

“Human Rights, Women’s Rights, States’ Rights: The Politics of Federal Family Planning Programs, 1965-1988”

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In 1965 the United States federal government announced that grants were available through the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) to establish birth control clinics in poor neighborhoods. For the first time, the federal government would openly support family planning programs in America. The OEO was responsible for carrying out President Lyndon B. Johnson’s “war on poverty,” so federal support for family planning began as an anti-poverty strategy. It has remained entangled with welfare policy ever since. However, scholars have not examined the history of federally-funded birth control programs in the U.S., and have therefore overlooked an important way that reproductive rights and the welfare state have been connected since the 1960s. My dissertation, “Human Rights, Women’s Rights, States’ Rights: The Politics of Federal Family Planning Programs, 1965-1988,” examines the history of federal funding for birth control in order to shed new light on the relationship between family planning policy and welfare policy. In so doing, it will contribute to our understanding of the histories of birth control, welfare, and the U.S. government’s influence on its citizens’ sexual and reproductive lives.

Historians and political scientists have, until now, studied birth control and welfare separately, thus failing to see how the two areas of government policy have shaped each other. Historians of family planning and reproductive rights have focused almost entirely on the issue

of legality: when, and under what conditions, have birth control and abortion been legal?¹ This is especially true for the period after the *Roe v. Wade* decision of 1973, when scholars have almost exclusively studied the politics of abortion. These studies inevitably focus on the ways access to abortion has been limited over time through statutes and court decisions. However, they fail to account for the ways that the federal government has affirmatively protected access to birth control through subsidies for poor women. Other scholars have studied the U.S. Government's involvement in overseas family planning programs without looking at parallel developments at home.² Meanwhile, historical scholarship in regard to the American welfare state largely focuses on cash subsidies and food stamps.³ In 1965 though, policymakers saw access to birth control as a fundamental condition for poverty relief. It is imperative that historians understand the connections between family planning policy and welfare policy in order to fully analyze our government's changing responses to poverty over time. Moreover, examining the history of federal family planning programs reveals the political reaction to changes in racial, sexual and gender norms during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s.

My dissertation fills these gaps by examining the politics of federally-funded family planning programs from 1965 until 1988, when President Ronald Reagan left office. I will show that during this time period, birth control moved from being seen as a pro-family, anti-poverty strategy to being seen as a tool for women's autonomy that consequently threatened the two-parent, patriarchal, nuclear family. As a result, while family planning programs enjoyed broad support from both liberals and conservatives during the late 1960s, in the following decades the programs faced increasing criticism. This was coincident with a growing critique that welfare programs reduced recipients' incentives to seek traditional forms of financial stability through marriage and work. Attacks on family planning and welfare programs therefore went hand-in-

hand, as conservatives believed that both forms of government assistance undermined the nuclear family and the American ideal of personal responsibility. Simultaneously, beneficiaries of these programs became more vocal in their insistence that all Americans deserved a guaranteed standard of living and control over their own reproductive lives, thus making broader claims for both welfare rights and reproductive rights. The politics of family planning funding thereby became increasingly polarized during the period under examination in my dissertation, as did the politics of welfare.

To uncover this history my project relies on government records and the archives of influential organizations and individuals involved in family planning activism. Among the most important were John D. Rockefeller 3rd (JDR 3rd) and the Population Council (PC), whose rich collections at the Rockefeller Archive Center (RAC) will form the backbone of much of my dissertation. Materials in these two collections reveal the actions not only of JDR 3rd and the PC, but of other significant individuals such as Bernard Berelson and Charles Westoff, and the organizations Planned Parenthood–World Population, the National Urban League, and Zero Population Growth. Moreover, these collections and the Commonwealth Fund (CF) archives have numerous records relating to Planned Parenthood of New York City, a local affiliate which will provide a narrower lens through which to watch the politics of family planning play out in my dissertation. The RAC’s collections have certainly been quite a treasure trove for me as I work on my dissertation.

