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**Constructive Welfare: The Social Security Act, the Blind, and the Origins of
Political Identity among People with Disabilities, 1935–1950**

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In contemporary America, identifying as a person with a disability is one of the many ways in which people acknowledge, even celebrate, who they are. Yet several decades ago, few persons with disabilities saw their condition as an identity to be embraced, let alone to serve as the basis for affinity and collective mobilization. The transformation of disability from unmitigated tragedy to a collective and politicized identity emerged in national politics, not in the 1960s or 1970s, as is commonly thought, but in the 1940s. During those years, the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) set out to galvanize the nation’s blind men and women, most of them poor and unemployed, to demand the economic security and opportunity enjoyed by sighted Americans. This aspiration for equal citizenship led the NFB into protracted contests with the Social Security Administration (SSA) over aid to the poor and sharpened the organization’s resolve to represent the nation’s civilian blind.¹ Long before disability rights activists declared “nothing about us, without us,” the NFB insisted that only the blind, not sighted social workers or experts in blindness, were entitled to speak on behalf of the blind.²

Pioneering an organizing strategy and a critique of American liberalism later embraced by activists of the Left, the NFB rose to become one of the most effective civil rights and antipoverty organizations of its time. Today, however, its story has been largely forgotten.³

By uncovering blind activism and grounding it in mid-century conflicts over economic rights, I illuminate the ways in which greater attention to political identity enriches our understanding of American political development. Political historians generally view the 1940s as a period of quiescence because Congress made few statutory changes to the Social Security Act between 1939 and 1950.⁴ By locating political change in major congressional legislation, however, the standard account of Social Security politics misses the bitter conflict that raged between the SSA and the NFB over the terms and conditions of public assistance. At a time when few national groups organized the poor, much less the disabled, the NFB sought to wrest control over the policies that shaped the economic security of the blind from the SSA and its allies in the social work profession. To members of the NFB, called Federationists, blind benefits were not just about money but also about the messages these programs conveyed to recipients and their fellow citizens about the social meaning of blindness and the civic status of individuals who were blind. Neither was blindness simply an impairment in need of compensation or treatment. Rather, it constituted an identity that united the blind under common political interests, irrespective of their race, gender, or social class. Leaders of the NFB were determined to organize, mobilize, and represent the individuals bound together by that identity, and in so doing, they developed a dissident tradition within American liberalism. Centered on demands for participatory governance, the right to welfare, and respect for difference, it would blossom in the 1960s and 1970s in the welfare rights and disability rights movements.

In this article, I draw on a wide variety of primary materials to reconstruct the debate between the SSA and the NFB. This article proceeds in three parts. First, I explain how the NFB's efforts to articulate a political identity around blindness and mobilize the blind into national politics can be thought of as a process of constrained entrepreneurialism. Contesting political identity offers citizen advocacy groups, like the NFB, opportunities to upend settled political dynamics and advance new policy frames and thereby to serve as consequential engines of political development. Such groups, however, operate in a political space teeming with hierarchies predicated on identity, which, in turn, channel and restrain their activism. The second part of this article applies this framework to understanding political blind activists, social workers, and federal administrators during the 1930s–1940s. New Deal policymakers laid the institutional foundations for a breadwinning welfare state, one that treated people with disabilities, including the blind, as incapable of competitive employment. By locking the blind out of an expanding array of rights tied to productive labor, the act profoundly shaped how activists conceived of their interests and the strategies they pursued. At a time when the meaning of equality for women, industrial workers, and the disabled was still largely unsettled, these activists helped to clarify the contours of civic incorporation by speaking to the dignity of the blind and their aspirations for inclusion. Between 1940 and 1945, the NFB organized the blind across the United States to resist the SSA's plans for public assistance. Championing an alternative "constructive" antipoverty agenda of flat grants and provisions allowing the poor to keep a portion of their earnings, the NFB drew from a nascent discourse of blind identity and used it to resist the cleaving of the blind from the emerging regime of benefits available to workers. Last, I consider the legacy of blind activism. The NFB advanced a biting critique of liberalism that called attention to the ways in which the New Deal excluded difference. That it

drew heavily from the ideology of breadwinning, an ideology deeply rooted in the ideals and practices of white masculinity, illustrates the extent to which prevailing identity-based orders tethered the NFB's rethinking of blind identity and equal citizenship.

This article makes two contributions to the study of political identity and political development. First, it elaborates on a policy area that scholars agree is a central feature of welfare states but has received little attention as a site of identity politics: disability benefits. Prior accounts of disability benefits policy emphasize the efforts of state actors to erect and expand income support and rehabilitation programs for the disabled.⁵ How people with disabilities themselves contributed to the formation of these programs through organized political activity or what they thought about them receives less scholarly consideration. By calling attention to the importance of nonstate actors to the processes of identity formation, institutional change, and policy formation, this article challenges narratives that underscore the insularity of policymaking for Social Security between 1935 and 1950. In its retelling of postwar welfare politics, people with disabilities emerge as important political actors in their own right. Second, highlighting the role that the NFB played in debates over public assistance disrupts established views of political development. Scholars widely accept that political development occurs when "durable shifts in governing authority" become discernible; however, recent scholarship suggests that attention to political identity revises our assumptions concerning the timing and sequence of development. By peering further back in historical time, attention to the unfolding of identity brings cultural and societal transformations into the political realm. Even if not immediately successful in overthrowing a prevailing order, conflict over identity and civic membership can activate new political actors and reconfigure institutions in ways that manifest as durable shifts of power later on down the road. As such, attention to the formation and

contestation of collective identity can call into question settled periodizations of American political development and illuminate engines of political change previously ignored.⁶

Disability is a case in point. According to conventional wisdom, the disability rights movement did not emerge until the late 1960s or early 1970s, after the black freedom (civil rights) struggle served as both an awakening and a template for activists with disabilities, who came to see themselves as an oppressed minority.⁷ The conventional wisdom, however, neglects a rich vein of recent scholarship that has revealed the rise of some form of disability consciousness at least as far back as the 1950s. These works suggest that, rather than mimic other equity-minded social movements, demands for equality and inclusion from the disabled emerged in tandem with and contributed to the postwar social and political transformation of American citizenship rights.⁸ Furthermore, activism among the disabled complicates scholarly and journalistic perspectives that view identity politics with apprehension because of their potential to fracture broad progressive coalitions dedicated to economic justice.⁹ Blind activists regarded redistribution—and the terms on which it occurred—as fundamental to their calls for equal recognition and respect. At a time when policymakers treated blindness as a misfortune that destined one for a lifetime of helplessness, activists spoke of blindness as a condition that, although it required some getting used to, need not impinge on a person's worth or capacity to make a contribution to society. Accordingly, they demanded social welfare programs that safeguarded the dignity of the poor and provided ladders out of destitution through rules that encouraged the poor to earn and save. These incentives, they argued, were imperative for the individual who, though blind, was nonetheless “young and vigorous”; they allowed a person to receive aid and yet still consider himself “capable of being a man.”¹⁰ Policymakers might have

viewed public assistance and competitive employment as antithetical policy outcomes, but for mid-century blind activists, welfare rights were civil rights.

Political Identity and Agency in American Political Development

Over the last twenty years, a growing body of scholarship has explored the links between political identity, civic membership, and the development of both modern liberalism and the capacities of the national state. It has deepened our understanding of how contests over identity were central to early efforts at nation building, the development of the social and political order, and the formation of national unity.¹¹ By “political identity,” I refer to those aspects of an individual’s self-understanding that lead one to see one’s fate as linked with other individuals and to unite with them in groups that have political significance. If, as Stuart Hall argues, “Identity is the narrative of the self ... the story we tell ... in order to know who we are,” then political identity encompasses those aspects of the narrative that lead us to reach beyond the self to engage politically.¹² It aggregates individuals under a larger narrative of the group, weaving together constitutive norms, shared purposes, and a communal history and worldview that, for the purposes of politics, infuse individuals with a sense of who they are.¹³ By allowing human beings to see themselves as part of a group, by serving as “symbolically charged loyalties,” political identity makes claims on individuals, influencing how they evaluate policies, formulate preferences, and ascertain their interests. Political identity can be so powerful, in fact, that it induces individuals to support policies that benefit the group but either have no personal benefits or entail some measure of sacrifice.¹⁴ Among African Americans, for instance, despite social and economic disparities that sometimes cause group and individual interests to diverge, a shared

history of oppression and experiences with discrimination have forged a politicized identity around race that organizes individual attitudes and behaviors in highly cohesive ways.¹⁵

