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SECTION II

GENDER AND PERCEPTIONS OF DEVIANCE

“THE CRIME OF SURVIVAL”: FRAUD PROSECUTIONS, COMMUNITY SURVEILLANCE, AND THE ORIGINAL “WELFARE QUEEN”

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The welfare recipients collecting trash along New York highways in 1999 would easily have been mistaken for convicts by passing drivers. Recipients, working in exchange for their cash grants at around \$1.10 per hour, had been issued orange prison jumpsuits as their workfare uniform.¹ In doing this, New York state forced onto women's bodies a graphic link to criminality that had circled them rhetorically for decades. The chain gang ritual broadcast recipients' marginalized social position and advertised the state's efforts to simultaneously punish and reform them. The spectacle rested upon commonly accepted beliefs that welfare recipients were lazy, sexually promiscuous, African American women who spawned the criminal “culture of poverty” in America's inner cities.² Encapsulated most often in the persona of the “welfare queen,” these stereotypes have figured prominently in domestic policy fights during the past decades and were integral in rationalizing the elimination of the federal welfare program, Aid to Families with Dependent Children, in President Clinton's landmark 1996 “welfare reform” legislation.

By tracing the genesis of the “welfare queen,” this article investigates the key role criminal procedures played in enshrining these beliefs in popular mythology and how they clashed with—and silenced—the perspectives of welfare recipients. I explore the anti-welfare fraud initiatives in Illinois during the 1970s to illustrate that charges of criminality were critical to accelerating the stigmatization of welfare recipients. Although the structure of the economy and low welfare grants made extensive fraud unavoidable, the state responded to these conditions with criminalization and surveillance, instead of drastic social or economic intervention. The public spectacle of fraud prosecutions, mediated through a complicit media, further undermined support for the entire welfare program as heightened access to the program by morally and racially stigmatized parents dramatically increased welfare program budgets. These state initiatives directly challenged welfare activists' claims to state support by virtue of their roles as mothers, citizens, and consumers.

Although it is rarely a focus in historical work, the perception that welfare recipients were fraudulent and deceptive was a primary factor in undermining support for the program.³ In *Why Americans Hate Welfare*, Martin Gilens's extensive review of public opinion polls revealed the importance of the link among race, fraud, and criminality.

[A] large majority of Americans agree that government should provide monetary support to those who are unable to support themselves. But the perception of welfare abuse is widespread. Indeed, as the survey evidence . . . suggests, it would be hard to exaggerate the level of cynicism toward welfare recipients held by the American public. *This perception of welfare recipients' dishonesty and freeloading is at the core of Americans' conviction that welfare spending should be cut* (emphasis added).⁴

The state's anti-fraud campaign framed welfare recipients, who were already burdened in the public discourse by the intersecting stigma of race, class, and gender, as deceptive criminals. This obscured families' material conditions and discursively constructed an isolated, suspect population. Cultural assumptions evident in this rhetoric were translated into policies that scrutinized and punished recipients while simultaneously constricting the availability of material support to low-income people. Additionally, these policies converged with other state initiatives, such as punitive criminal sentencing procedures, to help solidify the public perception of a racialized, criminal "culture of poverty."

Historical work about welfare has traced the evolution of discourse, changes in policy, and the campaigns of activists and reformers. Scholars have revealed the profound influence of racial exclusion in the development of social programs.⁵ Others have shown how gendered assumptions and the wide acceptance of the male breadwinner model caused Aid to Families with Dependent Children (or AFDC) to be more stigmatized and paltry than programs assumed to serve men.⁶ Researchers such as Michael Katz and Herbert Gans have studied how elite discourse about welfare, "the underclass," and the "ghetto poor" reworked the centuries-old traditional distinction between the deserving and undeserving poor.⁷ Taken together, this scholarship establishes the profound ways that welfare programs have always been intertwined with the politics of maintaining racial, class, and gender hierarchies.⁸

These works are primarily national in scope and trace the actions and rhetoric of politicians, policy makers and social reformers. Poor people are rarely the main focus of these studies and are often depicted as being arbitrarily acted upon by a punitive and stingy welfare system.⁹ To build on these important works, I use a state level study to juxtapose the perspectives of poor parents and elite policy makers. In addition to highlighting the gulf between their understandings of social phenomena, this approach emphasizes the constrained agency of recipients and illuminates how they worked within and around the program's regulations in order to make ends meet.

I conceptualize welfare as one in a collection of strategies families used for economic survival and not necessarily a significant part of recipients' core identity. Since welfare recipients floated between wage work and welfare or care-giving work, I do not think of them as distinct from the working class or the working poor. Scholars' tendency to address people on welfare only so far as they are connected to this particular state program can inadvertently reinforce the depiction of recipients as an isolated type of poor person and a "non-worker." This can distract from how most recipients floated between welfare and low wage work, often using both simultaneously to support their families. It can also lead historians to ignore how other state initiatives, employers and communities might influence and complicate welfare recipients' lives and identities. My research therefore

seeks to problematize the separation of welfare recipients from the working class or working poor and investigate how this distinction was maintained.¹⁰

The escalation in negative attitudes toward welfare and social programs has often been understood as part of a “backlash” against the social reforms and movements of the 1960s that attempted to address the racial inequality in American society.¹¹ By stressing the role of policy in exacerbating racially charged anti-welfare beliefs as opposed to simply reflecting them, I argue against conceptualizing hostility to welfare as a mechanical reaction to African American activism and political gains. As Neubeck and Cazenave’s *Welfare Racism* points out, “Typically, racial state actors are portrayed as mere puppets of public opinion. This portrayal ignores the active role of racial state actors and other political elites in helping to generate and inflame these white racial sentiments and the periodic white racial backlashes they in turn fuel.”¹² Since hostility toward recipients intensified during the highly publicized efforts to shrink welfare rolls through fraud persecutions, this study stresses the powerful role of punitive state policy in directing public antagonism toward specific targets.¹³

Beginning in the early 1970s, the penal and welfare systems intertwined to create new political, legal and technological means of surveilling and disciplining welfare recipients. Throughout the decade, law enforcement agencies took on new responsibilities for identifying and penalizing welfare fraud. This article tracks how the increased monitoring of welfare recipients by police and criminal prosecutors amplified and solidified recipients’ marginalized position in society.¹⁴ Instead of simply mirroring public attitudes, the relentless media attention about welfare fraud convictions and indictments tangibly linked criminality to what had been a more elusive, moral stigma against poor, single, usually Black motherhood. The spectacle of the actual indictments framed welfare recipients as dishonest criminals, eclipsing their status as mothers and citizens.

In order to illustrate the different levels at which this anti-welfare fraud campaign operated and how they interacted, the article contains four sections. The first briefly reviews relevant trends in welfare policy in the period up to the 1970s. After setting the national context, the article focuses on the state of Illinois’s efforts to manage fraud during the 1970s. Illinois is an apt case study because it was both a forerunner and a model for the anti-fraud efforts that accelerated across the nation throughout the decade. The state was also home to the original “welfare queen,” Linda Taylor, whose case generated national attention and influenced the stereotypes associated with welfare recipients. Despite the fervency and high profile of its anti-fraud initiatives, the Illinois case was not an aberration and can provide insight into the larger national phenomenon. Illinois’s exponential growth in fraud arrests and investigations during the 1970s corresponded roughly with the national trends.

A focus on the state level, as opposed to a national study, allows this paper to blend policy history and social history to capture the interactions among cultural assumptions, material conditions, legislation and interpretations of policy implementation at the local level. Therefore, in the third section of the paper, I focus on the people in the community who reported their acquaintances for welfare fraud and how their participation reshaped the state’s anti-fraud campaign. The final section examines how the anti-fraud initiatives interacted with welfare recipients’ strategies for making ends meet on low monthly cash grants.

It also explores how recipients interpreted and resisted the new policies, and the wider social implications of punitive state programs.

Managing Caseloads: Race, Class, Gender and U.S. Welfare History

Illinois anti-fraud initiatives were embedded in the long history of welfare bureaucracies' struggles to limit costs while policing sexuality and racial, gender, and class hierarchies. Since the earliest relief efforts, women receiving charity and public assistance have been the objects of suspicion and intense scrutiny of their financial and moral "worthiness."¹⁵ Many of these practices were incorporated into the federal welfare program, Aid to Dependent Children (ADC), which was inaugurated by the landmark 1935 Social Security Act. ADC was originally intended to enable single mothers, usually white widows, to stay at home and raise their children.¹⁶ To prevent undermining the male breadwinner ideal, the sculptors kept grant levels low to ensure that remarriage remained more lucrative than receiving welfare.¹⁷ State aid programs policed morality by implementing "suitable homes" regulations and "man in the house" rules, which made women ineligible for welfare if found living with a male companion.