In the mid-1960s, JDR 3rd and staff members of the PC strongly influenced federal policymakers in the White House, executive branch departments, and Congress in the first conversations about establishing various family planning programs. These discussions are well documented in the JDR 3rd and PC collections. In 1965 Senator Ernest Gruening hosted the first

Congressional hearings concerning family planning and population growth, and he became one of the most vocal Congressional advocates for family planning. The PC files show the beginning of his interest through letters from Gruening to Frank Notestein and Dudley Kirk at the end of 1963 and 1964.⁴ Subsequently the files reveal the PC's ongoing engagement with Gruening throughout the hearings, which took place in nineteen sessions over two years. The documents demonstrate Gruening's desire to use the PC and other non-governmental organizations to put political pressure on Congress and the Johnson Administration to create family planning programs.⁵ The RAC materials discuss many of the assorted federal government family planning programs that began in the mid-1960s including the Department of Defense decision in 1966 to begin offering birth control to military members and dependents, the Division of Indian Health's distribution of family planning information including services to its clients, and the Office of Economic Opportunity's funding of family planning services through anti-poverty programs.⁶ Additionally, the RAC's collections illuminate the Congressional efforts to expand federal subsidies for family planning in the late 1960s, with correspondence between the PC, Senator Joseph Tydings, Congressman Paul Todd, and others.⁷

In 1970 Congress convened a Commission on Population Growth and the American Future, charged with doing research and making policy recommendations about how to prevent ill effects of population growth in the coming decades. Although President Nixon initially supported this effort, by the time the Commission released its final report in 1972, the politics of family planning had changed so significantly that the president rejected the findings. The Commission's work, and Nixon's reaction to it, are the focus of my dissertation's third chapter. I use the story of the Commission as a way to examine the quickly changing politics of family planning in the early 1970s. JDR 3rd chaired the Commission, the PC's Bernard Berelson was a

commissioner, and PC staff members advised the White House, Congress, and the Commission throughout the process. Both the JDR 3rd and the PC collections hold significant amounts of material about the Commission. These records have therefore afforded me great insight into the Commission's work that will enable me to write this chapter. Some of the most important materials include transcripts of testimony from the Commission's five public hearings, summaries of the Commission's monthly internal meetings, discussions of major splits within the Commission, notes about the relationship between population and the status of women, and documents revealing the controversy over the Commission's final report.⁸

The RAC collections also provide extensive information about the changed conversation about family planning in the late 1970s, which I will analyze in my fourth dissertation chapter. In 1974, at a contentious United Nations World Population Conference in Bucharest, Romania, JDR 3rd gave a speech that marked a watershed moment for the population movement. In the speech, he disavowed a family-planning-first strategy for reducing population growth and endorsed broad-ranging development and education programs that would have the collateral effect of reducing population pressure. At the conference, many American population activists found themselves in conflict with increasingly vocal advocates from developing countries who accused the Americans of trying to suppress as well as oppress their populations with family planning programs. If the Americans really wanted to help reduce poverty they said, broad-ranging development programs were the solution, rather than family planning. When Rockefeller spoke, he surprised both sides of this debate by seemingly siding with the developing nations rather than the American allies that he had cultivated over the previous two decades.

The texts of JDR 3rd's address and follow-up presentations are in the RAC collection, enabling me to finally read the speech that I had read *about* in several secondary sources.⁹ Many

American family planning advocates were furious with Rockefeller, and several RAC collections document the ensuing upheaval in the population control and family planning movements. For instance, a memo by Joan Dunlop, an assistant to JDR 3rd, reported on a meeting between JDR 3rd and PC leaders about a month after the Bucharest conference. The memo notes that: “The purpose of the meeting was to clarify in the minds of the Council leadership what JDR meant in his speech at Bucharest. Behind this request lay an unarticulated feeling that some Council staff feel ‘let down’ by the implications in JDR’s speech with respect to family planning, aggravated by press reports.”¹⁰

