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Looking Back and Looking Ahead:  
Policy Visions from the New Deal and  
Great Society

Proceedings of a conference held April 10-11, 2007 and  
convened by the Center for Social Policy

Held at the University of Massachusetts Boston Campus Center  
and the John F. Kennedy Library

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# Looking Back and Looking Ahead: Policy Visions from the New Deal and Great Society

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## ***Introduction***

On April 10 and 11, 2007, the Center for Social Policy convened a conference exploring policy visions from the New Deal and Great Society and their implications for today's policy thinking. Titled, "Looking Back and Looking Ahead", this conference took place at the University of Massachusetts Boston Campus Center and the John F. Kennedy Library.

The conference was designed as an opportunity for speakers and participants to reflect on the lessons learned from these two watershed eras of policy innovation and their implications for looking forward. Policy actors and experts participated in three panel discussions on the historical context of the two eras, socio-economic issues and policy of the times, and arguments for compensatory education policy. Each of the three panels was moderated by a facilitator. Following is a summary of the proceedings: the talks by the policy actors and experts; their responses and comments to the question and answer sessions, and the learning conversations among conference participants that took place in the breakout sessions following featured panel discussions.

Presenters and participants were drawn from the fields of social policy, education policy, and history. They included former policy actors, representatives of civil society organizations (advocacy, public information, associations of public officials) and philanthropy, academics, and expert consultants.

The agenda, list of participants, list of readings, speaker biographies, and videos of introductions, speeches, panel presentations, and concluding remarks are available on the conference website at: <http://www.mccormack.umb.edu/csp/lookingback&lookingahead/index.php>

## ***Background and goals***

This conference project came from a desire for renewed inspiration in policy work and from conversations with the *Pathways out of Poverty* program officers at the C. S. Mott Foundation. Those involved in social policy advocacy and philanthropy find it increasingly difficult to argue that helping people who experience poverty and are economically vulnerable is good for society as a whole, and not only for those helped. In other words, it is difficult to convey that we, as a society, may choose to assist others and to redistribute resources because we wish to shape the nature of the society and its economy in ways that reflect a commitment to social justice. It has become challenging to hold up this simple and well known vision in the public eye and in policy debates.

This conference project aimed to learn from earlier policy eras during which advocates and policy makers articulated a broad vision for society and a clear role for government, as well as for social approaches rather than purely individual solutions. Policy actors of the New Deal and Great Society moved toward systemic change because it was needed, and social justice had to be delivered. Times were difficult. Policy actors came to the realization that a broad societal project was necessary. This project and conference aimed to learn from these two policy eras how to better make visible the interdependence of social and economic life.

In both eras, policy actors came to the realization of the need for change because of objective conditions—hunger, economic upheaval and displacement—but also because of the pressure from social forces and social movements. For the New Deal, it was labor and social unrest as well as the farm crisis. For the Great Society, it was the Freedom Rides and the subsequent movement for civil rights but also the urban riots and the “rediscovery” of multiple forms of poverty.

The primary goal for the conference was pragmatic; it was simply for participants to draw from the past what they need in order to better move forward with their respective policy agendas in social policy and education policy—what we termed “looking back while looking ahead.” It was to use an exploration of the past in order to understand how policy arguments were constructed to convey a broad vision for society, one that recognizes the interdependence of American life and acknowledges social justice as an explicit goal.

Participants and presenters were asked to engage in this exploration with their eyes open. Policy efforts in both eras, particularly those of the early New Deal, reflected tensions and politics of their time. De facto, and sometimes by design, racial-ethnic groups—at the time primarily African-Americans, Chicanos, and Asian-Americans— were excluded from the reach of key policies and often invisible in policy debates. Probably the best known case was the exclusion from Social Security old age pension of agricultural and domestic workers, a policy design which *de facto* excluded the overwhelming majority of African-Americans and many Chicanos from coverage and left a broad swath of the Southern population uncovered.

Each of the two policy eras had a distinctive approach. The New Deal era was unique in that it explicitly addressed multiple facets of economic life, regulating the capital markets, addressing the labor exchange in the workplace, and making the redistribution of income an explicit goal. The Great Society policies were motivated by calls to deliver on the un-fulfilled promise of universality of the New Deal apparatus, including minorities in the policies and programs initiated then. The era’s hallmarks are equal access policies.

We noted that the current social and economic context is different in meaningful ways from those of these two early eras. Most notable are the high level of immigration the country has experienced in the past 15 years and the transnational organization of production and consumption. For all participants, the challenge lay in moving from insights from early eras to the current context. All were asked during the two-days to take what was learned and refashion arguments they make in their respective work context. They were asked: how might you cast the vision you wish to convey in your policy arena?

In essence, participants were asked to focus on the goals and policy legacies of those eras, what has become “part of the woodwork”, while acknowledging their limitations, the most salient of which entailed racial and social exclusions. This document summarizes presentations as well as fruitful debates and small group discussions.

## ***Acknowledgements***

This project benefited from the insights and work of many individuals. We are very grateful to all of them. At the C. S. Mott Foundation, An-Me Chung and Neal Hegarty of the *Pathways Out of Poverty* program provided suggestions and feedback throughout the planning process. The generous support of the Foundation made possible this project and conference.

Of course, we thank the speakers and panelists whose thoughts and enthusiasm informed, challenged, and encouraged the audience to think broadly and deeply. And we thank all participants for bringing their questions and concerns to the meeting.

Several individuals served as advisors to the project. They are: Prof. Randy Albelda, Prof. James Green, Prof. Edmund Gordon, Dr. Milton Goldberg, Prof. Daniel Horowitz, Prof. Sanford Jacoby, Hubie Jones, Delia Pompa, and Sen. Harris Wofford. Of course, responsibility for any shortcoming is all ours.

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A team of facilitators focused conversations during small group meetings. They included: Dr. James Callahan Jr., Dr. Murray Frank, Prof. James Jennings, Rudolph Kass, Bill Nigreen, Prof. Maureen Scully, Prof. Paul Watanabe, and Martella Wilson-Taylor.

Several individuals took the notes that form the record of group discussions. They are: Rosa De La Cruz, Coleen Goodrich, Dr. Erika Kates, John McGah, Dr. Tatjana Meschede, Patricia Peterson, Jack Reynolds, Julia Tripp, and Elaine Werby.

## **Keynote speech – Taylor Branch, Author, “Civil rights and the Great Society”**

Taylor Branch begins with describing the times around the New Deal and, later, the Civil Rights movement and Great Society as times when the world was “fundamentally out of whack”. The models that emerged from those eras to go about “refining, pursuing, protecting, and advancing” American democracy at home and in the world are not those that are followed today. Nowadays, the world is “out of whack” again but the country’s policy is to follow a “Vietnam model” (spreading democracy through military action). People in the Civil Rights movement were “geniuses of the street and of the mind” who aimed to change the country’s political outlook and achieve “miracles”. They worked through a mass movement of people to whom the word “policy” was a foreign word; it was not part of the movement’s natural vocabulary. Nowadays, as it was then, to advance democracy and “rectify the world out of whack,” a key challenge is to find a way to connect the world of social movements with the world of policy analysis, in order to make both healthier and stronger. That melding did take place during the New Deal and Great Society eras.

Branch offers personal reflections upon the “radioactive” race divisions in the 1940’s South and the riveting as well as transformative impact on his childhood and youth of the Civil Rights marches, voter registration drives, and nonviolent direct action means of the movement. Branch wrote a story-telling history of civil rights activists and actions to resist what he sees as myth making in public discourse about the movement. People from the movement struggled with the meaning of equal citizenship and “equal souls,” and how the two concepts are related. In so doing their struggle and redefinitions of these two concepts fundamentally changed the South and national politics, drastically altering opportunities for all in society, not only Southern blacks. “Miracles came out of that era” for women, for immigrants (Immigration reform in 1965), and other people in subordinate social positions.

Historical story telling is a key means to avoid myth making. “I believe that stories that are human enough to resist mythology are necessary here because, in our history in the United States, we have a very sad tale of how myths, and how people need to believe what they want to believe, can subvert even the most powerful forms of history. And I think that’s related to the reason why the New Deal and the Great Society are not even today great upstanding models of public policy on everyone’s lips.” The movement took American democratic principles seriously, gave them life in the movement, and these same principles have been espoused in other parts of the world, a reminder to the US of the concrete life of its founding values.

What got lost in mythology about America’s founding, the New Deal, and the Civil Rights and Great Society eras are, among others, the following notions: the key role of government in affirming and making real the founding democratic principles of the country; the notion of public service; and the key responsibility of movements to compel the government to act on these principles. Pundits and others who interpreted the public legacy of the social movements of the Great Depression and the Civil Rights movement folded them in with the multifaceted social protest at the time of the Vietnam War. In so doing, they debased/denigrated the know-how of nonviolent direct action, the demands and expectations that these movements placed on the nation to uphold the true meaning of democracy, and minimized their tremendous legacy in everyone’s life.

“Nobody is more disciplined than a freedom rider and more disciplined in classical, democratic archetypes that James Madison said are ‘new in the world.’ That people can govern themselves, that they can be self governing, they can discipline themselves individually and collectively, and they can do it while cultivating a sense of public trust. The Freedom Rider says, ‘you can beat me but I’m going to establish a new relationship coming out of that that will make both you and me better off because I refuse to demonize you.’ Tremendous discipline, tremendous sense of public trust, and a tremendous tragedy that we’ve allowed that era to be denigrated by mythology... I don’t blame the people who did it. Most of the people who continued to be the pundits and the

interpreters of the era of the 1960's were confused by Vietnam; they were outside the Civil Rights movement... It took place in another world, and yet they had to be the experts and the interpreters of what had happened. So they, like the interpreters of the civil war and reconstruction, created all these myths that made them feel comfortable."

Branch reminds us of how social movements acted on democratic principles and laid claim to a constructive role for government.

"The people in the New Deal and the people in the Civil Rights era were modern "Founders". Just like the Founders, they were confronting systems of hierarchy, they were confronting vertical politics, they were confronting subjugation, and they were figuring out ways to transform it to horizontal politics of self-government that bind us together and create enormous strength out of that."

Branch closes with a call to revive these understandings and come to grips with the full meaning of the legacies of social movements —rather than the myths about them— in order to move forward.

