



**WESTERN
MICHIGAN**
UNIVERSITY

The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare

Volume 19
Issue 1 *March*

Article 7

March 1992

The Reagan Legacy: Undoing Class, Race and Gender Accords

Mimi Abramovitz
Hunter College

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw>



Part of the Gender and Sexuality Commons, Race and Ethnicity Commons, and the Social Work Commons

Recommended Citation

Abramovitz, Mimi (1992) "The Reagan Legacy: Undoing Class, Race and Gender Accords," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 19 : Iss. 1 , Article 7.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol19/iss1/7>

This Article is brought to you by the Western Michigan University School of Social Work. For more information, please contact wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu.



**WESTERN
MICHIGAN**
UNIVERSITY

The Reagan Legacy: Undoing Class, Race and Gender Accords.

MIMI ABRAMOVITZ

Hunter College

The impact of Reaganomics on women, workers, and persons of color is explored by looking at structural forces in the political economy that encourage business and government at one time to support and another time to undermine the welfare state. The expansion of the welfare state from 1935 to the mid-1970s meshed well with the needs of profitable production, political legitimacy and patriarchal control. With the economic crisis of the 1970s, the welfare state became too competitive with capital accumulation and too supportive of empowered popular movements and had to go. Women, persons of color, and the poor ranked high among the victims of the new austerity plan.

The 1935 Social Security Act, widely viewed as marking the birth of the modern welfare state in the United States, was enacted during a crisis in which the political and economic arrangements supportive of capital accumulation, social stability, and patriarchal controls from the 1890s to the 1930s collapsed (Bowles, 1982; Bowles & Gintis 1982; Bowles Gordon, & Weiskopf, 1983, 1986; Kotz, 1987, 1990). Signaled by the 1929 stock market crash, the crisis revealed what many already knew: that the drive for high profits and low wages that characterizes capitalist production, could not assure the levels of wages and employment needed to support the average family unless the state intervened. The state had to step in and absorb more of the costs of family formation and maintenance since profitable production depended heavily on the family system (and women's unpaid labor within it) to produce, nurture, and socialize the current and future labor force; to provide care for those too young, old, sick to care for themselves; and to assure that individuals affiliate with and integrate into society (Gough 1980; Dickinson & Russell, 1986; Sokoloff, 1981).

The enactment of the Social Security Act effectively legalized federal responsibility for social welfare. In the short run, this major restructuring of the system of social welfare provision cushioned the immediate blows of the Depression. It put cash into empty hands and increased purchasing power, which assisted people in need while stimulating the depressed economy. In the long run, bringing the federal government into social welfare acknowledged that the state had to socialize the costs of family life on a permanent basis. Instead of relying on families, charities, religious institutions and local governments to mediate between economic profits and economic security, the federal government had to provide minimal support (Bowles, 1982; Bowles and Gintis, 1982; Bowles, Gordon & Weisskopf, 1983, 1986; Kolz, 1987, 1990).

The Social Security Act also helped to restore the political legitimacy of the state. The thirties witnessed widespread agitation by trade union and numerous other popular movements seeking redress from the collapse and underlying inequities of the market. In the short run, the New Deal programs helped to restore political and economic equilibrium by providing some economic relief to thousands of people, legalizing unions and collective bargaining, and bringing the leaders of popular movements into the New Deal Administration. In the long run, the welfare state stabilized the new economic order, restored the political legitimacy of the state, and muted the class conflicts generated by organized labor and other dislocated and disenfranchised groups.

The restructuring of social welfare focused heavily on restoring business activity and containing class conflict. Much less attention was paid to the demands of the early civil rights and women's movements. The NAACP, the Urban League and women's rights movement had been active since the early part of the century but still lacked the voting power and political clout to secure its agenda (Piven & Cloward, 1971; Skocpol, 1988). Although Roosevelt supported New Deal programs that benefited African Americans and white women, his administration did not challenge the discrimination and the disenfranchisement of black Americans nor the lack of equal opportunity for women. Both the civil rights and women's movement faulted

the New Deal for excluding their members. Blacks in addition criticized Roosevelt for not introducing antilynching laws or passing civil rights legislation during his four presidential terms (Leuchtenburg, 1963; Sitkoff, 1981). The women's movement critiqued the New Deal programs for placing them in sex stereotyped jobs, offering them benefits as dependent spouses, and refusing to undo laws barring employment by married women (Abramovitz, 1988; Scharf, 1983; Ware, 1981).

