutrition during this critical developmental time was believed to have serious effects on physical, mental, and even social development. Concerns

⁷⁸ Glyphosate is one of the main ingredients in Bayer/Monsanto’s Round-Up weed killer and has been implicated in multiple lawsuits claiming that Round-Up causes cancer.

⁷⁹ News Release. “New Round of EWG Tests Finds More Children’s Cereals Tainted With Monsanto’s Cancer-Causing Weedkiller”. 2019 [online] Available at: <https://www.ewg.org/release/new-round-ewg-tests-finds-more-children-s-cereals-tainted-monsanto-s-cancer-causing>

about these groups merged with racially coded charges of nutritional ignorance amongst the poor. Advocates, politicians, and scientists often frequently asserted that poor individuals, especially those who were pregnant or parenting young children, were unable to provide proper nutrition to their young children and fetuses. These cultural beliefs merged with political concerns about the retraction of the Commodity Distribution Program. While many administration officials were pushing for a voucher program that would be added to the already existing Food Stamp Program, political calculations during the Johnson administration seemed to push the pre-WIC program in a different direction. Instead of using the voucher system, the administration moved toward expanding the number of commodity foods and utilizing new fortification strategies to make the foods, ostensibly, more nutritious. As the program shifted over time to a voucher-type system that could be used in stores, there remained consistency in its restrictiveness and in the types of foods that could be purchased and corporations began to use their influence to gain inclusion in the program.

The WIC model of food distribution, today, has broad bi-partisan support. The program is frequently touted as important to exposing pregnant women, mothers, and their young children to “healthy” foods that they might not be inclined to otherwise purchase. This perspective frequently goes uncritiqued but relies on several problematic assumptions discussed within this chapter. First, this perspective relies on the notion that the government has the right, if not the responsibility, to dictate what recipients can purchase with their benefits. Second, it is also assumed that those who are poor, particularly women of color, are ignorant consumers who, if left to their own devices, would make “bad” choices about food. Finally, this perspective holds that leaving women to make their own decisions about what to eat is particularly risky because

their choices have consequences for their fetus, infants, and children. These beliefs, stated within congressional testimony during the 1960s, remain intact today.

In addition, in WIC, the government makes determinations about which foods are deemed nutritious, but agricultural interests and multinational food companies play an integral role in this process. As shown within this chapter, the pre-WIC program which developed under the Johnson administration was influenced by powerful agricultural interests within Congress. Satisfying agricultural groups often took priority in determining which foods were “commodity foods” and therefore which foods were included in commodity distribution programs, such as the early WIC program. The Nixon Administration’s turn toward “free market” principles pushed the commodity program toward a voucher-style program redeemable at some grocery and drug stores. While the Nixon shift posed an avenue by which the food program might be liberalized, offering greater choice, the voucher program maintained a strict control over the diets of women and children, and instead created an opening for large food corporations to insert themselves in the program. These early decisions about the WIC program have consequences that reverberate today. Food corporations benefit greatly from the WIC program, while WIC participants are often forced to sacrifice personal, cultural, or health-related food preferences to participate in the program.

CHAPTER 4.

MEDICALIZED PREGNANCY AND NUTRITION SCIENCE: THE ROLE OF SCIENCE IN SHAPING SURVEILLANCE OF PREGNANT BODIES IN WIC.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

As part of participation in the WIC program today, recipients must submit to a series of medical screenings and nutrition education. Pregnant people, for example, are weighed over the course of their pregnancies—their weight gains and losses monitored by trained nutritionists. My introduction to WIC and the programs' medical model came when I was six months pregnant and just beginning participation in the program. I met with the staff nutritionist who led me to the back room of an office replete with posters about calcium, iron, and an array of other nutrients. The nutritionist asked me a battery of questions about my health and social life. “How tall are you?” she asked at one point. “Five feet five inches,” I reported back. In reality, I am five feet four and a half inches, but that level of detail seemed unnecessary and irrelevant. “What was your pre-pregnancy weight?” the nutritionist queried. “149 pounds,” I answered. The nutritionist logged my height against my weight, letting me know that I was in the “normal” range of the Body Mass Index—a scale initially developed to replace weight-based metrics in insurance, that despite concerns about its efficacy has become ubiquitous across a range of medical settings.

The nutritionist led me out of the room to a wall with a height graph. “Stand here,” she instructed. As she measured me, I heard her cluck quietly, “You are five feet *four* and a half inches,” she subtly reprimanded me. As she sat back down to her computer with this new information in hand, she informed me that my weight was no longer “normal.” I was now

deemed “overweight”—a designation that changed the suggested weight gain during my pregnancy. While the nutritionist had previously explained that I *should* gain no more than 35 pounds in my pregnancy, I was now expected to gain no more than 25 pounds. She looked at my current weight. “You should gain no more than five pounds for the remainder of your pregnancy. Do you think you can do that?” she asked. My irritation and frustration rose to the surface, “Do I think that I can gain no more than five pounds in the last three months of my pregnancy?!?!?” I asked. “Well,” she said, pausing, “at least try.” In her work on pregnant women accessing Medicaid, Khiarra Bridges (2011: 54) notes how women receiving Medicaid often found consultations with WIC nutritionists “offensive.” As illustrated in the anecdote above, these sessions tended to end in a reproach of women’s diets and bodies.

In this chapter, I examine how bodily surveillance and nutrition education became important components of the WIC program, while remaining largely absent from the Food Stamp Program. The story above documents just one way in which the pregnant body is surveilled, monitored, and disciplined within the context of a food assistance program—through required meetings with nutritionists or other similarly positioned staff. Initial WIC screenings, such as described above, are used to determine eligibility. Eligibility for WIC, unlike other social welfare programs, is based on four criteria: categorical eligibility criteria,⁸⁰ state residential criteria,⁸¹ income criteria,⁸² and nutritional risk. Because WIC recipients must be at “nutritional risk,” nutritionists or others must identify problems with the individuals’ health or diet to establish eligibility (Institute of Medicine 1996) sometimes leading to a “catch-all” designation of “other

⁸⁰ Categorical eligibility criteria includes being pregnant, up to six months post-partum (if not breastfeeding) or up to twelve months post-partum if breastfeeding, infant under one year, or child between one to five years old.

⁸¹ State residential criteria include living in the state or territory in which the application is made.

⁸² 185% of the federal poverty level or meeting the above criteria while participating in a program, such as Medicaid, that has a more restrictive income eligibility criteria.

dietary risk” for individuals otherwise considered healthy (Mason 2016). As Bridges notes, in her study of pregnant women accessing Medicaid, a repudiation of poor women’s bodies and diets as means for establishing eligibility should be viewed as “a moralistic gesture” (Bridges 2011: 56).

Establishing eligibility through scrutiny of participants’ diets and bodies is only one way in which the WIC program surveils participants. In practice, individuals receiving the program will receive follow-up nutrition appointments when they are renewing their vouchers (Mason 2016) or as the nutritionist or dietician dictates (Bridges 2011). However, there is flexibility and, therefore, variation on a state by state level in the education components of WIC. Since WIC’s inception in 1972, nutrition education has been one of the three main pillars of the program. Today education accounts for approximately 20% of the WIC budget (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities 2015). According the Food and Nutrition Services arm of the USDA, the goal of the WIC education component is to:

1) Emphasize the relationship between nutrition, physical activity, and health with special emphasis on the nutritional needs of pregnant, postpartum, and breastfeeding women, infants, and children under five years of age; and 2) assist the individual who is at nutritional risk in achieving a positive change in dietary and physical activity habits, resulting in improved nutrition status and in the prevention of nutrition-related problems through optimal use of WIC supplemental foods and other nutritious foods (Food and Nutrition Services 2010).

Yet, there is broad discretion given to local agencies to meet these federal goals (Cates et al. 2016). Given local agencies discretion in administering educational components and a lack of

academic research focused on WIC, what happens under the guise of education remains unclear (Cates et al. 2016).

However, the stated educational goals underscore the program’s dual purposes of identifying problems with the bodies and diets of those participating and then “changing” and “improving” those bodies and diets. Further these educational components of WIC are required and one cannot participate in the program without submitting oneself to the scrutiny of WIC staff. On the other hand, nutrition education is a voluntary part of SNAP and only developed in 1988 (FNS 2019). It has remained a non-mandated element of the program—with SNAP participants opting into the program at their own discretion.⁸³

Requiring that social welfare recipients receiving other services such as housing vouchers or cash-benefits be weighed, measured, and have their diets closely monitored as a requirement to receiving benefits, would likely strike many as excessive state-intervention—even for the poor. I argue that bodily surveillance within the WIC program is non-problematized because of the programs’ accepted status as both a food assistance program and a health program. Here I make two main arguments. First, the WIC program developed within the context of two complimentary shifts within U.S. society—the rise of nutrition science and the medicalization of pregnancy. As seen in the previous chapter, nutrition scientists and medical professionals had a prominent place at the table in Congressional hearings on hunger. They couched the problem of hunger, particularly for “high risk” groups (i.e. pregnant women, infants, children, and the elderly), in medical language—focusing on the absence of certain nutrients and potential medical consequences. Second, I argue that viewing recipients within a medical framework necessitated medical responses—food distribution was performed within medical centers, program

⁸³ However, the USDA website even advises that SNAP-Ed should focus its attention on mothers—since they are deemed critical to children’s food consumption.

evaluations required health metrics, and eligibility criteria necessitated a medical assessment of nutritional risk. These programmatic elements defined hunger and malnutrition for pregnant women, infants, and children as a medical problem, reinforced the importance of medical professionals to the program, and allowed for a level of bodily surveillance unprecedented in food assistance programs. Further, nutrition scientists' reduction of food into unseen, individual nutrients meant that nutrition education was essential to teaching pregnant women and mothers about how to "fix" their diets—thus also establishing nutritionists as indispensable to the program.

4.2 THE MEDICALIZATION OF PREGNANCY

Over the course of the 20th century, pregnancy became widely viewed as a medical event. The rise of physician assisted births and prenatal care are two examples that represent the ascendance of the medical model of pregnancy. At the turn of the 20th century, approximately 50 percent of births were attended by a physician and only 5 percent of pregnant individuals accessed prenatal care (Barker 1998; Ehrenreich and English 2005). By the late 1990s, however, prenatal care had become ubiquitous with an estimated 96 percent of pregnant people receiving such care and births attended by physicians rose dramatically (Barker 1998, 2003). The shift toward a medical model for pregnancy was aided by a variety of forces, including a vested interest in physicians to expand their services to pregnant women. To accomplish this goal, doctors and physicians constructed midwives as ignorant, dirty, and incompetent (Ehrenreich and English 2005: 96). Physicians looking to bring pregnancy under the supervision of the medical profession waged legal battles against midwives—leading to laws which severely curtailed and eliminated midwifery practices across the U.S (Ehrenreich and English 2005).