"And they (civil rights actors) proved to have this power that went all around the world, and we have to revive it. I think that there is an enormous range of intellectual questions that need to be raised, of political questions that need to be raised, but [also] a historical urgency not to let this disjuncture between the miracles that were set in motion in those eras, that so many of you were leaders in, be lost or be denigrated. Not because of what it's going to do for history, but what it's going to do for our future. In my view, these eras, the New Deal era, the Civil Rights era, are our future if we are going to recover the capacity to adapt, to define and defend our way of life in the world. That's the only story America has. If we don't [do it], we'll lose it. We'll lose our distinctiveness and we've got a lot of work to do to regain the momentum."

In closing Branch reminds the audience that the Civil Rights movement actors "had this indescribable courage to lift the rest of us toward the true meaning of our own values."

*The full text of Mr. Branch's remarks and his biography can be found at:  
<http://www.mccormack.umb.edu/csp/lookingback&lookingahead/index.php>*

## Q&A

In answer to a question about what movement might "take on" privilege on behalf of those who "need a hand": The labor movement can still be a good model because it is based in social class, is job based, and deals with economics. Issues like dysfunctional schooling or the environment have the power to mobilize people. It is unclear yet from where the issue will come around which multiple constituencies can coalesce. Branch identifies one group of actors as key.

"... I would like to see the people ... (in) that proliferation of non-governmental organizations, public interest groups, be recognized for what they are, which is people who are in politics. I think one of the side effects of the denigration of public service is that those people to some degree have pretended that they weren't doing something that 30 or 40 years ago would be political organizing, political agitation. They are part of the political process, and I think that it's really good, and they need to raise up the notion of citizen and public service again."

Thankfully, he observes, the distrust of government and the politics of denigrating any government role might have run their course.

In response to a comment suggesting to revive the "other side" of civil disobedience and non-violent direct action—which is constructive service and social invention—a direction which M. L.

King also valued, Branch agreed. The constructive side of protest also is connected to the constructive side of citizenship. He reports a movement leader, Diane Nash, said ‘if you really believe. ...you have to design constructive ways to help people grow.’ The Civil Rights movement had that in common with Gandhi.

## **Panel 1: Historical Context – The New Deal and the Great Society**

*The videos of these panel presentations and biographies of speakers can be found at: <http://www.mccormack.umb.edu/csp/lookingback&lookingahead/index.php>*

Professor James Green, the moderator, remarked that historians would like to be in dialogue with the world of public policy and public politics. He offered introductory thoughts stemming from his personal and professional experience with the ideas and politics of the Depression, the New Deal and the Great Society. “...I cast my first presidential vote for Lyndon B. Johnson in 1964 believing that the national government would create a second New Deal... I was an intern in the U.S. Senate for Senator Paul Douglas of Illinois who was a shaper of Great Society legislation. ... I worked on ...the Immigration Reform Act Of 1965 ... I think it’s one of the most forgotten and important pieces of legislation in the 60’s and a real legacy of the Civil Rights movement.” Green’s study of the politics of upheaval and the study of social movements have led him to conclude that democratic struggles and popular forces have exerted extraordinary influence on the state, particularly during the Great Depression. The questions put to the panelists by the conference organizer are: What lessons can we take from these two periods in our past about how the terms of public policy debate shifted so dramatically? So dramatically that ending poverty, and achieving greater social and racial equality, became national policy objectives.

### **Meg Jacobs, History, MIT, “What was new about the New Deal?”**

Professor Jacobs started off by reading a letter from a woman to Eleanor Roosevelt written in January, 1935. This woman is pregnant. She has other small children at home, one of whom is fairly sick. And she has a husband who cannot get regular employment. And she writes to Mrs. Roosevelt:

*“Please Mrs. Roosevelt I do not want charity, only a chance from someone who will trust me until we can get enough money to repay the amount spent for things I need. As proof that I am really sincere I am sending you two of my dearest possession to keep as security. A ring my husband gave me before we were married and a ring my mother used to wear.”*

(The writer goes on to explain her life circumstances and says): *“Somehow we must manage but without charity.”* She’s asking for the layette for the baby she’s expecting.

*“Here’s is a list of what I need but I will need it very soon. If you would get these for me I would rather no one knew about it. I promise to repay the cost of the layette as soon as possible. We will all be very grateful to you and I will be more than happy.”*

Jacobs is struck by the “act of faith” of sending one’s valuable possessions to Washington. This letter illustrates three of the key notions that are essentially new in American public life with the New Deal. The first is the notion of economic redistribution—not simply charity but a broad redistribution from the haves to the have-nots. The second is the sense of political mobilization, a reaching out by the citizenry to government, a broader awakening that was motivated by the New Deal. The third new notion was a new sense of the legitimacy of government, a new moral and ethical sensibility that government had a fundamental responsibility to its citizenry.



First, regarding economic re-distribution, the notion was that income inequality of the kind experienced in the Gilded age and with the Depression was “not just irresponsible or immoral but fundamentally a bad and harmful economic idea and fundamentally corrosive to society at large.” What was new was the notion that laborers were not only producers but also consumers on whom the market depended. The New Deal policies reflected the realization that “a market existed as long as people could afford to buy the goods.” Under-consumption was newly accepted as an explanation for economic crises and gained broader acceptance in the management press as well as among labor unions. Jacobs argues that the Wagner Act which established ground rules for union representation and collective bargaining was not only about worker rights but also reflected this new belief in the need to ensure worker purchasing power and ensure the country against deep inequality and under-consumption crises. She quotes the Wagner Act: “When employees are denied the freedom to act in concert even when they desire to do so they cannot participate in our national endeavor to coordinate production and purchasing power. The consequences are already visible in the widening gap between wages and profits. If these consequences are allowed to produce their full harvest, the whole country will suffer from a new economic decline.” The New Deal defines the government role as having a fundamental say about the distribution of national income between wages and profits. The same language of purchasing power is written into the Social Security Act. Income distribution was a legitimate component of public policy. Jacobs observes that economists, politicians, businessmen and labor leaders had a broader political sensibility to the importance of redistribution, beyond talking about the adequacy of purchasing power. They were animated by the notion that everyone had a fundamental right to a basic standard of living.

Second, the level of political mobilization was new and unprecedented. Letters poured into Washington with expectations of their government and came from all segments of society: “From black farmers, to middle class people who had never experienced unemployment before, to immigrant laborers, to desperate housewives.” These reflected a new connection to government. This radical transformation, this mobilization from below was “stoked from on high,” by FDR’s communications to the citizenry. Within a week of FDR’s first inauguration, 450,000 letters poured in to the White House and then the rate remained 5,000 to 8,000 per week thereafter. Jacobs argues that this kind and level of political mobilization— from writing letters to new expectations of government provision to labor activism to voting — was new and a result of the New Deal. Roosevelt’s public statements in support of the right to organize had great impact. The New Deal also was a moment of major political realignment with the forming of the New Deal Democratic Party, made up of liberals, intellectuals, second generation immigrants which would remain a backbone of democratic support and African Americans who had traditionally been in the Party of Lincoln (by 1936, 70% of African Americans voted for FDR).

Third, the New Deal ushered in a new notion of government, a sense that government had a stake and a responsibility to maintain and guarantee the well-being of its citizens and this was embodied in the notion of social security. Not just the Social Security Act, but the phrase social security, which gained broader acceptance. In a 1934 message to Congress, Roosevelt explained that the world of close knit communities that romanticizes the images of self-reliant and hardy Americans on the frontier no longer existed. He explained “the complexities of great communities and of organized industry make less real these simple means of security. Therefore, we are compelled to employ the active interest of the nation as a whole through government in order to encourage a greater security for each individual who composes it.” In so doing, he referred to, and tapped into, the legacies of the founders of the nation and of major politicians. To legitimate what he knew were dramatic claims, FDR invoked a declaration of the most famous Republican president, Abraham Lincoln when Lincoln said “The legitimate object of government is to do for a community of people whatever they need to have done but cannot do at all, or cannot do so well for themselves in their separate individual capacities.” Notwithstanding these appeals to historical antecedents, Jacobs argues, the New Deal’s vision represented a bold departure from the past.

This notion of security, of government being given the task to provide security, was expressed by Roosevelt in what he called the Economic Bill of Rights proclaimed in his State of the Union message in 1944. At that time, FDR was imagining what politics and what the New Deal should look like moving forward when World War II comes to an end. In the speech, he lays out a second Bill of Rights, a Bill of Economic Rights which includes “the right to a useful job, the right to earn enough to provide adequate food and clothing, the right of every farmer to raise and sell his products, the right of every businessman to trade freely, the right of every family to a decent home, the right to adequate medical care and the opportunity to achieve and enjoy good health, the right to adequate protection from the economic fears of old age, sickness, accident and unemployment and the right to a good education.” And then he says “All these rights spell security.” The conclusion to this speech captures a certain kind of hopefulness about the role government could play in American life and one that still resonates, or ought to resonate today. He says “After this war is won we must be prepared to move forward in the implementation of these rights to new goals of human happiness and well-being. American’s own rightful place in the world depends on a large part upon how fully these and similar rights have been carried into practice for our citizens. For, unless there is security here at home, there cannot be lasting peace in the world.”

## Bruce Schulman, History, Boston University, "Bold, persistent, experimentation: The state and social policy in the New Deal and Great Society."

Professor Schulman began by sketching some of the major features and achievements of the New Deal, then discussed the ways that the Great Society at once extended and transformed New Deal conceptions of the role of government, and its relations with the American people, and finally considered the lessons and legacies for today of these great experiments in social provision.

First, the New Deal emerges out of the unprecedented crisis of the Great Depression. “That catastrophe laid low the citizens of this favored land like nothing before or since. Shrouding them in misery, driving them into homelessness, subjecting them to freezing cold, loss and hunger seemingly without end, without hope. The Depression thoroughly transformed a generation of Americans touching every aspect of their lives from the way they re-used tea bags, never throwing anything out, to the way they stoically bore up under the challenges and cruelties of this 20<sup>th</sup> century.” Some statistics: “The bank failure rate and business failure rate reached an all time high. Between 1929 and 1933 nearly one out of every seven businesses failed. .. The value of farm property fell by almost half. Workers too faced unbearably desperate straits. .. one American in four lost their jobs and those who clung to employment saw their paychecks shrink. Wages dropped by more than 50%. Incomes plummeted. At one point 28% of the US population had an income of zero.” Importantly “Chaos and despair convinced many Americans that Capitalism even Democracy had failed and inspired numerous radical alternatives from Conservative Agrarians who sought to revive the pre-industrial past to Communists and Socialists.”