Political identity is not simply a matter of fixed, ascriptive characteristics or individual self-reflection. Rather, identity is constructed through politics. As David Engel and Frank Munger point out in their study of disability, the narratives that constitute identity remain fluid, continually revised through “a *process of interaction* over an extended period of time” between the individual and a range of state and nonstate actors.¹⁶ Because they are located at the nexus of two feedback loops, citizen advocacy organizations are key among these actors. One feedback loop connects these organizations to governing institutions, political processes, and public policies, where they speak on behalf of their constituents to elected and administrative officials, cultivate coalitional partners, and introduce emerging cultural and social ideas into political debate. In a second feedback loop, citizen advocacy organizations bring politics to their constituents. They educate their constituents about policies and the operations of government, signal to them which issues are relevant to their interests, and provide a conduit through which constituents to articulate their demands to government.¹⁷

As the lynchpin between citizens and the state, these organizations are well-situated to mobilize identity in strategic ways in order to translate what individuals would otherwise see as personal problems into broader claims of social and economic injustice.¹⁸ Organizational activists can—and often do—appeal to shared histories or invoke group norms and rituals, in order to strengthen group coherence and draw boundaries between members and external actors, allowing members to derive shared purpose from their common opposition to “outsiders.”¹⁹ They can also challenge prevailing constructions of identity in order to politicize certain affinities or heighten the salience of selected issues among their members. Exercising what Maureen Scully

and Douglas Creed call “institutional entrepreneurship,” activists knit together existing repertoires or reinterpret cultural frames, then move them across contexts in order to mobilize new constituents or channel their engagement in different ways.²⁰ By bringing new actors into the political process and heightening the political salience around issues, citizen advocacy organizations construct and clarify group identity for the purposes of destabilizing settled political dynamics and reordering existing power relationships.²¹

By placing political identity front and center in its analysis, recent scholarship in American political development underscores the ways in which identity animates what some critics see as an overly structural view of political change among scholars of development.²² In these accounts, contests over identity and civic membership serve as a means by which cultural values enter the legal and political realm and reshape policymaking.²³ Nevertheless, entrepreneurship is not without bounds.²⁴ The struggle to redefine categories of identity is done within a political institutional order already thick with identity-based meaning, some of which are salient enough to serve as orders in their own right. Race constitutes one of the most enduring of these orders. Desmond King and Rogers Smith use the concept of racial institutional orders to capture the ways in which race reaches beyond the individual to structure political interactions and outcomes. Racial institutional orders are coalitions of political institutions, organizations, and actors that are held together by shared beliefs about race and common aims with respect to race relations. Political leaders maintain these coalitions by pursuing governing agendas that distribute authority, resources, and prestige along racial lines. They concretize their aims through the enactment of public policies, rules, processes, and other arrangements that maintain political power and manage shifts in the exercise of that power. According to King and Smith, competition between two such orders—one committed to white dominance and the other to

racial egalitarianism—have informed the nation’s conflicts over other forms of hierarchy, including economic inequality, and profoundly shaped terms of civic membership in the United States across time.²⁵

Conceiving of identity as the crux of an institutional order rather than simply group affinity allows us to comprehend the ways in which it organizes politics in consequential ways. According to Evelyn Nagano Glenn, identities are dichotomous, relational oppositions, in which a category of identity is often defined as much by what it is as by what it is not. White–black, male–female, masculine–feminine, heteronormative–queer—These oppositions clarify the meaning of the dominant group and justify its hold on power through the construction of its relational opposite. While the subordinated “other” is named and often described in great detail to make clear its distinctiveness from the majority, the dominant group’s attributes—whiteness, maleness, heterosexuality, able-bodiedness—remain unspecified and appear “natural” or “normal,” thus obscuring the ways in which perceived differences between groups are not only systematically related but also expressive of power.²⁶ Under a system of white supremacy, whites are “normal,” their normality constructed through notions of black deviance and inferiority. Indeed, whiteness takes on the moniker of “everyone,” an unspecified and purportedly universal position that erases the marginalization of unnamed “others.”²⁷

While King and Smith primarily focus on racial orders, other scholars have noted that the existence of similar political coalitions united around aims pertaining to class, gender, sexuality, disability, and other forms of identity. These set the terms by which citizens and noncitizens alike experience civic membership.²⁸ As an institutionalized form of political identity, civic membership organizes the privileges, obligations, and civic standing of all individuals within the purview of American government.²⁹ But a particular individual’s civic status is never

unidimensional. Rather, status is constituted by multiple identities that locate the person within a complex system of power relations, fashioned by overlapping coalitions that defend their privileged position.³⁰ In other words, taken together, simultaneously existing identity-based political orders create an edifice of interlocking institutions, each organized around a distinct axis of inequality, mutually constituting one another into what Patricia Hill Collins calls a “matrix of domination.”³¹

Viewing citizen advocacy organizations as situated within this larger institutional landscape calls attention to the extent to which their efforts are politically grounded. Public policies, for example, are one aspect of a larger political order that influences organizational and citizen behavior. By dividing Americans into statutory and administrative categories and imbuing those categories with material consequences and subjective meaning, policies facilitate or stymie political involvement, rights claiming, group mobilization, and coalition building between potential organizational allies.³² Yet the effects of policy are inconsistent across members of the group because all groups, even ones that coalesce around subordinated identities, contain members of intersecting identities. Thus, members experience a “shared (though not uniform) location in hierarchical power relations.”³³ Some enjoy an ascriptive identity or resources, like income, skills, or social connections, that other members lack, and these relatively privileged activists often exercise disproportionate influence in setting the agenda or direction of the group.³⁴ As a result, though E. E. Schattschneider observed that “new policies create new politics,” try as activists might to reimagine the self, the strategies and tactics they deploy are informed by the extant identity-based orders.³⁵

While activists might understand that oppression operates simultaneously, as they navigate institutional obstacles, their political strategies for rectifying inequalities between

groups might actually deepen inequalities within groups. At various historical moments, activists engaged in rights-based campaigns for equality have distanced themselves from stigmatized identities in order to forge alliances with powerful political actors and maintain organizational unity. They have framed their analysis of oppression along a single axis of difference, arguing that they “deserve” equality by virtue of the moral decency or capacity for rational self-governance they share with the dominant group—and ostensibly lacking among other groups.³⁶ Cathy Cohen, for example, observes that contemporary white LGBTQ activists have pursued assimilation into dominant institutions rather than a transformative queer politics that questions “the political, legal, economic, sexual, racial and family systems within which we live.”³⁷ Similarly, Dean Spade chides disability rights activists for prioritizing access to workplaces, where discrimination of all forms is present, rather than rejecting the denigration of “dependency” and contesting “what is considered ‘normal on every front.’”³⁸ While such rights-based campaigns speak to the concerns of individuals who, but for one marginalized status, would qualify as full citizens, they leave unaddressed the injustices experienced by members whose exclusion rests on multiple dimensions and could, in fact, exacerbate those injustices by legitimizing some forms of exclusion.³⁹ Despite aspirations for intersectional justice, not all group members, Cohen says bluntly, are “equally essential to the survival of the community.”⁴⁰

The Intersectionality of the Blind

Thinking of activists as operating within a political environment replete with identity-based commitments directs us toward two significant aspects to the formation of disability consciousness in the United States. First, activism moved along already privileged channels of mobilization. Between 1880 and 1930, disability emerged as a formal category of social

differentiation, ingrained into medical and administrative practice through social scientific theories, casework practices, and federal, state, and local laws.⁴¹ Philanthropy and activism emerged for and among the “healthy disabled”—individuals who were not burdened by chronic pain or declining health and whose disabilities evoked empathy rather than fear and disgust.⁴² Such was the case with the blind. Organizing the blind was no easy task. A range of conditions caused blindness—everything from venereal diseases to impoverished and unsanitary conditions, from industrial accidents to old age—and individuals had vastly different experiences with blindness depending on the age at which they were blinded.⁴³ The blind, in short, had little in common other than the lack of eyesight. During the late nineteenth century, however, social and political changes brought young and highly educated white blind men together to form the first organizations of the blind. Moved by the “tragedy” of blindness, philanthropists founded a network of private and state-supported residential schools for blind boys and girls, starting first in New York, Massachusetts, and Pennsylvania in the 1830s and spreading through the Midwest between 1850 and 1870. These schools aggregated otherwise spatially dispersed individuals together under one roof to share their common experiences with blindness, leading to the formation of alumni associations and social clubs for the adult blind. By 1920, these organizations were present in almost every major American city.⁴⁴ Many were instrumental in lobbying state governments to support a range of charitable and public programs for the blind, including sheltered workshops, day schools for children, home aides to help with errands and chores, readers for the blind attending college, instructors to teach newly blinded adults to read Braille, and research into the prevention and curing of blindness—all of which were to be administered by an emerging profession of social workers trained specifically in work with the blind and coordinated through newly established state commissions for the blind.⁴⁵