The Post War Expansion of the Welfare State

The welfare state expanded rapidly after World War II. During this period Congress liberalized the Social Security Act and created new social service programs. Fueled by prosperity and political struggles, the expansion continued into the sixties with the War on Poverty, The Great Society, and new laws to protect civil rights, women's rights, the workplace, and the environment. The postwar institutionalization of the welfare state improved the standard of living and democratic rights of women, labor, and people of color. It also meshed well with business profits, political stability, and patriarchal controls. Reflecting the acceptance of government regulation of the economy and concessions to popular movements, the expansion of the welfare state was underpinned by Keynesian economic theory and informal accords negotiated with the trade union, civil rights, and women's movements.

Keynesian Economics

Keynesian economics actively sanctioned a more interventionist state. It called for government spending and regulations to assure that the economy recovered from its periodic crises of low production and high unemployment. The theory promised that if government tax and spending policies increased aggregate demand, tolerated a moderate deficit when necessary, and controlled inflation, higher profits for business and a better standard of living for workers would result. The emphasis on increasing demand and therefore consumption, reversed earlier economic practices which extracted profits by lowering rather than raising the standard of living. By arguing that the careful

use of fiscal and monetary policy would benefit the rich, the middle class, and the poor, Keynesian economics drew support for active government involvement. It did not, however, predict that the informal accords negotiated with the trade union, civil rights, and women's movements would later turn the expanded welfare state into an arena of political struggle.

The development of capitalism itself eroded the institutional arrangements that previously shielded the economic activity of business and the state from political influence (Piven & Cloward, 1982). While promoting a more interventionist state, Keynesian economics could not eliminate the drive for high profits and low wages nor could it promote greater equality. The resulting inequities led the trade union, civil rights, and women's movements to gain strength and to intensify their struggles. The labor, race, and gender accords granted important distributional and political gains to each group while ensuring the continued dominance of business and the state. The accords functioned until the mid-1970s when profound problems in domestic and international economies forced a new restructuring of the social order and made the postwar accords susceptible to attack.

Labor-Management Accord

The postwar period witnessed a reorganization of labor-management, which until this time had been highly contentious and disruptive. According to Bowles, Gordon and Weisskopf (1983, 1986) labor and management negotiated a new but informal pact which took hold after World War II. Grounded in part in New Deal legislation, the pact stabilized labor-management relations, increased the bargaining power of unions and expanded the welfare state. The 1935 Social Security Act, especially Unemployment Insurance, provided workers with an economic backup which strengthened their ability to resist unfair wages and working conditions. The 1935 Wagner Act legalized collective bargaining which further strengthened labor's hand and established the National Labor Relations Board to mediate labor-management conflicts. The 1946 Employment Act brought the federal government into the picture to control prices, unemployment, and inflation. The new laws gave management control over the workplace with fewer strikes, longer

union contracts and new shop floor rules. In exchange for its cooperation, labor won a share in capitalist prosperity through higher wages, better working conditions, greater job security and fewer anti-union campaigns. The government agreed to regulate economic conditions and mediate the disputes.

The accords smoothed the way for postwar business profits, integrated labor into the political mainstream, and made labor relations more predictable. Paradoxically, however, the accords also empowered labor. The expansion of the welfare state, the growth of the trade union movement, and the enforcement of newly won gains by the state improved labor's standard of living and gave unions a greater say on the shop floor. The 1947 Taft-Hartley Act and the 1950 Macarran Act and the rise of McCarthyism narrowed labor's advances. But at the time of the merger of the American Federation of Labor and the Congress of Industrial Organizations in 1955, a record 35% of the labor force was unionized. A higher standard of living, backed by stronger unions and new welfare state programs made it possible for labor to challenge the power of business and government through most of the postwar years. The struggle for control never ended, but in the mid-1970s, the cost of fringe benefits, the expansion of social programs, and labor's empowerment weakened business' control over labor and contributed to the demise of the accord.

The labor accord analysis developed by Bowles (1982), Bowles and Gintis (1982), Bowles, Gordon, Weisskopf (1983, 1986), Piven and Cloward (1982) among others does not directly deal with issues of race and gender. But the historical records show that by the late 1960s, business and the state had negotiated similar pacts with persons of color and women. A key goal of Reaganomics was to undo all three accords in order to contract the welfare state and disempower popular movements.

The Racial Accord

The postwar period also witnessed reorganization of race relations as the "go slow" politics of the early civil rights movement gave way to more militant demands for integration and civil rights in the mid-1950s. Until then Jim Crow remained strong and the dominant wing of the civil rights movement accepted limited change through self-help, litigation, and lobbying and tokenism. African Americans lacked the resources needed

to win the fight for racial integration despite a tenfold increase in the membership of the NAACP and the formation of the Congress of Racial Equality. But with the 1955 Montgomery Bus Boycott the civil rights movement became more militant. Tired of gradualism and tokenism the civil rights movement turned to direct action such as sit-ins, pray-ins, wade-ins, boycotts and Freedom Rides to secure its ends. The NAACP's numerous court victories against segregation, but especially the 1954 Supreme Court decision banning separate but equal schools empowered the movement.