Roosevelt’s first term began in the darkest days of the Depression. While cautioning that the New Deal is a reform episode that defies easy summary, Schulman identifies four key features of the New Deal. First and foremost was Roosevelt’s commitment to “bold, persistent experimentation.” The New Deal had an essentially improvisational character. New Dealers really made pragmatic accommodation to whatever needed to be done into their governing philosophy. Proudly accepting the label of ‘flip-flopper’, FDR explained in his words “It is common sense to take a method and try it. If it fails, admit it frankly and try another.” And in the course of all these experiments the New Deal attempted and accomplished many things, for instance: rural electrification, mortgage insurance, low-interest home loans, work-relief programs, and

infrastructure. The New Deal also insured bank deposits and regulated the securities industry, established a minimum wage in the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, recognized labor unions, and provided pensions for the elderly as well as jobs for the unemployed. New Deal federal agencies became by far and away the nation's largest employer.

The second defining feature, and the unifying principle, of the New Deal was a commitment to security. FDR meant security for the vulnerable but also for workers, for employers, for consumers, farmers, homeowners, and bankers —“job security, life-cycle security, financial security, market security, however it might be defined.” Social security was not only a policy, it was the central thrust of all the New Deal attempted, offering what Roosevelt called ‘protections from the hazards and vicissitudes of life.’

Third characteristic, in offering these protections the New Deal profoundly altered the relations between ordinary Americans and their government. “Depression-era Americans wanted the government to protect them just as they had previously asked their more conscientious employers, their extended families, and their ethnic communities to do. Many American developed this almost personal relationship with FDR. In 1932 people had mostly voted against Herbert Hoover. By 1936 they voted for Roosevelt because in the words of some of those other letters that Meg was referring ‘he gave me a job’ or ‘he saved my home’.” Moreover, letters to Washington indicate a strong sense of entitlement about government services that would have been unthinkable before the New Deal. A woman’s letter of complaint is emblematic because, only a few years earlier, the writer’s expectation that the Federal Government provide relief, a mortgage, a job for her son, and be fair and efficient about it all, would have been all but unthinkable. “This sense of entitlement, that Americans had legitimate rights, that all citizens could expect certain good from their government lay at the heart of the New Deal. It was exactly what FDR meant in 1941 when he sketched out what he called the Four Freedoms—the liberties that he proclaimed to be the basic birthrights of all man-kind.” These were: freedom of speech, freedom of religion to which were added freedom from fear and freedom from want.

Fourthly, the New Deal was about inclusion. “We are going to make a country,” FDR declared, “in which no one is left out.” Among the New Deal’s greatest achievements was its incorporation of the immigrant communities that had remained on the margin of American society for generations. To millions of rural Americans the New Deal offered the modern comforts of electricity, schools, paved roads. To the elderly and unemployed it extended the promise of dignity and security. A generation later, Johnson would lead the nation through an even more productive and dramatic transformation in the relationships between state and society. Now Johnson envisioned his program as both the culmination of the old liberal agenda that had remained unfulfilled. Things like federal aid to education, public housing, Medicare—but also the achievement of much broader objectives; civil rights, the elimination of poverty, immigration reform. And, as he groped for a slogan to name his program, Johnson actually briefly considered it the Better Deal. What would become the Great Society emerged not during an economic downturn but in a period of widespread affluence of the post-war economic boom. It was also a time of social and political turbulence, of grass roots struggles calling for national action, like the Civil Rights movement, and of widespread disagreement about the nature of causes of poverty. So unlike during the 1930’s when economic recovery and restored growth seemed likely to raise all boats, in the 1960’s Americans debated many different diagnoses of poverty amid plenty.

So how then did the Great Society proceed? First, with improvisation; the Great Society extended the New Deal spirit of bold, persistent experimentation in previously unimagined ways. In its anti-poverty programs alone it acted on numerous, different, understandings of the poverty challenge. It prescribed a variety of remedies such as Food Stamps, the Job Corps, Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Head Start, Medicaid, and the Community Action Program. The record of legislative achievement alone was outstanding. When the 89<sup>th</sup> Congress swept into office with LBJ in the 1964 landslide and then completed its work in the autumn on 1966, it left behind a staggering list of legislation. It is simply staggering. Johnson not only secured the civil rights, health, education and welfare measures commonly associated with the Great Society but a

host of other reforms. Less noted than the War on Poverty or Medicare, many of these proved to have even broader and more durable effects, such as the Immigration Act of 1965 that eliminated the odious quota system which first became law in the 1920's.

Second, security. The Great Society went much further than the New Deal in guaranteeing the most basic kinds of security. It did so through changes in eligibility rules, vastly expanding the reach of Social Security, for example, and dramatically reducing poverty among the elderly, long the poorest part of the population. It also expanded security through new programs such as Medicare and protections for the environment which added new dimensions of the promise of security.

And, in so doing, LBJ actually departed from some of the tenets of New Deal liberalism. He never challenged the emphasis on economic growth as a bulwark against recession. However, his own experiences in central Texas, and the tutelage of his advisors about the intractability of poverty among the nation's most poor citizens convinced Johnson that, in his words, "general prosperity and growth leave untouched many of the roots of human poverty." He recognized that the popular growth-centered strategies of the early 1960's had neither recognized nor addressed the problems at the very bottom of the economic of the social ladder. Those whose voices Johnson believed would become evermore insistent, desperate, and even dangerous if his government failed them. In the 1964 speech in Ann Harbor Michigan that names the Great Society, LBJ stressed the need to, in his words, "build a society where progress is the servant of the neediest. Not one where old values and new visions are buried under un-bridled growth."

Finally, about the Great Society's attention to inclusion. While FDR had offered jobs and some political recognition to African Americans, he had done very little not even supporting anti-lynching legislation. The Great Society stressed social justice for an integration of minorities far more than the New Deal ever did, reaching across barriers of race and ethnicity, insisting on civil rights.

So what lessons finally might we draw from the experiences of the New Deal and Great Society? What can we learn from their successes and their shortcomings? First, implementation. In most cases making law was only the first step in making policy. Programs needed to be administered well. Johnson thought that if he could just plant the seeds of his Great Society it would slowly but surely grow into a vast impregnable oak. But he proved much better at planting than at watering and nurturing. Unfortunately, some of the very compromises and concessions needed to prevail on Capitol Hill hampered the programs. For example Title I of ESEA (Elementary and Secondary Education Act), the program for compensatory education was designed as an antipoverty program. In practice, in most jurisdictions, it became a general aid program, a virtual blank check. Similarly the Community Action Program ran into formidable political hurdles. By the time it was re-authorized, it was recaptured by the very local elites it was designed to circumvent.

Finally, a second lesson, is improvisation. Schulman closes with: "The experiences of the New Deal and the Great Society show us that flexibility, a zest for bold, persistent, experimentation, is very difficult to achieve but it is certainly necessary. By the end of his career as a distinguished economist, best selling author and aide to four different presidents, John Kenneth Galbraith reflected on the quality that defined the nation's greatest chief executives. What he called the pragmatic accommodation to whatever needed to be done. 'If you ever hear a politician say I'm going to adhere strictly to principle, then you should take shelter because you know that you are going to suffer.' The current crop of presidential hopefuls, and the American public, could well heed that warning and remember Roosevelt and Johnson, the distinguished flip-floppers whose flexibility made this nation strong."

## Q&A

To a question about the letter to Roosevelt, Jacobs answered that letters are all in the archives. They required the creation of a corps of secretaries to answer them.

To a question about what would have been the outcome of the New Deal in the absence of the demand push from World War II spending, Schulman concurs that it was not by itself successful, but the New Deal was not only about economic recovery. It ushered in different kinds of reform that have been long lasting, as for example with Social Security. It changed the structure of political competition. The policy successes of the New Deal defined the political agenda for a couple of generations.

Jacobs remarks there is another way to look at the question. WWII was run differently from previous wars because of the New Deal's vision and mentality. The mobilization of resources for WWII reflected a much greater role of government in managing mobilization and the economy. There was "no return to normalcy" in Roosevelt's words, after the war. For example, the war cemented the success of labor unions and the commitment to redistribution. A mass tax was implemented during the War and maintained.

Schulman further observes that post-war policies and proposals, the Economic Bill of Rights, the GI Bill, the Employment Act of 1946, reflected a fear of depression and a commitment to a sustained federal role in stimulating the economy—they were a continuation of the New Deal. Green observes the National Labor Relations Act played a significant role in the post-war long run wage-led prosperity.

What about experimentation, what lessons can be learned from the New Deal in terms of creating a sense of entitlement or claims of citizens on their government? Schulman comments on the use of innovation and persistent experimentation. The idea that, when circumstances change, you get new information, you change your mind and try something different is not in fact an absence of principle. It *is* an intellectual and a moral principle. The flexibility and willingness to try new ideas in practice and to fairly assess the results is not a sign of moral or political weakness but a strength. The difficulty is that in our political system, when you try something you tend to develop a constituency that will support continuation and develop an opposition that can define the terms of the particular debate. This is a key lesson from the New Deal to reflect upon. Meg Jacobs adds that the willingness to go along with experimentation was supported by conveying a clear vision and commitment to government as providing something basic and essential to citizens that then allows for risk taking. The New Deal was instrumental in transforming the notion of government away from Calvin Coolidge's characterization of it as "if the federal government went out of business tomorrow, no one would notice."

In response to the impact of the Vietnam War and the death of Robert Kennedy, Schulman notes that the war stalled further legislative movement and "infected" the implementation and success of programs. It is unclear whether Bob Kennedy would have been able to keep the Democratic coalition together, particularly because there was also a conservative movement aiming to exploit divisions within it.