Activism and philanthropy tracked prevailing cleavages in American society. Among the most impoverished of the blind were African Americans in the South, where educational opportunities for blacks and social services for the poor, never mind the blind, were few and far between. Blind individuals who were deaf or cognitively impaired also faced limited prospects; schools and workshops routinely turned them away because they were, in managers' estimations, poor rehabilitation candidates. Similarly, because women who were blind were less likely to be married and less likely to be employed and, when employed, earned less than their male counterparts, they experienced deep levels of destitution.⁴⁶ Yet rather than organizing the most marginalized in American society, organizations of the blind featured largely male memberships, replicating the sex segregation of workshops and most residential schools. In the South, blind schools and their alumni networks remained racially segregated, as did state and local associations of the blind.⁴⁷ At a time when blindness was more prevalent among people of color and foreign-born immigrants and when the vast majority of people became blind after school age, organizations of the blind, including the NFB, were dominated by the white, native-born graduates of the residential schools. Yet even though NFB officers were professionally employed and hardly depended on the pensions that sustained many blind men and women, they shared a commitment with rank-and-file Federationists to defending the dignity of and opportunities for the blind, compelling them to reach beyond the concerns of male alumni groups and clubs to defend generous pensions for the poor.⁴⁸

A second aspect of disability consciousness is its development in opposition to the sighted professionals who specialized in the education and rehabilitation of the blind and, by extension, the gendered logic on which they grounded their arguments for public aid. The first alumni organization of the blind, the American Blind People's Higher Education and General

Improvement Association (ABPHEGIA) was founded in the 1890s, after graduates of the Missouri School for the Blind who had entered teaching became disenchanted with their professional organization, the American Association for Instructors of the Blind. They resolved to create an organization with membership restricted to blind educators and workers. Although the ABPHEGIA did not last long, it gave a voice to the blind that its members believed was missing from organizations dominated by the sighted.⁴⁹ While cooperation between blind groups, sighted philanthropists, charitable workers, and educators was common, throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, conflict between the blind and sighted professionals increased with the advent of blind pensions. Between 1890 and 1930, coalitions of alumni groups, clubs, and the friends and family of the blind were successful in persuading state legislatures to enact cash aid to the blind.⁵⁰ The first of these pension laws passed in Ohio in 1898, and by 1929, eighteen states in the Union had a blind pension. In at least half those states, the programs had been championed by blind activists over the opposition of social workers and instructors of the blind.⁵¹

Antagonism with the activist blind grew out of two objectives that sighted progressive reformers pursued. First, reformers sought to erect a welfare state that not only directed men and women into different programs but also established a different basis for their civic incorporation. From Civil War pensions to mothers' pensions, from maternal health programs to workmen's compensation, progressives premised public aid on gendered notions of national service: motherhood for women and military or industrial service for men.⁵² Blind benefits, however, defied this gendered logic. To offer aid based on the fact of blindness alone, reformers feared, would undo a regime that not only limited demands for redistribution but also reinforced proper gender relations.⁵³ Second, social workers worried that pensions undermined their status

as experts in the treatment and rehabilitation of blindness, which rested on their ability to deliver aid under “scientific” principles of administration. During the first decades of the twentieth century, social workers sought to professionalize charitable work. New schools of social work churned out young women and, to a lesser extent, young men trained in social scientific principles of case management, the determination of individual and family needs, and the care of infants and children.⁵⁴ Those social workers who specialized in serving the blind pursued the same professional transformation of their field and hoped to establish sheltered workshops as a key component of a comprehensive rehabilitation program for the blind.⁵⁵ The spread of pensions would make it difficult to find employees to fill the low-paying jobs in their workshops. Blindness social workers, therefore, argued for pension laws that placed them in charge of determining eligibility so as to keep benefits out of the hands of those “with known vicious habits”—habits that included begging, getting married, or failing to abide by the rehabilitative regimens they suggested.⁵⁶

The blind did not take kindly to being managed. In some states, social workers reported that blind pensioners were “openly resistant” to their help.⁵⁷ Across the Midwest and West, blind activists lobbied legislatures for laws that minimized administrative oversight and discretion, including pensions paid as flat grants and application processes that involved little more than a certification of blindness and low income.⁵⁸ By 1935, more than a dozen of the states with a blind pension used simple income thresholds to determine whether an applicant was needy rather than the individualized investigations that blindness workers endorsed. Some states went even further, paying blind pensioners a monthly grant irrespective of their actual level of need.⁵⁹

Rather than resolving the simmering conflict between professionals and activists, the New Deal thrust it onto the national stage. Between 1930 and 1950, social workers and their

allies in the SSA sought to split employment and public assistance; an individual could not both work in competitive employment and receive public aid. Those social workers specializing in blindness further advocated lodging control of assistance in their state agencies. The NFB, however, rejected supervision of the blind and used its dispute with the SSA to turn what until then had been loosely formed ideas about “help[ing] the blind help themselves”—to borrow an early motto of the Wisconsin-based Badger Association of the Blind—into a biting critique of social workers and government bureaucrats that drew from the New Deal’s rich vocabulary of rights belonging to breadwinners.⁶⁰ By grounding the political identity of the blind on their capacities for productive labor, Federationists rejected both the feminized status of welfare dependency and supervision by the largely female profession of social work. They also wedded themselves to rights reserved largely for men whose race and heterosexuality made them proper breadwinners. Although Federationists sought to reconstruct the political meaning of blindness, by embracing breadwinning, they acceded to a larger political order of identity-based hierarchies, which constrained their ability not only to reimagine blind identity but also to reframe narratives around poverty and unemployment.

The New Deal: Constructing the Blind as “Chronic Cases” of Dependency

The New Deal channeled state responses to the Great Depression along existing avenues of progressive activism. Many of the liberal reformers who came to Washington, DC, to work in the Roosevelt administration were trained social workers who brought with them their profession’s notions of what sound and modern antipoverty policy should look like, including a commitment to individual determinations of need, casework, and the family wage. These included Harry Hopkins, director of federal emergency relief; Frances Perkins, Secretary of

Labor; Grace Abbott and Katherine Lenroot of the U.S. Children's Bureau; and Jane Hoey, director of the SSA's Bureau of Public Assistance (BPA) in the 1930s and 1940s. They built upon the gendered tracks set forth during the Progressive Era, rooting social insurance in formal employment subject to uniform rules and national administration but leaving a largely "feminized" realm of public assistance to the states.⁶¹ Disability, however, left the reformers flummoxed. Their plans for both emergency relief and long-term economic security largely excluded people with disabilities, whom they deemed "chronic cases" of poverty.

The summary exclusion of the disabled from New Deal work relief programs illustrates the extent to which gendered notions of aid operated to marginalize people with disabilities. Hopkins headed up the Roosevelt administration's emergency relief efforts and brought with him an abiding interest in the psychology of unemployment. While running relief programs in New York in the 1910s, Hopkins had come to the conclusion that men and women required different forms of aid. Because men's social status was tied to their ability to provide for their families, the lack of a job, not poverty per se, left men demoralized and vulnerable to lapsing into drinking, gambling, and other intemperate behaviors. To remove the stigma associated with the dole and create male-appropriate assistance, he endorsed providing relief to men in the form of wages. While social workers closely monitored the recipients of mothers' pensions to ensure that only "deserving" women received aid, Hopkins believed that such supervision had no place in a relief program for men, whose poverty resulted from the vagaries of capitalism rather than moral imprudence.⁶² Eventually envisioning a job as the right of every man, he promoted public works programs as relief and put his ideas into effect on a national scale once he assumed control of federal work relief projects run by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC).⁶³

Nonetheless, because the demand for jobs far outstripped the resources available, Hopkins prohibited the hiring of “unemployables.” Senior citizens, mothers of young children, and people with disabilities—Hopkins believed them to be “chronic cases” of poverty, whose need was not the result of a temporary economic dislocation but was instead rooted in medical and social conditions that he considered beyond the purview of emergency measures. The exclusion of chronic cases, however, reflected more than Hopkins’s efforts to reserve jobs for laid-off male workers. It was also based on progressive conceptions of proper masculinity, which grounded citizenship on a man’s role as the provider of a family. The WPA and CCC preferred men who were married and encouraged the transient men who participated in work projects to settled down with a wife. These roles, however, were closed to many of the disabled. Women with disabilities were frequent targets of public and private sterilization campaigns, and many states discouraged or outright banned marriages to people with disabilities, including the blind.⁶⁴

