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# GRIM FAIRY TALES

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The Rhetorical Construction of American  
Welfare Policy

**Lisa M. Gring-Pemble**

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# Grim Fairy Tales

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## The Rhetorical Construction of American Welfare Policy

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Lisa M. Gring-Pemble

*Praeger Series in Political Communication*

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To Geoffrey, with love

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## Series Foreword

Those of us from the discipline of communication studies have long believed that communication is prior to all other fields of inquiry. In several other forums, I have argued that the essence of politics is talk, or human interaction.<sup>1</sup> Such interaction may be formal or informal, verbal or nonverbal, public or private, but it is always persuasive, forcing us consciously or subconsciously to interpret, to evaluate, and to act. Communication is the vehicle for human action.

From this perspective, it is not surprising that Aristotle recognized the natural kinship of politics and communication in his writings *Politics* and *Rhetoric*. In the former, he established that humans are “political beings [who] alone of the animals [are] furnished with the faculty of language.”<sup>2</sup> In the latter, he began his systematic analysis of discourse by proclaiming that “rhetorical study, in its strict sense, is concerned with the modes of persuasion.”<sup>3</sup> Thus, it was recognized more than 2,300 years ago that politics and communication go hand in hand because they are essential parts of human nature.

In 1981, Dan Nimmo and Keith Sanders proclaimed that political communication was an emerging field.<sup>4</sup> Although its origin, as noted, dates back centuries, a “self-consciously cross-disciplinary” focus began in the late 1950s. Thousands of books and articles later, colleges and universities now offer a variety of graduate and undergraduate course work in the area in such diverse departments as communication, mass communication, journalism, political science, and sociology.<sup>5</sup> In Nimmo and Sanders’s early assessment, the “key areas of inquiry” included rhetorical analyses, propaganda analyses, attitude change studies, voting studies, govern-

ment and the news media, functional and systems analyses, technological changes, media technologies, campaign techniques, and research techniques.<sup>6</sup> In a survey of the state of the field in 1983, the same authors and Lynda Kaid found additional, more specific areas of concern, such as the presidency, political polls, public opinion, debates, and advertising.<sup>7</sup> Since the first study, the authors have also noted a shift away from the rather strict behavioral approach.

A decade later, Dan Nimmo and David Swanson argued that “political communication has developed some identity as a more or less distinct domain of scholarly work.”<sup>8</sup> The scope and concerns of the area have further expanded to include critical theories and cultural studies. Although there is no precise definition, method, or disciplinary home of the area of inquiry, its primary domain comprises the role, processes, and effects of communication within the context of politics broadly defined.

In 1985, the editors of *Political Communication Yearbook: 1984* noted that “more things are happening in the study, teaching, and practice of political communication than can be captured within the space limitations of the relatively few publications available.”<sup>9</sup> In addition, they argued that the backgrounds of “those involved in the field [are] so varied and pluralist in outlook and approach, . . . it [is] a mistake to adhere slavishly to any set format in shaping the content.”<sup>10</sup> More recently, Nimmo and Swanson called for “ways of overcoming the unhappy consequences of fragmentation within a framework that respects, encourages, and benefits from diverse scholarly commitments, agendas, and approaches.”<sup>11</sup>

In 1988, in agreement with these assessments of the area and with gentle encouragement, Praeger established the Praeger Series in Political Communication, which is open to all qualitative and quantitative methodologies as well as contemporary and historical studies. The key to characterizing the studies in the series is the focus on communication variables or activities within a political context or dimension. As of this writing, more than 80 volumes have been published, and numerous impressive works are forthcoming. Scholars from the disciplines of communication, history, journalism, political science, and sociology have participated in the series.

I am, without shame or modesty, a fan of the series. The joy of serving as its editor is in participating in the dialogue of political communication and in reading the contributors’ works. I invite you to join me.

Robert E. Denton, Jr.