A participant comments about how, in current policy debates, it is hard to advocate for something that you aren't sure has a track of success. Also, there is the push to say that experimentation should happen in states. What lessons can be brought to bear to bring back the notion of experimentation into national policy discussions? Jacobs notes that experimentation was risky and uncertain then. Much of the experimentation in the New Deal and Great Society challenged very established political interests. The Tennessee Valley Authority had been opposed by incredibly strong organized business interests, and yet it succeeded. Part of the lesson with the New Deal is that in a moment of crisis, you must respond. The lesson from the Great Society is

that of learning how to situate the bold, new, experiment in a way that has political traction. With the Great Society, it was arguing that the country was rich enough to afford the redistribution.

Schulman points out that, in the current environment, Great Society successor programs face opposition that has successfully argued they must have a proven record. Yet there is much experimentation going on from the right without a track record of success, with ideas that are not “well proved.” The notions of market-based solutions to social problems, and of using tax cuts for both economic stimulus and redistribution, are such examples.

In response to what is the potential of the federal government in improving the life of its citizenry, Jacobs notes that candidates in the current presidential race are far more open to arguing for a constructive role for government, particularly around health care. Schulman points out two seemingly contradictory but complementary facts. One is the fragility of the liberal consensus even at its height. The other is that, in spite of it, the achievements of the New Deal, the superstructure of public institutions and provision (Social Security, Medicare, federal funding of education) are “so central to the way we live our lives that we couldn’t imagine the United States without them.”

About the role of government in a much more open system of international economy, Jacobs notes that the military role is more central to what the federal government does, because of its extensive budgetary and political commitments. Schulman notes that, in spite of deep political, military, economic, and social involvement by the US all over the globe, this is “an era in which nationalisms and national governments are still playing the decisive role in international affairs... national governments and national states are going to continue to be the lynchpin of the economic system, much to the disappointment of some who hope for a truly integrated, one-world set of institutions.”

## **Panel 2: Socio Economic Issues**

*The videos of these panel presentations and biographies of speakers can be found at:*  
<http://www.mccormack.umb.edu/csp/lookingback&lookingahead/index.php>

Moderator Margy Waller introduces the panel goals, how to take lessons from the past to shift the terms of the policy debates in which we conduct our work today. Waller points to the recent results of a Pew Research Center survey indicating that 70% of Americans think there should be a government safety net for the poor, and a majority support going into debt to do so. Yet, other surveys indicate a majority of Americans disagree with the notion that success is mostly determined by forces outside of one’s control. In this context, how can lessons from the past shape options for policy work today?

### **James Roosevelt, Tufts Health Plan, ”Bringing the New Deal forward: Lessons from a vision of hope and security.”**

The vision that animated the New Deal and Great Society is a patriotic one. The Pew Center survey reports that the majority of Americans support going into debt to provide for the needy. One other option is to raise taxes so we do not go further in debt. Roosevelt notes “There was a time when we paid for the things that we decided to do as a society and .. it is an important concept to keep in mind.” This year marks the 72nd anniversary of the Social Security Act. “Its success is important to me not only because of my family connection...; it’s also important to me personally because of my warm feelings for the Social Security Administration from my time working there under President Clinton. Some of the many programs of the New Deal continue today, and we wouldn’t call them vibrant because we consider them second nature, insurance of a bank deposit for instance. The Social Security Act was the result of years of witnessing issues of poverty and hunger and the needs of families around the country, particularly the

overwhelming need of the poorest group, older Americans. In signing the Social Security Act, our government made a bold step forward to provide some protection to elderly Americans through a form of what's loosely referred to as old-age pensions." From Social Security to Medicare, we are looking at a 30 year trajectory completing the concept of Social Security. Neither program is static, and they can be adapted for the future. This is a critical lesson in defining and advocating an agenda for social change. Clarity of vision and purpose means that the goals of a program can be measured. "...FDR believed that social security should be simple, guaranteed, fair, earned and available to all Americans." He was adamant that Social Security was insurance to assure basic needs in retirement. It is a different "economic animal"; it is social insurance because it applies across a society. Social Security's success lies in the fact that it has always been an insurance plan, not a welfare plan or an investment plan—without the upside and downside of an investment. The call for social programs is growing again. It was the reality of statistics on the hardships lived by Americans that brought the great visions of the New Deal and Great Society eras. While the share of the poverty population is not as high as in 1950 now, it has started growing again, four consecutive years of increase. Children in particular are impacted by poverty disproportionately. Nearly 46 Million Americans have no health insurance. Social Security was successful in impacting poverty. Significant numbers of Americans began being covered in 1950 and at that point half of the over 65 population was below the poverty line; it is now 5%. The principles developed by the New Deal administration have guided changes to Social Security over time. Both Republican and Democratic administrations have amended the program in response to challenges. In 1954 it was amended to include disability insurance. In 1972 it was expanded to provide cost of living increases. Most importantly for today, in 1983 President Reagan signed amendments that dealt with the solvency of Social Security through the retirement of the baby boom generation. It can meet its obligations to retirement and disability through 2042. The smaller number that is often thrown out takes into account the Medicare financing problem that has not been solved yet.

The Great Society had its roots in the same social issues that had been faced in the 1930's and 1940's. It also had clarity of vision early on; "it was to build a great society, a place where the meaning of man's life matches the marvels of man's labor." This same connection was made during the New Deal; the people were rewarded for their earnings. Yet it also included an acknowledgement that society as a whole, expressed through government, has a role in ensuring that people's accomplishments are rewarded and that the ups and downs that are part of achieving in one's life are cushioned, particularly after retirement. Medicare, a program of the Great Society passed in 1965, was also a broad based social insurance program. Today, 42 million people are eligible for Medicare. Of course, the solvency of Medicare faces more immediate problems with less obvious solutions (unlike retirement financing which could be handled with a small tax increase through the end of the 21<sup>st</sup> century). Medicare was designed to cover medical costs as understood in 1965, the highest costs at the time being hospitalization. It was intended to be the first step in universal coverage, not the last step. Progress lagged for a long time. Now, national health care expenditures account for 16% of the Gross Domestic Product and only 30% of those are hospital costs. Roosevelt emphasizes "...the Medicare program really offers a second important lesson in visions for social change, and that is that these programs must evolve over time to meet the current state of our need while continuing to deliver on their original promise..." We can expand and strengthen social programs with incremental changes by working together, without scare tactics, and if we put aside, or at least moderate, ideological agendas. Over the past 15 years, the debates on Social Security and to some extent over Medicare have been driven by ideological agendas. Roosevelt points to the recess appointment of a Deputy Commissioner of Social Security, a position responsible for implementation and exploring solutions, by President Bush over the objections of the Senate Finance Committee as an indication that the debate will continue to be overshadowed by a political agenda.

Medicare, on the other hand, faces financing problems as of 2012 or 2013. There are some solutions under consideration to extend the benefits provided by Medicare, but there are financing issues to be considered under each of the options.

In closing, Mr. Roosevelt emphasizes that the nation can continue to offer vital programs such as Social Security and Medicare. The founding principles of Social Security and Medicare apply today. "We can find a way to make them viable and to meet the needs of the American people if we keep the principles that first inspired them in mind...It is as true today as it was in 1932 that we are a society with a responsibility for the less well off, and that we need some degree of redistribution of wealth to ensure that we can all live with some degree of protection and comfort."

## Senator Harris Wofford, "Big visions and lost opportunities"

Senator Wofford notes it is good to look at things that have worked in policy as a challenge to "finish the job." It may be valuable to look at the lost opportunities, where we have failed to go forward in a serious way. Wofford highlights parts of his personal journey to how he came to having big visions from the New Deal through the New Frontier, the Peace Corps, and the War on Poverty and the Great Society. The vision of his childhood was that "all men are created equal with the right to govern themselves by the consent of the governed." Roosevelt was the first president he remembers and loved. Though his parents did not support him, they listened to his inaugural address and fireside chats. Wofford recalls Roosevelt's confident call for action and "action now" as if the country were in a war, and to act without fear. "...It was Roosevelt who gave me the sense that politics was fun, that self government was an even greater American game for me then and now than baseball, basketball or football." Wofford recalls Roosevelt's second inaugural address was dedicated to the fulfillment of a vision "to speed the time when there would be for all the people that security and peace essential to the pursuit of happiness." Roosevelt's speeches made him aware of poverty. As a 12 year old, he took a trip around the world on the eve of World War II, traveled through fascist Italy, Gandhi's India, in Japanese's occupied Shanghai. He came home with the knowledge that "two-thirds of the world was ill-housed, ill-clad, and ill-nourished" and an ardent interventionist. What he saw as a "war aim for peace" had Roosevelt's four freedoms for goals: freedom of speech, freedom to worship, freedom from fear, and freedom from want. These were to be goals for all around the world. If the New Deal did not end the Great Depression by itself, it did address the "depression of the spirit" in America. The job creations program did address some of the unemployment. The Civilian Conservation Corps was created because Roosevelt read that there were 500,000 young men on the streets, out of work and out of school. It took two weeks for his Secretary of Labor to get the law passed in April and 300,000 were enrolled in the Civilian Conservation Corps by the end of summer working on improvements to public lands. Wofford emphasizes "...Roosevelt left us with an with an example of what an active, innovative, caring government can do, and he set the stage for the rallying of the American people to win the war. We not only cracked physical atoms ...but in that era the American people came together and showed how the atom of civic power could be cracked." Out of that war came the G.I. Bill and the Marshall Plan and the idea of a moral equivalent of war "that in peace time we could come together on the major problems of our society with the same unity and the same drive and the same resources we put to war." With the Great Society, the country saw the coming together of popular protest from the Civil Rights movement and public power to end segregation laws.

Regarding "lost opportunities", the War on Poverty was lost when the war on Vietnam drained the resources of the nation and divided the country. It started with great aims, one of which was reviving the Civilian Conservation Corps approach. Sargent Shriver imagined the volunteer service and VISTA to have 500,000 people in it. The Job Corps was to have 500,000 involved in service and training in residential programs. The Foster Grandparents program was also slated to be large. The idea was for the Peace Corps to grow 100,000 a year so that over a decade there would be "a strong constituency (of returned volunteer) for an intelligent foreign policy" in the country. "Just think what 3 million former Peace Corps volunteers could mean in our public life." America Corps started with President Clinton's idea that all young people should have the opportunity to serve for a year or more of full-time service and get enough money to help them pay off their college loans or help go to college. America Corps was cut down in Congress to a



plan of 50,000 enrollment. On his (Wofford's) watch the goal was met. Bush the second called for it to be doubled and then gave the support to get it to 75,000 which is the current goal. Wofford notes "see how far short it falls from the idea of all young Americans having that opportunity when they come of age." In closing, Wofford notes "the best of American history is that gap between the galvanizing great goals and the reality. When it gets too great and lasts too long, you may have a breakdown like the civil war. But can we make it a 'spark gap' to draw from the past the energy to close that gap? If so, we need to revive that bold, persistent experimentation and the spirit, and the watch words. We must again be more inventive if we're going to do our duty."