The politics of the Social Security Act of 1935 further indicates liberal uncertainty concerning the place of the disabled in an incipient national welfare state that organized aid along the gendered lines of breadwinner and dependent. As they labored over the summer of 1934, the economists, academics, and social workers who staffed the Committee for Economic Security (CES) agreed that, in the long-term, the nation’s foundation of security should be social insurance to protect industrial workers from the economic risks associated with old age and temporary unemployment. To assist workers who were in immediate need, they proposed a massive work relief program, similar to the WPA. But for the “unemployables,” the CES recommended federal matching funds for two existing state pension programs. State pensions for the elderly became the federal-state matching grant, Old Age Assistance (OAA), while mothers’ pensions were converted to Aid to Dependent Children (ADC). Additionally, the Children’s

Bureau urged the CES to include federal grants to support state programs for maternal and child care, child welfare, the care of crippled children, and public health.⁶⁵

The CES, however, had little to say about adult disability. By 1934, more than half the states in the Union had a blind pension, many less than a decade old, but unlike OAA and ADC, they lacked a bureaucratic advocate within the CES. Though committee members understood that disability was a major contributor to poverty, they considered invalidity the most difficult risk against which to insure. They also believed that, relative to other groups of the poor, the blind were already well taken care of through state pensions, and they hoped that vocational rehabilitation, extended to civilians in 1926, would suffice to meet the needs of the disabled for the moment.⁶⁶ When it came time to forward its proposals to Congress, the CES set aside plans for health and invalidity insurance and decided against proposing federal matching grants for blind pensions.

Public assistance for the blind, however, became part of the Social Security Act through an act of serendipity that captures the period's conflicting ideas about blindness. As the bill moved through the House of Representatives in the summer of 1935, Robert Irwin, the executive director of the American Foundation for the Blind (AFB), realized that blindness professionals were about to get left out of the federal largesse the new law promised. When the bill reached the Senate, Irwin suggested a program of aid that mirrored the age-based distinctions in the Social Security Act. His proposal allowed older blind applicants, who had poor job prospects, to receive OAA at age 50 rather than 65 and extended services under the crippled children's program to children with visual impairments, thus permitting states to spend federal money on services that restored children's sight or helped them adapt to blindness. With the aged and children taken care of, blindness professionals would then be free to concentrate on the rehabilitation of

working-age adults. To that end, Irwin recommended federal funding for sheltered workshops and other services to the blind, essentially a federal rehabilitation plan for the blind. At the time, state vocational rehabilitation agencies routinely turned away blind applicants because they believed their impairments were too severe to make them viable job candidates.⁶⁷

Although the AFB, the American Association of Workers for the Blind (AAWB), and other organizations of blindness professionals lobbied for Irwin's proposal, the Senate Committee on Finance instead turned to cash support. A champion of the blind from a state that was among the most generous toward the blind, Representative Thomas Jenkins (R-OH) had tried to amend the Social Security Act from the House floor to provide matching grants for blind pensions so that, in his words, the blind "are recognized as a part of our citizenship."⁶⁸ Though Jenkins had been unsuccessful, the Senate was receptive to establishing federal aid to the blind, whom lawmakers likened to the aged. During floor debate, Finance Committee chair Pat Harrison (D-MS) noted that very few of the blind found jobs and, even among those who worked, only a small fraction earned enough to support themselves.⁶⁹ Desperate to bundle services with pensions, Irwin persuaded Senator Robert Wagner to offer an amendment that would authorize federal grants for blindness services. But the House and Senate struck the Wagner amendment in conference, leaving only cash benefits for the blind. Aid to the Blind (AB) became Title X of the Social Security Act. Modeled on OAA, AB set a ceiling on federal spending of \$15 per month per person and matched dollar for dollar state spending on blind pensions.⁷⁰ Because the Social Security Act barred individuals from receiving both an OAA and an AB grant, shortly after the law's enactment, most states transferred their aged blind—by far the vast majority of pensioners—into OAA, suddenly transforming Title X into a program for the

young. Blind men and women remained the only working-age adults eligible for cash grants under the Social Security Act until 1950.⁷¹

Though the blind were never more than a small share of the public assistance caseload, Title X soon became caught up in a larger struggle over aid to the aged.⁷² The Social Security Act charged the newly created Social Security Board with ensuring that state plans for OAA, AB, and ADC complied with federal law. Seeking to protect the embryonic Old Age Insurance (OAI) program from competition from public assistance, the agency used its power to harden the New Deal distinction between those who could work and those who could not. In particular, political executives at the board and the Federal Security Administration (FSA) were concerned about the popularity of flat grants.⁷³ OAA immediately met the needs of millions of Americans, but OAI would not begin paying benefits until 1940. Even after 1940, OAI benefits would be a pittance because workers would have a rather short history of contributions; the neediest among them would need to supplement their benefits with OAA. Meanwhile, Congress and state legislatures faced pressure to liberalize assistance programs. The Townsend Plan, which would pay a monthly pension of \$200 to every citizen over the age of 60, was the most popular of the flat grant proposals, but other movements, including Huey Long's Share Our Wealth crusade, Father Charles Coughlin's populist National Union for Social Justice, and Upton Sinclair's End Poverty in California campaign, enjoyed wide regional and national followings.⁷⁴ The pressure was especially intense in the Midwest and the mountain and coastal West, where several states paid old-age and blind pensions in the form of flat grants, and pensioners had come to view their benefits as based on rights rather than need. SSA officials speculated that these states lacked familiarity with the social work profession and, with small elderly and disabled populations, failed to develop the robust administrative techniques commonly used in the Northeast to

manage welfare rolls.⁷⁵ They feared that allowing flat grant plans to continue under the Social Security Act would diminish political support for social insurance before it ever got off the ground and pave the way for the enactment of a national Townsend Plan, which remained popular among Americans and in some quarters of the House of Representatives until the mid-1940s.⁷⁶

Between 1935 and 1939, using its administrative authority over public assistance, the SSA sought to shape the contours of the emerging welfare state. During this time, the agency was tasked with converting the nation's highly decentralized system of public aid into state-run programs that complied with a few basic federal conditions: residency requirements of not more than one year, program benefits available statewide, and opportunities for recipients whose applications were denied to request an administrative hearing. In approaching this task, SSA officials wanted to protect social insurance from an aggressive expansion of public assistance that would blur the distinction between OAI and OAA and doom OAI, but they also wanted to increase the resources available to poor children and their mothers, who remained the poorest of the public assistance recipients. Additionally, some mid-level agency staff sought to root out invidious forms of discrimination, in particular racial discrimination, that operated to keep welfare rolls small and impoverished mothers in the local low-wage labor force.⁷⁷

To distinguish public assistance from social insurance, and also to professionalize the administration of aid to the poor, the SSA interpreted the Social Security Act as requiring states to follow a rule of "individual need, individually determined." Promoted in model legislation drawn up by the American Public Welfare Association (APWA) in 1935, the rule required local welfare caseworkers to create a budget for each recipient based on the recipient's needs for housing, food, clothing, and fuel, and then count all of his or her income, assets, and other

resources, including gifts and contributions from relatives, when determining the individual's means. Caseworkers then subtracted the individual's needs from means to arrive at the amount of monthly benefit.⁷⁸ Standardizing eligibility determinations and casework practices across the states comported with the aspirations of social workers who had long hoped to develop a "new scientific philanthropy" that would replace local prejudice and pity as the basis of judgments about eligibility for assistance. Meanwhile, agency officials wrapped casework practices in the language of rights to emphasize that public assistance was not charity. Claimants had the right to apply for aid, the right to timely consideration of their cases, the right to appeal denials, and the right to keep personal information confidential.⁷⁹ Echoing these ambitions, Altmeyer noted that the SSA's objective was, in his words, to "assure that the rights and needs of each public assistance applicant were properly determined by trained social workers."⁸⁰

While SSA officials viewed recipients of public assistance as enjoying a limited set of rights to administrative fairness, these were not the same as the rights to adequate income and individual autonomy that Federationists would come to demand. In fact, even as the SSA sought to curb the ability of local officials to discriminate or harass low-income recipients of aid, it also moved to reduce the ability of states to expand public assistance. The agency's position not only placed public assistance squarely under the purview of social workers but also barred states from paying flat grants or using rudimentary means tests. Nor could states ignore recipients who were employed or who managed to accumulate savings. All income would now have to count against the means test, no matter how irregular or low paying, reducing monthly payments dollar for dollar.⁸¹ Although SSA officials were most apprehensive about OAA because it directly competed with OAI, they extended their interpretation of need to AB and ADC as well.