## NOTES

1. See Robert E. Denton, Jr., *The Symbolic Dimensions of the American Presidency* (Prospect Heights, Ill.: Waveland Press, 1982); Robert E. Denton, Jr., and Gary Woodward, *Political Communication in America* (New York: Praeger, 1985; 2d ed., 1990); Robert E. Denton, Jr., and Dan Hahn, *Presidential Communication* (New York: Praeger, 1986); and Robert E. Denton, Jr., *The Primetime Presidency of Ronald Reagan* (New York: Praeger, 1988).
2. Aristotle, *The Politics of Aristotle*, trans. Ernest Barker (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 5.
3. Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, trans. W. Rhys Roberts (New York: The Modern Library, 1954), 22.
4. Dan Nimmo and Keith Sanders, "Introduction: The Emergence of Political Communication as a Field," in *Handbook of Political Communication*, eds. Dan Nimmo and Keith Sanders (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage, 1981), 11–36.
5. *Ibid.*, 15.
6. *Ibid.*, 17–27.
7. Keith Sanders, Lynda Kaid, and Dan Nimmo, eds. *Political Communication Yearbook: 1984* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1985), 283–308.
8. Dan Nimmo and David Swanson, "The Field of Political Communication: Beyond the Voter Persuasion Paradigm," in *New Directions in Political Communication*, eds. David Swanson and Dan Nimmo (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage, 1990), 8.
9. Sanders, Kaid, and Nimmo, *Political Communication Yearbook: 1984*, xiv.
10. *Ibid.*
11. Nimmo and Swanson, "The Field of Political Communication," 11.

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## Preface

From 1992 to 1996, in a series of hearings and debates, congressional representatives and witnesses debated several welfare reform proposals, eventually crafting the controversial 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA).

Set to expire on October 1, 2002, PRWORA's impending reauthorization prompted considerable congressional discussion. As of the writing of this book, however, PRWORA has not been reauthorized. A series of continuing resolutions has allowed PRWORA to operate beyond the expiration deadline.

Today, many scholars and practitioners have expressed concern over how foreign policy and economic declines will affect welfare reform initiatives. This concern has spawned a multitude of studies to evaluate the effectiveness of recent welfare reforms. How are welfare families faring in an economic downturn? To what extent have the reforms contributed to increased workforce participation, increased earnings, and self-sufficiency on the part of welfare mothers? What effect have the reforms had on teenage pregnancy, marriage, and family formation? These are all important questions worthy of considerable attention.

Nevertheless, one frequently overlooked area of study has been the role of language in shaping policy options, which is the impetus for this book on welfare policy. This book's central goal is to analyze congressional hearings and debates on welfare to understand the role of language in framing welfare policy and contemporary welfare discussions. Through a review of welfare history and a rhetorical analysis of welfare delibera-

tions, this book illustrates the significance of language and ideology in shaping policy outcomes.

Writing this book has been a rewarding challenge. Throughout the course of this project, I have engaged in conversations with a number of scholars and consulted the books, articles, and editorials of many others who work on issues relevant to welfare reform and social policy. I am grateful to all of these individuals who contributed in important ways to the completion of this project. In particular, I want to thank Ron Haskins, former staff director for the Subcommittee on Human Resources of the House Committee on Ways and Means, and David Bradley, executive director for the National Community Action Foundation, both of whom graciously agreed to lengthy interviews. Brookings Institution staff, including Isabel Sawhill and R. Kent Weaver, as well as David L. Featherman, Director of the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan, shared relevant research and information. In addition, Cabell S. Brand, founder of Cabell Brand Center on the campus of Roanoke College, was instrumental in connecting me with an important network of scholars and policy makers.

For encouragement and support throughout this project, I am indebted to many colleagues. Special thanks goes to my mentor Martha Solomon Watson (University of Nevada, Las Vegas), Shawn J. Parry-Giles (University of Maryland, College Park), Janette Kenner Muir (George Mason University, New Century College), and Diane M. Blair (California State University, Fresno) for reading and critiquing excerpts from this project. I also wish to thank my colleagues and students at New Century College, George Mason University, for cheerfully collaborating with me in intellectually stimulating learning communities outside the bounds of this project.