Racism and racial politics have also fundamentally sculpted social welfare programs, especially those instituted during the New Deal.¹⁸ Domestic and agricultural workers, commonly understood to be African Americans, were ineligible for social insurance, such as Social Security and unemployment insurance. When they were able to access state support, African American families were forced to rely on the more paltry and stigmatized programs, such as ADC. In the south, many states barred Black women entirely from state aid, especially when their labor was in high demand during harvest times. These policies reinforced the long held assumption that African American women should belong to the formal workforce and remain ungoverned by white notions of domesticity. By barring many African Americans and unwed mothers, program administrators protected ADC from public criticism while keeping costs low and enforcing the dominant society's social norms.¹⁹

During the mid-1960s and early 1970s, many welfare regulations were liberalized due to War on Poverty programs and pressure from "poverty lawyers" and civil and welfare rights activism.²⁰ A vocal welfare rights movement composed predominantly of poor women of color demanded—and, in many cases, received—larger grants and a more responsive grievance procedure. Activists advanced a unique feminist ideology that challenged their stigmatized position and claimed the right to state support by virtue of their status as mothers, citizens and consumers.²¹

In the pivotal 1970 case, *Goldberg v. Kelley*, the Supreme Court ruled that welfare was an entitlement that could not be summarily suspended without due process.²² Welfare grants increased in real economic terms and most states' "substitute parent" or "man in the house" laws were ruled unconstitutional by the early 1970s.²³ These and other landmark cases greatly expanded access to welfare programs by constricting the state's ability to arbitrarily cancel grants or use "immorality" or race as a rationale to deny aid.

Legal reforms and welfare rights activism combined with de-industrialization's devastating impact on urban areas to swell the number of people receiving as-

sistance, particularly among African Americans.²⁴ Between 1965 and 1970, the program's size doubled, growing from 3.3 million to 7 million people nationally.²⁵ Although the majority of welfare recipients had always been white, after 1958, almost half were people of color.²⁶ As reforms opened the program to new groups, they also made welfare vulnerable to new attacks. Welfare administrators had long mitigated public hostility by denying aid to the most stigmatized women: African Americans and women with children born out of wedlock. As these people entered the welfare rolls in large numbers, the public's already limited approval of welfare waned. Hostility toward the program intensified as welfare budgets grew and people increasingly saw the program as disproportionately serving African Americans. In this climate, the program struggled to find new ways to limit costs while simultaneously managing the socially marginalized populations now contained within the welfare program, instead of excluded from it.

Legislators and bureaucrats at the state and federal level initiated new efforts to reduce the costs and size of the program; some state officials asserted that an influx of ineligible people had caused the growth in program costs. Fraud investigations, always a part of welfare administration, took up new importance as other tools to trim the welfare rolls were ruled illegal. In 1961, the city of Newburgh, New York instituted a collection of draconian welfare policies that included forcing all recipients, who were commonly thought to be African American migrants from the South, to pick up their checks at the police station for eligibility audits to "weed out the chisellers."²⁷ In 1962, U.S. Senator Robert Byrd (D., West Virginia) held hearings in Congress about the allegedly lax social workers in Washington D.C. who tolerated welfare fraud.²⁸ These early, nationally publicized, anti-fraud initiatives targeted African American communities and exacerbated the racialized and stigmatized public image of welfare recipients.²⁹ The policies simultaneously limited program costs by thinning the rolls and discouraging new people from entering the highly scrutinized caseload.³⁰

Hostility toward welfare hardened throughout the late 1960s, and the idea that recipients squandered their grants on frivolous consumer goods developed significant cultural resonance.³¹ There was even a hit country song, "Welfare Cadillac," by Guy Drake, that topped charts for over a month in 1970. The song caricatured a family living in a dilapidated, neglected house while using their welfare checks toward the payments on a brand new Cadillac.

Now the way that I see it
These other folk are the fools
They're working and paying taxes
Just to send my young'uns through school
The Salvation Army cuts their hair and
Gives them clothes to wear on their backs
So we can dress up and ride around
And show off this new Cadillac.³²

The song was so resonant that President Nixon requested that Johnny Cash sing "Welfare Cadillac" during a performance at the White House; Cash, however, refused the administration's request.³³ Around the same time, Governor Ronald Reagan pioneered a new comprehensive anti-fraud initiative in California that tightened eligibility standards and child support regulations. Illinois legislators

modeled many of their efforts on Reagan's programs.³⁴ Both Illinois and California would become models for other states attempting to curtail welfare costs and crack down on fraud.

Creating Criminals: Illinois State Anti-Fraud Initiatives

Illinois welfare rolls surged between 1967 and 1973.³⁵ Controversy regarding incompetent management had circled around the Department of Public Aid since the late 1960s, and the state's high error rates put Illinois in danger of sanction by the federal government. Often indistinguishable from bureaucratic bungling and the results of chronic understaffing, mistakes in cash grant amounts were handled administratively prior to 1973. Fraud by recipients was rarely prosecuted since it was extremely difficult to prove criminal intent. When an overpayment was detected, the state simply readjusted the grant amount or dropped the recipient from the rolls.³⁶

However, bad publicity, federal scrutiny, and spiraling program costs led state legislators to reevaluate the welfare administration's approach to fraud in the early 1970s.³⁷ The main impetus for reform in Illinois was a powerful bipartisan committee of state legislators called the Legislative Advisory Committee to Public Aid (LAC). This committee was charged with advising and assisting the agency that actually administered the welfare program, the Illinois Department of Public Aid (IDPA). Led for most of this period by Republican State Senator Don Moore (R., Midlothian) and emboldened by the high profile fraud case of Linda Taylor, the Legislative Advisory Committee became singularly committed to reducing welfare rolls through stringent eligibility reviews. Although Republicans enjoyed significant support from Democratic lawmakers, they strategically championed the anti-fraud cause throughout much of the 1970s in their struggle to regain control of the General Assembly.

In 1974, the *Chicago Tribune* began covering the bizarre case of Linda Taylor, the original "welfare queen." She was charged with defrauding Illinois welfare programs by collecting welfare cash grants, social security and food stamps under multiple aliases. Taylor's story generated significant media coverage nationally, as well as in her hometown of Chicago. Although the specifics fluctuated considerably between articles, Taylor's deceptive techniques were described in careful detail. The *Chicago Tribune* reported that she had illegally received over \$200,000 by using more than 100 aliases in 12 different states.³⁸ She allegedly had at least 31 addresses, 25 phone numbers, 3 cars (including one Cadillac), and several husbands (most dead and one 25 years her junior).³⁹ Her physical form was as elusive as her legal identity. Investigators alleged she had 30 different wigs and had claimed benefits as a white, an African American, and a Filipina.⁴⁰ Despite these remarkable estimates, prosecutors were ultimately only able to prove Taylor had defrauded the state of \$8,000 using four separate aliases.

It was Chicago journalists who originally crowned Taylor the "welfare queen."⁴¹ The moniker stuck, although welfare fraud was hardly Taylor's only legal transgression. The *Chicago Tribune* recounted tales of Taylor's alleged robberies, bigamy, and kidnapping, and told how she had collected fees as a "voodoo doctor" and tried to claim the inheritance of a policy runner who had died with \$700,000 in his home.⁴² Despite these diverse charges against Taylor, welfare

fraud remained her defining feature, and the press always referred to her as the welfare queen.

Ronald Reagan seized on the caricature, stripped it of its context and peculiarity, and gave it national visibility. He railed against welfare bureaucracies by telling crowds about the Chicago welfare queen at almost every campaign stop during his failed 1976 bid for the Republican presidential nomination. His account morphed over time, although he usually assessed the cost to the state at \$150,000 and fixed the number of aliases at around 80.⁴³

Connecting “queen” to popular images of welfare recipients symbolically transmitted multiple messages with derogatory racial, gender and class subtexts.⁴⁴ Surrounded by extravagant luxuries and services, queens are assumed to perform neither caregiving work nor waged labor. Linking these images to welfare recipients discredited poor women’s voices and insinuated that their claims of material hardship were disingenuous and malicious. By evoking socially unsettling images of politically powerful women, the phrase welfare queen also had racial connotations. 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. Since it could instantly convey multiple stereotypes, it should not be surprising that the moniker welfare queen quickly gained such currency.