The SSA had to tread carefully when questioning state plans both because it was not sure it had the authority to proscribe needs rules and because it did not wish to arouse organized opposition. The agency's legal counsel argued that Congress intended to allow the states wide discretion when determining need, and though it had implied that public assistance recipients had to be needy, it had never explicitly stated that. Nor was it clear that the SSA could tell the states how to determine need. Program executives worried that Congress might overturn its position if states or Townsend groups protested too loudly the agency's heavy hand.⁸² Officials waited until 1939, when Congress again took up the Social Security Act, to suggest inscribing into the statute the agency's preferred definition of need. The 1939 amendments are best remembered for enshrining the breadwinning status of workers. Much of the congressional debate focused on turning OAI from an individual to a family benefit by allowing dependent children and wives to receive the Social Security benefits of a covered worker in the event of the worker's death. Less noted, however, were the important changes the amendments made to public assistance and federal-state relations. Not wanting to alert supporters of the Townsend Plan that the public assistance titles of the Social Security Act were ambiguous, Altmeyer waited until the Ways and Means Committee was in closed session before recommending to lawmakers that they define need, which they did.⁸³ Although they did not explicitly rule out flat grants, the 1939 amendments instructed states to count all of the income and resources of a recipient when determining eligibility for public assistance. The incongruity between sighted and blind men was striking. Even as the amendments extended benefits to the dependents of heterosexual male workers, by adopting the SSA's preferred definition of need, they denied them to the families of blind workers, who could not pass onto their dependents the fruits of their labor, either in life as earnings or in death as savings. Emboldened by this "clarification," as the agency called it, the

SSA directed wayward states to revise their public assistance programs to include individualized assessments of need.⁸⁴

Building the Collective Identity of the Blind

In 1935, blind activists greeted the Social Security Act with optimism that soon turned to outrage. On the one hand, for the poorest citizens, Title X was a godsend. Although Congress struck provisions in the law that would have required states to set benefit levels compatible with “health and decency,” the Social Security Act made many individuals eligible for blind benefits for the first time. States that had not yet set up pensions were now eligible for federal matching funds if they did, and the act directed states that took federal money to make benefits available in every locality. Prior to the Social Security Act, most states that had blind pensions authorized but did not require local governments to provide grants to their residents, creating vast inequalities among the blind across different counties within states. The law expanded eligibility by reducing residency requirements, which had been as long as ten years in many states, and it barred rules that had limited pensions to individuals who could prove they had been blinded in the state.⁸⁵

On the other hand, the coming of the Social Security Act brought hardship to others. In states that either paid individuals both an old-age and a blind pension or paid a stipend to the elderly blind to cover the added costs of hired help, the Social Security Act lowered incomes, as the aged blind were moved into OAA and their pensions reduced to the same monthly grant as sighted senior citizens.⁸⁶ Similarly, roughly one-fifth to one-quarter of the blind had some earnings, though rarely enough to raise them far above subsistence levels. These individuals found themselves facing the prospects of lower assistance checks, as the SSA moved to rule out flat grants and exemptions for earned income. Following the transition from pensions to AB,

letters poured into the AFB from recipients complaining about caseworker investigations and reduced payments.⁸⁷ Organized opposition, however, was initially muted. Because, prior to 1939, the SSA did not publicly announce its opposition to flat grants and earnings disregards, blind organizations struggled to understand why the agency overturned some state provisions but not others. The enactment of the 1939 amendments, however, made evident the SSA's position on individual need. Following the amendments' "clarification," the agency warned California, Illinois, Missouri, and Pennsylvania that they would lose federal funds unless they promptly aligned their blind pensions—the most generous in the nation—with the agency's rules on need.⁸⁸

Blind activists were furious and galvanized to defend their benefits. Shortly after the passage of the 1939 amendments, Gayle Burlingame, head of the Pennsylvania Federation of the Blind, ran a series of ads in Braille magazines, inviting concerned men and women from around the nation to attend his organization's annual convention. Sixteen activists answered Burlingame's call, convening in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, in November 1940. They hailed from seven states, all with liberal pension laws, including the four that had been threatened with withdrawal of federal funds.⁸⁹ Among the attendees was Jacobus tenBroek, who had just completed a fellowship at Harvard Law School and was beginning a teaching position at the University of Chicago Law School. TenBroek was a protégé of Newel Perry, a mathematician teaching at the California School of the Blind in Berkeley and an activist who had united local groups into the California Council of the Blind (CCB).⁹⁰ Although blind associations were influential in several states, the attendees decided to organize the blind nationally in order to confront the SSA. TenBroek wrote the constitution for the new National Federation of the Blind, the name the delegates chose for their incipient organization, and, following the adoption of the

constitution, was promptly chosen president in an uncontested election. TenBroek would remain at the helm of the NFB for the next twenty-five years, infusing the organization with his fiery rhetoric and radical insistence that the “administrative despots” who ran the SSA represented “the single greatest menace to the welfare of the blind.”⁹¹

According to its constitution, the purpose of the NFB was “to promote the economic and social welfare of the blind,” a mission that could have included any number of the reforms that state blind associations pursued.⁹² Nowhere had a more wide-ranging agenda for blind equality been articulated than in California. Under the leadership of Perry, activists had developed a legislative program for aiding the “self-sufficient” blind, including state support for stipends and readers to blind students attending college, flat pensions and earnings disregards for the working blind, rehabilitative services that would place blind men and women in jobs outside of sheltered workshops, and reduced fares on streetcars and buses so that blind persons could travel economically with a sighted guide.⁹³ Much of this agenda was endangered, however, if blind persons could not keep their earnings, accrue savings, or disagree with the recommendations of sighted caseworkers. Thus, for the activists gathered in Wilkes-Barre, opposition to the SSA’s position on needs was their reason for being. Edward Collins, the delegate from Illinois, made clear the work of the NFB when he declared to the convention, “The primary purpose of this organization is to go to Washington.”⁹⁴

As president, tenBroek expressed the state activists’ yearnings for equality and amplified them onto a national stage. In a speech entitled “Have Our Blind Social Security?” tenBroek gave his presidential address to the handful of delegates composing the inaugural NFB convention, articulating two pillars of blind identity that would guide Federationists for the next decade. First, tenBroek asserted that blindness constituted a coherent political identity—that is,

that the blind had shared experiences and a worldview that distinguished them from the sighted. No matter how well-meaning, learned, or experienced sighted family members, friends, and social workers or other professionals were, they could not understand blindness the way the blind could and therefore could not adequately speak on their behalf. TenBroek committed the NFB to representing the voice of the blind, displacing the charitable and professional organizations that had long dominated policymaking. Without consulting the blind, he argued, agencies such as the SSA operated in “profound ignorance” and with “authoritarian arrogance.” “[We will] diminish the Board’s arrogance if we cannot reduce its ignorance,” tenBroek promised. Second, tenBroek argued that the blind were “normal” adults—albeit without sight—and that they, therefore, were entitled to the same rights and opportunities as the sighted. The SSA’s policy of individual need stood as the primary obstacle to civic equality because it barred the blind from earning a paycheck and building a nest egg in the same way that sighted workers did. TenBroek denounced the SSA for conspiring to reduce the blind to “paupers,” condemned to subsist at “a bare animal minimum.”⁹⁵

Despite the fact that substantial numbers of the blind did not live in states with generous pensions, flat grants, or earnings disregards, the historically tight labor markets during World War II heightened the salience of the NFB’s campaign against the SSA. Marginal workers of all kinds streamed into the nation’s factories, and sheltered workshops operated around the clock. But because of the SSA’s needs policy, each dollar that blind men and women earned led to corresponding reductions in public assistance, thus leaving workers no better off financially than when they had no work. In an open letter to members of Congress, Federationist Raymond Henderson criticized the SSA for expecting the blind, unlike other workers, to labor without

remuneration.⁹⁶ To hammer home their feelings of betrayal, several local and state blind clubs adopted the slogan “Save Our Social Security from the Social Security Board.”⁹⁷

As the war came to a close, the SSA drew up plans to sharpen the distinction between need-based aid and contributory social insurance. In 1943, a temporary government commission, the National Resources Planning Board (NRPB), began laying the groundwork for America’s transition to a peacetime economy, guided by President Franklin Roosevelt’s call in his State of the Union Address for a system of social insurance that offered “assurance against the evils of all major economic hazards” and “extend[ed] from the cradle to the grave.”⁹⁸ The SSA exercised great influence on the NRPB and the subsequent Wagner-Murray-Dingell bill, which embodied many of the board’s recommendations, including national health insurance, coverage of permanent and temporary disability, maternity and death benefits, a national system of unemployment insurance, and the expansion of OAI. Agency officials anticipated that, as contributory social insurance grew, spending for public assistance would drop to negligible levels, allowing states to resume responsibility for the poor. With the defeat of the Wagner-Murray-Dingell bill in 1943 and again in 1945, however, SSA officials were forced to reassess.⁹⁹ Although they still pursued the incremental expansion of social insurance, they no longer talked of public assistance withering away. The claim was dubious, as the increased cost of living and the end of wartime assistance to civilians drove public assistance rolls higher.¹⁰⁰