The publication of the manual *Prenatal Care* in 1913 by the United States Children's Bureau, the first federal organization focused on the welfare of children, exposed women to a biomedical understanding of pregnancy. By the mid-1930s, the publication had been distributed to approximately 22 million women. Sociologist Kristin Barker (1998: 1074) notes that the publication "...facilitated the medicalization of pregnancy by constituting it as disease-like, constructing pregnant women as patients, and (thereby) pulling pregnancy into the domain of medicine." A push toward a medical understanding of pregnancy was also institutionalized by the passage of the Sheppard-Towner Act of 1921 (Barker 2003; Skocpol 1992). Sheppard-Towner is considered one of the first U.S. federal social welfare programs and was focused on increasing maternal and infant hygiene. As part of the Sheppard-Towner Act, physicians within the U.S. Children's Bureau dispensed advice to pregnant women. Physicians in response to women's letters, encouraged women to redefine their pregnancies in medical terms and provided medical solutions for its monitoring (Barker 2003). Pregnancy became pathological and pregnant people became "vectors of risk" (Barker 1998; Bridges 2011; Fentiman 2017). These shifts also made physicians into "experts" over pregnancy and reinforced their medical skills as indispensable.

The expansion of scientific tools available to physicians further reinforced their importance to the management of pregnancy. Physicians could use blood tests and urine tests to diagnose a plethora of pregnancy-related conditions. In the mid-twentieth century, the development of fetal imaging technology also gained popularity (Fentiman 2017). Linda Fentiman argues that the ultrasound was more than just a medical tool. It created substantial shifts in our cultural views of pregnancy—separating the pregnant person and the fetus—and led society to think of these two entities as separate and distinct. Physicians began to think of

themselves as treating two patients, which can be seen in practices that force pregnant people to submit to unwanted medical interventions in the name of fetal protection (Fentiman 2017). Tools to monitor pregnancy not only lend an air of objectivity to physicians and insulate them from critique, but they also reinforce the idea that these tools cannot be used outside of the medical context and reifies the importance of physicians during pregnancy. By 1968, as the Hearings on Hunger were underway, the pregnant body was already widely viewed in medical terms. Subsequently, the medical monitoring of poor pregnant women was neither controversial nor problematized.

4.3 THE RISE OF NUTRITION SCIENCE

The development of WIC and the expansion of the Food Stamp Program should also be interpreted in the context of a second important shift—the ascendance of nutrition science. Nutrition science followed the trajectory of the medicalization of pregnancy, attempting to establish itself as a meaningful scientific endeavor with expertise in the consumption of food. Nutrition science, however, was also a comparatively new science. The first vitamins had been “discovered” in the mid-1920s and addressing vitamin deficiencies in humans had only become a focus in the twenty to thirty years preceding the congressional hearings on hunger (Mozaffarian, Rosenberg, and Uauy 2018). Dr. Stare, Professor of Nutrition at Harvard University, highlighted the relative infancy of the science—particularly regarding questions of human nutrition—during the House Committee on Education and Labor’s hearings on hunger, when Representative Roman Pucinski (D-Ill) questioned nutrition scientists’ lack of understanding of malnutrition in humans:

*Dr. Stare, your testimony deeply concerns me. You are recognized as one of the great authorities in the field of nutrition... You are the head of the nutrition department of one of the great institutions of this country. I am disturbed with your statement that we know practically nothing about the problems we are discussing. What have you nutritionists been doing for the last 20 years?*⁸⁴

The doctor's response highlights both the origins of, at least some, nutrition science programs and problems within the emerging field,

*What many of us have been doing is working in animal nutrition, as Mr. Purcell brought out. In fact, the whole science of nutrition developed for economic reasons for the farmer. He wanted to get more eggs out of his chickens with less feed and to get baby chicks to be broilers in three days less, to get more milk out of the cow and more beef off of the animal. There were many economic reasons.*⁸⁵

Dr. Stare's humble response about the origins and knowledge of nutrition science is tamed by the more brash linkages made between vitamin deficiencies and medical problems. As covered in the previous chapter, nutrition scientists were often quick to identify how the absence of individual nutrients absent in the diets of the poor could create health problems. Identifying health problems as emerging from a few essential nutrients lent credibility to nutrition science. As journalist Michael Pollan writes in his book, *In Defense of Food*, "Since nutrients, as compared with foods, are invisible and therefore slightly mysterious, it falls to the scientists... to explain the hidden reality of foods to us" (Pollan 2008:28). In 1968, as advocates, politicians, and lay people were

⁸⁴ Representative Roman Pucinski (D-Ill) question to Dr. Frederick J. Stare. "Malnutrition and Federal Food Service Programs" Hearings before the Committee on Education and Labor, House of Representatives, 90th Congress, 2nd Session, May 23, 1968. p. 215.

⁸⁵ Testimony of Dr. Frederick J. Stare. "Malnutrition and Federal Food Service Programs" Hearings before the Committee on Education and Labor, House of Representatives, 90th Congress, 2nd Session, May 23, 1968. p. 215.

considering how to change existing food programs and implement new food programs, nutrition scientists were at the head of the table.

4.4 THE POLITICS OF NEED INTERPRETATION

The framing of policies and the construction of policy targets are critical dimensions of creation of social welfare policy. How a policy or problem is framed determines how the problem is understood, the stakeholders invited to participate in policy development and debate, and dictates the potential policy solutions (McBride 2000; Van Hulst and Yanow 2016). Within the dominant framing of a policy issue, politicians and stakeholders construct both the problems facing the targets of the policy or recipients and their needs. Nancy Fraser (1987) refers to this process as the “politics of needs interpretation.” As I demonstrated in the previous chapter, much of the discussion of the problems facing policy targets were about the inability to get the “right” nutrients. This was often discussed in terms of nutritional ignorance, which had class, race, gender, and pregnancy/motherhood status intonations.

As Fraser suggests, the primary framing of the policy issue also determines which individuals, stakeholders, and groups are included in policy development and debate. Stakeholders most aligned with the primary framing are “heard,” while those less directly associated with the primary framing become peripheral to the debates (McBride 2000). Nutritionists and medical doctors were especially important to the framing of these debates. The issue of hunger and malnutrition, particularly for “high risk groups,” were framed in medical terms. The programmatic solutions offered by the WIC program relied on the “expertise” of nutritionists and medical personnel—thus establishing themselves as both critical to understanding the problem and necessary for the solution. Their influence in policy development

and participation in the program facilitated an understanding of WIC as a health and food distribution program and aided in the incorporation of medical surveillance and nutrition education within the program.

4.5 THE WIC RECIPIENT AND MEDICAL SURVEILLANCE

Three main program components developed early in the WIC program that established it as a health program: the pre-WIC program was primarily run out of medical and health clinics, established eligibility criteria that required a diagnosis of “nutritional risk,” and required the collection of biological and medical data to assess the program’s success. The inclusion of these components brought recipients under medical supervision as a prerequisite for receiving food, thus reinforcing WIC as a health program. Through the law, medical professionals and nutritionists became “experts” in the diets and bodies of poor pregnant women and their children. These experts required recipients to submit to the collection of biological and personal data, an endeavor not pursued by any other U.S. food assistance program.

4.5.1 *WIC Distribution Via Medical Centers*

One of the first developments that tied WIC to a medical model was its association with public health and medical centers. When the pre-WIC program began, it distributed USDA commodity foods via community health clinics—a move that reflected the prevailing concerns of public health officials. Rodney Leonard, the Deputy Secretary of Agriculture attended a series of meetings with public health officials that was convened by the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW). According to Leonard (Leonard 2015: 36), “...doctors and staff members at

local health clinics complained that many, if not most, mothers and infants they treated were suffering from illnesses related to chronic hunger.” The USDA which had expressed interest in using Section 32 funds for food distribution projects, saw the procurement and distribution of commodity foods to pregnant women and infants through the neighborhood health clinics as a viable approach to addressing hunger and malnutrition. The USDA established the program first as a direct distribution system and later as a cash voucher system run through community health centers.

The pre-WIC program’s association with physicians, nurses, nutritionists, and other medical staff not only increased the program’s legibility as a health program, it also created a strong set of advocates. Individuals operating the commodity distribution program for pregnant women and infants were quick to defend the program. For example, a change in commodity foods allocated to the programs under the Nixon administration drew extensive criticism. In 1970, the Nixon administration removed scrambled egg mix, peanut butter, and farina from the programs’ packages. Letters from doctors, nutritionists, dieticians, and others administering the program began to roll into the USDA. In San Francisco, Herbert Brosbe, a medical student at the University of California Medical School who was organizing food distribution for parts of San Francisco, stressed that the elimination of such foods would deprive recipients of “essential nutrients.”⁸⁶ A letter from Jo-Anne Kelly a nutritionist in San Francisco similarly chided the USDA, emphasizing that, “Growing children, pregnant and nursing women need the protein, iron, and other nutrients your department has seen fit to deny them.”⁸⁷ Similar letters came from

⁸⁶ Correspondence between Herbert Brosbe, Medical Student, to Richard Lyng, Assistant Secretary of Agriculture. Folder “Hunger in America” 1970, Box #5215, Compartment 3, Row 10, Stack 170, Record Group 16. National Archives, College Park, Maryland.

⁸⁷ Correspondence between Jo-Anne Kelly, Nutritionist, and Richard Lyng, Assistant Secretary of Agriculture. Folder “Hunger in America” 1970, Box #5215, Compartment 3, Row 10, Stack 170, Record Group 16. National Archives, College Park, Maryland.

nutritionists and doctors running programs in Detroit and other areas. Since individuals running these early WIC programs were also associated with community health and medical clinics, their concerns were frequently expressed in medical language, focusing on the relationship between a lack of nutrients and poor health outcomes.

In the early 1970s, Rodney Leonard, who had left the USDA to create a public interest group focused on improving federal food programs,⁸⁸ and Jim Thorton, an aide to Hubert Humphrey, met to draft legislation that would create the WIC pilot program (Clapp 2016). According to the two men, they drew upon two models: the early USDA pre-WIC program and two unrelated projects being run by Dr. David Paige at John Hopkins in Maryland⁸⁹ and St. Jude Children's hospital in Memphis, Tennessee (National WIC Association 2007). These programs maintained a great deal of similarity to the USDA program, including their use of community health and medical centers to distribute food or vouchers to "high risk" groups. Modeling after these early projects, the WIC pilot legislation included language that would continue distributing food services through medical settings.

In part as a result of its linkage with medical centers, the program became viewed by advocates and others as both a health and food program. In recalling resistance to the bill that established WIC as a permanent program, Richard Stone, an aide to Senator George McGovern comments (NWA 2007),

You know when I was first writing this bill people, people said to me, you know, 'public health centers will never do this. They don't want to hand out vouchers for

⁸⁸ Following his departure from the USDA, Rodney Leonard established the Community Nutrition Institute.

⁸⁹ The John Hopkins project provided iron-fortified infant formula to low-income women with infants in Baltimore. The program was administered through community health clinics and later became known as the "Iron Fortified Infant Formula Program." As it expanded the program began to use a voucher system, which WIC would later be modeled upon.

food. It's not what they do.' And I said, 'No. The strength of this is going to be that it is through the health system. It is food and health and this is the direction that the country is going in.'

This emphasis on the program's health components and distribution of the program via health clinics further established pregnant and nursing women and their children as medical subjects. Unlike Food Stamp recipients who received their benefits through welfare or similar offices, WIC recipients became tied to the health care settings.