Beyond the Bucharest speech, the political conversation about family planning had changed significantly by the late 1970s. Whereas in the 1960s advocates focused on the potential reduction in poverty that could result from more widespread access to birth control, by the late 1970s, teen pregnancy and abortion had become the two issues driving the political conversation about family planning. Moreover, feminist concerns about family planning advocates’ treatment of women began to change discussion and practice. PC documents reveal that the organization debated how to incorporate feminist analyses into its work, pushed by international conversations about women’s roles and the efficacy of family planning programs.¹¹ JDR 3rd’s files also document his increased interests in abortion and teen pregnancy in the years before his sudden death in 1978.¹² Together, these documents show family planning advocates adjusting to a changed political landscape in the late 1970s. They will enable me to piece together the politics of family planning in these years.

The RAC also holds assorted documents about other organizations that I will discuss in my dissertation. In addition to the PC, Planned Parenthood-World Population (PP-WP) played a fundamental role in shaping federal family planning policy. The PC papers contain some

important documents from PP-WP, including advertisements that suggest the racial underpinnings of the family planning debate in the 1960s, policy statements, staff memos and political advisories.¹³ The PC collection also holds documents from the National Urban League, the most significant African American organization that supported broader family planning programs.¹⁴ Finally, the PC and the CF collections include documents about Planned Parenthood of New York City (PPNYC) which will inform my efforts to include a local lens on family planning policy in my dissertation. I have visited the PPNYC offices to gather documents and plan to interview several former PPNYC staff members about the affiliate's political and service work from the 1960s through the 1980s. However, since PPNYC does not have an archival collection, I will have to piece together documents from other collections in order to examine the affiliate's activities. Therefore, documents like the records of several grants to PPNYC from the CF will be crucial as I try to understand the issues the affiliate faced.¹⁵

The JDR 3rd and PC collections at the RAC hold extensive information about the politics of domestic government-funded family planning programs that will be crucial for my dissertation. These documents span the time period under study, from the 1960s to the 1980s, and they document not only the PC's activities, but those of federal policymakers and elected officials, the Commission on Population Growth and the American Future, Planned Parenthood – World Population, and other organizations that will figure in my project. They reveal adept political actors and organizations who adjusted their positions over time in response to changing political winds without sacrificing their core beliefs in the dangers of population growth and the necessity for reproductive self-determination.

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Rockefeller Archive Center Research Reports Online is a periodic publication of the Rockefeller Archive Center. Edited by Erwin Levold, Research Reports Online is intended to foster the network of scholarship in the history of philanthropy and to highlight the diverse range of materials and subjects covered in the collections at the Rockefeller Archive Center. The reports are drawn from essays submitted by researchers who have visited the Archive Center, many of whom have received grants from the Archive Center to support their research.

The ideas and opinions expressed in this report are those of the author and are not intended to represent the Rockefeller Archive Center.

ENDNOTES:

¹ Some of the best examples of this scholarship include Linda Gordon, *The Moral Property of Women: A History of Birth Control Politics in America*, 3rd edition. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002; David J. Garrow, *Liberty and Sexuality: The Right to Privacy and the Making of Roe V. Wade*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998; Kristin Luker, *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood*. California series on social choice and political economy. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984; James Reed, *The Birth Control Movement and American Society: From Private Vice to Public Virtue: With a New Preface on the Relationship Between Historical Scholarship and Feminist Issues*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984; Ellen Chesler, *Woman of Valor: Margaret Sanger and the Birth Control Movement in America*. Revised edition. New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2007.

² Matthew James Connelly, *Fatal Misconception: The Struggle to Control World Population*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008.