The Taylor case was a huge embarrassment for the bureaucracy that administered welfare programs, the Illinois Department of Public Aid (IPDA). Instead of treating Taylor’s actions as an anomaly, key conservative politicians and state bureaucrats claimed it was indicative of the permissiveness and incompetence of the welfare system in Illinois. The welfare administration, IDPA, responded to political pressure by initiating a series of bureaucratic efforts to identify ineligible recipients. They instituted a “redetermination program” in February of 1975, which called for caseworkers to visit the home of each welfare recipient three times a year and resulted in the cancellation of over 40,000 cases in the first two rounds.⁴⁵ To find people who were illegally working, state officials used newly developed computer technology to crosslist the names of people receiving welfare with lists of state employees or recipients of unemployment insurance. Despite the worsening economic climate, bureaucrats strived for “caseload stabilization,” which meant stopping and even reversing the caseload increases. Through these programs, IDPA dropped people from the program faster than new eligible cases were added, and caseloads stabilized in 1974 for the first time in over three years. The caseload even decreased for a few months that year despite the recession.⁴⁶

Still frustrated by the alleged lack of cooperation by the IPDA, LAC initiated numerous efforts to coerce collaboration through threat, public humiliation, and enticement. Legislators worked closely with the media to publicize stories about the inefficient welfare bureaucracy and the behavior it tolerated.⁴⁷ Although IDPA already employed fraud investigators, the LAC hired its own staff of off-duty police officers to track down ineligible welfare recipients.⁴⁸ In practice, this meant identifying the two behaviors that most frequently constituted fraud: failing to report additional earned income, or an extra wage earner (usually husbands or boyfriends) living with the family.

The LAC established an anonymous, 24 hour-a-day hotline that people could

call to report suspected fraud. LAC investigators also circulated memos to police stations that implored officers to include welfare fraud in the crimes they watched for during patrols.⁴⁹ After researching cases, LAC staff would hand over the files to welfare caseworkers for termination or readjustment of the cash grants. If there was sufficient evidence, they would send the cases to the State's Attorney's office for criminal prosecution. The members of the Committee staff would then proceed to badger the reluctant and understaffed State's Attorney's offices and local law enforcement into prosecuting the cases.⁵⁰

The LAC also sponsored legislation designed to entice prosecutors to prosecute welfare fraud more enthusiastically. Concerned that low penalties discouraged prosecution, legislators crafted a bill allowing welfare fraud to be tried as a felony instead of a misdemeanor. Other legislation allowed the State's Attorney offices to keep 25% of the money recovered from welfare recipients after successful prosecutions. Chairman Moore explained that "This incentive plan should help 'sweeten the pot' and inspire our prosecutors to even greater heights."⁵¹ In 1977, the State's Attorney office established a separate division dedicated entirely to prosecuting welfare fraud.⁵²

To eliminate theft and prevent recipients from falsely reporting missing and stolen welfare checks, Public Aid started mailing all grants directly to banks and currency exchanges, instead of peoples' homes.⁵³ Recipients had to report in person to collect their checks and were required to present three forms of identification and sign a receipt in order to match signatures.⁵⁴ Although this program was expanded to the entire state in 1977, it was tested in Chicago starting in 1975. Intensive scrutiny of all welfare recipients illustrated the extent to which these policies were directed at a stigmatized group of people, not specific criminals within a group of respected citizens. Both the language used and the location of the pilot programs revealed a particular concern about urban, usually Black, welfare recipients.

Efforts to start fingerprinting the entire caseload were perhaps the most dramatic evidence that officials saw all recipients as suspect. Although fingerprinting ostensibly served the administrative purpose of preventing recipients from collecting grants under multiple aliases, it also clearly reinforced an already stigmatized position by linking the recipients to explicit images of criminality.⁵⁵ Despite its obvious parallel to processing criminals, the plan received considerable support.⁵⁶

By the time that prosecutors were finally able to convict and sentence Linda Taylor to three to six years in prison, media attention and public outrage had shifted from her individual story to the hundreds of fraud cases that the state's campaign had unearthed.⁵⁷ In October of 1978, the *Chicago Tribune* remarked on how the pervasiveness of welfare fraud made Taylor's case seem less remarkable and instead simply representative of a larger pattern.

Once the focus of national outrage, the flamboyant and mysterious Chicago woman has relinquished her throne to hundreds of others who have developed equally outrageous schemes to bilk the welfare system of millions of dollars.⁵⁸

Although the idea of the welfare queen never lost its link to fraud and criminality, its original connection to Linda Taylor and high-ticket welfare fraud receded as welfare queens multiplied before the public gaze.

Over the course of the decade, Illinois state devoted increased resources to investigating fraud. In 1979, agencies initiated 5,803 investigations and referred almost 2,000 cases to law enforcement for prosecution. This represented a 476% increase over the number of cases initiated in 1971 and a 1015% increase in the number of cases referred to law enforcement. Although practices varied among states, this remarkable growth in fraud investigations was paralleled at the national level. Between 1970 and 1979, there was a 729% increase in the number of fraud cases initiated nationwide.⁵⁹

Initiatives sponsored by the LAC enjoyed wide support within the Illinois General Assembly. For example, the bill to raise penalties for welfare fraud sailed through the Democratic-controlled House of Representatives 124 to 26.⁶⁰ The main critics of these policies were African American legislators and community leaders from Chicago. For example, Senator Richard Newhouse (D-Chicago) spoke out in the community and in the Senate. At a public meeting in 1977, he explained:

“Welfare cheaters” has become the new code word for the poor, for minorities in general and those temporarily down on their luck. Here in Illinois, we presently have three separate agencies seeking out “welfare cheaters” at goodness knows what cost to the taxpayer.⁶¹

In 1978, Senator Newhouse issued a press release condemning the state for “squandering more than \$3 million peeking under the beds of welfare recipients.”⁶² He also challenged the much-publicized idea that the anti-fraud efforts resulted in savings for the state. “Then—with appropriate fanfare—the state proudly proclaimed that it had recovered the magnificent sum of \$1 million as the result of its \$3 million effort.”⁶³ He insisted that anti-fraud efforts were racially charged initiatives designed to stigmatize the poor, especially from Black urban neighborhoods. Jesse Jackson called the fraud investigators “welfare bloodhounds” and pointed out that the state made no similar effort to track down the \$100 million of uncollected income taxes.⁶⁴ Because the dominant discourse about fraud erased recipients’ poverty and rendered their perspectives suspect, these critical voices were unable to significantly intervene in the public discourse about welfare fraud.

Although Illinois was not monolithically behind efforts to crack down on welfare fraud, only a few legislators wasted political capital on impeding anti-fraud initiatives directed against socially stigmatized poor parents. In fact, bureaucratic inertia was probably legislators’ biggest adversary in their efforts to politicize the fraud issue and shrink the welfare program. To implement their policies, the LAC had to pressure two reluctant, overburdened agencies into expending their limited resources on criminalizing actions that had previously been administratively handled. This transformation could not happen overnight and required considerable political and bureaucratic mobilization. As the LAC’s chief investigator acknowledged in a front page *Wall Street Journal* article, “We’re trying to convince people that welfare fraud is a crime just as bank robbery and homicide.”⁶⁵ Despite these struggles, legislators had powerful allies in their campaign: a large percentage of the public and the media. The more people heard about welfare fraud, the more infuriated they became; many even embraced the opportunity to join in the campaign themselves.

Cadillacs, Turtles, and Revenge: Community Participation in Identifying Fraud

Most of the public became informed about the state's anti-fraud efforts through the media. Although some media, such as the African American newspaper the *Chicago Defender*, published articles critical of the campaign, most mainstream papers tacitly assisted the investigations. Members of the LAC worked closely with journalist George Bliss from the *Chicago Tribune* in his multiple exposes about Linda Taylor and the resistance of IDPA to initiate further investigations. Investigators' reports acknowledged his help in generating public pressure on welfare administrators.⁶⁶ The LAC clearly saw the *Tribune* as a partner in their efforts, as illustrated by a letter to the *Tribune* editor that concluded: "We certainly appreciate the support of the *Chicago Tribune* in our ongoing investigations."⁶⁷

In addition to echoing the indignant and alarmed tone of state legislators, newspapers publicized the state's hotline to report welfare cheaters. They frequently included the phone number in stories about the LAC's efforts and occasionally even designated separate space in their articles to promote the state's hotline.⁶⁸ Set apart from the article with lines or a box, the announcements were essentially advertisements for the hotline and a clear endorsement of the state's campaign. A 1976 article that ran in the *Markham Star Tribune* assured readers that there was no risk in reporting fraud and that all tips would be taken seriously. "All calls will be confidential and callers are not required to identify themselves. All reports will be checked."⁶⁹

The *Chicago Tribune* also aided the campaigns by publishing the lists of names of those charged of welfare fraud. When the State's Attorney started returning indictments in groups of 50 or 75, the paper ran all the names, along with addresses and places of illegal employment, at the end of the article in smaller print.⁷⁰ This public shaming of welfare recipients broadcasted the LAC's message more powerfully than simply repeating legislators' allegations or speeches. Reading about actual indictments played a key role in convincing the public that the welfare program wasted their tax dollars on financially secure, manipulative criminals.