The growing size and militancy of the civil rights movement eventually forced state action to maintain civil order and restore black confidence in the government. When, in 1956, angry black voters left the Democratic Party to protest its lack of support for civil rights, politicians took note. In 1957, Eisenhower reluctantly sent Federal troops into Little Rock, Arkansas to enforce the 1954 Supreme Court decision. That same year both Democrats and Republicans backed legislation which protected the right of blacks to vote and created the Commission on Civil Rights (Piven & Cloward, 1971). At the same time, the blatant and often violent refusal of Southern white officials to obey federal civil rights laws engendered sympathy for the cause among working-class blacks and northern whites. Finally, the civil rights movement escalated its demands moving from constitutional protections to equitable distribution of societal power.

The race accord, negotiated by Kennedy who owed his narrow 1960 presidential victory to the swing black vote (Meier & Rudwick, 1976) reduced racial barriers to voting employment, education, and housing and expanded social welfare programs. The shift in the Democratic Party's civil rights stance was signaled when Kennedy appointed blacks to high federal positions, forced Governor Wallace to desegregate the University of Alabama, recommended a sweeping civil rights law, supported the march on Washington led by Dr. Martin Luther King, and privately encouraged nearly 100 corporate and foundation leaders to contribute over one million dollars to the five major civil rights groups (Meier & Rudwick, 1976; Sitkoff, 1981). After Kennedy's assassination Johnson offered to seat the Mississippi

Freedom Democratic Party at the 1964 Democratic Convention. Congress followed suit and passed the 1964 Civil Rights Act and it passed the 1965 Voting Rights Act. The movement's demands for greater economic justice were met with The Great Society and the War on Poverty which further enlarged the welfare state. Sargent Shriver, who directed the War on Poverty, said it created "a new relationship and new grievance procedure between the poor and the rest of society just as the National Labor Relation Act did for unions" (Piven & Cloward, 1971, pp. 270-271).

Negotiated by business and government to contain the civil rights movement without modifying white supremacy, the racial accord eased tensions for a while. Business and government secured increased political loyalty from the rising number of African American voters who from 1960-1964 furnished Democrats with the presidency and control over both houses of Congress (Sitkoff, 1981). Race relations were stabilized without any loss of white privilege or control of the political process. In exchange for their cooperation, African Americans and other persons of color won basic rights and greater access to the political and economic systems. But the race accord also empowered the civil rights movement and modified the balance of power, making it easier for persons of color to challenge and at times threaten the dominance of the white power structure. In the late 1960s, these challenges included the "long-hot summers," the spread of the civil rights movement from the South to the North, and the replacement of the integrationist call for "Black and White Together" by the more radical demand for "Black Power" (Sitkoff, 1981). In the 1970s, middle-class African Americans won local and state office and in 1984 Jesse Jackson was a candidate for President of the United States.

The Gender Accord

The post-war period also witnessed a reorganization of gender politics due to changes in women's role that posed threats to patriarchal authority and fueled the rebirth of the feminist movement. Under the accord, the state reduced gender barriers to employment, education, credit and pensions, expanded social welfare benefits and reproductive rights, and granted women

greater access to the state. In exchange for these advances, the women's movement promised less militancy, continued political allegiance, and demands that would not challenge the underpinnings of patriarchal arrangements.

The women's movement had been in the doldrums during the 1940s and 1950s, but it did not disappear. A small network of middle class women sustained mutually antagonistic voices in behalf of women's rights with one wing supporting legislative reforms for poor and working women and the other pressing for the Equal Rights Amendment (Evans, 1989; Rupp & Taylor, 1987). African American women kept segregation, lynching, and race discrimination on the political agenda; and working-class women of both races struggled to preserve their wartime employment gains (Evans, 1989; Gabin, 1990; Rupp & Taylor, 1987). Meanwhile, changes in the structure of work and family life exposed thousands of women to discrimination, led them to ask why the equal-opportunity-for-all promise did not apply to them, renewed interest in the Equal Rights Amendment, and eventually revived the feminist movement.

Kennedy initiated the gender accords in 1961 to fulfill promises to the women who voted for him, to side-track renewed interest in the ERA and to keep increasingly independent women voters tied to the Democratic party. Pressed by Esther Peterson, his appointed head of the Women's Bureau, Kennedy established the Commission on the Status of Women in 1961 (Evans, 1989, McGlen, 1983; Rupp & Taylor, 1981). Its 1963 report, *American Women* paid careful obeisance to the centrality of women's traditional roles, but documented the realities of female inequality. Although the report opposed the Equal Rights Amendment, it exposed many problems of employment discrimination, unequal pay, the lack of social services, continued legal inequality and other gender inequities.