4.5.2 *Nutritional Risk*

In addition to tying WIC to medical centers, the WIC pilot program wrote into the law eligibility criteria which required assessments of nutritional risk. The law establishing the WIC pilot program in 1972 reads:

...the Secretary shall make cash grants to the health department or comparable agency of each State for the purpose of providing funds to local health or welfare agencies or private non-profit agencies of such State serving local health or welfare needs to enable such agencies to carry out a program under which supplemental foods will be made available to pregnant or lactating women and to infants determined by competent professionals to be nutritional risks because of inadequate nutrition and inadequate income.⁹⁰

The law further provides broad definitions of nutritional risk, thus necessitating the collection of this data and requiring medical personnel to find fault with either the diet or the health of the

⁹⁰ Public Law 92-433. September 26, 1972.

individual accessing the program. By contrast, the Food Stamp Program and other food distribution programs do not require designations of nutritional risk.

Importantly, the law also provides guidance on who is authorized to identify “nutritional risk.” “Competent professionals” are those with medical training or someone who has been given the approval to make such designations by physicians or health officials. The law reads:

*‘Competent professional authority’ includes physicians, nutritionists, registered nurses, dieticians, or State and locally medically trained health officials or persons designated by physician or State or local medically trained health officials as being competent professionally to evaluate nutritional risk.*⁹¹

As Fraser’s (1987) “politics of need interpretation” framework might suggest, incorporating medical professionals into the law reinforces their importance to the program and further establishes them as experts. Similar to social workers of the early 20th century who argued that the poor should receive cash benefits and then established themselves as experts in teaching the poor how to use cash, nutritionists have become essential to making determinations about what constitutes “nutritional risk” and therefore eligibility in the program. In 1978 as the Senate Subcommittee on Nutrition was considering eliminating the “nutritional risk” designation as part of eligibility, many protested this shift. Geraldine Seifert, a registered dietician and WIC coordinator for the State of Indiana, testified:

While there is a recognized relationship between low income and poor nutrition, the philosophy of the WIC program as a health and nutrition program would be in jeopardy if income alone may determine eligibility... Excluding the nutritional need factor for all recipients will conceivably place WIC in the category of a welfare

⁹¹ Public Law 92-433. September 26, 1972.

*program in the mind of health professionals, the general public, and even WIC recipients.*⁹²

The underlying suggestion made by Seipert is that without nutritional risk assessments, the program becomes administratively similar to other welfare programs—potentially threatening its continued funding. It was also in the best interests of “competent professionals” to maintain the assessment of nutritional risk. After all, without this component of the program, their role in the program could be construed as superfluous. Commenting on why she was not supporting removing nutritional risk criteria from proposed WIC legislation, Secretary of Agriculture Carol Tucker Forman suggested that the removal of such criteria would not only symbolically place it with other welfare programs, but it would also compromise the support of the medical and professional community. “There was concern that if it was strictly set on income limits rather than on income plus nutritional risks, that you would see a decrease in the support of the professional community, both nutritionists and medical personnel, for it.”⁹³ It seemed that the professional and medical associations had successfully lobbied to maintain the eligibility criteria, thereby preserving their importance to the program.

The identification of “nutritional risk” also had one other consequence for those attempting to access the program. In 1978, mothers filed a lawsuit against the city of Philadelphia after benefits for their four year old children were terminated. As Susan Gluck Mezey (1996) explains, when there were more people applying for WIC than available WIC spots, the city used nutritional risk assessments and age as a form of triage:

⁹² Testimony of Geraldine Siefert, WIC Coordinator for the State of Indiana. “Child Nutrition Amendments of 1978” Hearings before the Subcommittee on Nutrition of the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry.” Committee on Education and Labor, House of Representatives, 95th Congress, 2nd Session. April 6, 1978. P. 224

⁹³ Testimony of Robin Tucker Foreman, Secretary of Agriculture. “Child Nutrition Amendments of 1978” Hearings before the Subcommittee on Nutrition of the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry.” Committee on Education and Labor, House of Representatives, 95th Congress, 2nd Session. April 12, 1978. P. 341.

...pregnant and breastfeeding women and infants with documented medical or clinical indicators of need for supplemental food were first in line for benefits...Pregnant and breastfeeding women and infants under six months with only an “inadequate dietary pattern” rather than clinical or medical indicators of inadequate nutrition were lower in priority. Finally children over four and postpartum women with “dietary insufficiency” were placed in the lowest priority (Mezey 1996:74).

Questionable measures of nutritional risk were therefore also used to rank the importance of WIC receipt in tight budgetary conditions.

4.5.3 *Medical-based Evaluations*

In addition to legally tying the program to nutritional risk and further fomenting the role of medical professionals in identifying risk, the early program required maintenance of medical records for programmatic evaluation.

State or local agencies or groups carrying out any program under this section shall maintain adequate medical records on the participants assisted to enable the Secretary to determine and evaluate the benefits of the nutrition assistance ... submit reports containing an evaluation of the program provided under this section and making recommendations with regard to its continuation.⁹⁴

Pilot studies often include evaluation components to support recommendations for continuation (or non-continuation) of a program. Yet when WIC was finally approved as a permanent program in 1975, the law had been rewritten to expand, not eliminate, the medical evaluation

⁹⁴ Public Law 92-433. September 26, 1972.

component. The permanent WIC program now required the establishment of an advisory committee with representatives from various health related departments and associations, including the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Centers for Disease Control, and the American Academy of Pediatrics.⁹⁵ The stated goals of the committee were to examine the methods used in previous and ongoing studies of the WIC programs being conducted by the state. Establishing oversight and extending medical evaluations was partially the result of controversies surrounding the medical evaluation component.

In 1972, Congress passed Public Law 92-433, compelling the USDA to fund WIC pilot programs. The USDA, headed by Secretary of Agriculture Earl Butz, immediately attempted to shift responsibility for the newly established program to Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW). In early 1973, when HEW refused to administer the program, the USDA reluctantly began planning its administration and evaluation. A few months later, potential beneficiaries of the WIC program with the help of the Food Research Action Committee (FRAC) brought a lawsuit against the Secretary of Agriculture in *Dotson v. Butz*, claiming the program's slow implementation was in violation of the law.⁹⁶ The court agreed, ruling that WIC pilot program should be funded immediately. Butz reportedly blamed the program delays on the required evaluation (Moran 2018).

Other attempts to undermine the program also developed under the guise of the medical evaluation component of the program. In 1974, the USDA directed WIC sites to conduct potentially dangerous and costly medical evaluations. The USDA proposed that WIC clinics

⁹⁵ The law states that individuals from the following organizations be included on the advisory committee: "Maternal and Child Health Division of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, the Center for Disease Control, the Association of State and Territorial Public Health Nutrition Directors, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the National Academy of Science—National Research Council, The American Dietetic Association, the American Public Health Association, the Public Health Service, and others as the Secretary deems appropriate."

draw blood samples from the jugular veins of babies participating in the program, which drew outrage from WIC participants and program staff (Schwartz-Nobel 2001). The USDA quickly retracted the recommendation.

The controversial suggestion highlights an important issue with the medical evaluation criteria: because WIC was characterized as a program which would improve the health of recipients, the program evaluation required biological data to evaluate the claim. Jugular blood draws were clearly an absurd recommendation. However, even regular blood draws were unappealing to participants and costly. Instead, Moran (2018) notes that the Advisory Committee recommended height measurements for children and weight measurements for all WIC participants—and blood draws for a small subsection of individuals receiving services at locations which had the capacity to perform them. Thus, weight and height became stand-ins for indicators of health.

4.6 WIC RECEIPT AND NUTRITION EDUCATION

In addition to these medical components, the WIC program also contains mandatory nutrition education. As mentioned previously, nutrition education became a mandatory part of the WIC program in 1978. However, the Food Stamp Program never mandated nutrition education. Here I make two main arguments about the importance of nutrition education within WIC. First, extending many of the arguments made previously, I point out that nutritionists were vocal advocates for the expansion of the nutrition education components—often pointing to nutrition education’s promise for changing the consumption behaviors of poor women, and subsequently their children. Second, I note that similar to the intervention of agricultural politics and later food corporations into the WIC food packages, interest groups were critical to the

creation of WIC education materials. In fact, many of the materials were being created for the program by private companies. As Marion Nestle (2013) notes in *Food Politics*, food corporations focus on getting consumers to purchase more of their foods. They are far less interested in the nutritional benefits of those foods—unless promoting their nutritional benefits will lead to greater consumption. In addition to the regular channels in which consumers are exposed to corporate messages about food (i.e. advertising), poor women because of their enrollment in the WIC program were also being exposed to corporate messages through non-governmental educational material.

4.6.1 *Nutritionists Push to Expand WIC Nutrition Education*

In 1978, the WIC program adopted mandatory nutrition education, although nutrition education had already been a non-mandated component of the program for at least two years. The nutrition component leading up to the change was financed through monies earmarked for administrative costs (20 percent of the WIC budget). However, Congress was considering changes to the program that would create a separate stream of money specifically for the use of nutrition education. As Senator George McGovern (D-SD), chair of the Subcommittee on Nutrition and a major advocate for the WIC program, stated in a discussion of the new bill, “Many States seem to be saying that the current 20 percent that we allow for administrative costs is not enough. One result is that the nutrition education is often given a very low priority and is the first to suffer when administrative funding becomes tight.”⁹⁷

⁹⁷ Statement of Senator George McGovern “Child Nutrition Amendments of 1978” Hearings before the Subcommittee on Nutrition of the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry.” Committee on Education and Labor, House of Representatives, 95th Congress, 2nd Session. April 6, 1978. p. 1.

As the Subcommittee on Nutrition considered revisions to the WIC program, doctors and nutritionists testified in support of the program. In the first three days of testimony, the vast majority of those testifying were medical doctors, nutritionists, or dieticians. While the content of their testimonies ranged, there was a resounding cry for a greater attention to and investment in the nutrition education component of WIC. Many nutritionists and dieticians working within the program saw their educational roles as both critical and expansive. For instance, one WIC nutritionist working in Lynn, Massachusetts described the program as one that teaches participants about their pregnancies, catches dietary problems, corrects poor eating habits, and informs women about immunizations and family planning. As one nutritionist suggested, “nutrition education” did not come close to encapsulating the wide range of activities in which WIC nutritionists and dieticians engaged.

When defending the relevance of these activities, many drew upon the view that pregnant women and mothers desired education and were critical to changing the consumption patterns of their children. One nutritionist argued that, “Counseling helps mothers understand their children’s food behavior, and gives them ideas to help their children avoid poor food habits and future obesity... more time is needed for counseling and education of the WIC families.”⁹⁸ Nutrition education, many argued, could change the behavior of recipients. Since the recipients and caregivers of children were primarily women, their education, was believed to have long-lasting impacts of the health behaviors of their children. A letter to the McGovern committee from Vikki Kern and Rosa Quintana, co-chairs of the New York City WIC Consumer Caucus states this point succinctly, “Education for mothers will affect their use of other food programs

⁹⁸ Testimony of Barbara Yost WIC Nutritionist, Lynn, Massachusetts. “Child Nutrition Amendments of 1978” Hearings before the Subcommittee on Nutrition of the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry.” Committee on Education and Labor, House of Representatives, 95th Congress, 2nd Session. April 6, 1978. p. 215.

and their food dollars. It will also affect the attitudes of their children toward nutrition and health.”⁹⁹

The responsiveness of the executive branch to the concerns of professional and medical associations and representations of these groups in the hearings helped drive forward changes to nutrition education components of WIC. The 1978 bill¹⁰⁰ made education an essential component of WIC programming by requiring that WIC clinics conduct education and spend at least one sixth of their budget for such activities. In the following year, approximately 18 million dollars were allocated for nutrition education through WIC.¹⁰¹ The expectation was that the Secretary of Agriculture would approve nutrition education materials, which would then be sent through HEW to states and local clinics. One of the consequences of the mandate was that the Department of Agriculture quickly became overwhelmed by local clinic and state requests for nutrition education materials.

