

PERIODICALS

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POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

LBJ's Legacy?

"The Two Wars Against Poverty: Economic Growth and the Great Society" by Charles A. Murray, in *The Public Interest* (Fall 1982), P.O. Box 542, Old Chelsea, New York, N.Y. 10014.

Lyndon Johnson's "War on Poverty," launched in 1964, spurred a sharp 16-year rise in social spending. Yet Murray, former chief scientist of the American Institutes for Research, argues that Washington's new activism had a perverse result: It brought the gradual spread of American affluence to a "grinding halt."

Thanks chiefly to economic growth, the number of people living in poverty (when income and government transfer payments are counted) declined from 33 percent of the population in 1949 to 18 percent in 1964. By 1968, it had dropped to 13 percent. Then, just when Johnson's programs were shifting into high gear, progress slowed. During the next five years, poverty declined by only 1.9 percentage points, to 11.1 percent in 1973. Washington's outlays for transfer payments grew by two-thirds in constant dollars during the 1970s, but by 1980, poverty had returned to the 13 percent level.

What happened? Murray contends that more generous social welfare policies increased dependency and encouraged family break-ups. In 1965, 21 percent of the population would have fallen below the poverty line without the help of government aid. By 1968, such "latent" poverty had fallen to 18.2 percent. But it reversed course thereafter, rising to 19 percent in 1972 and to 22 percent in 1980. A smaller percentage of Americans, especially black Americans, were "making it on their own."

Other data suggest what lay behind the change. Black and white men long had nearly identical labor-force participation rates; in 1965, the rate for black men was only one point lower. By 1968, a 3.4 point gap had opened, widening to 5.9 points in 1972 and to 8.1 in 1980. Middle-income black and white men still had comparable participation rates; changes in the behavior of the poor account for the gap. Family break-ups followed a similar pattern. In 1965, two-parent families accounted

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for 73 percent of black households. But the percentage of black two-parent families dropped to 54 percent in 1980. [Fifty percent of black families headed by women are on welfare.]

By one measure, LBJ's War on Poverty was a success. If poverty is calculated counting income, transfer payments, *and* in-kind benefits (food programs, medical care, housing), the rates were 10.1 percent in 1968, 6.2 percent in 1972, and 6.1 percent in 1980. But, says Murray, the goal of the War on Poverty was to help people escape "the dole."

In retrospect, he concludes, economic growth proved to be the only real antidote to poverty. "If the War on Poverty is construed as having begun in 1950 instead of 1964," he says, "we were winning . . . until Lyndon Johnson decided to wage it."

The Balanced Ticket Myth

"The Electoral Significance of the Vice Presidency" by Danny M. Adkison, in *Presidential Studies Quarterly* (Summer 1982), Center for the Study of the Presidency, 208 East 75th St., New York, N.Y. 10021.

Presidential nominees traditionally pick running mates on the basis of geography, ideology, or religion to boost their own chances on election day. But Richard Nixon, for one, did not put much stock in "balancing the ticket." "The Vice President can't help you," he asserted in 1968. "He can only hurt you."

By and large, Nixon was correct, argues Danny M. Adkison, a political scientist at Oklahoma State University. Using opinion surveys conducted by the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research, he analyzed voters' responses to the six major party tickets in the 1968, '72, and '76 elections. In four of the six cases, no more than 15 percent of voters who were unimpressed by a presidential nominee but pleased with his running mate voted for the party's ticket. Both exceptions involved Richard Nixon and Spiro Agnew. The first occurred in 1968, when 28.5 percent of voters who disliked Nixon but found Agnew appealing voted Republican. Yet, says Adkison, the Republicans triumphed in 1968 precisely because Nixon bucked the usual logic of ticket-balancing and found a running mate so unknown that voters simply had no initial reaction to him.

And Vice-Presidents can definitely hurt a ticket. Three-quarters of voters who liked both candidates on a ticket in the three elections voted for them. But only 46 percent of those who favored the presidential nominee but disliked the vice-presidential nominee cast their ballots for the ticket. Thus, a presidential candidate can cut his support by as much as 30 percent by picking an unpopular running mate.

One kind of ticket balancing—the "Home State Strategy"—does work. Since 1900, the winning presidential candidate has carried the Vice-President's home state 85.7 percent of the time. But the home state vote was decisive only once: In 1916, former governor Thomas R. Mar-