For enriching my life and reminding me of what is truly important, I thank my family. I especially wish to thank my parents, David and Susan, for their love, advice and encouragement. It is in honor of my parents, a most extraordinary team, that I write this book. I also want to thank my dear grandfather, Rodney, whose life-long commitment to service and learning is inspiring. My son, Will, brightens my days with his laughter, insatiable curiosity, and amazing sense of wonder for life. Finally, I express my deepest appreciation to my husband and life partner, Geoffrey, to whom this book is dedicated. His constant love, abiding faith, thoughtful intellect, and playful spirit are sources of great joy and comfort.

*Part I*

**The Changing Faces of American  
Welfare Policy: Historical Roots of  
Contemporary Welfare Legislation**



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## Chapter 1

# Welfare Legislation Is Symbolic: An Introduction

What we should attend to...are the discursive practices of policy.... [T]he important and neglected dimension of welfare policy is symbolic, and the symbols or interpretations constructed by welfare policy discourse are transmitted both by words and arguments about policy and by welfare practices. Thus, we cannot understand welfare policy and policy science simply as interventions by government to alter objective conditions, by manipulating the balance of incentives and disincentives attached to work or welfare, for example. Rather, policy and policy science are about interpretation.

Frances Fox Piven, 1995, xii

Words and welfare. Stories and public policy. Transcripts from contemporary welfare reform deliberations read like best-selling novels. Woven throughout the policy transcripts is a compelling narrative, a riveting tale of heroines like Clarissa Pinkola Estes, a Latina who courageously rose from the depths of welfare dependence to new heights as a psychoanalyst with doctoral and postdoctoral degrees (House Committee on Ways and Means 1995c, 1345). Then there's Jo Sires, a divorced mother of three. After four years of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), this inventive entrepreneur successfully started her own business, with sales ranging from \$3,000 to \$6,000 per month (*Cong. Rec.* 1995, S11761; Senate Committee on Appropriations 1994b, 37, 38). There are also representatives like Maxine Waters (D-Calif.) and Lynn Woolsey (D-Calif.) whose current political successes seem to belie their former dependence on public aid.<sup>1</sup> These uplifting stories powerfully reinforce the American dream, the pull-yourself-up-by-the-bootstraps mentality that assures us that if we work hard enough and want "it" badly enough, the dream is ours for the taking.

As with any remarkable tale, however, the stories embedded in policy negotiations also tell of victims and villains. Listen to the tragic story of 17-year-old Ms. Franklin. Living in a windowless shack on the edge of a field with no running water or indoor plumbing, Ms. Franklin was sexually abused by her father for several years before conceiving her first child (House Select Committee on Hunger Domestic Task Force 1992b, 26). There's also Ms. Henderson, an unwed mother of three, who received \$723 per month in public assistance. Addicted to crack while pregnant and breastfeeding, she was charged with the murder of her two-month-old infant son, who died from drug-laced breast milk (*Cong. Rec.* 1995, S11778). Gracing the pages of many hearings and debate transcripts is the chilling story of the Chicago Keystone case, in which police officers found 19 children in a filthy, rat-infested, two-room hovel. The four cocaine-addicted mothers of the children squandered their welfare payments to feed their addictions, leaving their children to gnaw on a bone with the family dog (House Committee on Ways and Means 1994a, 521).<sup>2</sup> Like all good fairy tales, these heart-wrenching and painful stories have morals; they warn of the consequences for violating such cherished values as hard work, marriage, and virtuous living.

The stories go even further, as the epigraph to this chapter suggests. The stories structure our collective understanding of both welfare problems and solutions. Through language—anecdotes, metaphors, empirical data—those who testify in the welfare policy deliberations weave a story about welfare. This narrative, in turn, provides policy makers with a framework for interpreting and understanding the complex dynamics of the welfare system. The narrative also offers policy makers evidence to support legislative proposals and policies. Thus, one fundamental guiding assumption of this inquiry is that language plays a significant role in shaping policy outcomes. Indeed, as the following chapters demonstrate, the stories and narratives about welfare recipients, welfare families, and the welfare system exert a powerful influence on both policy proposals and the resulting legislation.