Although supportive of women's traditional role, the Commission's Report activated many women. It generated commissions on the status of women in most states and led to the passage of the 1963 Equal Pay Act which outlawed gender-based wage discrimination (Evans 1989). But patriarchal resistance persisted. Congress refused to provide equal pay based on comparable worth, the broader pay equity concept favored

by the women's movement. A legislator added the word "sex" to Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act in hopes of defeating the bill which prohibited employment discrimination (Evans 1989; Rupp & Taylor, 1987).

Just as the state's reluctance to enforce the 1954 Brown decision catalyzed the civil rights movement in the late 1950s, the refusal by Equal Employment Opportunity Commission to act on thousands of sex discrimination complaints mobilized the feminist movement. Tired of gradualism and tokenism and angered by the widening male-female wage gap (Bird, 1968), middle-class women formed new feminist organizations in the 1960s including the National Organization of Women (NOW) (1967), the Women's Equity Action League (WEAL) (1970), and the National Women's Political Caucus (NWPC) (1971). The insurgency crossed race, class, and age lines with the appearance of the National Welfare Rights Organization (NWRO) (1966), National Black Feminist Organization (NBFO) (1973), and the Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUB) (1974). Younger women activists in the Student Non-Violent Organizing Committee (SNCC) and Student For a Democratic Society (SDS) angered by male domination of their organizations and personal lives began to call for women's liberation, not just women's rights (Chafe, 1978, Evans 1980, 1989).

The new militancy expanded the gender accord in the early 1970s. President Johnson issued Executive Order 11375 in 1967 which mandated affirmative action to redress discrimination by firms with federal contracts. In 1972, Congress passed the ERA although right-wing opposition in a few key states prevented its ratification. This was followed by Title IX of the 1972 Education Act Amendments, the 1974 Equal Credit Act, and the 1978 Pregnancy Disability Act. The Supreme Court ruled in favor of women in a host of class action sex discrimination suits and in 1973, it legalized the right to abortion. Women also secured access to party councils, political appointments, and elected office.

Negotiated to contain the women's liberation movement without modifying patriarchal arrangements, the gender accord expanded women's rights, welfare state benefits, and economic opportunities. Greater economic independence, reproductive control, and access to the state modified the gender balance

of power and made it easier for women to challenge the patriarchal powers of business and the state.

Taken together in the short run, the postwar accords enhanced economic profitability, political legitimacy, and stabilized class, race and gender relations without costing business and the state, undue loss of control. In fact, they contained popular movements. By confining the contest to democratic rights and distributional gains, they directed the struggles away from the structural roots of inequality. But in the long run, the accords had paradoxical effects that eventually caused business and government to retreat from them. They increased the political influence of popular movements whose protests spread to new issues and new groups. The demands of the empowered movements turned the welfare state as well as the workplace into highly contested terrains. The hard-won victories of trade unions, civil rights and women's groups, among others, challenged the once impervious structures of class, race, and gender dominance in the family, the market, and state (Bowles, & Gintis, 1982; Bowles, Gordon, & Weisskopf, 1983, 1986; Piven & Cloward, 1982).

In brief, the accords leveled the playing field too much for business and the state. Like the nation's founding fathers who worried that with "too much democracy" the landless majority might overrule the landed minority (Farrand, 1972), today's leaders explored ways to roll back increasingly effective challenges to the power structure (Crozier, Huntington, & Watanushi, 1975; Dickson & Noble, 1981; Wolfe, 1980). The accords no longer achieved their ends and had to be undone.

Breaking the Accords: The Reagan Legacy

Throughout most of the postwar period it seemed that the modern welfare state, fueled by Keynesian economics and the three accords, would expand forever. But hindsight reveals that business and government's support for the welfare state was one of a series of time-bound solutions to the problems of capital accumulation and social conflict of a particular historical period. By the mid-1970s, these post-war solutions had begun to unravel due to the loss of United States world hegemony, increased international economic competition, rising national

indebtedness, declining corporate profitability, chronic economic stagnation and active resistance from organized popular movements. The erosion of the nation's economic and political power reached crisis proportions in the 1970s and required plans to restructure the political economy. While its prior restructuring during the Great Depression had expanded the welfare state and strengthened the trade union, civil rights, and women's movements, the new political strategy emphasized austerity and sought to roll back the gains of the previous period. Its goals included redistributing income upwards, cheapening the cost of labor, and curbing the influence of popular movements (Piven & Cloward 1982; Weisskopf, 1981). Accomplishing this goal included shattering the postwar consensus on government's expanded role in the economy, and undoing the labor, race, and gender accords.