4.6.2 *Corporations Educating Consumers*

The 1978 law provided little guidance regarding nutrition education. However, it had directed the USDA to develop nutrition education materials in conjunction with HEW for distribution to state and local WIC agencies. Overwhelmed by requests for materials, the USDA instead began directing State and local administrators to a mix of governmental and non-governmental nutrition materials collected by the USDA (Moran 2018). A list of audiovisual and

⁹⁹ Statement from Vikki Kern and Rosa Quintana, Temporary Co-Chairpersons, New York City WIC Consumer Caucus. “Child Nutrition Amendments of 1978” Hearings before the Subcommittee on Nutrition of the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry.” Committee on Education and Labor, House of Representatives, 95th Congress, 2nd Session. April 6, 1978. P. 448.

¹⁰⁰ Public Law 95-627 November 10, 1978.

¹⁰¹ Report from the Joint Council on Food and Agricultural Sciences. “Research, Extension and Higher Education in Human Nutrition. In Folder: Nutrition. Box 398 of Staff Office Council of Economic Advisors William Boehm. Jimmy Carter Presidential Library. March 1980. p. 94.

print materials for the use in the nutrition education component of WIC from 1976 include materials from corporations and food interest groups, alongside publications from public health centers and medical associations. For example, Ross Laboratories, producers of Similac infant formula, Gerber, and General Mills are just a few examples of companies with brochures included. The National Dairy Council and National Live Stock and Meat Board also were represented in the materials.¹⁰²As historian Rachel Moran (2018:148) notes, “WIC nutritionists, then, were encouraged to use private industry as an advisory tool.”

However, the incorporation of private interests under the guise of a government program is not the only problematic feature of the WIC program. Nutritionists in WIC, like nutritionists generally, take a reductionist approach to food. Food is broken down into nutrients and these nutrients tend to be divided into “good” and “bad” categories. The view about the “goodness” of certain nutrients are reflected in WIC food packages and reinforced by nutrition education. Health panics also drive the advice of nutritionists to clients, and in the 1970s an obsession with thinness meant that much of the advice coming from nutritionists, “...touted weight maintenance and weight loss as nutritional goals” (Moran 2018:153).

4.7 CONCLUSION

The medical surveillance and nutrition education components of WIC developed within the context of the rise of medicalized pregnancy and the ascendance of nutrition science. These components gave WIC credibility as a health program—distinguishing it from other social welfare programs such as the Food Stamp Program. The identification as a health program and

¹⁰² Report, “Audiovisual and Print Materials: For Use in the Nutrition Education Component of WIC”, U.S. Department of Agriculture. Box 1. Food Programs Division Controlled Correspondence, 1976. Food and Nutrition Services, Supplemental Food Programs Division. Records of the Food and Consumer Service (RG 462). National Archives, College Park, Maryland.

reliance upon professional (nutritionists, dieticians, etc.) and medical staff importantly expanded the programs' advocates. These advocates came to the defense of the program at critical junctures, but more importantly, they defended aspects of the program that maintained its standing as a health program.

The Food Stamp program, however, avoided being defined as a health program. Instead, it was widely viewed as an anti-poverty program. As I will examine in the next chapter, these divergent constructions have had implications during times of welfare retrenchment. In part, the Food Stamp Program avoided many of the medical and nutritional elements of the WIC program because recipients of the program were not easily construed as medical subjects. Their poverty put them at risk of nutritional deficiencies, but they were not deemed a “high risk” group, nor were they viewed as having special needs (as demonstrated in the previous chapter). They required income support—and in a country unwilling to establish a substantial safety net, the Food Stamp Program, simply put, kept the poor from starving.

Viewing WIC as a health program, and WIC recipients as medicalized bodies, buffers the program from critique. Only when we think of the program as a food assistance program can we begin to identify the problems with subjecting recipients to bodily measurements and monitoring as a condition of receiving food.

CHAPTER 5.

WHEN THE “DESERVING” FETUS BELONGS TO AN “UNDESERVING” BODY: FETAL PROTECTIONS IN AN ERA OF WELFARE RETRENCHMENT

5.1 INTRODUCTION

On a damp gray day in October of 2015, a large crowd snaked around an old brick industrial building in Franklin, Tennessee. Many in the line wore red hats adorned with the slogan “Make America Great Again”.¹⁰³ They were waiting to hear the notably bombastic Republican primary candidate, Donald Trump, speak. The topic of the speech meandered, settling predictably on what was becoming one of Trump’s favorite topics—building a wall between the United States and Mexico. Trump claimed that the creation of the wall would keep criminals from entering the United States and, on this day, added that babies born to immigrant parents were a drain on the system. The call for a border wall incited “build the wall” chants which reverberated through the sea of spectators. Importantly, the rhetoric and response underscored deep anti-immigrant sentiment.

At the same time, 800 miles west in Sedgwick County, Kansas a much quieter campaign was playing out in the County Commissioners’ office. The County Commissioners requested that staff at public health clinics operating WIC create questionnaires, requiring individuals using services to identify their citizenship statuses. While the commissioners initially suggested that

¹⁰³ Cowan, Jill. “Donald Trump Reinforces Why He’s Running in Franklin Visit”. *Tennessean*.

the action was an attempt to gain information not deter non-citizens from accessing services, in mid-October, the commissioners requested that the state WIC program stop serving non-citizens. In a letter, the commissioners requested that the state, “take any and all necessary actions to ensure that participation in the WIC program is limited to ‘United States citizens, nationals, and qualified aliens’”.¹⁰⁴ The regional WIC office responded, reinforcing that eligibility for WIC was not limited by citizenship. Further, the regional WIC Director cautioned that, “The county should not be asking WIC clients about their citizenship status because it has no bearing on WIC eligibility.” Further, the email went on to say, “If they ask for additional information from WIC clients, in any form, they would be out of compliance...and subject to legal action.”¹⁰⁵

Eligibility restrictions within social welfare programs often reflect and reinforce cultural beliefs about the deservingness of groups (Gans 1995; Katz 2013; Moffitt 2015; Steensland 2006). Restricting eligibility also plays an economic function. Entitlement programs, such as the Food Stamp Program or Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC, formerly),¹⁰⁶ are required to serve all eligible individuals. During times of economic downturn, more individuals and families become eligible for programs and costs rise. One way to reduce spending is through narrowing eligibility requirements and thus the ability of some groups to access programs. Welfare reform legislation of 1996 severely curtailed eligibility for various groups and painted them as unworthy of aid. For example, the legislation allowed states to eliminate benefits to individuals with drug offenses for both the Food Stamp Program and Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF), which was the restructured version of AFDC. Both programs saw the removal

¹⁰⁴ Salazar, Daniel. “Sedgwick County formally requests state block illegal immigrants from WIC.” *The Wichita Eagle*. October 13, 2015.

¹⁰⁵ Salazar, Daniel. “Feds blast Sedgwick County proposal to ask for WIC clients’ immigration status”. *The Wichita Eagle*. January 9, 2016.

¹⁰⁶ During welfare reform, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) became Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF). The cash welfare program experienced a number of changes. Among those changes was that the program was turned into a block-grant to states, thereby eliminating the federal entitlement.

of legal permanent residents and maintained restrictions for non-citizens. Many of these eligibility requirements remain in some form today. Yet, the WIC program avoided these same restrictions. As demonstrated by the controversy in Sedgwick County, Kansas, citizenship status never became a part of eligibility criteria for the program. To this day, WIC remains one of the few federal programs that serves non-citizens. Further, only seven years prior to welfare reform legislation WIC was extended to incarcerated pregnant women. While this component of the program was retracted during welfare reform, the program never adopted exclusions for formerly incarcerated individuals.

Scholars often describe welfare reform as representative of a larger punitive turn in U.S. social welfare policy (Abramovitz 2006; Collins and Mayer 2010; Soss, Fording, and Schram 2011)—eligibility restrictions, surveillance, and social control increased. Programs such as the Food Stamp Program and AFDC, followed this trend. However, other social welfare programs such as WIC, did not. WIC recipients, as demonstrated in the prior two chapters, were already subject to uniquely high levels of surveillance and control. Yet, during welfare reform efforts to reduce eligibility were not incorporated into the program. In this chapter, I examine why WIC was buffered from the more stringent eligibility criteria imposed on other programs. Like previous chapters, I utilize case comparison methods. I examine Congressional documents associated with the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) legislation, also known as welfare reform, and legislation from the late 1980s that extended WIC to incarcerated individuals. In previous chapters I examined the trajectories of WIC and the Food Stamp Program. However, in this chapter AFDC provides a useful third case. One of the features of AFDC that makes it so compelling for inclusion is that AFDC targets similar demographic groups as WIC—primarily mothers and their dependent children. If

politicians avoided attacking WIC, as the work of Schneider and Ingram (1993) would suggest, because targeting women and children was perceived as politically unpopular, then one would suspect that lawmakers would also avoid attacking AFDC. And yet, AFDC recipients, largely poor mothers and their children, were among the most widely demonized group during welfare reform.

In this chapter I explore this discrepancy. First, I briefly describe the era of welfare reform in the mid-1990s. I then focus on two types of eligibility restrictions that resulted from the PRWORA legislation—eligibility limitations based on immigration status and those based on prior drug felony convictions. I note that both the Food Stamp Program and AFDC restricted eligibility to these groups but WIC did not. I then examine congressional documents and newspapers from the era to help explain the divergence of WIC from these other federal programs. I make three arguments. First, I note that AFDC and the Food Stamp Program were portrayed as propagating fraud, waste, and abuse. Recipients had greater control over the use of their benefits than WIC recipients and were frequently depicted as using benefits irresponsibly. These claims led to calls to rein in the programs. On the other hand, WIC recipients had less autonomy, which shielded them from these same claims. Second, I examine the possibility that WIC may also have been buffered from reduction in eligibility to certain groups because WIC recipients were generally viewed sympathetically. Comparing WIC to AFDC, I note that while they serve similar demographic groups, the duality of pregnancy allowed for divergent framings of AFDC and WIC recipients. WIC recipients were primarily framed as the “deserving” fetus or child, while AFDC recipients were perceived as the “undeserving” mother. I note that while this framing might have protected WIC, it did little to safeguard AFDC from the punitive elements of welfare reform. Finally, I note that anti-immigrant sentiment, rhetoric attacking drug dealers and

users, and anti-welfare sentiment merged together to eliminate eligibility to these groups in some federal welfare programs.