Certainly, other approaches to examining welfare change are both possible and appropriate. For example, scholars have explored the role of public opinion, partisan politics, the press, policy research, and interest groups, among others, in guiding policy decisions. Any of these perspectives “necessarily rests on a simplified model of political life... focusing on what the observer considers the most important causes while paying less attention to others” (Weaver 2000, 23). It is outside the scope of this book to address all of the complex factors that affect welfare policy outcomes. Instead, this book aims to focus on one important and frequently overlooked area of study in the area of welfare reform—the role of language. The role of language in policy formation remains unclear, despite sustained calls to investigate this important relationship.<sup>3</sup>

My purpose in this book is to conduct a case study of a significant piece of legislation, the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, P.L. 104-193 (PRWORA), to contribute to the growing and nascent dialogue on the relationship between rhetoric and public policy.<sup>4</sup> From 1992 to 1996, in a series of hearings and debates, congressional representatives and witnesses deliberated over several welfare reform proposals that eventually culminated in the 1996 act, one of the most controversial social policy reforms in history. The congressional hearings, debates, and subsequent proposals attracted widespread attention from both critics and supporters, initiating heated debates, editorials, opinion polls, protest marches, and policy arguments. *New York Times* reporter Jerry Gray explained in an August 1, 1996, article that many groups, including the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, “hailed the legislation as a reaffirmation of ‘America’s work ethic.’” “Republican presidential nominee Robert J. Dole praised the bill and said it would be remembered as a Republican victory,” reported *Washington Post* correspondent Barbara Vobejda on August 23, 1996. In contrast, reporter Francis X. Clines observed in an August 22, 1996, *New York Times* article that many individuals and groups, such as the nation’s Roman Catholic bishops, Children’s Defense Fund, National Organization of Women, and Feminist Majority, decried the president’s historic signing as a “moment of shame.” In an act that “illustrated the deep divisions in the administration over Mr. Clinton’s decision to approve the Republican welfare legislation,” *New York Times* reporter Alison Mitchell explained in a September 11, 1996, article that several of the Clinton administration’s top welfare policy officials—Deputy Assistant Secretary of Human Resources Wendell Primus, Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation Peter Edelman, and Assistant Secretary of Children and Families Mary Jo Bane—resigned in protest over PRWORA’s passage. Lauded as “historic welfare legislation... that...rewrites six decades of social policy,” and “the most radical overhaul” in welfare policy, the 1996 welfare reform bill officially ended the cash assistance, entitlement-based program, AFDC (Harris and Yang 1996, A1; Vobejda 1996, A1; Weaver 2000, 335–36).

Set to expire on October 1, 2002, PRWORA’s impending reauthorization prompted congressional consideration of several proposals. Consistent with the Bush administration’s commitment to promoting healthy marriages as a top priority, on May 16, 2002, the House of Representatives passed H.R. 4737, the Personal Responsibility, Work, and Family Act, to encourage marriage [promotion] and responsible fatherhood. Later, on June 26, 2002, the Senate Finance Committee passed a bipartisan reauthorization bill with marriage provisions similar to those in H.R. 4737. This bill never made it to the Senate floor for action, and the expiring 1996 Act was not reauthorized (Parke 2003). A Brookings Institution briefing, from December 11, 2002, explained: “With terrorism and a potential war in Iraq

dominating both headlines and politicians' attention, domestic social policy concerns have slipped into the background. Moreover, a worsening federal budget deficit has made it less likely that any costly social policy initiatives can be launched. Congress and the president have not even been able to agree on a reauthorization of the expiring 1996 welfare reform legislation." Currently, many scholars and practitioners have expressed concern over how foreign policy affairs and a troubled economy will affect welfare reform initiatives. If the passage of a GOP bill—H. R., the Personal Responsibility, Work, and Family Act of 2003—by the House on February 13, 2003, is any indication, however, PRWORA will soon be reauthorized in a form similar to the 1996 act, with an even greater emphasis on marriage and work.