Shattering the Postwar Consensus on Active Government

The Reagan revolution began by attacking big government. The prevailing economic orthodoxy now held that countries with low labor and welfare state costs fared best in domestic and international trade. Reflecting this, a special 1974 issue of *Business Week* on the capitalist crisis, called for less government spending to promote private investment. The reporter acknowledged that idea of doing with less so that big business could have more would be a hard pill for Americans to swallow. The attack on big government meant Keynesian economics had to go. "Supply-side economics," its replacement, blamed the nation's economic ills on "big government" and called for lower taxes, reduced government spending (military exempted), fewer government regulations, and more private sector initiatives. Supply-side economics undercut the welfare state by intentionally creating the largest deficit in the nation's history. David Stockman, Reagan's first budget director, later confessed that the Administration hoped that the deficit would justify domestic program cuts for years to come (Block, 1987). These policies combined with economic downturns and deindustrialization redistributed income upwards, lowered the standard of living, and put popular movements on the defensive (Phillips, 1990; Greenstein & Barancik, 1990). Without totally

eliminating Keynesian demand-side policies, supply-side economics weakened the material and the ideological support for government intervention in the economy, especially in the social welfare arena.

The attack on big government and the retreat from the accords went hand in hand. Both were part of the effort by business and the state to transfer the costs of production and reproduction back to the poor and working class, and to regain control over the family, the market, and the state. To redistribute income upwards and to curb the influence of popular movements, it was necessary to launch an assault on the welfare state and on the groups whose demands contributed to its growth. The lower standard of living that followed is confirmed in regular media accounts of the feminization of poverty, the loss of civil rights gains, the rise of the working poor, and the declining middle class.

Undoing the Labor Accord

During the postwar years, economic prosperity, relatively low unemployment, and the labor-management accord brought a degree of harmony to the workplace and the state, especially in the highly unionized industries. By the mid-1970s, facing a profitability panic, business turned against the unions and the welfare state whose victories now interfered with its ability to lower labor costs and control labor-management relations. The post-war labor accord which had increased the power of the unions and expanded the welfare state had to go.

By all accounts, Reagan signaled the end of the post-war labor management pact in 1981 when he fired over 11,000 striking air traffic controllers. This action, combined with antilabor appointments to the National Labor Relations Board, implicitly granted employers permission to revive long-shunned anti-union practices: decertifying unions, out-sourcing production, and hiring permanent replacements for striking workers (Kilborn, 1990; Prokesch, 1985). To strip unions of their excessive power, business fought labor law reforms and encouraged the formation of new antiunion groups such as the Council for a Union Free Environment (Boyle 1980).

Combined with plant closures, bankruptcies, and the decline of jobs in manufacturing, the attack on labor weakened the labor movement. Union membership fell to 15% of the labor force, down from its 1955 peak of 35%. Unable to fight back, workers and unions accepted smaller wage increases, less favorable work rules, and a host of other take backs just to save their jobs. But according to most experts, the promised exchange of job security never materialized (Prokesch, 1985).

Shrinking social welfare programs not only transferred the cost of family maintenance back to workers and the poor, but helped management regain control over labor. It restored the disciplinary power of unemployment which management had historically counted on to keep wages down, but which expanding cash assistance programs had undercut. Despite their meagerness, programs such as Aid to Dependent Children (AFDC) and Unemployment Insurance (UI) created an economic cushion for workers. The cushion helps employed workers risk joining unions or otherwise fighting for better paying jobs. Inflation, and the Reagan cuts reduced purchasing power and the number of people who qualified for both UI and AFDC. The Administration's refusal to raise the minimum wage from 1981-1990 pressed wages downward as did the 1988 Family Support Act which channeled many poor women into low-paid jobs in the rapidly expanding service sector where labor shortages threatened to force wages up.

Retreat From The Race Accord

The civil rights revolution brought a degree of harmony to race relations. It strengthened the Democratic party, secured black allegiance to the state, and began to redress historic racial grievances. However, the registration of more black voters, the dramatic increase in the number of black elected officials, and the implementation of affirmative action programs that compensated blacks for past inequalities also challenged white supremacy. Support for the race accord was short-lived and came to an abrupt end. Uncomfortable with expanded civil rights, many white Americans began to regard them as reverse discrimination. For business and the state, the empowered civil

rights movement had become too strong, too demanding, and too expensive.