Instead, SSA officials pressed for the standardization of public assistance and its subordination to OAI. They envisioned a residual safety net that would catch individuals whose income fell below a state’s established standard of need, irrespective of their age, family status, or disability, thus constraining the capacity of local officials to discriminate against the “undeserving” poor. To standardized public assistance, agency leaders advocated the end of

categorical assistance and the merging of aid to the poor into one universal relief program. The SSA further recommended adopting a “variable” grant formula that paid a higher share of the public assistance costs for impoverished states, expanding federal spending on social services to prevent “dependency,” and consolidating the administration of antipoverty programs under state welfare departments.¹⁰¹ The safety net would be comprehensive, but it would not challenge OAI’s primacy. To ensure that public assistance remained ancillary to social insurance, SSA officials insisted on basing eligibility on individualized determinations of need.¹⁰² They also reinforced the conceptual distinction between social insurance and public assistance. As Altmeyer liked to remind audiences in his many speeches, OAI benefits were a right earned through years of payroll contributions. Therefore, upon retirement, social workers did not visit the beneficiaries to ensure that they budgeted their needs and lived within their means. Public assistance, by contrast, was residual; even if applicants enjoyed certain administrative rights, they still had to show welfare officials that they lacked the resources to meet the basic needs in their family budget and that they used their aid judiciously.¹⁰³ Even if the public assistance programs paid larger benefits than OAI or aided a larger number of individuals, as they did in the 1940s, even if they were comprehensive rather than categorical, this fundamental distinction between the two forms of public aid remained.

Plans for comprehensive welfare placed the SSA on a collision course with the NFB. Federationists did not want their lives managed by social workers, and they viewed rights as protecting recipients from the whims of sighted administrators, whether local or federal. According to the NFB, flat grants and earnings exemptions would allow the blind to seek employment without worrying that the state would reduce benefits, thus speeding the rehabilitation of the newly blind. But these demands threatened the SSA’s plans. Money that

states spent on flat grants or earnings exemptions was money not available to extend aid to new categories of the poor or to increase the benefits of needy children and their families, which were already appallingly low in the most impoverished states. The NFB's purpose, however, was not to advocate for the poor but for the blind. To the extent the NFB spoke of poverty, it was to plead the cause of the blind who were poor.

Throughout the 1940s, the NFB connected the struggles of the blind to the larger political discourse of rights and freedoms that animated postwar American liberalism—and to the expanding regime of benefits enjoyed by breadwinners. The blind, tenBroek argued, had as much right to “the helping hand of government” as other citizens. While the Social Security Act extended the promise of economic security to industrial workers, the SSA “continually impresses upon [the blind] a sense of their own helplessness and dependence.”¹⁰⁴ In 1944, President Franklin Roosevelt dedicated American liberalism to an Economic Bill of Rights, which articulated the federal government's commitment to the rights and security of American workers and their families. That same year, Congress enacted the Servicemen's Readjustment Act, popularly known as the G.I. Bill of Rights, the most sweeping social welfare law since the Social Security Act. To Federationists, the exclusion was palpable. In a pamphlet circulated among the blind, Ross M. Koen denounced offers of a “pauper's mite.” “The blind do not want pity or sympathy,” Koen declared. “They only want the same treatment” as “the manufacturer, the farmer, or the laborer,” which meant “a fair compensation and a chance to take their place among other men.”¹⁰⁵ To that end, in 1948, at the NFB annual convention, tenBroek called upon the nation's leaders to enact a Bill of Rights that would recognize the rights of the blind to economic security, equal opportunity, and equality. Shortly after President Harry Truman vetoed a bill that

would have allowed blind workers to keep a portion of their earnings, tenBroek declared “Social security, training and employment ... inseparable.”¹⁰⁶

Organizing the Blind to Speak for Themselves

Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, advocacy for the blind was spearheaded by the sighted family members and friends of blind men and women and the professionals who treated, educated, and counseled the blind.¹⁰⁷ Indeed, in the 1930s, the two most prominent national organizations to lobby on matters related to the blind were the AAWB and the AFB. Both organizations were dominated by sighted members, though they sometimes employed blind individuals as spokespersons, notably the AFB’s executive director Robert Irwin and its patron Helen Keller. Federationists, however, reconceptualized identity and representation. They dismissed individuals like Irwin and Keller as “occasional blind showpieces” for the sighted and were determined to displace the authority enjoyed by professionals.¹⁰⁸ The NFB drew a sharp distinction between organizations of the sighted that spoke for the blind and organizations of the blind themselves, resting its political legitimacy on the fact that it was the latter. It urged its state affiliates to ensure that their leadership consisted of persons who were blind, and it frequently called attention to its federated grassroots membership of blind associations and individuals. As executive secretary A. L. Archibald liked to say during congressional testimony, “We do not speak for the blind; we are the blind speaking for ourselves.”¹⁰⁹

The distinction the NFB made between organizations of the blind and organizations for the blind emerged from early-century activists seeking to carve a distinctive blind identity from a landscape of poverty and charity work sculpted by white maternalist reformers. One of the most

vocal and influential of these activists was Newel Perry of California. While charity and social workers asked philanthropists and elected officials for additional funds for sheltered workshops, Perry lobbied the state legislatures of New York and California to provide stipends so that blind college students could hire readers, complete their degrees, and enter white-collar professions instead of sheltered employment.¹¹⁰ Perry had little patience for becoming the object of social feminists' "municipal housekeeping."¹¹¹ He had once derided Winifred Holt, the wealthy New York heiress who established the Lighthouse workshops, as being driven by nothing more than the desire "to get a little glory." Rather, Perry aspired to build organizations of the blind that would contest the influence that social workers enjoyed in policymaking. In the 1920s, he founded the Association of the Self-Sufficient Blind in Berkeley to lobby for pensions that preserved the dignity of their recipients and expanded opportunities for the blind in higher education. In 1934, after traveling throughout the state speaking to activists, Perry aggregated local blind groups into the California Council of the Blind. The CCB featured bylaws that banned sighted persons from holding leadership positions so that, as Perry explained, it would remain "a real blind man's club and not a tool of the social welfare ladies."¹¹²

To advance a distinctive voice of the blind, Perry cultivated many of his most promising male students to become leaders in their profession and among the blind. Counted among Perry's Boys, as blind activists affectionately called this fraternity, were NFB President Jacobus tenBroek; its executive secretary, A. L. Archibald; its first executive director, Raymond W. Henderson; its first legal counsel, Leslie Schlingheyde; several members of the NFB's executive committee; and many prominent officials in the CCB and California state government.¹¹³ Like Perry, they had little regard for social workers, blindness professionals, or state commissions for the blind. Citing the "many petticoated investigators, who constantly shove their long, cold facial

extremities into every blind person's affairs," Earl Wilcox professed his "intense hatred for the professional social worker" and "their violation of all psychological and sociological laws of rehabilitation."¹¹⁴ His fellow Federationist, Allen Jenkins, was only slightly less dismissive. The typical blindness worker, he noted, was "very well motivated" but not "the brightest guy out of college." These blindness workers might know the social work curriculum, but, Jenkins claimed, they had no idea what it was like to be blind and so knew little about the needs of the blind.¹¹⁵

Perry's Boys brought to the NFB their mentor's commitment to giving voice to the blind. Upon being elected president of the NFB in 1940, tenBroek promised delegates at that first convention that they would build "a militant, aggressive, group-conscious organization of the blind," capable of resisting "the oppression of the social worker and the arrogance of the governmental administrator." He warned, "Individually, we are scattered, ineffective, and inarticulate." Only by creating the "machinery ... to unify the action and concentrate the energies of the blind" could blind persons become "masters of [their] future." Anticipating themes of participatory governance that would blossom in the 1960s, tenBroek asserted that mastery entailed demanding that programs be designed to serve their interests as they, not some caseworker or bureaucrat, defined them.¹¹⁶