This book analyzes the congressional hearings and debates on welfare reform from the 102nd, 103rd, and 104th Congresses to understand how these discursive exchanges shaped PRWORA and how they continue to frame contemporary welfare discussions. Explaining the importance of such an inquiry into the language aspects of welfare reform, political scientist Sanford Schram wrote in his *Words of Welfare*:

[H]ighlighting the ways in which discourse helps construct what is taken to be real, natural, and true creates resources for working toward alternative arrangements.... Welfare policy has therefore not only material consequences in terms of the benefits it supplies. It also has symbolic consequences in reinforcing prevailing understandings of "the poor," "welfare dependency," "dysfunctional families," and so on. In fact, attention to discourse helps show how the symbolic and the material are interrelated. (1995, xxiv)

Indeed, one major goal of this book is to explore the relationship between symbolic talk about welfare and the material consequences of this talk in terms of welfare reform legislation and the lives of welfare recipients.

Because public policies are one powerful vehicle for signaling American values, the hearings and debates surrounding PRWORA provide critics with an appropriate case study to examine the relationship among language, political arguments, and policy formation. Congressional hearings and debates are two important venues for public policy making because they provide a public record of the issues, research, and proposals that ultimately inform legislation (Oleszek 1996, 110–12). In such hearings and debates, the congressional members and participants who testify—public interest groups, policy experts, concerned citizens—articulate their views about a policy issue and together construct a variety of depictions about the problem and potential solutions. Congressional hearings also "suggest something about what sorts of information sources legislators value or at least believe should be provided a forum in which to express their views" (Weaver 2000, 141). The committee report that emerges from these hear-

ings, and that also reflects any amendments to the proposal, becomes the basis for future floor debates in Congress. Thus, in many respects, legislative hearings and debates help frame future policy decisions. Certainly, factors such as partisan politics and negotiations between legislators and special interest groups exert a strong influence on legislative outcomes. Nevertheless, as this study indicates, the link between legislator and witness descriptions of welfare families and corresponding legislation also underscores the significance of language and ideology in shaping policy change.<sup>5</sup>

### **DEPICTION, NARRATIVE, AND PRESENCE: A FRAMEWORK FOR INQUIRY**

Several sets of questions animate this inquiry into how legislators craft public policy and how historical ideologies, narratives, and arguments influence public policy construction.<sup>6</sup> One set of questions facilitates investigation of the historical roots of welfare legislation. How have representations of welfare recipients, welfare providers, and the welfare system evolved throughout American history? How does this historical context frame the hearings and debates over PRWORA and discussions surrounding its subsequent reauthorization? These questions assist in tracing the broad trajectory of welfare reform legislation in American history; they highlight important shifts in public perceptions of welfare, goals of and responsibility for welfare provision, and causes of welfare dependence.

A second set of questions concerns the identification of competing representations (or depictions)<sup>7</sup> of welfare recipients and their families that emerge in the hearings and debates to support various proposals for welfare reform. How do witnesses and legislators depict welfare recipients and their families in the hearings and debates? What arguments and evidence do witnesses and legislators use to warrant these depictions? What values, motives, and assumptions are implicit in these depictions and arguments? These questions assist in acquiring a comprehensive picture of how witnesses and legislators characterize welfare recipients and their families and the roots of the welfare problem.

A third set of questions centers on the role of depictions in social policy making. How do the competing versions of welfare recipients and policy objectives emergent in the hearings and debates play out in enacted legislation? How do the depictions frame the ways legislators can respond in the form of public policies? What are the implications of basing public policy on particular depictions? The objective of this line of inquiry is to assess what this case study of PRWORA can teach about the strengths, weaknesses, values, and pitfalls of the discursive nature of policy making.

A final set of questions interrogates the dynamics of power inherent in the legislative process. How do specific discourse practices and rules in congressional hearings and debates affect the construction of public policy? How does the discourse work to legitimate, privilege, or discount evidence, depictions, and authority? What are the gender, racial, and class implications of the depictions of welfare recipients and their families? These questions seek to unveil the ideological influences in the legislative process by examining how the legislative discourse sustains, challenges, and perpetuates historical values, power relationships, and special interests.

Addressing these questions requires an integrated interdisciplinary approach, drawing on the works of rhetorical theorists, political scientists, feminist scholars, and public policy practitioners. Outlining some of these works provides the methodological and theoretical grounding for the chapters that follow. Specifically, the theories of Michael Osborn, Walter Fisher, and Maurice Charland provide an excellent framework for identifying significant depictions emergent in welfare reform history and contemporary legislative hearings and debates. These works also help assess the influence of the depictions on PRWORA and reauthorization deliberations. Raymie McKerrow's work on critical rhetoric also provides an appropriate theoretical background for uncovering the power dimensions inherent in the legislative process.