## Michael Piore, Economics, MIT, "Perspective on income distribution."

Professor Piore speaks about the different perspective on income distribution of today as compared to that held in the 1930's and the broader role of government in society that is suggested by looking at income distribution issues. Piore then raises the issues of race and immigration because they are particularly central to the income distribution problems that the country faces today and will likely face in the future.

The perspective on income distribution of the Great Depression and New Deal was different from that of now for two reasons. First, the Great Depression was a period in which there were enormous unemployed economic resources. There was 25% unemployment but capital was also unemployed. It looked like, from a visceral perspective, you could distribute income to the poor, to the unemployed, or anybody without taking it away from anybody else. "The problem of changing the income distribution appeared to be a problem of taking unemployed resources and putting them into use." The second reason why the income distribution seemed a tractable problem in the 1930's was that there was a general view that the Depression had been caused by under-consumption. By raising wages, by distributing income, encouraging unions, raising the minimum wage, creating job programs, you could get the country out of the Depression. This was not an argument that was made explicitly and did not have particular support from economists. It was a visceral argument; it seemed obvious to everybody. The argument made sense in a closed economy; there was virtually no foreign trade. Raising consumption in the country seemed like it would pull these unemployed resources into production.

Now, and since the 1970's, the country has lived in a different world, a world that differs along dimensions in which the New Deal argument for redistribution made sense. Therefore, we as a country need to understand income distribution in a completely different way. The country has gone from a situation where trade constituted less than 5% of GDP and now accounts for 25%. In this world, redistributing income/raising wages does not do much for the economy directly for two reasons. First, the consumption leaks too easily to other parts of the world through trade and, second, viscerally, it appears that high wages undermine the US competitive position. These points are not made by economists, but seem self evident to the "man in the street." There are two ways to address these concerns but they are not easily made in the current environment. First, "...we are not going to reduce our wages to the point where we can compete with China and Mexico. We have to compete on another basis." The US primarily competes with Europe and Japan and, there, its competitive position is primarily affected by the exchange rate, not wage levels. The US competes largely on the level of innovation and the ability to remain at the technological forefront. That has affected income distribution too because of the visceral belief that innovation is dependent on creative entrepreneurs, and "if you don't reward those people...then our innovation will lag." This argument is basically untrue—how one makes the argument in the public arena is another question. The US ability to compete through innovation has been enormously dependent on government and has grown out of basic research financed by military expenditures and government investment in medical technology. Entrepreneurs and the entrepreneurial apparatus have been important to the way innovations have been transferred to the commercial sector but have not been really key to US ability to dominate world markets in terms of innovation. Piore emphasizes "... In that particular way, government is central to the way in which the American economy operates in the world market, and our ability to compete is not

really dependent on having the very unequal income distribution that we have generated in the last 20 years.” This is an argument that does not have the appeal that the under-consumptionist argument for redistribution had in the New Deal; that argument almost did not need to be made explicitly.

Piore notes that the role of government overall has been underestimated, not just its role in spurring innovation. The Great Society set off a new direction in concerns with the income distribution, a direction which focused attention on upward economic mobility and equal employment opportunity. What drove income distribution during the New Deal, and animates today’s debates on income distribution, is a focus on people’s economic identities. Yet, since the Great Society policies, there have been enormous changes in the income distribution along other dimensions. Groups that were previously stigmatized or disadvantaged have made enormous gains in their relative position. Groups that benefited started with blacks, then gains were extended to women. We reorganized the society for the disabled. There has been continued redistribution to the aged. There have been gains for gays and lesbians as well, and there have been gains along ethnic dimensions highly dependent upon immigration. Women compare themselves to their mothers and grandmothers, the disabled to the previous generation, and those who are the product of immigration to the people left at home. “There is a sense of progress in this period in American society that is probably the equivalent in many ways although very different from the sense of progress that grew out of the New Deal.” Yet, Piore stresses, if one asks “could we even have the same sense of progress along those dimensions in the next generation?”, the answer is more problematic.

The children of today’s young women may not progress. The second generation of the recent waves of immigration will compare themselves, not to those left in the country of origin, but to other Americans. They will want the kind of status and economic security that is afforded to people much further up the income distribution. “Can American society provide that?”

Piore offers the following insights on this question. “I would submit to you... that in the Great Depression a lot of the social action, indeed most of the social action, was a reaction of a second generation of immigration ... to the positions that they inherited from their parents.” The trade union movement changed these positions; they made a set of jobs that were initially unappealing into middle-class jobs. Similarly with the 1960s, Piore notes: “... what I remember about the 1960s and 70’s was not the marches in the South, although I was in the South myself, but the riots in the ghettos and in particular the conversations I had as ... a scholar with employers and workers in low-income jobs.” The riots were a revolt of a second generation of migrants from the South against the jobs that they had inherited from their parents.

The legacy of today is two-fold. One is that people in those low-income jobs lost those jobs, they were replaced by the recruitment of a new generation of immigrants, and that immigration continues today. While the society has provided upward economic mobility for a lot of the African American population, it has yet to deal with the way in which people in the bottom of the job hierarchy, in the African American community, fare. “We have inherited a problem that is now a second generation of the recent wave of immigration that is going to emerge and the remaining problem of people who remain unemployed.” They are not unemployed in the way that people were unemployed in the Great Depression. Then, there were resources, and there was capital that was unemployed; all that needed to be done was to somehow get the economy to work. It is not the situation in which we find the majority of the poverty population today.

Piore concludes: “I think the spirit of the Great Depression and the Great Society is really relevant to our times, and I think that the role of government in our society has remained, despite the ideology of individualism, central to the way the society operates. But I think that we have inherited from the era of the Great Depression and the era of the Great Society a set of problems which it is not easy to think of solutions for and which it is going to take more than spirit and will to address.”

## Q&A

In response to a moderator question —about how social actors in the days of the New Deal and Great Society bring together multiple constituencies with different prescriptions for change and build momentum around addressing poverty— Wofford notes we need to remember the value and terrible power of a great crisis to stir people and prepare them for coming together. “You can actually end poverty if you come together.”

Roosevelt notes that the achievements of the 30's, 40's and 60's seem self evident now, but these were times of great political and ideological strife. In the first New Deal administration, both Congress and the Supreme Court were resistant to many of the measures. When the Civil Rights Act was passed in 1965, it was by one vote. It should not be forgotten that the coming together of the forces for the New Deal and Great Society was partly shaped by the opposition to those forces which was serious. Roosevelt notes “I think we are on the verge of the next evolution of how people come together in this country to direct attention toward domestic economy and domestic living situation.”

Piore notes the New Deal was passed on a great compromise, and that compromise was with the South. It involved the exclusion of almost the whole of the black population from all of the social legislation; 79% of the black population was in the South. The benefits of the minimum wage, of union protection and so on were completely left out of agriculture. Agricultural workers were not included in the Social Security. All of that was in order to obtain the votes that barely passed this legislation. So it was in a very real sense that the Great Society completed the New Deal agenda because it extended all of this legislation. Symbolically, the extension of the minimum wage to agriculture was kind of indicative of completing the New Deal platform. Union protection was never really extended to the South. This is the “knife edge” that seems in retrospect to have sunk into the “ethos of American society” and the compromises which were involved.

Roosevelt notes the compromise took place at a time when the power of the Southern leadership in Congress posed challenges to creating a majority for progressive legislation. Social Security and Medicare were universal in principle, but because certain sectors of the economy (like agriculture) were excluded, it was de facto segregation.

To a question about what it will take to address the problems of the labor market that the country has inherited through these eras, Piore answers it will take immigration legislation first. The immigration debate is critical to the future of American society because it raises the question as to whether the current wave of immigration is going to be underground or not. Social and labor protection laws can be passed but would not apply to immigrants if they are outside the legal structure of society. For example, 40% of current legal immigrants came to the US without papers; what would the country be like had they remained underground? The mobilization of immigrant communities of this spring is comparable to union rights mobilizations of the 30's and the Civil Rights mobilizations of the 60's. In addition, there remains in the labor market and society 40 to 50% of the African-American population that has not experienced the kind of upward mobility and participation in the society that were opened up by all of the legislation that emanates from the Great Society. Their issues and those of second generation immigrants are getting intertwined. Piore notes that the difference from the New Deal era is that much experimentation has taken place and, even if programs did not get all resources necessary to succeed, there is skepticism about experimenting with policy again.

A question raised what is realistic to promote for passage and funding in the next 5 to 10 years in terms of social policy given the divided government. Roosevelt suggests health insurance needs attention. Medicare may provide a framework but needs to be greatly adapted to meet the needs of the broader population. Health status affects people's ability to work, health crisis may lead to bankruptcy. Progress has begun in some states, Massachusetts being one of the leading cases.

Wofford suggests: youth education, preschool to Head Start, expanding Quantum Leap, and after school programs and health insurance for children and youths. Importantly, Wofford stresses increasing the number of opportunities for full-time national service for the young (to a much larger scale) as well as for retirees engaged in innovation. A “pincers” movement from the young and the old would be part of his strategy.

To a question about the policy work advocating for asset development, Piore answered that assets are difficult to build in a context where low earnings are a major constraint. Individual-focused solutions may not be enough to deal with the societal poverty and inequality problems.

## Highlights of Discussion Groups Following Panel 2

In facilitated small discussion groups participants focused on “take away” points from the panel presentations and further discussed the insights that helped them think about their work going forward. What follows are some of the recurrent themes from these discussions.

Presentations resonated in a number of ways with participant concerns, a number of questions and dilemmas were identified. Some important issues remained outstanding as requiring significantly more thought and exploration.

Concerns about future generations loomed large. These centered on economic viability and the nature of civil society overall. There were concerns about the quality of jobs that today’s youths who do not attend college will get. There were concerns about the impact on society of the coming of age of the second generation of the current wave of immigration. Participants picked up on the observation that the second generation will not settle for jobs that their immigrant parents have taken because their reference point will be other Americans, not the people left in the country of origin.