People responded to this news of rampant welfare fraud in various ways. Some angry citizens answered the articles by writing letters to their paper's editorial page. One man demanded that judges who handed down light sentences for welfare fraud be removed from their jobs immediately, and asked, "Aren't such judicial decisions tantamount to aiding and abetting criminal acts?"⁷¹ Another woman, furious about the waste of "our money," wanted to be a part of the effort to hunt down welfare cheaters.

I could think of a hundred people, including myself, who are tired of seeing our money wasted, and would love the opportunity to volunteer for a part in the investigations, without a penny for it. Just for the satisfaction of doing something! But that's the trouble with the system, they'll never let the people become involved.⁷²

It seems that these sentiments are not aberrations. As the anti-fraud investigations produced more and more convictions, the public became increasingly

invested in identifying and punishing “cheaters.” Concern seemed to intensify throughout the decade as people became convinced that fraud was endemic to the entire program. One legislator wrote to encourage the LAC to expand their work after reviewing a poll from his district that revealed 96% of his constituents thought “too many people on welfare are receiving benefits to which they are not entitled.”⁷³ In 1978, a poll of 800 Illinois voters showed that 84% ranked controlling welfare and Medicaid fraud and abuses their *highest* legislative priority, polling above controlling crime and government costs generally.⁷⁴

Despite their similar economic and social positions, many living among recipients shared these anti-fraud sentiments. In the fiscal year of 1977, the state’s fraud hotline received 10,047 calls, with the numbers mounting each month.⁷⁵ Between 1977 and 1980, it received over 30,000 tips.⁷⁶ Since the tippers reported specific instances of welfare fraud, these numbers suggest extensive involvement by people who frequently interacted with or lived near welfare recipients.

Although the intake records for the hotline are not available, it is possible to piece together anecdotal evidence about why people participated in this campaign. Tippers rarely had a clear understanding of what technically constituted fraud and instead turned in the more traditional targets of state sanction, such as morally stigmatized unmarried mothers. Many tips were inspired by a sense of frustration and injustice about a cheater who seemed to be getting ahead unfairly. The tippers expressed anger that others were getting financial support that they had not “earned.” These complaints echoed the state’s assumption that work did not include unpaid domestic labor or raising children. Tippers directed their complaints at objects of personal frustration and were remarkably unsuccessful at identifying criminal behavior. The almost 32,000 tips resulted in the adjustment or cancellation of 3,400 grants, making the informers effective in finding fraud only about 10% of the time.⁷⁷

Tippers were most frequently alerted to fraud by seeing material possessions denoting status. These complaints reflected the assumption that welfare recipients should not have access to consumer goods. Recent historical work has argued that the ability to acquire consumer goods had become increasingly understood as a right of citizenship. In her book, *Consumer’s Republic*, Lizabeth Cohen argued that citizenship and consumerism became hopelessly intertwined in American society in the prosperous decades after World War II. A new material abundance was omnipresent in political rhetoric and corporate advertising but the poor, especially people of color, were largely excluded from the fruits of the post-War consumer boom.⁷⁸

In her work on the National Welfare Rights Organization (NWRO), Felicia Kornbluh illustrated the importance of this new consumerism for Welfare Rights activism.⁷⁹ She showed that recipients demanded sufficient resources to support their families in dignity, which implied access to consumer goods. Kornbluh explained,

One key way that welfare recipients understood and expressed themselves as rights-bearing citizens was as consumers in an affluent society. NWRO members criticized both the private marketplace and the welfare system for failing to allow welfare recipients to participate fully in the post-World War II consumer economy.⁸⁰

Like other American women, recipients insisted that they were entitled to consumer goods, such as perfume or a decent dining room table. These activists articulated a different claim to rights and dignity, one based on their position as mothers and citizens, which did not depend on participation in wage work. By claiming entitlement to material comforts by virtue of their citizenship, recipients directly challenged dominant ideas about the social and material value of domestic and care giving labor while also collapsing the category of consumer and citizen.

In contrast with the high-profile activism of the NWRO, many people were offended when welfare recipients possessed consumer goods. Tippers who notified the state about fraud assumed that nice or new possessions were sufficient evidence to establish the guilt of the recipient. In one typed, anonymous letter sent to a State Senator, the author reported that the family next door had a house full of children and that the parents floated between welfare and wage work. Offended by the family's unimpeded access to various commodities, the author explained, "They made the comment that whatever they want they will go buy . . . They go to town every week and spend between \$40 and \$50 for new clothes and foolishness. They buy turtles, guinea pigs, white mice and a lot of toys that are broken up in one day."⁸¹ The crime, in this writer's mind, was illustrated by the existence of frivolous toys and pets. Although there was no explicit fraud stated in the letter, the investigators followed up on this tip and found that the family had not received aid for over a year.⁸²

Although not stated explicitly, it seemed that the tippers could not afford such luxuries for their own family and found the comparison with their neighbors disturbing. The author wrote, "These people are living high on the hog and sitting home doing nothing and we have to get out and work to support them."⁸³ Tippers assumed that their neighbors were not contributors to the organs that funded welfare programs. This rhetoric created a dichotomy between "tax payers," which served as a proxy for full citizen, and welfare recipients, who were inaccurately presented as not contributing to the polity and therefore, having no claim to the benefits of citizenship.

The use of "we" suggests that both parents in the tipper's family were forced to work for wages. As the economy struggled throughout the 1970s and women continued to move into the formal workplace, fewer and fewer families could rely solely on one breadwinner's wages. Therefore, assumptions about a "family wage," on which welfare policy was originally built, were increasingly inapplicable to the lives of poor and working class families. Their inability to earn enough to keep a member of their own family at home probably contributed to resentment toward welfare.

Other examples suggest that tippers may have felt that welfare gave their neighbors unfair advantages, especially when used to subsidize low-wage work. Chief Investigator Tom Coughlin explained to reporters that the best informants were "the outraged, average community tax payer." He explained, "One man called here and started chastising me . . . He accused me of not doing my job because the man across the street was on aid, working, and driving a new car." In this case, the new car, a symbol of status and consumerism, angered the neighbor and inspired him to inform the authorities. The investigator explained that

there was nothing he could do unless the tipper could name the place of employment. An hour later, the tipper called the investigator back to report that he had looked through his neighbor's window with binoculars and, upon seeing his work shirt, found out he was employed at Sears.⁸⁴ The press and law enforcement usually would have condemned spying on people as a violation of privacy but in this discourse, welfare recipients had entered a semi-criminal category where surveillance was encouraged.

One man wrote a letter to LAC Chairman Moore to remind him that food stamp fraud was also a problem. Although he had no specific person to report, he simply wanted to alert the authorities that there were a lot of people using food stamps and some of their actions made him suspicious. "What makes this so noticeable is that some of these people using food stamps are often dressed in fine clothing and purchasing items considered for expensive taste. Need I say more?"⁸⁵ The concluding question revealed that the author assumed a common understanding about the limits of recipients' rights to nonessential or frivolous commodities. According to this logic, people surrendered their cherished American rights of consumer choice once they started receiving food stamps. Simultaneously, it became any citizen's right to monitor, judge, and report recipients' decisions. By excluding welfare and food stamp recipients from this consumer society, tipsters were also reinforcing the image of recipients as a separate and degraded category of second-class citizen.

The campaign against fraud also caused people who were bothered by deviant social behavior to feel that the state might intervene to discipline their neighbors. Another anonymous letter, written in 1974, testified to the power of the media's representations of welfare queens. "In wake of recent newspaper stories concerning welfare cheaters, I would like for you to investigate another 'unfortunate' person who is collecting food stamps and welfare checks while riding around in a white late model Cadillac . . ."⁸⁶ Again, this tipper named no act that technically constituted welfare fraud. Instead, the welfare recipient's guilt was established by her access to status symbols and her sexual impropriety. The letter detailed the woman's use of her parents' Cadillac, her lack of attention to her child, and her "marathon sexual activities."⁸⁷ It concluded, "As a concerned citizen of this area, I think you should investigate this woman's daily activities (and nightly ones as well) . . ."⁸⁸ This tipper seemed more interested in convincing the state to regulate the recipient's sexual behavior than in addressing her use of the welfare program. By highlighting her inappropriate connection to a key symbol of post-War prosperity, the Cadillac, the complaint interlaced traditional assumptions with more contemporary concerns.⁸⁹ It connected the older rhetoric that considered normative sexual behavior a condition for receiving aid with the more modern anxiety regarding poor women's inclusion into the consumerist society.