Michael Osborn's work on rhetorical depiction seeks to shift the traditional focus of rhetoric from a "study of primarily rational calculations" to one that "emphasizes instead the symbolic moorings of human consciousness." Thus, a focus on depictions "seeks those moments in which audiences encounter significant presentations of reality, and it strives to illuminate the rhetorical implications of such encounters" (1986, 97). The remaining chapters of this book explore "significant presentations of reality" concerning welfare recipients and their attitudes, values, and behaviors as constructed in the hearings and debates. In the end, the chapters demonstrate how these symbolic representations of welfare recipients and their families exert a persuasive force that rivals the traditional rational arguments associated with deliberative hearings.

Defined as "strategic pictures, verbal or nonverbal visualizations that linger in the collective memory of audiences as representative of their subjects," rhetorical depictions perform a vital role in the formation and maintenance of community life, chiefly by embodying accepted cultural values and goals (Osborn, 1986, 79–80). These depictions may assume a variety of forms, including extended anecdotes, metaphors, allegories, and empirical evidence. Taken together, these depictive forms function as brush strokes in painting a vivid portrait of the typical welfare recipient and welfare family. This portrait then serves as the basis for policy formation in the context of a public moral argument.

The lens of depiction complements one of this book's tasks of considering the role of historical context in framing welfare problems and identifying solutions to those welfare problems. Often, "graphic lessons" from the past "lend urgency to present decisions" (93). This book not only attends to depictions of welfare recipients and their families as constructed in the contemporary debate, but it also examines the sociohistorical context of welfare reform in America, from colonial times to the present. As a result, the study illuminates how prevailing characterizations of welfare recipients grounded in historical ideologies and value systems shape resulting legislation.

Another central feature of depictive rhetoric is that depictions imply narratives. Osborn contended that depiction is "more a compression than a reflection. The portrait it offers may express implicitly and simultaneously an assertion concerning the origins of a subject, a prediction of that subject's fate, and the moral stance of the speaker" (79–80). In the context of the welfare reform debate, the depictions of welfare recipients and their families imply welfare narratives. W. Lance Bennett and Murray Edelman made a related point in their study of political narratives: "Just as any narrative is likely to imply a wider set of related stories and an ideology, so a term or a simple reference in any political text may evoke a full-fledged story. . . . Political communications, then, . . . are always seedbeds of stories" (1985, 164–165). Similarly, the demographic and character attributes ascribed to welfare recipients in the hearings and debates implicate a more comprehensive story about the past and future behaviors, lifestyles, and aspirations of welfare recipients. Ultimately, these depictions of welfare recipients and their families serve as evidence to support legislative proposals and policies designed to enforce values and desirable behaviors.

In his work on the narrative paradigm, communication theorist Walter Fisher explored how audiences evaluate one form of depictive rhetoric—narratives. The narrative paradigm holds that humans are essentially storytellers who create and communicate stories that form understanding, guide collective reasoning, and shape behavior. "[S]ymbols are created and communicated ultimately as stories meant to give order to human experience and to induce others to dwell in them to establish ways of living in common, in communities in which there is sanction for the story that constitutes one's life" (Fisher 1984, 6). According to Fisher, narration is the dominant mode of human communication and is particularly well suited to evaluating public moral argument such as welfare reform deliberations. "No matter how rigorously a case is argued—scientifically, philosophically, or legally—it will always be a story, an interpretation of some aspect of the world which is historically and culturally grounded and shaped by human personality" (Fisher 1987, 17). Consequently, Fisher believed that the narrative paradigm is the best way to account for how



and why people adopt particular stories to create meaning and guide collective action.