A recurrent theme coming out of presentations on the New Deal in particular was whether crisis is the needed precursor to reform and change. The current era does not present crisis throughout the economy and society –the enormous underemployed resources of the Great Depression. Crisis in the current environment is less visible to decisions makers, felt differently by different groups, the very poor, the underemployed people in deindustrialized urban centers, or the middle class workers losing employer-sponsored social protection. For example, unemployment was self-evident by the time Roosevelt acted. Participants asked, how the same visibility could be given to the lack of access to health insurance, or to the notion that corporate responsibility for social protection is fading. Others asked whether we need a crisis in order to build solidarity (like the Depression or World War II did) in the country. What would be the solidarity building crisis nowadays?

According to those with longer experience, crisis prompts reform in complicated ways. The movement for equal access and civil rights called on creative, innovative youths. Ideas of the movement captivated young students, across a broad spectrum. According to some, the movement for reform that led to the Great Society responded to two concurrent phenomena: the non-violent direct action of the movement of civil rights and the riots in Northern ghettos. Mobilization for change came out of inspiration as well as reckoning with racial and social conflict. A question raised in more than one group was whether youths could become motivated and mobilized for collective action now.

Extensive discussions took place around the notion of consensus. The point of departure of many in the group is that the current era is fraught with social and political divides, whereas these earlier eras benefited from greater consensus for reform. Those with experience in the Civil Rights movement reminded others that the movement jarred social norms early on, and ran

against violent opposition. Others recalled that the early New Deal similarly ran into strong opposition. There was an element of fortuitous occurrences that allowed for the passage of key New Deal and Great Society legislation. Yet, eventually, institutions created out of those eras came to be accepted, or at least not undermined. So, acceptance of reform (“consensus” of sorts) came to be understood as seeing the opposition “not stand in the way,” or not aggressively undermining policy.

Dilemmas and questions remain about thinking of consensus going forward. Around whom (whose welfare) and for what could a consensus be built? Should it consist of a set of consensus around segregated issue areas? If the New Deal consensus was forged around a notion of survival, and the Great Society’s around the notion of equity and equal access, what might be a consensus for social justice and for addressing poverty? Some noted it needs to be forged with something more than a mobilization around self interest. It could not be narrow. For example, focusing it on children’s well-being might come up short because, if adults are not supported, their children suffer and see no future for themselves as adults. It would need to focus on structures, economic and social (for example focusing on the causes of wealth, not just the causes of poverty.)

In holding up the notion of consensus and how it might be built, discussions examined the legacy of racial inequality and division that was inherited through the New Deal compromises with Southern official segregation. The New Deal policies’ strengths were their universal approach and mandate. Yet the contrasting reality that many of these policies excluded much of African-Americans’ economic life from their reach considerably weakened the claim to universality of the New Deal. While the Great Society’s policies were explicitly about equal access and redressed many exclusions, they have not reached the most economically vulnerable minority populations. Any notion of consensus would need to take account of long standing and remaining racial inequalities and divides. Cross race and cross class coalitions were named as key building blocks for effectiveness and to ensure that exclusion does not re-occur.

Participants took away the clear role that government played in both the New Deal and Great Society as a force for change. Many pointed to the need for a stronger government as a countervailing power, particularly to the power of corporations. Many noted that the notion of “big government” is not acceptable, or far less acceptable, in the current environment. Nowadays, the government is big, but it has grown primarily through military functions.

During this first set of discussion groups, as well as throughout the rest of the conference, participants addressed the notion of policy experimentation as it was raised by the two historians, Bruce Schulman and Meg Jacobs, in their presentations. Participants noted that policy experimentation entailed risk taking, the willingness to try things in spite of uncertainty and insufficient information, and contending with trying something else yet again when a policy approach did not show results. They noted that experimentation took place during the New Deal in particular in spite of organized opposition to policy change. They explored how to move policy debates from the current environment where opponents to a policy only need say “it has not been proven to work yet” to stall policy change.

The recognition that policy innovators faced narrow windows of opportunity to act, and strong opposition, was a useful insight. Still, some participants wondered whether an environment of dire crisis—as with the Great Depression or urban riots—is required to make problems, and the need for bold policy innovation, “self evident.” They considered what would have to change in the current environment in order for action on poverty and inequality in economic life and education to rise higher in the public eye and that of policy makers. Quite a number of times, participants noted they had been reminded that bigger ideas and bolder visions were necessary to pursue policy work in their field.

For many participants, the panel presentations contributed to dispelling the notion that policy innovation happened in these two earlier eras simply because there was consensus in politics

and society. Panelists reminded all that several key pieces of New Deal legislation encountered severe challenges in Congress, and occasionally the Supreme Court— that the policy consensus was fragile at times. The Civil Rights legislation narrowly passed and encountered strong opposition. Lyndon Johnson accepted a tradeoff; he knew that the Democrats would lose the Southern votes. Yet, once passed, key policies became accepted and “part of the woodwork” to use a panelist words.

### ***Panel 3: Elementary and Secondary Education Policy- Compensatory Education***

*The videos of these panel presentations and biographies of speakers can be found at:<http://www.mccormack.umb.edu/csp/lookingback&lookingahead/index.php>*

Moderator Hubie Jones introduces the panel topic. Forty-two years ago, in 1965, the U.S. Congress passed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) which was the centerpiece of the Great Society’s compensatory education policy. Title I funded local school districts to provide compensatory education to low income students in order to assist them in achieving acceptable educational outcomes. Title VII funded bilingual education programs to enable English language learners to be successful in their schooling. These programs aimed to be “equalizers” by addressing the needs of these target populations. The panel examines the rationales, promise, and outcomes of these programs. Jones notes: “We face monumental challenges in public education in this country going forward so it is appropriate that we call the lessons from the past, from past federal education policy, which might be applied to future actions.”

#### **William Taylor, Citizen’s Commission on Civil Rights, “Arguments for compensatory education: Title I of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act”**

Mr. Taylor speaks of the origins of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and aims to draw connections to current issues and challenges. While involved in school desegregation at the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, Taylor reports, he came to know something about Lyndon B. Johnson’s passion for education. Johnson commissioned a report on racial isolation in Northern schools from the Commission and considered the findings seriously. “Johnson said ‘I really know what you mean because I can see the difference between my two daughters and their education when they’re at school in Texas, and now that they’re at the National Cathedral School in Washington.’” Johnson talked of his experience as a teacher of impoverished Mexican-American kids in his early days in Texas. “He knew what we meant when we talked about how all kids could learn.” Johnson had said that the ESEA would be the most important piece of legislation he would sign.

A couple of things were crucial in the passage of the Act. One was that, every year prior to 1965, Congressman Adam Clayton Powell would offer legislation to ban discrimination in whatever federal grant program was up for renewal. Powell would get support from southerners who figured, correctly, that if they voted for it and the amendment passed, it would kill the whole bill, whatever the piece of legislation was. In 1964, the Congress passed the Civil Rights Act in which Title VI prohibited discrimination in any program that received federal funds; nondiscrimination was a condition for getting the funds. That removed the first major obstacle. Second, a compromise was worked out with the Catholic Church over how parochial schools would be treated under the legislation and how they would benefit. Johnson worked with Hugh Carey and

influential leaders in Congress to reach a compromise that would allow the Catholic church a role in educating poor children. That cleared the major stumbling blocks to the passage of the Act. Johnson could see how developing support (from groups emanating from social movements) could be used to overcome policy barriers and get an important piece of legislation through Congress.

As Bruce Schulman also noted, policy implementation is critical; indeed, there was uneven implementation of the ESEA. In the early years of Title I, there was substitution of funds—using the money to replace local funds and therefore not addressing the inequities and inequalities that existed in poor schools. Rules were tightened and implementation improved. Title I of the ESEA led to desegregation in the South. With the passage of the Civil Rights amendment, desegregation became policy, but Title VI of the Act also said that obeying the Constitution was a prerequisite for receiving federal funds. In the South, federal funds accounted for 25 to 30 % of school districts' budgets; they made a real difference. Southern districts could not refuse the federal funds, and the country saw extraordinary changes in just a few years. The first report from the National Assessment of Educational Progress in 1980 noted that there was a significant narrowing of the achievement gap between African American children and white children from 1970 to 1980. The largest gains were made by black students in the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade in the Southeast United States, the largest gains nationwide. How did that happen? The Supreme Court decision mandating remedies led to school desegregation. Head Start and Title I of ESEA had passed. The critical mass of programs and policies led to these educational gains. In the mid 1980s, educational improvements receded. Title I itself was implemented through two-tier systems, similar in some ways to the racial dual school systems that the *Brown vs. Board of Education* case was designed to eliminate. In these two-tier systems, the idea was to get the poor kids up to a basic level whereas other kids increasingly were being asked to master advanced subjects, to be involved in critical thinking, and to have analytical skills. This was brought home by the fact that there was a separate bureaucracy teaching the poor kids under Title I; they were pulled out of the regular curriculum in order to attend classes where they were drilled in the basics. Their teachers, by and large, did not have the training and the skills that other teachers had.

These barriers led to a reform movement. Over the past 25 years, Taylor has been involved with a case in Saint Louis that has led to the largest inter-district voluntary school desegregation program in the country. The kids who participate are black kids from St. Louis who go to school in about 18 school districts in St. Louis County. Three quarters of them are eligible for free and reduced price lunch, and yet they graduate high school at a rate much higher than the kids who remain in St. Louis and the inner-city kids in other places. They graduate high school, and they go on to college. The difference is that they are going to middle class schools where there is a degree of accountability. If the teacher doesn't perform, or the principal doesn't perform, they are "out of there." Accountability is what is missing in many inner-city schools and is what the school reform movement is designed to provide, Taylor argues.