Revenge and personal disputes also motivated people to report their acquaintances for welfare fraud. Although it is difficult to establish what percentage of the tips were thus inspired, it is not surprising that this would occur. The state promised to investigate all leads and did not require any proof or documentation from the anonymous tipsters. Even welfare officials occasionally acknowledged that the calls were not always civically motivated. As one Public

Aid employee explained, "We get a lot of grudge calls from people upset with their neighbors, and we have a couple of callers who just give us doses of music, but we're obligated to check all calls if they give us the necessary information."⁹⁰

A few specific examples illustrate this phenomenon. In one case, it was clearly a woman's estranged husband who informed authorities she was working while receiving welfare. He even went on a stakeout with LAC investigators to help identify her.⁹¹ In another example, a couple testified against their downstairs neighbor who had not reported to Public Aid that her husband resided with the family. The defendant attempted to have her neighbor's testimony thrown out on the grounds that they had frequently fought and were biased against her. It also turned out that the witnesses were themselves under investigation for welfare fraud and were possibly hoping for leniency if they cooperated with their neighbor's prosecution.⁹² Although the files do not clearly establish what happened, it seems that the parties involved reported each other and were certainly using the state to settle personal scores.

These examples suggest that people became involved in the fraud campaign for reasons that deviated from the state's motivations. Not aware of the specifics of welfare policy, neighbors watched recipients for signs of social and cultural transgressions. They duly noted evidence of sexual impropriety, even though the state could no longer legally deny benefits using this criterion. Many of these tippers were probably struggling financially—only one accident, lost job, or pregnancy away from welfare themselves. The staggering unemployment and inflation throughout the period undoubtedly exacerbated these frustrations. Since neighbors were notoriously ineffective at identifying actual welfare fraud, the hotline's main success seems to have been providing an outlet for dissatisfaction about constricting economic opportunities. By helping find "cheaters," citizens were able to harness the state's power to address concerns in their personal lives. Their participation, however, further legitimized the state's campaign and added another technique by which poor families were monitored. This street level surveillance enabled citizens to intervene in the *performance* of recipients' stigmatized position; it barred recipients from subverting that position through acquiring consumer goods connoting status.⁹³

"The Crime of Survival": Welfare Recipients and Fraud Prosecutions

The LAC legislators were probably correct when they charged that welfare fraud was rampant in Illinois in the 1970s. A high percentage of recipients probably committed fraud as the state defined it; there is little other explanation for how they managed to survive on the checks from Public Aid.⁹⁴ The final section of this study investigates how recipients used fraud to survive on paltry cash grants and how they reacted to the state's anti-fraud initiatives.

Welfare recipients were personally, racially and socially diverse. However, they supposedly all shared two conditions: poverty and parenthood. They probably also shared an awareness that it was incredibly difficult, if not almost impossible, to support a family on a welfare grant.⁹⁵ In 1974, the welfare grant for a family of four was approximately \$288 per month, plus \$65 in food stamps. Based on 1972 prices, this was 35% percent below the lowest floor set by the federal

government for a four-person family.⁹⁶ Even after adding wage work, many families still lived below the federal poverty line.⁹⁷ This difficulty was exacerbated by the failure of the already low grants to keep pace with the era's rampant inflation. The national recession, which started in 1973, added to the economic insecurity of poor families. Unemployment rose to 8.3 percent by 1975 and real weekly earnings fell 0.4 percent annually during the 1970s.⁹⁸

The state's indictments illustrate that much of what became defined as fraud were simply attempts to supplement welfare grants with additional income from low wage work or living with another wage earner. Herbert Saul was a typical case. He was sentenced to two years probation and \$13,024 in restitution for working at a furniture store while also receiving welfare. He explained his crime to a journalist concisely, "I have a wife and three kids and I'm loaded with medical bills. That is all I can say."⁹⁹ Although recipients were depicted as lazy, the main crime constituting welfare fraud was *working*, holding a job on top of raising children. Similarly, although publicly viewed as promiscuous single mothers, Public Aid most often sanctioned women for living with their husbands or long-time partners after claiming to be single, deserted, or separated.

Investigators' files also illuminated the techniques parents used to make ends meet while on welfare. Many recipients chose not to notify welfare administrators when they got new jobs in order to avoid having their cases reassessed and grants reduced. Although many people held low wage jobs with formal employers, one woman's grant was reduced because she failed to report babysitting income.¹⁰⁰ Some worked under different names, usually maiden names, or used fake social security numbers to avoid detection by Public Aid. Other recipients reported checks missing and cashed both the original and the duplicate. One woman paid her nephew's friend \$40 to rob her on the way home from cashing her welfare checks. After she reported the money stolen, the fake robber returned the original money.¹⁰¹ In one particularly bizarre case, investigators struggled to ascertain who had been cashing the checks of a man that had been murdered months before.¹⁰²

It is impossible to ascertain the true extent of fraud without access to extensive interviews or surveys where recipients felt safe enough to tell the truth about their behavior. Surveys conducted during the 1970s in Seattle and Denver showed that 50% of recipients admitted to "cheating" in order to get by financially.¹⁰³ In an interview with the *Chicago Tribune*, an ex-fraud investigator for IDPA estimated that 25 to 50% of welfare recipients committed some degree of fraud. She explained that, "the extent of the fraud varies. Some of it is rather minor, some of it is huge. But people are forced into committing fraud because of the silly rules of the system."¹⁰⁴

Many of the less extreme techniques mentioned above must have been relatively well known, and recipients shared information about how to supplement grants without being detected. One woman told a reporter how she was terrified to find out that people were suddenly being jailed for working while on welfare.

"I had a good job," she said, "but then I got laid off. I had a baby and so I got on welfare. But then I got my job back and everyone told me to just stay on welfare and not tell them that I was working again. So I did. Everyone was doing it . . . But now what am I going to do? Go to jail!"¹⁰⁵

She and other welfare recipients had come to believe that this behavior was not risky or could not be detected.

The woman went on to explain how the extra income from fraud impacted her family. "I moved from my apartment with roaches to a decent apartment. I could go to the store and load up the basket instead of buying hamburger and chicken necks. I could send my baby to Catholic school."¹⁰⁶ In this case, she felt fraud was the only way to raise her family's standard of living to what would be considered comparable to an average American family.

Other recipients also felt that the state's anti-fraud campaign blocked one of their few available avenues for economic advancement. When one woman was arrested for working while receiving welfare, the investigator reported that, "she felt she was getting arrested for trying to upgrade herself, and she thought this was just terrible." She then informed the men that when she got out of jail, she intended on killing herself and her two children.¹⁰⁷

Some committed fraud out of what they considered dire financial need. The *Chicago Defender* carried a story about Shelley Miller, father of three, who was indicted for illegally collecting aid while he was employed as a community service worker for the Chicago Department of Human Services. In the article, he admitted to lying about this income but refused to plead guilty because he held the system responsible for his situation.

Prior to applying for this assistance two years ago, my family was nearly starving. I couldn't buy clothes for my wife or shoes for my kids . . . The money we were receiving from Public Aid we weren't stealing from the poor, because we are the poor. And if you add that \$261 a month to my income of \$5,000 a year, I still was below the poverty line.¹⁰⁸

The article explained that Miller was an upstanding and active member of the community who was recognized by both Mayor Daley and Alderman Marzullo for his work with West Side youth. Because of the pride in his commitment and connection to his community, Miller explained to the reporter that he almost cried when asked to resign from his job.

I grew up on the West Side. I've worked in the community with the youth and I've never been involved in crime. But if I'm convicted and put on probation, then it will be three strikes against me. I'm black, I don't have a college education and I'll have a criminal conviction on my record.¹⁰⁹

Already struggling to get by, the indictment would cripple his ability to support his family. The state's crackdown invariably had equally severe implications for other families. The lives that were most disrupted were obviously those families where a parent was sent to jail or became a felon. Recipients endeavored to mitigate the consequences through various strategies, such as legal challenges or fair hearings. Miller, for example, collected over 120 signatures in a petition to support his not-guilty plea. In addition to the families convicted criminally, thousands more had their grants reduced or eliminated through new stringent administration. The deployment of new technologies that matched the welfare rolls with employee lists forced many to choose between welfare or wage work, neither of which provided sufficient income.