In addition to inferring narratives, depictions also imply an ideal audience, or those individuals who would accept the assumptions, values, and narratives embedded in the rhetoric.<sup>8</sup> According to Osborn, "We experience the world either directly or through depictions, and even direct experience can be mediated and predisposed by previous depictions that prepare us for the experience." These "repetitive presentations" draw on deeply seated cultural values that "imply shared evaluative outlooks, which are a necessary condition to mass cooperative action" (1986, 81, 82). As such, depictions are constitutive: They implicate an ideal audience and commit the audience to act in accordance with the narrative logic inherent in the depictions.

Maurice Charland described this process of constitutive rhetoric in greater detail through an analysis of the White Paper and the *Peuple Québécois*. He argued that when individuals recognize themselves as participants in a historical narrative, they become "constituted as a subject in a narrative...constituted with a history, motives, and a *telos*" (1987, 140). Charland explained that constitutive rhetoric acquires this power to frame audience responses because of its ideological nature: "The power of the text is the power of an embodied ideology. The form of an ideological rhetoric is effective because it is within the bodies of those it constitutes as subjects.... Ideology is material because subjects enact their ideology and reconstitute their material world in its image" (143). This passage calls attention to the influence of ideology in decision-making processes. In the case of welfare reform legislation, when legislators and witnesses assent to characterizations of welfare recipients, they also subscribe to the narrative suggested by the depictions. In turn, the logic of the welfare narrative encourages legislators to act consistently with the motives, values, and assumptions embedded in the narrative. Legislator actions are manifested materially in the form of legislation based on the depictions of welfare recipients and their families.

Rhetorical theorist Raymie E. McKerrow (1989) offered a more comprehensive account of how to explore the ideological and power dynamics of discourse in his article "Critical Rhetoric: Theory and Praxis." McKerrow articulated a perspective of critical rhetoric that seeks to understand how discourse creates, sustains, and challenges the social practices that order people's lives. Strongly influenced by Michel Foucault, McKerrow's "Critical Rhetoric" acknowledges that discourse maintains existing power relations through discourse rules and "taken-for-granted" processes that govern who may speak, which topics are appropriate to address, and what counts as authoritative evidence (93).

As is evident in the following chapters, discourse rules surrounding welfare reform hearings and legislation empower dominant social relations in three important ways. First, as demonstrated in chapters 2 and 3, centuries of welfare legislation provide a long history of taken-for-granted discourse that privileges social faith in traditional values. McKerrow explained: "The discourse of power creates and perpetuates the relations, and gives form to the ideology which it projects. Ideology, regardless of its expression, begins with these social relations as integral to its creation.... Power is expressed anonymously, in nondeliberate ways, at a 'deep structure' level and may have its origins in the remoteness of our past (carried forward through a particularizing discursive formation)" (1989, 99). Similarly, this book shows how the historical context surrounding the welfare reform deliberations lends presence to certain values that support existing power relations and structures. Chaim Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca defined the concept of presence in their comprehensive study of argumentation, *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation*, as the process by which speakers enhance the significance of certain elements of their message in the minds of their audiences: "[O]ne of the preoccupations of a speaker is to make present, by verbal magic alone, what is actually absent but what he considers important to his argument or, by making them more present, to enhance the value of some of the elements of which one has actually been made conscious" (1971, 117).<sup>9</sup> Relying on the concept of presence, chapters 2 and 3 illustrate how the historical context of welfare in America lends presence to such values as work, family, and individual responsibility, enhancing the primacy of those values in the minds of witnesses and legislators.

Second, legislative discourse privileges some testimony as authoritative and discounts other forms of evidence as irrelevant. McKerrow explained that "discourse insinuates itself in the fabric of social power and thereby 'effects' the status of knowledge among the members of the social group" (1989, 92). In the case of welfare, the largely unfavorable depictions of welfare recipients and their families justify the exclusion of welfare recipient testimony from the hearings and debates with few exceptions. In contrast, welfare scholars, legislators, religious leaders, and welfare program managers receive considerable time on hearings panels, guaranteeing an audience for their views.

Third, discourse rules of the legislative process also favor dominant ideologies. Explaining this phenomenon in *The Archaeology of Knowledge and Discourse on Language*, Michel Foucault noted that "in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed according to a certain number of procedures whose role is to avert its powers and its dangers, to cope with chance events, to evade its