The reform movement started with Bill Clinton, with the finding that all children could learn, and almost all except those who are cognitively impaired could learn at the highest levels. If that is the case, then teachers and school systems have a responsibility to teach them. That is what education reform has been all about, first in improving the American School Act, and now with the No Child Left Behind Act. Instead of compensating for failings, "we ought to get to the point where, from the very beginning, we are giving students advantages." There is an attack on the Act which is led in part by teachers' unions and others in the education establishment who are being told by their leaders that they are being made victims by being asked to be accountable for children's progress, Taylor says. A lot of this attack is coming from the affluent. Affluent parents have a feeling that their kids deserve an edge in this society, that they deserve their privilege; they are a little concerned about any changes which may disturb that edge. "I don't know how we combat that, but I think that's part of what we are there to combat" Taylor notes.

Taylor recalls a prime example of this dynamic. In 1994, he was Vice Chair of the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights. He thought they could get a consensus on the Opportunity to Learn

standards, which aim to equalize resources, including teachers, for poor children. "It turned out that it was scheduled to be vetoed by Al Shanker and the American Federation of Teachers. I could not figure that out because the AFT, they were the unions that operated in the central city, so I took it off the agenda, and I went to see Al Shanker and he told me that the lesson he learned in California from the experience with school finance-equalization...and then Proposition 13, was that giving an advantage to affluent people was the price you had to (pay) ... for keeping public schools going. It was one of the more discouraging things that I've been told over the years but I think that's what we're struggling with right now."

Finally, Taylor notes that, in his current teaching, he encounters increasing numbers of young people who are ready to embrace teaching and to work with minorities, the poor, and children with special needs. "As long as we're continuing to have that kind of renewal, there's no reason to be pessimistic about things."

### Roger Rice, Multicultural Education, Training and Advocacy, "Title VII (bilingual education) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and beyond."

To answer the question of what arguments were made for Title VII, Roger Rice reports going back to read the transcript of the 1967 hearings and congressional debates. He observes "we were a good country at one point, or could have been, or came close to being." The bill received support from Republican Congressmen from the West and Southwest. It was a different era. The bill passed, two years after Title I, and with only 3 votes against it in the Senate and overwhelming bipartisan support in the House. This occurred because of general "unawareness." The nation's attention was riveted with the Vietnam war, urban riots, a war in the Middle East. The Bilingual Americans Act, the bill sponsored by Senator Ralph Yarborough of East Texas, "didn't sound like a big deal" compared to concurrent developments at the time.

Three types of arguments were made in proposals for the Bilingual Americans Act. First, the "common sense" argument which called attention to the fact that little learning can go on if teacher and students do not understand each other. Second, a pedagogical argument stated that research shows that students who learn fundamental concepts in their own language can later grasp them in their second language more easily and thoroughly. Third, "a civil rights language and cultural equity" argument advocated for equal visibility and validity for Hispanic culture.

However, compromises made to pass the bill into law struck out significant clauses and turned the law into a compensatory law. The teaching of Spanish as a first language and English as a second language are struck. Efforts to attract promising individuals of Mexican and Puerto Rican descent as teachers are struck. "We go from the recognition of the special needs of large numbers of students whose mother-tongue is Spanish and to whom English is a foreign language, that's then changed in recognition of the special educational needs of the large numbers of children of limited English speaking ability. We are now going to compensate kids for a limitation. The limitation is that they don't speak English." Where, under the original proposal, programs could have been designed to impart to Spanish speaking students a knowledge of, and pride in, their ancestral culture, the actual law only makes room for history and culture associated with their language.

As a result, the policy debate became focused on teaching English quickly and centered on pedagogical arguments. The attacks on the policy started as soon as it was passed and bilingual programs started to appear. It became good politics to attack bilingual programs as a proxy for anti-immigrant statements.

The original goals of the 1967 bill were clear and different from what happened. Senator Yarborough said "The goal of this new education is a child who is completely fluent in both



English and Spanish.” In the early 70’s, a federal judge, Judge William Wayne, in an eastern district of Texas in a case call San Felipe-Del Rio, a de-segregation case, said “the Anglo-American students too must be called upon to adjust to their Mexican-American classmates and to learn to understand and appreciate different linguistic and cultural attributes.” He ordered a bilingual program for all the children in San Felipe-Del Rio. The spirit embedded in this kind of decision did not get carried out in the law.

Arguments for Title VII directly related the goals of the law to those of the Great Society; the connection of education and income was made very clearly. In terms of support from social movements, there was a nascent Latino consciousness movement but it was not driving the push for Title VII. However, there was awareness among congressmen from the Southwest and New York that Latino communities were becoming more vocal, and their problems needed to be addressed. Overwhelmingly, the hundred witnesses that testified for the bill were Latinos, teachers, or from community organizations.

The most successful and constructive aspects of the initial debates and arguments for Title VII were the recognition that there was a problem—the common sense argument. Also successful was the argument that home and school must be connected, that parents need to know what is happening in school and vice versa. It was not successful to push too much for the “pedagogical” argument, to present it as a magic bullet—that, if education were bilingual, all other issues of the Latino student population would be resolved. Dr. Jose Cardenas who testified at the hearings once observed that proponents should not paint themselves into a “language corner,” that Latino children tend to be poor and need other things that poor children need beyond language education like appropriate funding for pre-school programs and for schools, as well as trained teachers. Bilingual education became held up to a standard of performance that other programs were never held to.

Could attacks on Title VII have been more effectively forestalled? Rice notes that some have argued bilingual education should have been folded into Title I, not handled with a separate bill and separate programs. In fact, few of the Title I resources had gone to Latino students during the first three years of implementation. To this day, in many states, Title VII funds are the only resources going toward the education of Latino students. In many states (e.g. North and South Carolina, Oklahoma, Texas) the only resources for bilingual or ESL education are the federal resources, and some of these states have growing Latino populations. Rice stresses “unless you change hearts and minds to an extraordinary extent, you need to have something out there that funds it separately.” And this something has to be backed with enforcement power. There needs to be a separate authority and program to ensure that Title I funds and other sources of federal funding for education go equitably to children who don’t speak English.

Finally, the attack on bilingual education is fed by nativist sentiments and political use of these resentments. Moreover, the belief that previous generations of immigrants “did not get special programs” and that the sooner people learn English, the better, is a difficult one to change and to beat. Research evidence that demonstrates the effectiveness of bilingual education is not visible to the general electorate and does not carry much weight in political debates. These are the facts on what was the impetus for Title VII, what it became and is today. Listeners will draw their own conclusions.

## Milton Goldberg, Education Consultant, “The Evolution of education policy”

Before reviewing highlights of 50 years of education policy, Milton Goldberg alludes to his personal experience as a junior high teacher and school principal in the Philadelphia school district. One story recalls the low expectations of a junior high curriculum for troubled youths, a curriculum that was asking him, as teacher, “to do nothing with them.” Later, Goldberg recalls, he

ran a large elementary inner city school in Philadelphia that benefited from resources under Title I. Because he had experimental programs that appeared promising, other principals from schools with a similar student population were invited to visit. Most left with a single message “.. what you’re doing in this school is just terrific. Let me tell you why I can’t do it in my school.” The argument was that education is idiosyncratic and ruled by localism. Expectations are traditionally low in American education, particularly for minority kids, and disadvantaged kids.

Concerns about education quality go far back. In 1958, a Rockefeller Foundation report, *The Pursuit of Excellence*, called attention to the bad state of education as well as the fact that increasing complexity and variability of tasks rendered educational improvement essential. The 1958 recommendations for the federal role in education were the following: “One: The Federal Government should address those needs educators have identified as highest priority. Two: Federal funds should be used to balance the serious gaps in the national education system while state and local funding remain primary sources of support. Three: Federal funding should preserve local leadership and control over education. Fourth: Federal Government must recognize that it inevitably exercises leadership functions in whatever it does. Therefore, the Federal Government should see itself as a pace maker, rather than its confirming traditional and outdated attitudes.” Policies of the War on Poverty reflect an acceptance of those four principles, particularly the idea of the Federal Government being a pace setter and not confirming traditional attitudes like the low expectations described earlier.

In 1971, President Nixon said the 1965 Education Act was “not working”. He created the National Institute of Education to conduct education research with the goal of improving education, particularly compensatory education. The research function continues but, nowadays, education research and data are used in a policy context that suffers from political bias, where ideologues use data that support their point and ignore other data. During the 1980s, the Nation at Risk report prepared by the bipartisan National Commission on Excellence in Education [Goldberg was its Executive Director] ran into difficulty. President Reagan’s advisors wanted him to not accept it because it did not deal with the administration’s priorities which were: the elimination of the Department of Education; school prayer; and tuition tax credits. The report called attention to serious trouble in the education system, particularly for minority kids, and argued expectations and standards needed to be raised. The report’s recommendations prompted and supported work in states, by Southern governors in particular, to provide more resources and improve conditions. Another milestone was the 1989 presidential summit with governors that established national goals for education. Progress was made during the Clinton years in establishing national standards. Ideas for reform also were raised in the public discussion to change the school year and time spent in school to facilitate learning —rather than fit learning activities to a fixed school year (see *Prisoners of Time* report). Finally, the *No Child Left Behind* act has elevated the federal government to highest level of authority over education; it is the most directive federal legislation in history. Although sponsored by a Republican president, it has been opposed by a number of Republicans in support of states’ rights.

Goldberg closes by noting that we still have far too many unsuccessful, poor, minority children. “It’s tragedy for them and it’s a tragedy for the nation.” In 1964, the country sought solutions through the War on Poverty, and now we seek equity and excellence for all children. “I believe ...[this] has got to be a crusade for what is the ultimate civil right, a quality education.” Maybe the next president will convene leaders to build on what has been learned and create a better future for all children—not just through education but through all the work done in other agencies as well.

## Q&A

A participant asked whether a highly directive federal policy in education has had a positive or negative result. William Taylor answered that the impetus behind the No Child Left Behind act

and its predecessors was to emphasize accountability for results over directing input and how things are done. It is state administrations, rather than the federal government, who do the accountability plans. Taylor argues the law is basically right in asking schools to be accountable for children's progress. What is at issue is what effective measurements of educational outcomes should be. There is still insufficient information about how children are doing and the qualifications of their teachers. It would be better to collect longitudinal information about each child. Roger Rice, in answer to the same question, observed that schools continue to under-fund English as a Second Language (ESL) teaching as well as other resources for educating English learners. In this context, he argues, what is testing telling us? He further notes that in a state like Massachusetts, having English learners in the student population can entitle a city or towns to extra resources, yet the school department has discretion on how the money is spent. The federal government is saying that school departments must only demonstrate progress on test scores, but no one is assessing whether students are getting needed educational resources, like enough ESL teachers.