5.2 BACKGROUND: WELFARE REFORM

Beginning in the 1970s, welfare programs became increasingly punitive. Many means-tested social welfare programs within the United States restricted eligibility criteria and took a punitive approach towards the treatment of welfare recipients. Some social welfare scholars argue that this change can be understood as a broader neoliberal shift in the welfare state. Neoliberal ideals emphasize the free market, reduce the size of the welfare state, transfer control of welfare programs from the federal government to states, and stress personal responsibility and family values (Abramovitz 2012; O'Connor, Orloff, and Shaver 1999; Soss, Fording, and Schram 2011; Wacquant 2009). Further, the entrance of evangelicals and fundamentalists into politics in the 1970s and 1980s allied evangelicals with fiscal conservatives as both groups were opposed to many social welfare programs. Historian Michael Katz (2001:20) writes,

... conservative Christians entered politics largely to protect families. Only through politics, they came to believe, could they guard their interests and reverse the moral corruption of the nation. Welfare, they thought, weakened the institution of family by encouraging out-of-wedlock births, rewarding sex outside of marriage, and allowing men to escape the responsibilities of fatherhood.

On the other hand, fiscal conservatives saw welfare programs as fraudulent, ineffective, and wasteful. With welfare as a common enemy, social and fiscal conservatives could work together to try and dismantle welfare programs.

However, not all social welfare programs were prone to the same type of attacks. Entitlement programs targeting the poor—such as the Food Stamp Program and AFDC were

uniquely vulnerable because as entitlement programs they run counter to neoliberal goals. The size and the budgets of the programs are difficult to control. During economic downturns the programs balloon as more individuals become eligible for benefits. Further, the programs were centralized federal programs and thus limited state control. Conservative politicians and stakeholders, as well as some Democrats, saw the restructuring of entitlement programs targeted at the poor as one avenue by which to reduce the size and reach of the federal government. Decreasing the size of entitlement programs, either through restructuring the programs or restricting eligibility, relied on framing the programs as wasteful and rallying popular sentiment against recipients.

From the 1970s into the 1990s, poor individuals accessing welfare programs, particularly single women accessing AFDC, were often framed by the media and politicians as deviant, lazy, lacking moral fortitude, and fraudulent. In the mid-1970s, politicians and the media focused their attention on fraud and abuse within welfare programs (Kohler-Hausmann 2017). In 1976 Ronald Reagan, who was running against Gerald Ford in the Republican primary, brought the term “welfare queen” into the national spotlight. The “welfare queen” was initially a reference to Linda Taylor, a Black woman from Chicago who was accused in a number of fraud cases-- including welfare fraud. As historian Julilly Kohler-Hausman (2017:186) notes, “Instead of framing welfare as one of myriad avenues Taylor used for her nefarious enterprises, political rhetoric in the 1970s positioned her as a representative AFDC recipient and a product of the welfare bureaucracy.” The racialized and gendered construction of policy targets as “welfare queens” taking advantage of government largesse predominated from the 1970s to the 1990s. The “welfare queen” narrative placed the responsibility for poverty squarely on the personal failings of those experiencing poverty (Collins 1998). Further, tying images of poverty and

welfare receipt to black individuals stoked negative racial stereotypes and decreased support for welfare programs (Gilens 1999; Hancock 2004).

PRWORA of 1996, was a broad piece of legislation with consequences for a variety of social welfare programs. While it is viewed as altering AFDC or cash welfare, the legislation had implications for other federal assistance programs, including the Food Stamp Program. Earlier versions of the bill attempted to turn the Food Stamp Program into a block-grant program, thereby eliminating the entitlement element of the program and transferring responsibility for the program to states. However, that legislation was blocked due to political pressures, as it became clear that President Clinton would be unwilling to sign any legislation attempting to turn the Food Stamp Program into block grants (King 2000; Poppendieck 2014). One of the remaining tools in the hands of politicians interested in limiting the scope of the program was decreasing the size of the program by limiting eligibility.

5.3 ELIGIBILITY RESTRICTIONS: CITIZENSHIP AND DRUG FELONS

The sweeping PRWORA legislation restricted eligibility to some groups for select programs. For example, a last-minute amendment barred individuals convicted of drug felonies from receiving Food Stamps and TANF. The drug felon restriction had disparate impacts on women of color, particularly Black women, who were more likely than their white counterparts to experience poverty and were disproportionately targeted and incarcerated during the United States' "War on Drugs" (Godsoe 1998; Payne and Morrow n.d.). One source suggests that over 180,000 women were affected by the TANF felony drug exclusion provision between 1996 and

2011 (Mauer 2013).¹⁰⁷ The actual number of individuals eliminated from receiving the Food Stamp Program is likely much higher given the greater number of individuals eligible to receive food stamp benefits, generally.

Legal permanent residents who had been previously eligible also lost access to the Food Stamp Program and TANF. These restrictions similarly extended to Medicaid and Social Security Insurance (Siskin 2016). Citizenship status had been a widely used to determine benefits previously. However, welfare reform provisions marked one of the first times that legal permanent residents were denied social services. President Clinton during his signing of the bill referred to this stipulation as “not right” and a “budget saving measure,” Clinton said,

*It is wrong to say to people, ‘We’ll let you work here; you’re helping our country. You’ll pay taxes. You serve in our military. You may get killed defending America. But if somebody mugs you on a street corner, or you get cancer, or you get hit by a car, or the same thing happens to your children, we’re not going to give you assistance anymore.’*¹⁰⁸

President Clinton further promised to retract these elements of the program although many, if not most, remain today.

While there is a substantial literature on welfare reform, scholars have not asked how some programs resisted the more punitive elements of welfare reform while others did not. While the Food Stamp Program and TANF adopted restrictions for drug felons and legal permanent residents, WIC adopted neither. In fact, only seven years prior, the WIC program was extended to incarcerated pregnant women. The bi-partisan supported legislation, “Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 1989”, passed both the House and Senate. The legislation

¹⁰⁷ This estimate is only for the states that have maintained a full ban and does not include the 25 states that had a partial ban. Inclusion of those states would increase the number of individuals affected by the drug felon exclusion policy.

¹⁰⁸ “Text of President Clinton’s Announcement on Welfare Legislation” *The New York Times*. August 1, 1996.

allowed states to grant benefits to incarcerated pregnant women. People convicted of crimes are, for the most part, consistently denied benefits during their incarceration.¹⁰⁹ However, both the retraction of the Food Stamp Program and TANF from *formerly* incarcerated individuals and the extension of WIC to *currently* incarcerated individuals during the 1980s and 1990s, were pivots away from the status quo. Further, defining the boundaries of citizenship to exclude certain groups and then excluding non-citizens from receiving benefits is a practices that extends well before the establishment of federal assistance programs (Nakano Glenn 2009). However, the exclusion of legal permanent residents from means-tested social welfare programs was not common following the New Deal. Maintaining eligibility for non-citizens in WIC and retracting benefits from legal permanent residents in Food Stamps, TANF, and other federal assistance programs were both shifts away from the norm. In the next section, I address the question of why these programs moved in opposite directions by examining legislative documents from the time.

However, this section does not answer why the framing of these programs diverged. Nor does it fully address why eligibility to some groups became an important part of TANF and the Food Stamp Program while remaining absent from WIC. In the next section, I take up these issues.

5.4 CASH, FOOD, AND FRAUD

During welfare reform, politicians and some stakeholders focused attention on issues of fraud, waste and abuse. AFDC recipients were frequently seen as engaging in fraud and abusing the system. Politicians suggested that “poor” life decisions, such as single parenthood and teen pregnancies, were not only supported but encouraged by welfare programming. Further, because

¹⁰⁹See (Sufrin 2017) for a discussion of how incarcerated individuals are the only individuals within the U.S. with a right to healthcare.

recipients received cash benefits, they had discretion over how to use benefits and their decisions were often drawn into question. Despite the fact that Food Stamp recipients were limited to purchasing foods, they were similarly identified as engaging in fraud and making poor food choices—either the foods they purchased were too “fancy” or were “bad” foods that contributed to health problems. On the other hand, WIC participants had very limited discretion in their food choices. In this section, I argue that the restrictiveness of the WIC program buffered it from the sweeping claims of fraud and abuse that plagued the Food Stamp Program and AFDC.

5.4.1 *Fraud and Abuse in Food Stamps and AFDC*

As one of the largest federal assistance programs, the Food Stamp Program often came under attack for fraud and abuse. Anti-fraud efforts were viewed as not stringent enough and recipients were potential thieves. As Representative Ron Wyden (D-OR) says in a hearing before the Committee on Agriculture, “The Food Stamp Program has become the target of choice for crooks and chislers from coast-to coast.”¹¹⁰ Californian Republic Representative, Duke Cunningham went a bit further,

*You talk about how great the food stamp program is, Doc. Did you ever watch “20/20” and the fraud, waste, and abuse that is in that? I need you to fight to clean it up to be able to help you. But yet I don’t see that with the liberals. They want to fund illegals. They want the food stamps. They want more money.*¹¹¹

Representative Cunningham then goes on to suggest that the Food Stamp Program should be block-granted. However, even the Republican Representative known for his brash style still had

¹¹⁰ Hearing Statement of Representative Ron Wyden (D-OR). “Eliminating Waste and Fraud, and Promoting Better Management in the Federal Food Stamp Program.” Committee on Agriculture. February 1, 1995.

¹¹¹ Comments of Randy “Duke” Cunningham (R-CA) “Hearing before the Committee on Economic and Educational Opportunities. House of Representatives. 101st Congress. p. 123.

a soft spot for WIC. “Now on the other hand, let me be a little gentler. WIC works in our State. It is a good program. I support keeping the food nutrition programs out of the welfare block grants...”¹¹²

The comments from stakeholders and representatives were buoyed by sensational testimonies and media accounts which claimed widespread abuse within the Food Stamp Program. *The Washington Post* reported that, “Agriculture’s Inspector General Roger A. Viadero showed a videotape of people lining up to trade food stamps for cash at a produce market in Baltimore.”¹¹³ Small grocery stores were often implicated in purchasing food stamps from recipients in exchange for cash. Some alleged that recipients would sell the stamps below value. The suggestion often was that recipients were purchasing drugs. Stories of such practices were not uncommon. The *LA Times* wrote one such story about Evelyn Branham. The single mother on welfare who for two years traded food stamps for drugs.

*Branham would count her \$290 worth of coupons and then hit the streets near her Northwest Washington apartment. Within hours, the mother of four says, she succeeded in trading \$100 worth of stamps for \$50 in cash or a fix of heroin from dealers or ‘anyone who would trade’.*¹¹⁴

Stories like these played out in major newspapers across the country and reinforced attitudes that the Food Stamp Program was flawed and that recipients were frauds.

AFDC was also subject to similar claims of abuse and fraud. The welfare queen image, which became so popular from the late 1970s onward, had clear racial and gender overtones. The

¹¹² Comments of Randy “Duke” Cunningham (R-CA) “Hearing before the Committee on Economic and Educational Opportunities. House of Representatives. 101st Congress. p. 123.

¹¹³ Babock, Charles A., “Food Stamp Probe Overstated: Store Crackdown Find Few Criminal Cases.” *The Washington Post*. Pg. A1.