Anti-fraud efforts contributed to the increased surveillance of poor urban neighborhood. Recipients' homes were inspected more frequently and they were forced to comply with continual bureaucratic examinations of their personal and financial decisions. This heightened presence of state officials intertwined with the increased policing that followed the massive social and political upheavals of the late 1960s and 1970s and contributed to the growing criminalization of inner-city space.

Many of the strategies implemented to prevent fraud had far-reaching, negative consequences for poor communities generally. For example, Mary Cowherd, a resident of Chicago's Robert Taylor Homes, testified before a legislative committee about the consequences of the decision to send all welfare checks to currency exchanges instead of people's homes. She explained that on the day that the checks arrive "it looks just like a bread line . . . it's like a concentration [camp] line . . . Then you go to the currency exchange and they charge you 5 or 6 dollars to cash a check. And then . . . you get ripped off outside of the place."¹¹⁰ Since the whole community could see who had just cashed their check, the state's anti-theft initiative turned recipients into "sitting ducks" and increased robberies. The punitive policy was therefore both demoralizing and counter productive. It also forced all recipients to perform in the degrading theater that constructed them as a distinct, suspect segment of society.

This formal monitoring by various state agencies was intensified by the knowledge that neighbors, acquaintances, and ex-lovers had the power to report recipients to Public Aid. Welfare rights activist and recipient Kathi Gunlogson explained:

I really feel like when someone applies for Public Aid, they are giving up a great majority of their constitutional rights. And one of those things is privacy. If somebody down the block from you sees somebody moving in a new table, which they may have given you, and you never had one before, they can go and call Public Aid and tell them that you are going against the laws. And Public Aid [does] not have to tell me who that person is that informed on me. But they can decide to cut my grant.¹¹¹

Reminiscent of previous examples, Gunlogson's anecdote illustrated that recipients also understood that consumer goods triggered fraud complaints. In becoming a welfare recipient, Gunlogson felt that she had forfeited her right to privacy and the right to face a hostile accuser. She argued that these conditions amounted to stripping welfare recipients of the intertwined rights of citizenship and participation in the consumer economy.

In testimony before members of the state legislature, Frank Smith articulated a similar sense that welfare policy deliberately degraded recipients. He explained,

. . . I think that the Department [IIDPA] is geared to cause people to commit crimes . . . [T]hey treat us as if we are less than human beings . . . You know, but I have personally went out and committed a crime, a crime I call survival. And a lot of guys that's sitting down there in Menard [Prison] right now committed that crime of survival because they were unable to take care of their families. And it's mainly because of the Department of Public Aid not taking them at heart [sic] once they come to you and have no other place to go.¹¹²

Smith felt financial options were so constrained that poor people could not survive without breaking the state's rules. His language united welfare policy and criminal law into a single, undifferentiated oppressive structure. Indeed, he saw his survival within these structures as essentially and inevitably a criminal act. Shelly Miller, the recipient profiled in the *Chicago Defender*, echoed these sentiments when he explained that welfare forced people to "live worse than animals." He claimed that the structure of the welfare program made crime inevitable: "they force people who are unemployed and on welfare to go out there and commit crimes because they don't provide enough on their welfare budget to coincide with the cost of living today."¹¹³ Although opinions about the welfare program undoubtedly varied among recipients, it should not be surprising that a percentage of them considered the entire program a dehumanizing effort to criminalize the poor, especially people of color.

Examining recipients' perspectives on fraud highlights the immense gap between legislators' rhetoric and the material conditions of poor families. The architects of Illinois anti-fraud initiatives were not in conversation with welfare recipients nor with statistics about falling wages and rising prices. Their policies were designed to discipline the welfare queen: a deviant woman burdened by neither work nor family. They almost never acknowledged brutal poverty in Illinois or the fact that the welfare grant kept families living below the federal poverty level.¹¹⁴ They did not discuss racism and the devastating levels of unemployment in central cities. Their language and policies reflected the assumption that only wage labor constituted "work." In this rhetoric, work and welfare were diametrically opposed. The caregiving labor that welfare was originally designed to remunerate was rendered invisible and irrelevant.

Juxtaposing elites' rhetoric and the experience of people on welfare illuminates the human costs of the welfare queen trope once its logic was translated into state policy. It reveals that legislators' political responses were the product of specific cultural, racial, and economic assumptions that were divorced from the material realities and perspectives of most recipients. Instead of new financial supports or other drastic social intervention, legislators responded to welfare fraud through costly punishment: increased scrutiny, stigmatization, and criminalization. Punitive policies, such as the fraud prosecutions described here, were instrumental in solidifying the perception of recipients as a marginalized category within society. The spectacle of surveillance and prosecutions rearticulated the stigma associated with welfare while exacerbating the hardship of poor families. The focus on crime, sexual impropriety, and fraud obscured, if not completely expunged, the material conditions of struggling families from the public dialogue.

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ENDNOTES

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1. Vivyan Adair, "Branded with Infamy: Inscriptions of Poverty and Class in the United States," *Signs* 27, no. 2 (Winter 2002): 465.
2. Wahneema Lubiano, "Black Ladies, Welfare Queens, and State Minstrels: Ideological War by Narrative Means" in *Race-ing Justice, En-gendering Power*, ed. Toni Morrison (New York, 1992), 323–363. Lubiano argues that the welfare queen is held responsible for an array of social problems, such as crime and drug abuse.
3. One thoughtful exception is Rickie Solinger, *Beggars and Choosers: How the Politics of Choice Shapes Adoption, Abortion, and Welfare in the United States* (New York, 2001), 139–182.
4. Martin Gilens, *Why Americans Hate Welfare* (Chicago, 1999), 64.
5. See Robert Lieberman, *Shifting the Color Line: Race and the American Welfare State* (Cambridge, MA, 1998); Michael Brown, *Race, Money, and the Welfare State* (Ithaca, NY, 1991); Jill Quadagno, *The Color of Welfare: How Racism Undermined the War on Poverty* (New York, 1994); Dorothy Roberts, *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty* (New York, 1998); and Kenneth Neubeck and Noel Cazenave, *Welfare Racism* (New York, 2001).
6. See Linda Gordon, *Pitied but Not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare, 1890–1935* (New York, 1994); Alice Kessler-Harris, *In Pursuit of Equity: Women, Men, and the Quest for Economic Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Oxford, 2001); and Gwendolyn Mink, *Welfare's End* (Ithaca, NY, 1998).
7. See Herbert J. Gans, *The War Against the Poor: The Underclass and Antipoverty Policy* (New York, 1995); Michael Katz, *The Undeserving Poor: From the War on Poverty to the War on Welfare* (New York, 1989); and Michael Katz, ed., *The Underclass Debate: Views from History* (Princeton, 1993).
8. For additional examples, see Joel Handler, *The Poverty of Welfare Reform* (New Haven, CT, 1995); Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward, *Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare* (New York, 1971); and Laura Briggs, "La Vida, Moynihan, and other Libels: Migration, Social Science and the Making of the Puerto Rican Welfare Queen," *Centro Journal* 14, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 75–101.
9. Historians of the National Welfare Rights Organization are an important exception. They focus on the activism and ideology of welfare recipients. See Felicia Kornbluh, "A Right to Welfare? Poor Women, Professionals, and Poverty Programs: 1935–1975" (PhD diss, Princeton University, 2000); Felicia Kornbluh, "To Fulfill Their 'Rightly Needs': Consumerism and the National Welfare Rights Movement," *Radical History Review* 69 (Fall 1997): 76–113; and Premilla Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors: The Welfare Rights Movement in the United States* (New York, 2004).
10. For some background into this debate, see Katz, ed., *The "Underclass" Debate: Views from History*.