William Taylor further noted that "we need to fight for an individual right to sue" for adequate resources, that it is not only up to school departments to enforce the law. The Bilingual Education Act was a grant-in-aid program which did not include entitlements. During the 1990s, there were debates about reforming Title I, which is an entitlement program, in which Latino rights organizations participated. Currently, a bill in Virginia is calling for testing children in the language that best reflects what they know and can do.

Milton Goldberg addressed the notion of real accountability. A recent federal program *Reading First* has been criticized for being too prescriptive about curriculum. It is possible for the government to set the goals and the standards, and then allow for states to figure out a way to meet these. Also, the education debates currently include arguments that the stringency of the testing movement has thwarted experimentation and innovation. Whether true or not, experimentation is not a significant factor in schools these days.

Moderator Hubie Jones noted Goldberg's notion of "education as the ultimate civil right" and noted civil rights organizations seem to be missing in action in the education debates these days. Taylor notes there is ambivalence about testing in some organizations. Nevertheless, testing is a means to hold school departments accountable. However, expectations of better testing were not met. Taylor listed several activities joined by civil rights organizations (Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights, National Council of LaRaza, Mexican-American Legal Defense Fund), notably a Connecticut NAACP lawsuit against a state department of education that argues that testing is an un-funded mandate. Taylor's response is "the Constitution of the United States is an unfunded mandate"; in other words, the state must meet its responsibilities.

Moderator Hubie Jones asked whether a metropolitan educational solution is possible or pie-in-the-sky. Taylor responded a metropolitan solution was struck down by courts. He still fights for it. He and others advocate for amending the NCLB act in order to include a right to transfer out of schools that are in need of improvement into schools that do better within the district. They also advocate that there be a mandated metropolitan solution when there are no schools in the district that do better.

Taylor further noted that there needs to be better assessment, and that educational quality continues to be poor in many urban districts. For children in those districts, it is worth for parents gaining the right to enroll kids in another school.

Rice responds that making a metropolitan solution, overriding district boundaries, a condition for receiving federal education funding, is not feasible. In many communities, particularly where Spanish language speakers reside, there is no feasible alternative school to attend. Regarding the role of civil rights organizations in education debates, Rice notes that outside of the "beltway",

students are far away from any kind of organized, sustainable organization. Finally, having an undocumented immigration status prevents parents from filing suits.

A participant noted that, at least, the NCLB provided documentation of how children of all racial/ethnic groups were doing in all school districts, because the notion that all urban, poor, black, Latino schools do a lousy job and schools that are white in majority do a great job “is just not true.” Data demonstrated that schools with majority white population, that would not be expected to need improvement, don’t do a good job with children of color. Taylor concurred it is helpful to know these gaps.

Hubie Jones noted that parents have concerns about teaching to the test and that the consequences of testing remain to be explored. Jones closed by reminding all that something has to be done about public education in this country. It is “at the heart of it all”, it impacts jobs, crime, incarceration rates. These are all related to what is not happening in public education and should.

### Highlights of Discussion Groups Following Panel 3

A common theme among discussion groups was whether and how the national discussion of education policy has gotten “stuck” on testing issues. To some degree, conversations reflected this tendency. The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act influences education at all levels. It is discussed primarily in terms of student testing and its impacts. The testing issues seem to have crowded out the broader agenda for education policy and the socio-economic context for achievement.

Group participants discussed the ambivalence of many in the education field toward NCLB. Most participants liked the notion of accountability for teaching poor children, and all noted there is agreement on the goal of raising achievement for all children. There is great debate about what standards to use for accountability. Some noted that the positive side of NCLB is the data disaggregation for educational outcomes, which draws attention to poor outcomes and to the schools, and populations within them, that experience difficulty. In this way, testing is useful to child advocates to highlight inequality. Yet NCLB has focused far less attention on “inputs”, the resources needed to meet standards. The policy now mandates only “adequate” (not equal) resources needed to meet testing standards.

The negative aspects of reliance on testing were discussed as well (e.g., teaching to the test, the depletion of teaching variety, reduction of arts, culture, and other aspects of education that facilitate student engagement). More severe consequences included indications that students who fail tests are more likely to drop out. In more than one group, the word “fear” was used to describe the motivations and reactions of teachers and school officials to testing standards. Most importantly, most groups noted that testing is in the hands of state administrations that have an incentive to shape tests so failure is less likely; therefore, test results are a poor indicator of achievement.

Some asked: “If no test, then what?” Advocates have found that tools are needed to compel districts to address education difficulties of poor children and the lack of appropriate funding. Alternative approaches discussed included focusing on school districts’ progress toward explicit goals (rather than a pass/fail approach) and to keep testing but stop the punishments. Alternative approaches also included redefining and clarifying educational standards. Possibilities include exploring lessons from improvement in the vocational education system and assessing their transferability to conventional schools.

Discussion groups tackled the long standing issue of federal control versus local control in education—how much there is, and should be. The federal government cannot mandate details of implementation at the local level. Yet implementation of any national policy is impaired by the lack of capacity at the local level. Federal involvement, so far, has been primarily limited to funding. There is talk of national standards, but state governments want to retain control because education is a significant share of their budget. Conversely, the lessons from successful local initiatives do not get integrated into federal policy. Also, mayors are ambivalent about exerting greater control over their school administration; some want more, others do not.

The extent of local control also arose in the context of discussions of a “metropolitan” solution to educational disparities. The publication of test results has triggered greater disparity among communities in urban areas. As people seek to move to high performing schools areas, housing prices have risen unevenly. Given that the property tax is a main source of local funding for education, this trend exacerbates disparities. Others noted that, in African-American communities, there is greater interest in improving the schools where children reside rather than busing them to another district.

The broader topic of the financing of public education and of the socioeconomic context for education gave rise to far ranging discussions and questions. Some noted the societal ambivalence about the purpose of education—is it just to get a job? for access to higher education? Civic education is equally important as academic preparation but is overlooked. Participants voiced doubt about the nation’s commitment to education: Does the American public believe that education is needed to move society forward? Do businesses want to operate in an uneducated society?

The financing of education encounters difficulties partly because there are different perspectives on education—i.e. the same conflicts encountered over all programs occur in education: common good vs. individual goals. How might a consensus bridge these perspectives? What would a new social contract look like given the current leadership, economic situation, and set of barriers? Difficulties include finding consensus across class and race. Hope may lie in younger generations’ greater ability to bridge racial gaps.

Some participants acknowledged the paradox that schools can be gateways to opportunity but also replicate disadvantages. Learning at school is embedded in other socio-economic dimensions (of home and community life), but few see institutions addressing these other dimensions. The community and parental contexts for learning receive limited support. For example, workplaces do not accommodate parental responsibilities readily, and child care is under-funded. Neighborhood and cultural issues are not addressed in current policy. Trying to address education policy without addressing broader socio-economic dimensions for learning is an incomplete and problematic approach.

Another constituency for raising education achievement is the business community. There is lack of clarity about how it can be productively involved in debates about the socio-economic dimensions of education. Participants noted a lack of clarity about support from businesses for NCLB goals, or whether the business community support education standards [editor note: segments of the business community have been very active in the public debate on standards.]. Some note that promoting economic competitiveness and education’s great impact on the economy as a whole are arguments for education funding that carry weight with some businesses. What is less clear is whether the socio-economic dimensions, the community needs, are considered sufficiently important by business interests.

Running through a number of discussions was the concern about how history is experienced differently across race and class groups and, therefore, interpreted differently as well. For example, the impact of the Katrina flood, interpreted differently by different groups, has now faded from national visibility. The understanding of these “wedges” and divisions in the nation’s consciousness has to be deepened before a national consensus can be forged around particular

issues. Minority groups may first want to build community strength before joining a coalition. A “new New Deal” would require understanding history’s lessons from perspectives other than those of one’s group and joining coalitions from a place of strength.

## ***Conclusion***

This conference provided participants with the opportunity to be thoughtful about broad ranging challenges and issues rather than policy details. Also, it created opportunities for participants to hear the issues faced by other practitioners who operate in different policy settings. The goal of bridging the concerns of social policy and education policy specialists was met and quite fruitful.

The joint exploration in which panelists and participants engaged, and which is summarized in these proceedings, raised long standing and uneasily resolved issues in American public life and policy conversations. The relationship between the public sphere and the private economy needs to be revisited and understood in new ways. For example, the weakened employer-based safety net makes this necessary. The imbalance between the sphere of action of corporations (often multi-national) and that of most government structures was raised as another cause for reframing this relationship. Notions of government, and the terms used to describe constructive government action, need to be revisited as well in light of what are broadly considered achievements of government. While some see that the language of public discourse on government’s role needs to be reframed, others welcomed being reminded of the deeply constructive, and unabashedly activist, role that government played in both the New Deal and the Great Society. Yet others noted that, while social movements compel government to live up to its obligations and the Constitution’s vision, they cannot do it alone but rely on policy actors to transform claims into policy.

The history of racial exclusion that undermined the achievements of New Deal policies in particular was discussed by panelists and explored by discussion groups. The claim of universality of New Deal policies remains their strength and appeal. When made a reality with the commitment to equal access that was ushered in with the Civil Rights legislation and Great Society programs, this claim came closer to reality, though much remains to be done. The aims of New Deal policies to affect many key spheres of American life—the workplace, business and capital markets rules, as well as building the social safety net—remain the hallmarks of that era. The commitment to equal access of the Great Society policies and their recognition that poverty had many causes are the hallmarks of that era.

Conversations held during this conference began to address what the next vision for the relationship between Americans and their government, and between business and government, might be. For many, these concerns inform much of their applied policy work. The next vision will contend with, and be informed by, changed social conditions. Among key dimensions of change, participants noted the different family structures and the social change to be expected when the second generation of the current immigrant wave comes of age. How social movements will build strength—around what identities and quests—and in what directions they will push the society, remain issues for further discussion.

## ***Further Information and Resources***

The conference website provides the list of participants, speaker biographies, a bibliography on the two eras including both primary and secondary sources, a downloadable version of this report as well as video recordings of each of the presentations. The conference website link is: <http://www.mccormack.umb.edu/csp/lookingback&lookingahead/index.php>