¹¹⁴ Spolar, Christine. “Drug Dealers Are Key Players in Thriving Food-Stamp Fraud” *The L.A. Times*. P. A19.

image drew upon ideas of excess and laziness—of women using welfare to buy expensive items and avoiding work. As Kohler-Hausmann (2017:187) explains, “It implicitly referenced popular beliefs associated most frequently with the Moynihan Report, which attributed the ‘pathology of the Black family’ to its alleged matriarchal structure.” The image of the racialized and gendered image of the welfare queen was used to gain traction for punitive welfare efforts.

Fraud was frequently referenced in debates and hearings on welfare reform. Bruce Wagstaff, Deputy Director of Welfare Programs Division in California, argued that fraud in California was widespread. Referring to the amount of fraud as, “alarming” he called for allowing states to pursue welfare fraud more aggressively.¹¹⁵ These types of calls were not uncommon and were coupled with sensational media reporting on individual welfare fraud cases: a surrogate parent who claimed benefits in California,¹¹⁶ a Manhattan teacher who concealed her employment to receive welfare for ten years,¹¹⁷ and a Mexican national who collected welfare for just under a year following her return to Mexico.¹¹⁸ All of these reports created a more entrenched view that AFDC was subject to fraud, abuse, and wasteful, and further tied recipients of AFDC to these images.

5.4.2 *Cost-saving Measures of WIC*

In Chapter Four, I argued that advocates and stakeholders worked to distinguish the WIC program from other welfare programs by establishing it as a health program. Distinguishing it from other welfare programs was also possible because of the restrictiveness of the program. As the Food Stamp Program and AFDC struggled with claims of fraud and abuse, the WIC program

¹¹⁵ Statement of Bruce Wagstaff. Hearings before House Committee on Ways and Means, Subcommittee on Human Resources. 104th Congress. May 22, 1996 p. 113.

¹¹⁶ Lait, Matt. “Surrogate Mother Admits Welfare Fraud” *Los Angeles Times*, June 28, 1992. Pg. SEJ5.

¹¹⁷ The Associated Press. “Teacher is Accused of Welfare Fraud” *New York Times*, March 10, 1995 pg. B4.

¹¹⁸ Gorman, Gary. “Woman Sentenced in Welfare Fraud”. *The Los Angeles Times*, November 4, 1992. Pg. VCB3

remained largely immune from such attacks. As the former U.S. Senator Lawton Chiles who was now with the Commission to Prevent Infant Mortality in discussing the WIC program says during hearings in 1989, “Here we are dealing with a program where everybody who has looked at the program from the General Accounting Office to all the studies—you do not hear anyone saying that this is a program that is full of fraud, full of waste.”¹¹⁹ Even seven years later, as welfare reform was in full effect, stories of fraud and abuse were rare.

Not only did the program avoid such framing, it was often touted as a program that saved the government money. The program, as described by politicians and stakeholders, was a very successful preventative program that improved infant health and weights. The program, it was argued, would ultimately save money spent on other federal programs, such as Medicaid.¹²⁰

As shown here, the Food Stamp Program and AFDC were described as filled with fraud, abuse, and waste. Recipients of these programs became linked with media reporting about individuals exchanging benefits for drugs or engaging in fraud. At the same time, WIC had broad bi-partisan support and was considered a program that saved money. The programs’ restrictiveness likely also helped buffer it from suggestions that recipients were making poor choices. In the next section, I examine whether WIC’s focus on women, infants, and children may have also protected the program from punitive welfare reform legislation. I do this by comparing WIC to AFDC, since the programs serve similar demographic groups.

¹¹⁹ Testimony of Lawton Chiles from the Commission to Prevent Infant Mortality. Hearing’s in the House Subcommittee on Elementary, Secondary, and Vocational Education on the Committee of Education and Labor, House of Representatives. P. 13.

¹²⁰ Testimony of Robert Greenstein, Executive Director, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. “Broad Policy Goals of Welfare Reform” Hearing before the Committee on Finance, U.S. Senate. 104th Congress 1st Session. March 9, 1995 p. 23.

5.5 PREGNANCY AND THE DESERVING VS. UNDESERVING POOR

As Schneider and Ingram (Schneider and Ingram 1993) suggest, the way that the policy target is perceived by legislators is important to the extension or retraction of benefits. One might argue that one of the reasons that welfare reform legislation spared WIC was because the program targeted pregnant women and their young children—as opposed to the generally-targeted Food Stamp Program. However, if that were the case, one would expect AFDC to also avoid some of the more punitive eligibility restrictions. Yet, AFDC and WIC moved in opposite directions. In this section, I examine how legislators and stakeholders framed these two sets of policy targets. I note that WIC recipients were primarily identified as the fetus, while pregnant women accessing the program were rarely referenced. On the other hand, AFDC recipients were perceived as pregnant women and mothers.

5.5.1 *WIC and the “Deserving” Fetus*

Seven years before PRWORA was signed into law, another piece of legislation made its way swiftly through Congress. In 1989, legislators passed “The Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 1989”.¹²¹ A far cry from the symbolically “tough on crime” and punitive welfare legislation of 1996, the WIC Reauthorization Act allowed states to extend the WIC program to incarcerated pregnant women in prisons and juvenile detention centers. The legislation also increased funding for the WIC program.

Despite the extension of the program to incarcerated pregnant women being a central feature of the legislation, the provision was only referenced once within congressional debate.

¹²¹ Importantly, during these years, the majority party in the House and Senate were Democrat, with a Republican President. In 1996, when PROWRA was signed into law, the majority party in the House and Senate were Republican, with a Democrat President.

Senator Miller (D-CA) in support of the law says, “The WIC amendments target previously unserved populations, such as drug-exposed infants and children in the child welfare system, and permit States, at their option to serve women in State and local juvenile and correctional facilities.”¹²² The lack of opposition to the provision was surprising because adding incarcerated pregnant women to the list of WIC eligible individuals could keep others from accessing the program. Within the subcommittee hearings and debates, stakeholders and politicians bemoan the fact that 50% of eligible individuals receive the WIC program. The program would need to be funded at twice its level to reach all eligible individuals. Extending the program to incarcerated pregnant women could jeopardize non-incarcerated women’s access to the program. This concern is anticipated in the only article written about the provision that I was able to access. *The Washington Post* writing in favor of extending the program to incarcerated pregnant women asks,

*Why then, should states divert any of the scarce money to offenders some would find unworthy of help? First, of course, because the real beneficiaries are babies for whom an extra egg, an extra carton of milk or a piece of cheese every day can made a life-saving difference. Second, if one chooses to be hardheaded about it, because improving prenatal nutrition costs society less in the long run.*¹²³

The Washington Post frames the issue as a benefit to the “baby” not to the pregnant person and draws upon the cost-savings to society.

Identifying the target of the program as the fetus, was a common within the WIC legislation and continued during hearings surrounding PRWORA. In 1989, WIC recipients were almost exclusively addressed as nutritional delivery systems—both when they are pregnant and

¹²² Comments of Senator Miller (D-CA). “WIC Reauthorization Act of 1989” Debate. July 31, 1989.

¹²³ “Pregnant and in Prison”. *The Washington Post*. September 12, 1989. p. A20

when they are breastfeeding. Humanizing descriptions of those receiving WIC were few and far between. When they did exist, it was often to draw attention to the ways WIC recipients were a hinderance to program goals—for example their unwillingness or inability to read WIC materials and their opposition to breastfeeding. For example, in one exchange between Representative Owens (D-NY) and Ms. Djamillah Samad from the WIC Association of New York State, Representative Owens asks about whether the WIC program still produces booklets for mothers to read. Ms. Samad responds by describing WIC mothers in the following way, “Our mothers do not read and cannot read as much as they should read.” When pushed as to whether free booklets still exist, Ms. Samad replies, “I do not know, they may be available, but I am not so sure that our women are going to read them.” When Representative Owens suggests that he has seen such material used by clients, Ms. Samad replies, “I also see them in garbage cans outside WIC offices too.”¹²⁴ While women were frequently ignored when discussing WIC, AFDC mothers were hyper visible.

5.5.2 *AFDC and the “Undeserving” Mother*

Contrary to WIC mothers who were viewed as nutritional delivery systems, AFDC recipients were constructed as “welfare queens”. The story of Linda Taylor, as discussed previously, came to exemplify the welfare recipient—someone who was taking advantage of government programs for personal gain (Collins 1998; Kohler-Hausmann 2017). Pregnant AFDC recipients in particular were demonized. Their pregnancies were, at best, viewed as irresponsible. At worst, they were viewed as intentional attempts to defraud the government

¹²⁴ Discussion between Mr. Major R. Owens (D-NY) and Ms. Djamillah Samad of WIC Association of New York State. “Hearing on HR 24, Child Nutrition and WIC Amendments of 1989”. Subcommittee on Elementary, Secondary, and Vocational Education of the Committee on Education and Labor. House of Representatives. Congress 101-1. p.72-73.

(Roberts 2014). These lines of thought ran throughout hearings and debates on the passage of welfare reform. Phil Gramm (R-TX) in his discussion of welfare reform measures says,

*... And clearly, the rewards in the current welfare system are all bad from the point of view of producing behavior that we do not want...Any 16-year-old girl in our bigger cities can escape from her mother, can get cash and voucher benefits equal to \$14,000 of earnings a year, can get housing subsidies, food stamps, and AFDC by doing one thing—by getting pregnant.*¹²⁵

Pregnant women and teens were not viewed as claiming an entitlement, rather they were nefariously procuring benefits.

As Dorothy Roberts (2014) notes, these myths led to a number of restrictive policy recommendations—meant to curtail poor women’s (and especially poor Black women’s) reproductive freedom. For example, congressional representatives proposed that Norplant a long-lasting and difficult to remove birth control be inserted into the arms of AFDC recipients. Or that states could implement family caps—the elimination of benefits to babies born to mothers receiving AFDC.¹²⁶ These efforts attempted to limit the reproductive capabilities of recipients and were a response to the framing of AFDC recipients.

The duality of pregnancy allowed legislators and stakeholders flexibility to frame the policy target as the “undeserving” mother or the “deserving” fetus. Recipients of WIC were primarily framed as “deserving” fetuses and children. On the other hand, AFDC recipients were framed as the “undeserving” mother. I suggest that these framings were important to both

¹²⁵ Senator Phil Gramm (R-TX). Congressional Record of Senate. 104th Congress, 1st Session, September 13, 1995. S13511.

¹²⁶ While the Norplant recommendation did not pass, states were given the option of creating family caps.

programs—essential to leaving eligibility intact for the WIC program and critical to reducing eligibility in AFDC.

5.6 THE RESULTING LEGISLATION

AFDC and Food Stamp policy targets were often viewed as abusing the system—taking advantage of government programs and engaging in fraud. However, WIC recipients were buffered from these same interpretations. The program viewed as a cost-saving strategy with the primary beneficent as the fetus and young children. While AFDC served a similar demographic, pregnant women, mothers, and children, the program was framed as a benefit to the mother. Mother’s decisions for how to spend cash benefits were often called into question. AFDC and the Food Stamp Programs now framed as full of fraud and abuse were ideal targets for politicians to display “tough on crime”, “tough on drugs”, and “tough on immigrant” sentiment which was so prevalent at the time. One way to do this was by limiting eligibility to maligned groups.