11. Some scholars argued that working-class whites resented African Americans' new rights because they were forced to shoulder the burden of remedying past injustices and felt abandoned by the Democratic Party. See Thomas Byrne Edsall and Mary Edsall, *Chain Reaction* (New York, 1991); and Jim Sleeper, *Closest of Strangers: Liberalism and the Politics of Race in New York* (New York, 1999). Others asserted that these conceptualizations of backlash obscured the extent to which gains by African Americans threatened the racial distribution of resources that had benefited whites for generations. See Linda Williams, *The Constraint of Race* (University Park, PA, 2003). Thomas Sugrue and Arnold Hirsch show that backlash proponents often fail to consider the longer history of hostility toward civil rights and integration, which predated the high profile activism in the 1950s and 1960s. See Arnold Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940–1960* (Cambridge, UK, 1983); and Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, NJ, 1996).
12. Neubeck and Cazenave, *Welfare Racism*, 124.
13. For a discussion of other reasons anti-welfare attitudes heightened during the 1970s, see Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors*, 194–199.
14. Arrests and criminal indictments have historically served key roles in heightening stigmatization. See, for example, Ellen Schrecker's discussion of how criminal prosecutions of Communists during the 1940s hardened public opinion against the Party. Ellen Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America* (Princeton, NJ, 1998), 120.
15. See, for example, Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: the Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States* (Cambridge, MA, 1992); Molly Ladd-Taylor, *Mother-Work: Women, Child Welfare, and the State, 1890–1930* (Urbana, 1994); and Joanne Goodwin, *Gender and the Politics of Welfare Reform: Mothers' Pensions in Chicago, 1911–1929* (Chicago, 1997).
16. See Katz, *The Undeserving Poor: From the War on Poverty to the War on Welfare*; Winifred Bell, *Aid to Dependent Children* (New York, 1965); and Gordon, *Pitied but Not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare, 1890–1935*.
17. Gordon, *Pitied but Not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare, 1890–1935*. For the early history of fraud investigations in Illinois' mother's pension program, see Joanne Goodwin, *Gender and the Politics of Welfare Reform: Mothers' Pensions in Chicago, 1911–1929* (Chicago, 1997).
18. See Mary Poole, *The Segregated Origins of Social Security: African Americans and the Welfare State* (Chapel Hill, 2006); and Linda Faye Williams, *The Constraint of Race: Legacies of White Skin Privilege in America* (University Park, PA, 2003).
19. Bell, *Aid to Dependent Children*.
20. Rickie Solinger, *Beggars and Choosers: How the Politics of Choice Shapes Adoption, Abortion, and Welfare in the United States*, 139–148. See also Piven and Cloward, *Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare*.
21. Kornbluh, "To Fulfill their 'Rightly Needs': Consumerism and the National Welfare Rights Movement" and Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors*.
22. Gwendolyn Mink, *Welfare's End* (Ithaca, NY, 1998), 49–52.

23. Mink, *Welfare's End*, 55.
24. Solinger, *Beggars and Choosers: How the Politics of Choice Shapes Adoption, Abortion, and Welfare in the United States*, 145–152.
25. Neubeck and Cazenave, *Welfare Racism*, 78–92.
26. Mink, *Welfare's End*, 52.
27. Rick Perlstein, *Before the Storm: Barry Goldwater and the Unmaking of the American Dream* (New York, 2001), 130. I would like to thank Jason Kozlowski for bringing this to my attention.
28. Neubeck and Cazenave, *Welfare Racism*, 92–109.
29. *Ibid.*, 112–114.
30. *Ibid.*, 108–109.
31. Premilla Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors*, 196–199.
32. Guy Drake, “Welfare Cadillac,” CowboyLyrics.com, <http://www.cowboylyrics.com/tabs/drake-guy/welfare-cadillac-6468.html> (accessed June 12, 2006).
33. “Nixon’s Numbers,” *Time Magazine*, 13 April 1970. I am indebted to Brandon Mills for telling me about this event.
34. Draft of Sen. Don Moore’s speech before Welfare Association, [1974?], Legislative Advisory Committee on Public Aid, Administrative Files, 616.003, Illinois State Archives, p. 2.
35. *Ibid.* See also *Annual Report: Illinois Department of Public Aid*, 1974. Published by the Office of Public Information, Springfield IL, 19.
36. “Welfare Cheats Find ‘Easy Street’ Has a Dead End,” *Chicago Tribune*, 26 March 1978, sec. 1, p. 25.
37. John Gardiner and Theodore Lyman, *The Fraud Control Game* (Bloomington, 1984), 147.
38. Jane Fritch, “Welfare Queen Becomes Case Study,” *Chicago Tribune*, 29 October 1978, p. 2.
39. George Bliss, “Cops Find Deceit-But No One Cares,” *Chicago Tribune*, 20 September 1974, p. 3.
40. George Bliss, “Panel Probes Welfare Cheating Charges,” *Chicago Tribune*, 14 November 1974, p. 14.
41. David Zucchino, *Myth of the Welfare Queen* (New York, 1997), 65.
42. William Griffin, “Policy Chief’s Estate an 11-year Game,” *Chicago Tribune*, 20 February 1975, p. 1; George Bliss and William Griffin, “Probe Aid Queen Tie to Kidnapping,” *Chicago Tribune*, 21 March 1975, p. 3; William Griffin, “‘Welfare Queen’ Is Under New Probe,” *Chicago Tribune* 10 April 1975, sec. A, p. 8; William Griffin, “Welfare Queen’s

Role-Was It Voodoo Spell?," *Chicago Tribune*, 29 July 1975, p. 6; William Griffin, "Medical 'Practice' just that for Welfare Queen," *Chicago Tribune*, 14 July 1975, p. 3; and George Bliss, "'Welfare Queen' charged with stealing furnishings," *Chicago Tribune*, 26 February 1976, sec. A, p. 6.

43. "'Welfare Queen' Becomes Issue in Reagan Campaign," *New York Times*, 15 February 1976, p. 51.

44. For writings about the implications of the welfare queen in later periods, see the important discussions in Roberts, *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty*; Lubiano, "Black Ladies, Welfare Queens, and State Minstrels: Ideological War by Narrative Means"; and Ange-Marie Hancock, *Politics of Disgust: The Public Identity of the "Welfare Queen"* (New York, 2004).

45. Report to the Legislative Advisory Committee by James Trainor, Director of the Department of Public Aid, 17 March 1976, Legislative Advisory Committee, Administrative Files, 616.002, Illinois State Archives, 8.

46. *Annual Report: Illinois Department of Public Aid, 1974*. Published by the Office of Public Information, Springfield IL, 32. See, also, graphs on pages 10 and 11.

47. Neal Caauwe, Fred Pennix, Gerald Kush, and Jack Sherwin, Progress report by investigative unit of the Legislative Advisory Committee, 14 and 19 November 1974, Legislative Advisory Committee, Administrative Files, 616.003, Illinois State Archives, 6.

48. Gardiner and Lyman, *The Fraud Control Game*, 155.

49. Neal Caauwe, Fred Pennix, Gerald Kush, and Jack Sherwin, Progress report by investigative unit of the Legislative Advisory Committee, 1.

50. In numerous letters, investigators and other committee staff demanded progress reports on leads from LAC. The committee also called representatives from the State's Attorney's office before the committee to testify as to why they were not more effective at convicting welfare cheaters. See, for example, Testimony of Mr. Gross before the Legislative Advisory Committee on Public Aid, 22 March 1977, Legislative Advisory Committee, Committee Meeting Minutes, 616.001, Illinois State Archives, 89–123.

51. Draft of Sen. Don Moore's speech before Welfare Association, 2.

52. Gardiner and Lyman, *The Fraud Control Game*, 163.

53. *Ibid.*, 161, 188.

54. Report to the Legislative Advisory Committee by James Trainor, Director of the Department of Public Aid, 17 March 1976, Legislative Advisory Committee, Meeting Minutes Summaries, 616.002, Illinois State Archives, 7.

55. Sociologist Harry Murphy called this practice "deniable degradation." Harry Murphy, "Deniable Degradation: the Finger Imaging of Welfare Recipients," *Sociological Forum* 15 no. 1 (2000): 39–63.

56. "Way to Curb Aid Abuse; Judge Backs Welfare Fingerprinting," *Chicago Tribune*, 24 April 1979, p. 3 and Robert Carleson, Commissioner of Welfare, Department of Health, Education and Welfare to Don Moore, Chairman of Legislative Advisory Committee, 29

October 1974, Legislative Advisory Committee, Meeting Minutes Summaries, 616.002, Illinois State Archives.

57. Jay Branegan, "State Calls Courts 'Soft' of Aid Fraud," *Chicago Tribune*, 19 February 1978, p. 44.

58. Jane Fritch, "Welfare Queen Becomes Case Study," p. 2.

59. *Disposition of Public Assistance Cases Involving Questions of Fraud*, (U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, National Center for Social Statistics, 1972, 1973, 1974, 1975, 1976, and 1979). These numbers reflect those cases suspected of deliberate and, therefore, possibly criminal fraud. They do not reflect the number of people whose grants were adjusted and cancelled through other routine aspects of the anti-fraud initiatives, such as the redetermination and data matching programs discussed above. It is extremely difficult to access the number of recipients directly materially affected by the campaigns. For example, many people probably removed themselves from the rolls to avoid scrutiny or sanction after hearing about the new policies. Those cases would obviously not be reflected in the official numbers.