³ Michael B. Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse: A Social History of Welfare in America*, 10th edition. New York: Basic Books, 1996. James T. Patterson, *America's Struggle Against Poverty in the Twentieth Century*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2000; Felicia Ann Kornbluh, *The Battle for Welfare Rights: Politics and Poverty in Modern America, Politics and Culture in Modern America*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007.

⁴ Letter from Ernest Gruening to Frank W. Notestein, November 20, 1963, and letter from Ernest Gruening to Dudley Kirk, January 8, 1964, both in Folder 2108, Box 115, Series 5, Population Council Papers (PC) (Accession I), (PC I), RAC.

⁵ See, for example, Letter from Ernest Gruening to Bernard Berelson, December 22, 1966, and The Population Council Office Memorandum from Nan McEvoy to Notestein, Berelson, RKA, Kirk, SS, RL, Subject: Gardner, Bell and Mann Testimony, April 7, 8 and 11, 1966, both in Folder 2109, Box 115, Series 5, PC I, RAC.

⁶ Memorandum for Secretaries of the Military Departments, Subject: Family Planning Services for Dependents, October 3, 1966, in Folder 2131, Box 116, Series 5, PC I, RAC; Letter from Albert C. Diddams, Acting Clinical Director, PHS, Alaska Native Medical Center, to Planned Parenthood World/Population Council [sic], January 24, 1966 in Folder 2118, Box 116, Series 5, PC I, RAC; for example, Memorandum No. 37-A, from the Community Action Program, Office of Economic Opportunity, Subject: New Statement of OEO Policy on Family Planning Activities – Supersedes CA Memo No. 37, February 3, 1967, in Folder 310, Box 38, Population Council - Organizational File, Population Council Papers (Accession II), (PC II), RAC.

⁷ For example: Letter from Senator Joseph Tydings to Frank Notestein, President, The Population Council, December 6, 1965, Folder 2108, Box 115, Series 5, PC I, RAC; "Defusing the Population Explosion," Remarks Prepared for Delivery by Senator Joseph D. Tydings on the Senate Floor Upon Introduction of Family Planning Bills, February 28, 1966, Folder 2109, Box 115, Series 5, PC I, RAC; Letter to Bernard Berelson [sic] from Congressman Paul H. Todd, Jr., June 19, 1966, Folder 2107, Box 115, Series 5, PC I, RAC; Memo from Paul H. Todd, Jr., Chairman to Members of the President's Committee on Population and Family Planning, September 10, 1968, Folder "President's Committee on Population & F/P," Box 37 (Bernard Berelson) [unprocessed], PC Administration Files, PC II, RAC.

⁸ Public hearings: Folder 443, Box 67, Subseries 4, Series 3, RG 5 John D. Rockefeller 3rd Papers, Rockefeller Family Archives (JDR 3rd Papers), RAC; Folder “American Future - Population,” Box 38 (Bernard Berelson) (unprocessed), PC Administration Files, PC II, RAC. Internal meeting summaries: Folder “Commission on Population Growth & the American Future – Summary (meetings),” Box 38 (Bernard Berelson) (unprocessed), PC Administration Files, PC II, RAC. Splits in the Commission: Folder 462, Box 69; Folder 454, Box 68, both in Subseries 4, Series 3, JDR 3rd Papers, RAC; Folder “Commission on Population Growth & the American Future – BB’s notes, etc.,” Box 37 (Bernard Berelson) (unprocessed), PC Administration Files, PC II, RAC. Status of women: Folder 468, Box 70, Subseries 4, Series 3, JDR 3rd Papers; Folder “Commission on Population Growth & the American Future – Status of Women,” Box 38 (Bernard Berelson) (unprocessed), PC Administration Files, PC II, RAC. Final report: Folder 454, Box 68, Subseries 4, Series 3, JDR 3rd Papers, RAC; Folder “Commission on Population Growth and the American Future – Staff,” Folder “Commission on Population Growth and the American Future Press (Miscellaneous),” Folder “Commission on Population Growth & the American Future Press (Miscellaneous),” all in Box 38 (Bernard Berelson) (unprocessed), PC Administration Files, PC II, RAC.