Once viewed as central to electoral victories, both Democrats and Republicans began to ignore black voters. Despite the devastating riots that followed the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., the issue of racial equality dropped from the political agenda of both major political parties (Orfield, 1988). The 1968 presidential campaign was the last to seriously debate the problems of the urban ghetto. An ideological campaign helped to justify the shift. From Moynihan's 1965 report that blamed poverty on the black family, to Nixon's "Southern Strategy" to Willie Horton's appearance in Bush's 1988 campaign ads, the GOP wooed disaffected white Democrats by manipulating racial tensions. The Republicans carried the white vote in every election between 1968 and 1984 (Sitkoff, 1981). Smarting from their losses, the Democratic Party backed away from the race accord. To keep white voters, blacks were asked to lay low and to desist from pushing their agenda too hard. In contrast to the Party's historic pattern of rewarding loyal interest groups, when blacks did not obey, party leaders tarred them with the special interest label implying that they were selfish and motivated by self-interest (Wellman, 1968; Edsall and Edsall, 1991).

With the cooperation of many Democrats, the Reagan Administration dismantled the civil rights programs that comprised the racial accord. It equated affirmative action with quotas and reverse discrimination, decimated the budgets of civil rights enforcement agencies, and appointed civil rights opponents to the Civil Rights Commission and the Supreme Court (Chambers, 1987). In 1990, Bush vetoed the Civil Rights Act which tried to redress some of these wrongs. In 1991, he nominated Clarence Thomas, a conservative African American opposed to affirmative action, to replace the retiring liberal Supreme Court jurist Thurgood Marshall. The Administration's domestic cutbacks also weakened the position of people of color. They focused heavily on means-tested programs such as AFDC, Medicaid, and subsidizing housing—which serve disproportionate numbers of impoverished people of color while treading more lightly on Medicare and Social Security which serve more middle-class whites (Slessarev, 1988).

The hard-won gains made by persons of color faded during the eighties. The number of poor families of color rose sharply while in all classes, persons of color lost ground. Their standard of living, life expectancy, and health status declined while infant mortality and diseases rates climbed. Fewer persons of color received student loans, graduated from high school or attended college. Mortgage loans became less available, and their neighborhoods became more segregated. By retreating from the racial accord, the nation's leaders put the civil rights movement on the defensive. They divided the nation on racial grounds, and implicitly provoked the rise of hate violence.

Undoing The Gender Accord

The gender accord stabilized gender relations by bringing the law into line with the changing realities of women's lives, correcting long-standing gender inequities, and granting women a place in electoral politics. But it also expanded the welfare state, empowered the women's movement, and undercut patriarchal arrangements. Like the racial and labor accords, the gender accord came to an abrupt end. The result has been cheaper labor, a redistribution of income upwards, and the strengthening of patriarchal structures.

The 1980 platform of the Republican Party signaled the end of the post-war gender accord. It dropped the party's former endorsement of the Equal Rights Amendment, called for a constitutional amendment to end abortion, affirmed the Party's belief "in the traditional role and value of the family in our society," and emphasized the importance of motherhood and homemaking in maintaining the nation's value (McGlen & O'Connor, 1983, p. 74). If fully implemented, the Family Protection Act of 1981 would have made societal institutions more patriarchal. It proposed to end federal support for child care, abortion, family planning, women's shelters, rape crisis centers and welfare programs believed to undermine the traditional nuclear family. It prohibited legal aid lawyers from handling abortion, divorce, lesbian or gay rights cases, banned sex education in schools, coeducational sports, and the use of federal funds for school materials depicting homosexuality and non-traditional gender roles (*Time Magazine*, 1981).

Seeking to transfer the costs of family maintenance back to the family, the Reagan administration encouraged working and middle-class women to return home. The attack on big government eliminated thousands of public sector jobs that employed women and persons of color (Erie, Rein, & Wiget, 1983). Reduced child care, housing, health care, food benefits and social services increased women's household burdens which made it harder for them to be employed. Lack of services also added to the costs of family maintenance previously subsidized by the state. Undoing the gender accord also weakened affirmative action and anti-discrimination laws. It ignored sex and race segregation of the workplace and refused to support family policies to ease women's work and family burdens. In sharp contrast to efforts to send middle-class women back home, the 1988 Family Support Act replaced AFDC's voluntary work incentives with rules which forced poor women to work outside their homes. Those not deprived of support, saw the value of their benefits fall by a third. AFDC, which allows women to raise children without men, came in for especially harsh treatment because it openly threatened patriarchal norms.

The attack on abortion rights and family planning services and the rise of involuntary sterilizations undermined women's control over their bodies, while less support for women's shelters, programs for battered wives, and rape crises centers implicitly endorsed male violence against women. With the introduction of Learnfare which docks about a \$100 a month from the checks of welfare mothers whose children miss school without an acceptable excuse (Gerharz 1990), welfare programs become more coercive. Similar coercive tendencies characterize "wedfare" which gives women a bonus for marrying and leaving the rolls (Kerr 1991), and plans that offer financial incentives to women for using Norplant, the new long-term contraceptive implant.