Following the convention, tenBroek contacted several activists about forming NFB chapters in their home states. He found eager affiliates in states across the Midwest, the mountain West, and the West coast, where flat grants and disregards for earned income had been commonplace.¹¹⁷ In 1941, when the NFB held its second convention, 104 delegates from eleven states were in attendance. The following year, Perry addressed the convention, challenging attendees to "make a definite, personal, active effort ... to enlarge the organization as rapidly as possible."¹¹⁸ Throughout the war, the NFB took advantage of the working blind's resentment of

the SSA's policy for determining individual need, which restricted earnings despite high demand for labor. Existing chapters held statewide recruitment drives, social clubs for the blind converted into political organizations, and local affiliates banded together into state chapters. Despite wartime restrictions on travel, the NFB managed to hold all but two of its annual conventions, and in between these yearly meetings, tenBroek and other officers fanned out across the United States, traveling to state and local gatherings to persuade attendees to become affiliates. When the NFB convened its 1944 convention in Cleveland, Ohio, nearly 200 delegates representing eighteen states attended, sufficient grassroots support for tenBroek to proclaim the NFB the preeminent organization of the blind.¹¹⁹

Framing the Blind as Workers

Throughout the 1940s, the NFB pursued a political agenda that tied the identity of the blind to their roles in the labor market. Its emphasis on productive employment as not only the crux of blind identity but also the vehicle through which to secure equality placed Federationists squarely in line with the New Deal's redefinition of national citizenship in economic terms.¹²⁰ In 1940, delegates to the NFB's inaugural convention passed two resolutions that captured the extent to which activists saw the SSA as standing in the way of equality. The first resolution endorsed a national pension for the blind, protection against the economic risks of blindness as a matter of right. Recognizing, however, that a national pension would take years to secure, in a second resolution, delegates spoke to the immediate needs of the blind. They endorsed flat grants and exemptions for earned income and committed themselves to blocking the SSA's efforts to keep AB residual.¹²¹

The Federationists' demands challenged assumptions that had long guided disability policy. Sighted policymakers viewed rehabilitation and welfare as serving two distinct purposes. Rehabilitation taught impaired individuals how to resume their place in the labor market by adapting to or overcoming their conditions; welfare, by contrast, provided financial compensation to individuals beyond rehabilitation's help. Blind activists contested this distinction and argued instead for a rehabilitative public assistance program "so arranged as to leave the recipients' independence unimpaired." In so doing, they gave voice to an expansive definition of need, one that spoke to the subjective as well as material well-being of the poor.¹²²

According to tenBroek, the rehabilitation of a newly blinded person entailed "individual personal reconstruction" rather than mere return to work.¹²³ This individual not only had to learn to do many once-familiar tasks without the aid of sight but also had to come to a new self-understanding. He had to reject prevailing social stereotypes about the blind and overcome the inferiority and defeatism that he felt. To adjust to blindness, the individual had to accept both the permanence of the condition and the conviction that a life without sight was still worth living.¹²⁴ If the individual could do so, tenBroek asserted, blindness might still be "a physical nuisance," but it did not "determine his career" or "affect his usefulness or happiness."¹²⁵ Productive employment was imperative because it not only provided a paycheck but also fostered dignity, as blind men came to see that, despite their impairment, they could still contribute to their families and communities.¹²⁶ The great scourge of blindness, Federationists often claimed, was not blindness itself, but the enforced "idleness" that came with it.¹²⁷ Without the opportunity to contribute to society, to be tested on their merits, tenBroek argued, the blind experienced "the disintegration of the personality," "social isolation, and the atrophy of their productive powers." Confined to "the sidelines of life," the blind became nothing more than "players warming the

bench in the game that all should play.”¹²⁸ To be sure, Federationists did not suggest that women’s roles as Caregivers were any less valuable than men’s roles as workers and breadwinners. Yet by highlighting the centrality of productive employment to personal reconstruction, by falling back on metaphors of sports and competition, they gave voice to a masculine interpretation of blindness that resisted incorporation into the feminized world of welfare.

The NFB’s vision of “constructive” public assistance set activists at odds with the SSA’s pursuit of universal but residual public assistance.¹²⁹ Following the 1940 convention, Burlingame and TenBroek traveled to Washington, DC, to meet with FSA and SSA officials to plead their case. The encounter did not go well, reinforcing the activists’ disdain for sighted professionals. TenBroek dismissed Jane Hoey as “simply another social worker ... with a higher salary than most.” TenBroek was equally scornful of male administrators. He described Paul McNutt, head of the FSA, as “a lesser Hitler” who made California social workers “look like angels by comparison.”¹³⁰ Though Federationists had hoped for better relations with the SSA once Arthur Altmeyer became commissioner in 1946, it was not to be. The following year, frustrated with the SSA’s continued opposition to its agenda, delegates at the NFB annual convention passed a resolution calling on President Truman to fire Altmeyer; he did not.¹³¹

As the SSA pressed states to bring their assistance programs in line with the 1939 amendments, blind activists resisted. In 1941, the CCB and the NFB convinced the California state legislature to create a program of flat grants and earnings exemptions that would supplement AB. called California’s Aid to the Partially Self-Supporting Blind (APSB) paid a flat grant of \$60 per month to recipients and allowed earnings or other income of up to \$800 per year before state welfare officials began reducing assistance payments. Because this plan violated the

SSA's rules requiring the counting of all income and resources when determining need, APSB was entirely state-funded and sat alongside the state's SSA-approved and federally matched AB program. SSA officials grudgingly allowed California's program, reasoning that it was a rehabilitation rather than assistance plan because it required recipients to devise an individual plan for self-support.¹³² Shortly thereafter, Missouri and Pennsylvania created similar programs, but the SSA would not accept them. Even though the states offered to pay the full costs of the program for the working blind, the SSA refused all federal matching funds, even for AB programs that complied with SSA rules. The agency argued that the plans did not have the trappings of rehabilitation, such as a plan of self-support, and therefore the states were running two assistance programs that treated persons in similar need differently. Those who could not work received AB; those who could were directed to the state's program of partial support, which had the potential to provide a higher standard of living than AB. Because Missouri and Pennsylvania refused to budge, for a decade, these states operated dual public assistance programs for the blind without any federal grants at all. Meanwhile, the NFB used these three state-funded plans not only as models for what a federal work-based public assistance program might look like but also, in the case of Missouri and Pennsylvania, as an example of bureaucratic meddling that stood in the way of state autonomy and blind people's efforts to better their lives.¹³³

The Decisive Welfare Battles of the 1940s

The discord between the SSA and the NFB came to a head at a time when liberals were on the defensive. By 1946, after waiting patiently during the war years, liberals were ready to expand the scope of protections for American workers and their families. Following the demise

of the Wagner-Murray-Dingall bill in 1945, President Truman proposed a twenty-one-point plan designed to boost the American economy. This plan pledged, among other things, to guarantee full employment; raise the minimum wage; expand the availability of unemployment benefits, Social Security, and housing assistance; and grant the federal government greater powers to initiate tax cuts and spending programs should the economy slide into recession. The 1946 midterm elections, however, proved disastrous for Democrats. Riding voter displeasure over price controls and labor unrest, Republicans gained seats for the first time since 1930 and took control of both houses of Congress. Joining with Southern Democrats to form the Conservative Coalition, Republicans truncated Truman's grand ambitions for the Fair Deal and sided with business groups that hoped to hold onto wartime profits by blocking capacious social welfare measures and labor legislation.¹³⁴ Despite the inauspicious political climate, liberals believed that reconsideration of Social Security was long overdue. Demobilization had brought both cost-of-living increases and unemployment. Meanwhile, emergency civilian war relief and work projects had ended in 1943, and with no other federal aid available, public assistance and general aid rolls were growing rapidly across the United States.¹³⁵ In his State of the Union Address, Truman noted that the time had finally come for "a thorough reconsideration of our social security laws," which Congress had not done since the 1939 amendments.¹³⁶

Preparing for a major reform of Social Security, the administration split social insurance and public assistance into two separate bills. Introduced by Aime Forand (D-RI), the Public Welfare Amendments of 1946 had been written in consultation with the APWA and embodied many of the SSA's objectives in public assistance.¹³⁷ Its overriding purpose was not so much generosity—Altmeyer demurred when members of the House Ways and Means Committee asked him to name a minimally adequate income—as was it was remedying inequities among the

poor.¹³⁸ The bill broadened eligibility for public assistance by allowing states to place all poor persons, including those currently receiving OAA, AB, and ADC, into one catch-all public assistance program under Title XIII of the Social Security Act. Additionally, Title XIII erased inequities between categories of the poor by placing all programs under the same federal matching rate; at the time, ADC was matched at a lower rate than the adult public assistance programs. The Forand bill also added federal reimbursement for state spending on social services designed to keep families intact and prevent “dependency,” and it encouraged states to consolidate administrative responsibility for public assistance under the state welfare office.¹³⁹ These changes, former APWA president Elizabeth Wickenden argued, would reduce disparities in how the poor were treated from one state or one category to the next, “placing a floor under need” (albeit state-defined) “whatever its cause” and allowing welfare administrators to meet the needs of families “as a whole, not piecemeal.”¹⁴⁰ Additionally, Altmeyer told Congress, administrative unification would enhance “the effectiveness and the economy of assistance programs” and simplify the application process for the needy.¹⁴¹