5.6.1 *Drug Felon and Legal Permanent Resident Eligibility Restrictions*

Phil Gramm, Republican Senator from Texas, introduced a last-minute amendment to “deny most federal benefits for the poor to welfare recipients convicted of possessing, using or distributing illegal drugs”. The amendment was a part of the larger PRWORA legislation. The proposed Gramm Amendment targeted both individuals convicted of misdemeanor and felony drug offenses accessing a variety of social welfare programs. Although Democrats were opposed to many of the measures aimed at reducing the population of eligible individuals for food stamps, 29 of the 47 Senate Democrats and 45 of the 53 Senate Republicans supported the Gramm Amendment. The Amendment notably addressed two primary concerns of the American Public. In 1997, Americans reported that crime and drugs were the most important problems

facing the U.S. (Gilens 1999:211). Attacking these groups within the highly visible welfare reform legislation was politically beneficial.

Senator Gramm had lost the Republican Primary Nomination to Bob Dole earlier in the year and was now facing re-election in the quickly approaching fall. His introduction of the amendment that would penalize drug offenders was an opportunity for him to display his “tough on crime” and “tough on drugs” approach. The amendment received a mere two minutes of debate. Within the debate, Gramm suggests that those who are serious about drug laws should vote for the amendment. He says, “But the bottom line is, if we are serious about our drug laws, we ought not to give people welfare benefits who are violating the Nation's drug laws.”¹²⁷ (US Congress 1996: S8498). Following the passage of the legislation the New York Times wrote,

*‘It’s a tough provision and it’s meant to be,’ said Larry Neal, Senator Gramm’s press secretary, adding that Congress had made no estimate of how many people might be affected by the provision, which will take effect after it is signed by President Clinton but will not be retroactive. ‘It doesn’t matter if it’s one or it’s a million.’ Mr. Neal said. ‘We want to make the point. When they come off the rolls, your state and mine will save some money.’ There is no impact on children, he asserted, because they remain eligible for welfare benefits*¹²⁸

Neal stresses the toughness of the provision, money saving, and stresses that the “deserving”, in this case children, will be unaffected by the legislation. However, the focus on “the rolls” and welfare benefits disguised that not only cash welfare recipients but recipients of less maligned

¹²⁷ Phil Gramm (R-TX) . Congressional Record of Senate. 104th Congress, August 20, 1996. S8498.

¹²⁸ “Criminal and Welfare Issues Raise Issues of Fairness” *New York Times*, August 20, 1996 p. A1.

programs—such as the Food Stamp Program, Medicaid, and even federal student loans, were the targets of the policy.¹²⁹

Voiced opposition to the amendment was limited. Senator Kennedy (D-MA) attempted to reframe the debate by drawing upon ideas of “deservingness” through identifying the consequences of legislation for pregnant women. He argues, that the amendment “...would make drug addicts ineligible for any of the effective drug treatment programs that are being developed by the States and the Federal Government. It would eliminate any prenatal care for mothers that get convicted of drug crimes.”¹³⁰ Senator Kennedy draws upon the issue of the time--drug use during pregnancy to try and appeal to Senators. Further, he puts the denial of benefits of drug addicted pregnant women in contrast to the maintenance of benefits for “murderers, rapists, and robbers.” However, these attempts did not stop the legislation from passing.

Similarly anti-immigrant sentiment fueled restrictions for legal permanent residents in both AFDC and the Food Stamp Program. Unlike the late addition of drug offender exclusions, eliminating benefits to legal permanent residents was an integral part of earlier versions of the welfare reform bill. As others have noted, the move to restrict eligibility to legal permanent residents reflected concerns that less economically advantaged and less educated individuals were migrating to the U.S. and relying on public benefits (Fix and Passel, 2002). Many Democratic Congressional Representatives, some Republican Representatives, stakeholders, and advocates found the move to restrict certain immigrant groups particularly cruel. Representative

¹²⁹ It isn't until the House bill and the Senate bill are reconciled within conference that the amendment shifts to a) focus exclusively on drug felons (and not misdemeanors); b) is limited to loss of benefits for the Food Stamp Program and TANF (as opposed to other federal programs); c) gives states the ability to opt-out of the amendment, thus addressing some Republican concerns about federal over-reach.

¹³⁰Senator Kennedy (D-NY). Congressional Record of Senate. 104th Congress, August 20, 1996. S848

Xavier Becerra (D-CA) stated, "...some immigrants will still experience personal hardship. When the federal government reduces its contributions for caring for the needy, including those legally in our country under laws enacted by Congress, those individuals needs do not disappear."¹³¹ However, the exclusion was also viewed as some as a major cost-saving measure. When PRWORA was signed into law, it eliminated legal permanent residents from receiving Food Stamps, TANF, and a number of other social welfare programs.

5.7 CONCLUSION

Eligibility restrictions, such as those leveled at legal permanent residents and drug offenders during welfare reform, exemplify politicians use of punitive legislation to appease their constituents. Consistent with the work of Schneider and Ingram (1993), groups that were negatively constructed and had little political power were subject to additional burdens. However, when we consider that these groups were eliminated from some but not all federal social welfare programs the story becomes more complicated. Why did politicians limit legal residents and drug offenders' access to some but not all social welfare programs? One explanation explored here is that politicians avoided appearing as though they were attacking programs with sympathetic groups. Pregnant women and children tend to typify a sympathetic group and were primary beneficiaries of both AFDC and WIC. However, only AFDC recipients saw cuts to eligibility, while WIC continued to operate with broad eligibility criteria.

I argue in this chapter that two main forces buffered WIC from punitive welfare reform legislation. First, the very elements of the program that have chipped away at the privacy rights

¹³¹ Statement of Representative Xavier Becerra (D-CA) "Welfare Reform" Hearings before the Subcommittee on Human Resources of the Committee on Ways and Means, House of Representatives, 104th Congress, 2nd Session. May 22, 1996 p. 61

of recipients—high degrees of surveillance and control of their diets—shielded the program from claims of fraud and abuse. Second, pregnancy poses a unique and flexible discursive opportunity for legislators and the media. For WIC, the beneficiary of the program was viewed as the fetus. AFDC recipients, on the other hand, were viewed as the pregnant woman or mother. Politicians derisively suggested that poor women were become pregnant with the intent to access benefits—a far cry from the baby-saving language often associated with WIC. This chapter joins the rest of the dissertation in pointing to the importance of understanding how ideas and values about pregnancy shape surveillance, control, and eligibility restrictions within social welfare programs.

CHAPTER 6.

CONCLUSION: PREGNANT BODIES, RIGHTS, AND THE FUTURE OF FOOD ASSISTANCE

Means-tested social welfare programs provide support to those experiencing poverty. However, when individuals access these social welfare programs, they are not treated as though they are accessing a right. Rather, benefits are viewed as resources of the state, and individuals must submit themselves and their families to whatever stipulations, regulations, and monitoring that the state deems important. Previous scholarship has noted that social welfare program requirements vary and point to the important role that the perceived race, gender, and class-status of individuals accessing services plays in shaping requirements. However, ideas about pregnancy and motherhood status shape program components have not been incorporated in any substantial way. I rectify this by providing a comparison of two programs over time—one focused on poor pregnant women and mothers and the other focused more broadly on those experiencing poverty.

A comparison of WIC and the Food Stamp Program emphasizes how pregnancy, motherhood, poverty, and race have shape the nature of food distribution to the poor. Views that poor pregnant women, particularly women of color, were ignorant consumers was common in the 1960s. In the dissertation, I argue that the politicians and advocates framed pregnant women and mothers as appropriate targets of excessive state control because their actions had consequences for the fetus and children. Once the WIC program developed, a number of seemingly small decisions such as requiring recipients to be a “nutritional risk”, attached the program securely to nutrition science and medical models. Policies that might seem invasive in food assistance or welfare programs, such as regular weigh-ins and dietary critiques, were

viewed as medical interventions. Further, as nutritionists and dieticians gained a greater role in the program, they protected their positions—fighting against legislation to eliminate education or remove “nutritional risk” criteria. The result of these actions is that WIC recipients today are surveilled and monitored in ways that other food assistance recipients are not. However, the restrictiveness of the program, endorsement of the medical community, and focus on the fetus and young children has also given the program broad bi-partisan support and protected it from punitive welfare legislation. While Food Stamp recipients have not been subject to the same surveillance and control as WIC recipients, the program also faces a barrage of attacks that often aim to eliminate some groups’ access to the program.

While the dissertation primarily focuses on WIC and the Food Stamp Program, the findings may apply to other related fields and intervene in broader conversations. The study contributes to existing literature in two main ways. First, it reinforces the importance of the perceived policy target to the policy making process. Hegemonic understanding of pregnancy and motherhood, in conjunction with race, gender, and class, shaped many elements of the WIC program. While not explored within this dissertation, it is plausible that these same views shape other policy making processes as well. Research on Medicaid, for example, has pointed to how pregnant women experiencing poverty face a variety of state interventions that those accessing pregnancy services with private insurance do not experience. However, views about pregnancy and motherhood do not exist in isolation, they combine with views about gender, race, and class in ways that are complex and may result in divergent policy approaches. Second, the findings here complicate the story of the punitive shifts of social welfare programs, broadly. As mentioned previously, social welfare programs are often viewed as adopting surveillance, control, tightened eligibility, and attempts to limit funding simultaneously. However, WIC did

not follow this trend. One possibility is that WIC's surveillance, control, and attempts to change behavior may actually represent the ideal-type for the future of welfare programs. Allowing the program to flourish allows it to exist as a model for future assistance programs.

6.1 IMPLICATIONS

6.1.1 *The Future of Domestic Food Assistance*

Pregnant individuals, infants, and children accessing WIC may be the proverbial canary in the coal mine—an indicator of the future of domestic food assistance programs. Some elements of WIC have slowly become incorporated within the Food Stamp (now SNAP) program and calls to make SNAP more like WIC are common. SNAP-Ed is the non-mandated educational arm of SNAP that operates similarly to the mandated components of WIC. Further, debates on restricting certain foods within the SNAP program often use WIC as a model program. In 2016, sociologist Katherine Mason (2016) foreshadowed a shift toward the WIC model of limited choice and using education to change patterns of consumption. Mason argued that WIC was “the future of food assistance in the United States” (Mason 2016). Opinion pieces in the *Washington Post*¹³² and blog post in *The Hill*¹³³ both heralded the WIC model as an example for SNAP. The Hill blog post suggests that SNAP could be modeled after WIC and in doing so could, “...alleviate hunger and improve the health of Americans.” The Trump Administration has also introduced proposals that would make SNAP more like WIC, although without referencing the WIC program. For example, Trump's suggestion to change shift SNAP to a commodity food box distribution program would impinge upon the decision making abilities of recipients.

¹³² Lane, Charles. “How Liberals Undermine the Food Stamp Program.” *The Washington Post*. February 15, 2017.

¹³³ Jordan, Chuck. “Ge the Junk Food Out of SNAP.” *The Hill*. 2017.