These and other measures struck deeply at the institutions which support the economic security and independence of women. The cuts also reversed gains that women along with persons of color and organized labor have won since the 1930's. The attack on the Equal Rights Amendment and abortion put

the women's movement on the defensive and limited its ability to seek new gains.

Conclusion

The historical forces that underpin the expansion and contraction of the welfare state, suggest that the Reagan legacy goes beyond the machinations of an actor turned president to the roots of our economic and political system, and that the rise and fall of the welfare state has more to do with maintaining corporate profitability, political legitimacy, racial hierarchies, and patriarchal arrangements than the satisfaction of human needs.

Reaganomics was not fully implemented nor totally successful. But it did engineer a dramatic reversal of public policy and ignored the high human cost that accompanied the change. Attempting to secure economic and political control, the president undermined the philosophy and structure of the liberal welfare state, weakened popular movements, and eroded democratic structures. The new austerity program has fostered distrust and violence, as economic deprivation and inflammatory politics pit one group against another. The role of business and the state in creating the Reagan legacy is obscured to the extent that observers blame the fear, chaos, poverty, social decay, and loss of communal solidarity that now plaques our nation, on the behavior of those at the bottom instead the decisions made by those at the top.

No social system can function for long without a viable labor force, families able to maintain themselves, and a minimally content and loyal citizenry. No social system can thrive, no matter how much military might and patriotism it musters, if its people remain divided, and disaffected. Recognizing this fact, leading business groups have begun to call for health care and educational reforms (The Committee on Economic Development, 1987) and policies to reduce the rising rates of crime, hunger, homelessness, illiteracy, illegal drug use, high infant mortality, and other by-products of Reaganomics (New York Times, 1988a, 1988b). Even some taxpayers have accepted the need for more revenues. Finally, coalitions of social activists have continued to resist the attack on the welfare state. These movements have the potential to undo the disastrous Reagan

legacy. Eventually, their victories will confirm that progressive social change cannot arise without people's activism and "pressures from below."

References

- Abramovitz, M. (1988). *Regulating the lives of women, Social welfare policy from colonial times to the present*. Boston, MA: South End Press.
- Bird, C. (1984). *Born female: The high cost of keeping women down*. NY: David McKay, Co.
- Block, F. (1987). Rethinking the political economy of the welfare state. In F. Block, R. A. Cloward, B. Ehrenreich, & F. F. Piven (Eds.), *The mean season: The attack on the welfare state* (pp. 109-160). NY: Pantheon Books.
- Bowles, S. (1982). The post Keynesian capital-labor stalemate. *Socialist Review*, 7, 45-74.
- Bowles, S., & Gintis, H. (1982). The crisis of liberal democratic capitalism. *Political and Society* 11, 51-93.
- Bowlers, S. Gordon, D., & Weisskopf, T. (1983). *Beyond the wasteland: A democratic alternative to economic decline*. Garden City, NY: Anchor/Doubleday.
- Bowles, S. Gordon, D., & Weisskopf, T. (1986). Power and profits: The social structure of accumulation and the profitability of the postwar U.S. economy. *Review of Radical Economics*, 1 & 2, 132-167.
- Boyer, H. C. (1980). *The backyard revolution: Understanding the new citizen movement*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- Business Week* (1974). Editorial. (October 12, 1974). p. 120.
- Chafe, W. H. (1974). *The American woman: Her changing social, economic and political role 1920-1970*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Chafe, W. H. (1978). *Women and equality: Changing patterns in American culture*. NY: Oxford University.
- Chambers, J. I. (1987). The law and black Americans: Retreat from civil rights. In J. Deward (Ed.), *The state of black America*. Washington, DC: The National Urban League.
- Committee For Economic Development (1987). *Children in need. Investment strategies for the educationally disadvantaged*. NY: Committee for Economic Development.
- Crozier, M. Huntington, S. & Watanuki, J. (1975). *The Crisis of democracy: Report on the governability of democracies to the Trilateral Commission*. NY: New York University Press.
- Dickinson, J. & Russell, B. (1986). Introduction: The Structure of reproduction in capitalist society. In J. Dickson, & B. Russell (Eds.), *Family, Economy & State* (pp. 2-15). NY: St. Martin's Press.
- Dickson, D., & Noble, D. (1981). By force of reason: The politics of science and technology policy. In T. Ferguson & J. Rogers (Eds.), *The hidden election* (pp. 2-6). NY: Pantheon Books.