⁹ John D. Rockefeller 3rd, “Population Growth: The Role of the Developed World,” *Lecture Series on Population*, International Union for the Scientific Study of Population, World Population Year, Bucharest, 1974; and Remarks by John D. Rockefeller 3rd to Planned Parenthood of Virginia, November 22, 1974, both in Folder 800, Box 98, Subseries 6, Series 3, JDR 3rd Papers, RAC.

¹⁰ Memo from Joan M. Dunlop to File, Subject: Notes on Meeting between JDR and Population Council Leadership (Mauldin, Demeny, Pease, Segal), September 27, 1974, in Folder 476, Box 71, Subseries 4, Series 3, JDR 3rd Papers, RAC.

¹¹ Anna Quandt, “A Report on International Women’s Year Conference and Its Meaning for the Population Council,” July 17, 1975; Report of the Committee on Women’s Roles and Population, November 7, 1975, both in Folder 444, Box 67, Subseries 4, Series 3, JDR 3rd Papers, RAC.

¹² Remarks by John D. Rockefeller 3rd, Breakfast Meeting with Congressmen, September 21, 1977, Folder 801, Box 98, Subseries 6; JDR 3rd Testimony before Select Committee on Population, February 9, 1978, Folder 453, Box 68, Subseries 4, both in Series 3, JDR 3rd Papers, RAC.

¹³ (Advertisements), Folder 1997, Box 107, PC I, RAC; “Closing the Gap in US Birth Control Services,” A Statement by George N. Lindsay, Chairman, PP-WP, February 9, 1966 and Letter from Stewart R. Mott to Friend of Planned Parenthood, April 6, 1966, Folder 1998, Box 107, PC I, RAC; Letter from Alan F. Guttmacher to Friend of Planned Parenthood, October 11, 1966, Folder 1999, Box 108, PC I, RAC; Memo from Jeannie Rosoff to Planned Parenthood–World Population Board Members (et. al), September 30, 1966, Folder 2109, Box 115, Series 5, PC I, RAC; Memo from Jeannie Rosoff to Planned Parenthood–World Population Board Members (et. al), Subject: The “Poverty” Bill, 1966, November 2, 1966, Folder 2133, Box 116, Series 5, PC I, RAC; Memo from Jeannie Rosoff to Planned Parenthood–World Population Board Members (et. al), December 12, 1967, Folder 300, Box 36, Series 4, PC II, RAC.

¹⁴ National Urban League, “Policy Statement on Family Planning” and “A Preplanning Proposal,” and Letter from Jeweldean Jones, ACSW, Associate Director of Health and Welfare, National Urban League, to Bernard Berelson, Vice President, Population Council, August 2, 1966, all in Folder 1973, Box 106, PC I, RAC.

¹⁵ Letter from Mrs. Philip Bastedo and Alexis C. Coudert, Co-Chairmen, The Joint Campaign, to Friends, December 16, 1966, Folder 1999, Box 108, PC I, RAC; “The Visible Symptoms,” Folder 2673, Box 280, Series 18, Commonwealth Fund Archives (CF), RAC; Letter from Alfred F. Moran to Quigg Newton, November 15, 1968 and Letter from Quigg Newton to Alfred F. Moran, February 18, 1969, both in Folder 2674, Box 281, Series 18, CF, RAC; A Specialized Service Program to Young People: Report for the Commonwealth Fund, June 1970, by PPNYC, Inc, Folder 2675, Box 281, Series 18, CF, RAC; Planned Parenthood of New York City, Inc., Financial Statements and Schedule, December 31, 1976, Folder 2680, Box 281, Series 18, CF, RAC; “Completed Grant Report: Reorganization of Public Family Planning Clinics in New York City,” July 8, 1986, Folder 780, Box 104, Series 18, CF, RAC.