6.1.2 *The Rights of Pregnant People*

Since *Roe v. Wade* there has been a steady stream of civil and criminal cases that seek to challenge pregnant individuals' decisions when these decisions are considered at-odds with the welfare of the fetus. Most recently, a woman in Alabama was charged with manslaughter after a co-worker shot her in the stomach thus ending her pregnancy. The state justified the charges by arguing that the injured woman had started the fight that led to the shooting.¹³⁴ While charges were later dropped, this is one example of the precarious legal position in which many pregnant people find themselves. Criminal and civil charges like this are often viewed as abortion rights advocates as attempts to undermine *Roe v. Wade*. However, social welfare and legal scholars have paid less attentive to how the rights of pregnant individuals are challenged in non-criminal contexts, such as social welfare programs. The dissertation recognizes the specific ways that the WIC program has challenged the rights of recipients—even when those rights are not clearly at odds with fetal welfare.

6.2 LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

There are a number of limitations to the current study—including limitations of case selection and of available data.¹³⁵ First, the dissertation relies primarily on the analysis of federal government publications, presidential documents, and newspapers. This limited focus leaves out several important perspectives. Aside from those accounts within Congressional testimony, first-hand accounts of individuals who receive social welfare benefits are absent. Second, I also did not collect data on how the programs operated on the local level. Understanding how the

¹³⁴ Allyn, Bobby. "Alabama Prosecutors Dismiss Charge Against Woman Indicted In Death of Her Own Fetus." *NPR News* July 3, 2019.

¹³⁵ These limitations are described in more detail in Chapter One.

programs function on the ground is important because programs are not always interpreted or applied in predictable ways. Further, welfare bureaucrats play an important role in how programs function.

The study is also limited by the nature of the cases examined. As noted previously, the cases do not provide a “perfect” comparison (i.e. they do not differ in all but one aspect). In fact, the WIC program and the Food Stamp Program differ in many ways that likely affect the trajectories of the program. For example, the Food Stamp Program is an entitlement program with a much more substantial budget, while the WIC program is budgetarily smaller and funds for the program are appropriated each year by Congress. I have attempted to overcome some of these deficiencies by engaging depth fully with each case over time.

Future research can address some of these limitations. In a future project, I intend delve into the lived experiences of WIC recipients, the grocery store retailers they interface with, and WIC office staff. I plan to utilize ethnographic and qualitative methods to examine how program regulation and surveillance shape recipients’ economic and social citizenship rights and identities. I see this portion of the project as remedying a lack of first-hand accounts within the dissertation. I also plan to conduct historical research at a single WIC site to better understand the dynamics of local implementation of WIC. I see these components as allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of the programs’ operation at the local level—and moves the project beyond the federal scope.

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APPENDIX

TABLE 1.1. ARCHIVES AND DATA SOURCES USED

Presidential Libraries (In-Person Visits)

Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library

Richard M. Nixon Presidential Library

Jimmy Carter Presidential Library

Presidential Libraries (On-Line Access)

John F. Kennedy Presidential Library

Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library

National Archives and Libraries (In-Person Visits)

National Archives- College Park

National Agricultural Library

Other Libraries

Wayne State University Labor Archives

Wisconsin Historical Society

Online Congressional Resources

Hein Online

ProQuest Congressional

Online Newspaper Resources

ProQuest Historical Newspapers

TABLE 1.2. KEY FEATURES OF WIC AND SNAP

	SNAP (Food Stamps)	WIC
Established		
Pre-Program	N/A	1968
Pilot Program	1961	1972
Permanent Program Status	1964	1975
Funding Type	Entitlement	Federal Annual Appropriations
Size (in 2018)		
Budget	\$64.9 billion	\$5.9 billion
Participation	39.7 million	6.9 million
Demographic Characteristics of Participants (in 2016/2017) ¹³⁶ by percentage		
White ¹³⁷	35.8% ¹³⁸	58.6% ¹³⁹
African American	25.4%	20.8%
Asian	3.2%	3.6%
Native American	1.4%	10.3%
Multiple Races Reported	1%	5.8%
Race Unknown	16.8%	0.2%
Hispanic, any race	16.5%	41.8%
Eligibility Criteria		
Target Demographic	All households who meet the below criteria (some time restrictions for certain groups)	Pregnant, Post-Partum, and Breastfeeding Individuals, Infants, and Children 5 and under

¹³⁶WIC is based off data from 2016, while SNAP is based off data from 2017.

¹³⁷ SNAP has combined the data for ethnicity with that for race. For SNAP, therefore the category of “white” is actually “white, not Hispanic”. WIC’s race categories, on the other hand, will include individuals who also identify as “Hispanic”. Therefore, SNAP’s percentages will equal 100%, while WIC demographic race and ethnicity totals will exceed 100%.

¹³⁸ Demographic Characteristic Data taken from: USDA Publication. Cronquist, Kathryn and Sarah Lauffer. 2019. “Characteristics of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Households: Fiscal Year 2017”

¹³⁹ Demographic Characteristic Data taken from: USDA Publication. Thorn, Betsy, Nicole Kline, Chrystine Tadler, Eric Budge, Elaine Wilcox-Cook, Jason Michaels, Michelle Mendelson, Kelly Patlan, and Vinh Tran. 2018. “WIC Participant and Program Characteristics 2016: Final Report.”

Income Criteria	130% of federal poverty level	185% of federal poverty level
Nutritional Risk Criteria	No	Yes
Citizenship Restrictions	Yes	No
Purchasing Restrictions		
Food Type Restrictions	Non-Food Items, Prepared Foods	Restricted to: Specified Government-Approved Items*
Brand Restrictions	No	Yes
Program Requirements		
Nutrition Education	Optional	Mandatory

FIGURE 1.1. USDA TABLE OF 2019 ALLOWABLE ITEMS FOR WOMEN AND CHILDREN¹⁴⁰

SNAPSHOT of the WIC Food Packages ¹				
Maximum Monthly Allowances of Supplemental Foods for Children and Women				
Foods	Children	-----Women-----		
	Food Package IV 1 through 4 years	Food Package V: Pregnant and Partially (Mostly) Breastfeeding (up to 1 year postpartum)	Food Package VI: Postpartum (up to 6 months postpartum)	Food Package VII: Fully Breastfeeding (up to 1 year post-partum)
Juice, single strength	128 fl oz	144 fl oz	96 fl oz	144 fl oz
Milk ²	16 qt	22 qt	16 qt	24 qt
Breakfast cereal ³	36 oz	36 oz	36 oz	36 oz
Cheese	N/A	N/A	N/A	1 lb
Eggs	1 dozen	1 dozen	1 dozen	2 dozen
Fruits and vegetables	\$8.00 in cash value vouchers	\$11.00 in cash value vouchers	\$11.00 in cash value vouchers	\$11.00 in cash value vouchers
Whole wheat bread ⁴	2 lb	1 lb	N/A	1 lb
Fish (canned) ⁵	N/A	N/A	N/A	30 oz
Legumes, dry or canned and/or	1 lb (64 oz canned) Or	1 lb (64 ounce canned) And	1 lb (64 ounce canned) Or	1 lb (64 ounce canned) And
Peanut butter	18 oz	18 oz	18 oz	18 oz

¹ Refer to the full regulation at www.fns.usda.gov/wic for the complete provisions and requirements for WIC foods.

² Allowable options for fluid milk substitutions are yogurt, cheese, soy beverage, and tofu.

³ At least one half of the total number of breakfast cereals on State agency food list must be whole grain.

⁴ Allowable options for whole wheat bread are whole grain bread, brown rice, bulgur, oatmeal, whole-grain barley, whole wheat macaroni products, or soft corn or whole wheat tortillas.


⁵ Allowable options for canned fish are light tuna, salmon, sardines, and mackerel.

¹⁴⁰ Figure 1.1. taken from: USDA <https://fnsprod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/wic/SNAPSHOT-of-WIC-Child-Women-Food-Pkgs.pdf>


FIGURE 1.2. EXAMPLE OF WASHINGTON STATE WIC BOOKLET FOR ALLOWABLE CEREALS AND WIC CHECK¹⁴¹

Breakfast Cereal

Cold Breakfast Cereal



Hot Breakfast Cereal



You can choose a combination of breakfast cereals up to the amount of ounces (oz) printed on the check. Examples:

12 oz + 12 oz + 12 oz

= 36 oz

OR

16.5 oz + 17.2 oz

= 33.7 oz

OR

18 oz + 18 oz

= 36 oz

Breakfast Cereal

APPROVED	NOT APPROVED
<p>Must Be</p> <p>Boxes, 11 oz or larger</p> <p>Plain</p> <p>These brands and types:</p> <p>Cold Breakfast Cereal</p> <p>Bran Flakes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Albertsons * Food Club * Fred Meyer * Great Value * IGA * Safeway * Western Family * <p>Cheerios (Plain) *</p> <p>Corn Chex</p> <p>Kellogg's Corn Flakes</p> <p>Kellogg's Mini-Wheats, Unfrosted Bite Size *</p> <p>Kix (Plain)</p> <p>Life (Plain)</p> <p>Post Grape Nuts *</p> <p>Post Grape Nuts Flakes *</p> <p>Rice Chex</p> <p>Wheat Chex *</p> <p>Hot Breakfast Cereal</p> <p>Cream of Wheat (1 minute, 2 1/2 minute, 10 minute)</p> <p>Instant oatmeal in boxes containing individual packets:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Albertsons, Regular Flavor * Great Value, Original * Hy-Top, Regular Flavor * IGA, Regular Flavor * Safeway, Regular Flavor * Quaker Oats, Original * Western Family, Regular Flavor * 	<p>Do Not Buy</p> <p>Brands, sizes, and types not listed as approved</p> <p>Bags of breakfast cereal</p> <p>Added flavors, foods, or spices</p>
<p>Shopping Tip</p> <p>You can choose oatmeal in boxes containing individual packets when "breakfast cereal" is printed on the check.</p>	

* These breakfast cereals are good sources of whole grain and fiber.

WIC

WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
P.O. BOX 47886 OLYMPIA, WA 98504-7886
1-800-841-1410

"Quit Smoking, 1-800-Quit-Now"

United Community Bank

64.1968
611

1965567100

Client ID#: 000111269 Name: Washington, Noel M
Pay To: Any Washington WIC Approved Store

2 First Day To Use
Feb 01, 2011

Transaction Date

Last Day To Use
Mar 03, 2011

*** You may buy less, not more *** See WIC Shopping Guide ***

2 gallon(s) 2%, 1%, or non fat milk, any brand

3 6 dozen white eggs, small, medium, or large

1 dozen white eggs, small, medium, or large

1 juice, 64 oz plastic bottles

1 lb cheese, any brand, made in USA

4 Actual Purchase Price

\$

Retailer Stamp ID Here

Retailer must deposit this check within
60 days of "First Day To Use"

5 Customer Signature - Show ID to match name below

X

Washington, Patrice S

Washington, James D

February 2011 **1**

1221 / 20100927

SAMPLE

¹⁴¹ Figure 1.2 Example of allowable cereals and sample check taken from the Washington State 2011 WIC Shopping Guide: https://wicworks.fns.usda.gov/wicworks/Sharing_Center/WA/WIC_Foods.pdf

FIGURE 1.3. TIMELINE WITH CRITICAL DATES FOR WIC AND SNAP PROGRAMS



VITA

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