- New York Times*. (1988a). Editorial: For children: A fair chance. (September 6, 1988). p. 14.
- New York Times*. (1988b). Editorial: The candidates and poor children. (September 25, 1988). p. 24F.
- Edsall, T. B., & Edsall M. D. (1991). *The Atlantic Monthly*, 53-86).
- Erie, S. P. Rein, & M. Wiget, B. (1983). Women and the Reagan Revolution: Thermidor for the social welfare economy. In I. Diamond (Ed.), *Families, politics and public policy: A feminist dialogue on women and the state* (pp. 94-119). NY: Longman.
- Evans, S. (1989). *Born for liberty: A history of women in America*. NY: The Free Press.
- Farrand, M. (1927). *Records of the Federal Convention*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Gabin, N. (190). *Feminism in the labor movement: Women and the United Auto Workers, 1935-1975*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Gerharz, G. (1990). Wisconsin's Learnfare: A bust. *New York Times*, (January 29, 1990). p. 23.
- Gough, I. (1980). *The political economy of the welfare state*. London: Macmillan.
- Greenstein R., & Barancik, S. (1990). *Drifting apart: New findings on growing income disparities between the rich, the poor and the middle class*. Washington, DC: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.
- Kerr, P. (1991). Trenton Legislator Proposes Overhaul of Welfare System, *New York Times*, (April 9, 1991). p. B4
- Killborn, P. T. (1990). Replacement workers: Management's big stick. *New York Times*, (March 13, 1991). p. A11.
- Kotz, D. M. (1987). Long waves and social structures of accumulation: A critique and reinterpretation. *Review of Radical Economics*, 4, 16-38.
- Kotz, D. M. (1990). A comparative analysis of the theory of regulation and the social structure of accumulation theory. *Science and Society*, 1, 5-28.
- Leuchtenburg, W. E. (1963). *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal*. NY: Harper Colophon Books.
- McGlen N. E., & O'Connor, K. O. *Women's rights: The struggle for equality in the 19th and 20th centuries*. NY: Praeger.
- Meier A., & Rudwick, E. (1976). *From plantation to ghetto*. NY: Hill and Wang.
- Orfield, G. (1988). Race and the liberal agenda: The loss of the integrationist dream 1965-1970. In M. Weir, A. S. Orloff, & T. Skocpol (Eds.), *The politics of social policy in the United States* (pp. 313-357). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Phillips, K. (1990). *The politics of rich and poor. Wealth and the American electorate in the Reagan aftermath*. NY: Random House.
- Piven, F. F., & Cloward, R. A. (1971) *Regulating the poor: The functions of public welfare*. NY: Pantheon.
- Piven, F. F., & Cloward, R. A. (1982). *The new class war: Reagan's attack on the welfare state and its consequences*. NY: Pantheon.
- Prokesch, S. E. (1985). Another decline in wage increases expected. *New York Times*. (October 21, 1985). p. A21.

- Rupp L. J. & Taylor, V. (1987). *Survival in the doldrums: The American women's rights movement, 1945-1960*. NY: Oxford University Press.
- Scharf, L. (1987). The forgotten women: Working women, the New Deal and Women's Organization. In L. Scharf & J. M. Jensen (Eds.), *Decades of Discontent* (pp. 243-259). Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press.
- Sitkoff, H. (1981). *The struggle for black equality 1954-1980*. NY: Hill & Wang.
- Skocpol, T. (1988). The limits of the New Deal system and the roots of contemporary welfare dilemmas. In M. Weir, A. S. Orloff, & T. Skocpol (Eds.), *The politics of social policy in the United States* (pp. 293-311). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Slessarev, H. (1988). Racial tensions and institutional support: Social programs during a period of retrenchment. In M. Weir, A. S. Orloff, & T. Skocpol (Eds.), *The politics of social policy in the United States* (pp. 357-381). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Sokoloff, H. (1980). *Between money and love: The dialectics of women's home and market work*. NY: Praeger.
- Time Magazine* (1981). To the right march! September 14, 1981. p. 36.
- Ware, S. (1981). *Beyond suffrage: Women in the New Deal*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Ware, S. (1982). *Holding their own: American women in the 1930s*. Boston, MA: Twayne Publishers.
- Weisskopf, T. (1981). The current economic crises in historical perspective. *Socialist Review*, 57, 9-54.
- Wellman, D. (1986). The new political linguistics of race. *Socialist Review*, 16, 43-79.
- Wolfe, A. (1980). Capitalism shows its face: Giving up on democracy. In H. Sklar (Ed.), *Trilateralism: The Trilateral Commission and elite planning for world management* (pp. 295-307). Boston, MA: South End.