60. Transcripts of Illinois House Debates, 11 November 1977, 10.

61. "Leaders Meet on Poor," *Chicago Defender*, 26 November 1977, p. 3.

62. Press release by Senator Richard Newhouse, February 21, 1978, Legislative Advisory Committee, Administrative Files, 616.003, Illinois State Archives.

63. Ibid.

64. "Jesse Rips State Welfare Plan," *Chicago Tribune*, 31 May 1974, p. 8.

65. David Garino, "Chasing the Cheats; Drive Against Fraud in Obtaining Welfare Is Gaining Momentum," *Wall Street Journal*, 18 November 1976, p. 1.

66. Neal Caauwe, Fred Pennix, Gerald Kush, and Jack Sherwin, Progress report by investigative unit of the Legislative Advisory Committee, 2.

67. Joel Edelman, Executive Director of LAC, to Clayton Kirkpatrick, Editor of the *Chicago Tribune*, 17 February 1976, Legislative Advisory Committee, Administrative Files, 616.003, Illinois State Archives.

68. See for example Jay Branegan, "State Calls Courts Soft on Fraud," *Chicago Tribune*, 19 February 1978, p. 44.

69. Ted Chan, "Welfare: What Can a Small Staff Accomplish?," *Markham Star Tribune*, 1 April, 1976, p. 1.

70. See, for example, Jay Branegan, "Jury Indicts 53 for \$508,000 in Welfare Fraud," *Chicago Tribune*, 20 July 1978, p. 2; Jane Fritsch, "31 More Indicted in Welfare Fraud Probe; Total Now 342," *Chicago Tribune*, 1 May 1979, p. 3; and Jane Fritsch, "75 Indicted in Welfare Fraud, Netting More than \$1 million," *Chicago Tribune*, 29 June 1979, p. D1.

71. Letter to the Editor by Al Jaburck, "Fraud sentences," *Chicago Tribune*, 5 March 1978, sec. 2, p. 4.

72. Letter to the Editor, *Chicago Tribune*, 18 May 1978, sec. 3, p. 2.
73. Rep. Thomas Miller to Don Moore, 10 February 1976, Legislative Advisory Committee, Correspondence Files, 616.004, Illinois State Archives. The poll was taken in December, 1975–January 1976 in Illinois' 10th legislative district (which included South Holland, Dolton, Harvey, Lansing, Riverdale and Thornton.)
74. Remarks by Samuel Skinner, *Secretary's National Convention on Fraud, Abuse, and Error: Conference Proceedings* (U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, 1978), 21.
75. "Welfare Fraud 'Hotline' Pays Off for Taxpayer," *Chicago Tribune*, 1 January 1978, sec. 3, p. 6.
76. Gardiner and Lyman, *The Fraud Control Game*, 155.
77. *Ibid.*, 155.
78. Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Post-War America* (New York, 2003), 368–388.
79. Kornbluh, "To Fulfill their 'Rightly Needs': Consumerism and the National Welfare Rights Movement."
80. *Ibid.*, 79.
81. Anonymous letter to Senator John Carroll, [1970?], Legislative Advisory Committee on Public Aid, Administrative Files, 616.003, Illinois State Archives.
82. Memo regarding Geraldine, 13 October 1971, Legislative Advisory Committee, Administrative Files, 616.003, Illinois State Archives. I have removed the last names of those charged with welfare fraud who did not choose to be included in these public records. I have retained the names of people who spoke in public forums, such as to the media or at legislative hearings.
83. Anonymous letter to Senator John Carroll, [1970?], Legislative Advisory Committee, Administrative Files, 616.003, Illinois State Archives.
84. "1,000 Cheats a Month," *Chicago Defender*, 17 December 1977, p. 1.
85. John Knoll to Don Moore, 24 June 1974, Legislative Advisory Committee, Administrative Files, 616.003, Illinois State Archives.
86. Anonymous letter addressed to "Gentlemen," July 1974, Legislative Advisory Committee, Administrative Files, 616.003, Illinois State Archives.
87. *Ibid.*
88. *Ibid.*
89. For a discussion of how African American ownership of luxury goods, especially the Cadillac, challenged white cultural norms, see George Lipsitz, "'Swing Low, Sweet Cadillac': Antiracism and White Identity," *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness* (Philadelphia, 1998), 158–183.

90. Daniel Egler, "Welfare Fraud 'Hotline' Pays Off for Taxpayers," *Chicago Tribune*, 2 January 1978, p. 136.
91. Welfare fraud report on Beverly, [Feb–March, 1975?], Legislative Advisory Committee, Administrative Files, 616.003, Illinois State Archives.
92. *People of the State of Illinois vs. Bobbie Baugh*, 80–1456, (Appellate Court of Illinois 1st District, 4th Division, 28 May 1981). Although most of the events regarding this case occurred around 1977, it did not reach the appellate level until 1981.
93. Nasaden argues that welfare activists advocated for credit cards in order to replace these outward signs of poverty. Premilla Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors*, 114.
94. See Kathryn Edin, "There's a Lot of Month Left at the End of the Money: How Welfare Recipients in Chicago Make Ends Meet" (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 1989).
95. Neubeck and Cazenave, *Welfare Racism*, 100.
96. Lee Strobel, "Coalition of 40 Groups Backs 10 Percent Aid Payment Hikes," *Chicago Tribune* 11 June 1974, p. 3.
97. For one example, see Mae Gentry, "Man Indicted for Fraud Blames Welfare System," *Chicago Defender*, 14 October 1978.
98. Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Post-War America*, 389.
99. William Juneau, "Aid Cheat ordered to pay back \$13,024," *Chicago Tribune* 28 June 1974, p. 1.
100. Welfare fraud report on Anna, 10 March 1977, Legislative Advisory Committee, Administrative Files, 616.003, Illinois State Archives.
101. Welfare fraud report on Luretha, 17 April 1975, Legislative Advisory Committee, Administrative Files, 616.003, Illinois State Archives.
102. Welfare fraud report on Lancie, 10 March 1977, Legislative Advisory Committee, Administrative Files, 616.003, Illinois State Archives.
103. Edin, "There's a Lot of Month Left at the End of the Money: How Welfare Recipients in Chicago Make Ends Meet," 253. Edin suggests that the percentage might have been even higher since many respondents were probably not convinced of the survey's confidentiality.
104. Derrick Blakley, "Red Tape of Public Aid Job Pushes Her Off Payroll, Onto Welfare Rolls," *Chicago Tribune* 25 June 1974, sec. 4A, p. 1.
105. "Welfare Cheats Find 'Easy Street' Had Dead End," *Chicago Tribune*, sec. 1, p. 25.
106. Ibid.
107. Welfare fraud report on Beverly, [Feb–March, 1975?], Legislative Advisory Committee, Administrative Files, 616.003, Illinois State Archives.

108. Mae Gentry, "Man Indicted for Fraud Blames Welfare System," *Chicago Defender*, 14 October 1978.

109. Ibid.

110. Testimony of Mary Cowherd before Sub-Committee on Emergency Assistance on LAC, 29 November 1976, Legislative Advisory Committee, Administrative Files, 616.003, Illinois State Archives, 66.

111. Verbatim testimony of Kathi Gunlogson, 2 February 1979, Commission to Rewrite the Public Aid Code, Meeting Minutes and Transcripts, 557.003, Illinois State Archives, 122.

112. Testimony of Frank Smith before Sub-Committee on Emergency Assistance, 29 November 1976, Legislative Advisory Committee, Administrative Files, 616.003, Illinois State Archives, 26–28.

113. Gentry, "Man Indicted for Fraud Blames Welfare System."

114. For example, in 1974, even after a 10% cost of living increase, the cash grant totaled \$3,804 a year for a family of four. The poverty threshold, according to the federal government, was \$5,038. It should also be noted that the federal poverty thresholds are frequently critiqued for underestimating the actual costs of living, especially in metropolitan areas. *Annual Report: Illinois Department of Public Aid, 1974*. Published by the Office of Public Information, Springfield IL, 27; and "Historical Poverty Tables-Poverty by Definition of Income," U.S. Census Bureau, <http://www.census.gov/hhes/poverty/histpov/rdp01a.html> (accessed September 15, 2006).