The Forand bill provoked outrage from both organizations of the blind and organizations for the blind. Blindness professionals feared that the bill would render them obsolete by giving blindness services to the family-oriented social workers who dominated state and local welfare offices.¹⁴² During congressional hearings in 1946 and again in 1949, when the SSA made another push for comprehensive welfare, they pleaded with lawmakers not to eliminate Title X in pursuit of a “model bureaucratic set-up.”¹⁴³ North Carolina worker for the blind Helen Reinhardt explained to Congress that, like “medicine, dentistry, law, and other established professions,” caring for the “specialized problems” of the blind required the “special skills” that social workers lacked if trained only in the needs of “large over-all groups of the population.”¹⁴⁴ Rather than roll

the blind into a comprehensive program under the supervision of generalist social workers, she endorsed an AFB proposal to lodge administrative control over all blindness programs in state commissions for the blind.¹⁴⁵ Consolidating responsibility for pensions and social services had been a long-standing goal of professional groups, allowing them to deploy (or withhold) aid as part of a professionally supervised rehabilitation plan. “Relief is of little assistance to blind recipients,” Reinhardt argued, “unless it is administered by case workers especially trained in the field of work with the blind and in connection with programs of rehabilitation and prevention.”¹⁴⁶

Caught between two sparring factions of the social work profession, the NFB articulated its constructive vision of rehabilitation, which not only distinguished the blind from other groups of the poor but also prioritized the dignity of disabled men. Though NFB leaders shared the AFB’s opposition to comprehensive public assistance, they thought little of the specialized guidance that blindness professionals claimed was central to their rehabilitation of the blind. TenBroek argued that the blind were capable of rehabilitating themselves if “given the complete freedom of choice as to the direction of the rehabilitative effort.”¹⁴⁷ To be sure, the loss of sight required adjustment, but, he insisted, “there are no general formulae, no regularly established procedures” to direct acclimating to blindness. In fact, insisting upon the standardized processes promoted by social workers “destroys that individual personal process of reconstruction.”¹⁴⁸ “When a person must be placed at the mercy of other individuals,” Archibald argued to Congress, “when he must be told what he can have and what he can do with what he has ... he no longer is capable of being a man.”¹⁴⁹ Rather than facilitating recovery, the ongoing involvement of social workers “damages the mentality of the recipient of aid.”¹⁵⁰ By contrast, a flat grant of assistance and a graduated schedule of exemptions for earnings would constitute a

truly rehabilitative program by freeing the blind from the intrusive management of the social workers and creating financial incentives that fostered “among the blind a sense of the usefulness, growing independence, and self-reliance.”¹⁵¹

The SSA and the APWA opposed the NFB’s agenda on three grounds. First, though support for the Townsend Plan was much weaker by the late 1940s than it had been a decade earlier, SSA and APWA officials underscored their belief that flat grants and earning exemptions undermined the clear divide between contributory social insurance and public assistance by granting benefits tied to neither payroll contributions nor financial need. During congressional hearings in 1946 and 1949, they maintained that expansion of the increasingly popular social insurance program was possible only if public assistance was a program of “last resort,” which meant retaining “an individualized approach to need.”¹⁵² If public assistance became the “primary reliance” for any one group, BPA director Jane Hoey warned, then it could grow to eclipse OAI as the foundation of economic security.¹⁵³ Second, hoping to rid the administration of public assistance from local prejudices against the “undeserving” poor, SSA and welfare officials believed strongly that the government should pay grants of public assistance based on an individual’s need alone rather than one’s categorical classification. A person aged 60 who was as needy as a person aged 65 should be entitled to assistance. The needy child should be eligible for aid irrespective of whether the reason for need was parental abandonment or parental unemployment. Whether a person with a disability could find work should be irrelevant when determining how much of the person’s need to alleviate.¹⁵⁴ Otherwise, the APWA asserted, policymakers created “a virtual caste system in assistance” by dividing the poor according to judgments other than need. In short, earnings disregards for one category of the poor exacerbated inequity among the poor by channeling more resources to one group (those who had the

wherewithal to work) than another group (those who could not work) that was equally, if not more, needy.¹⁵⁵ Third, however worthy the cause of employment, the SSA's plan to make public assistance more widely accessible to the poor necessitated holding the line on generosity to the blind. Money that states spent on disregarded earnings or flat grants was money not available to cover additional groups of the poor or raise benefits for families with needy children, which were lower across the states than those for the aged or blind.¹⁵⁶

Herein was the fundamental conflict between the NFB and SSA. While the SSA tried to establish need as the sole factor in eligibility for public assistance, the NFB was adamant that the poor were not all the same even if they were similarly needy.¹⁵⁷ Testifying to the Ways and Means Committee against comprehensive public assistance program, Archibald objected that the blind "have their own peculiar problems; they have their own particular needs." Society had decided that "dependent children should not be permitted to work, in order that they may reach maturity in health and in knowledge," while the aged were long past their working years. Thus, the needs of children were temporary, and the failure of the aged to work did not implicate their social identity. The blind, on the contrary, were "in the productive years of life" and demanded "measures ... appropriate to their condition."¹⁵⁸ The unique needs of the blind was a message that organizational leaders also conveyed to rank-and-file activists. In his address to the first NFB convention in 1940, tenBroek told the intimate gathering of activists that the need of the blind person "can only be obtained by restoring him to economic competence in a competitive world."¹⁵⁹ Durward McDaniel, a member of the NFB's board of directors, put the matter just as bluntly to a much larger audience at the 1949 convention. In contrast to the aged, "the blind," he declared, "are young and vigorous and need opportunity above all else."¹⁶⁰

In 1946, as an alternative to the Forand bill, Representative Jerry Voorhis (D-CA) introduced legislation, drafted by the NFB, that ran counter to the SSA's efforts to exert greater control over state administration. The Voorhis bill overturned the 1939 amendments by explicitly allowing states to enact flat grants and leaving the method of determining need entirely at the discretion of the states so they could create income exemptions, if they chose.¹⁶¹ Congressional hearings in 1946 and 1949 over the Forand and Voorhis bills made clear the incompatibility between residual but comprehensive welfare, on the one hand, and constructive but categorical welfare, on the other. Even though the Forand bill would have raised benefit payments for the blind, Federationists argued that the blind were entitled to more than mere "animal survival." The spiritual or psychological dimensions of poverty mattered as well. Archibald insisted on the "inherent right of every good American to retain his self-respect and dignity, no matter how physically handicapped." Such could only be accomplished through policies that not only set an income floor but also offered ladders out of poverty. The blind, like sighted Americans, he argued, had a "right to own a little and enjoy a little."¹⁶² By contrast, Archibald explained, under the SSA's rules for determining need, the blind were "denied the normal right to retain the benefit of meager, hard-won earnings, penalized for effort and ambition . . . , [and] robbed of incentive for self-improvement."¹⁶³ Without this opportunity, the blind were condemned "to a life which is not enriched by the thrill of achievement, by success, or by the feeling that life has been made complete."¹⁶⁴ SSA officials were largely unmoved. During House hearings in 1946, Representative Daniel Reed (D-NY) protested that the SSA's approach to need would weaken the rehabilitation of the blind. Altmeyer simply responded, "You might say the same thing about any payments based on need."¹⁶⁵

Neither the Forand nor the Voorhis bill made it out of committee. But Reed, a champion of expansive aid to the poor, especially to the blind, proclaimed the blind “the most courageous group in this country” and resolved to find some way of assisting them.¹⁶⁶ In 1948, with Congress at an impasse, Reed and Senator Irving Ives (R-NY) introduced legislation drafted by the NFB that allowed recipients of AB to exempt up to \$40 of income per month. The bill’s stated purpose was to “provide a much-needed encouragement to blind individuals to become useful members of their community” and to retain “every possible incentive to pursue useful occupations.”¹⁶⁷ Despite the SSA’s opposition, the Reed-Ives bill passed the House and Senate by voice vote late in the session. President Truman vetoed the bill within weeks, explaining that the bill was unfair to “those needy blind who are unable to work” because paying for income disregards would lead states to reduce aid overall. The president added that disregards would lead to “converting public assistance payments into flat, noncontributory pensions” that would undermine “the development of a sound and comprehensive social security.”¹⁶⁸

Though vetoed, the Reed-Ives bill signaled strong congressional support for earnings exemptions, reflecting a growing consensus behind returning disabled men, in particular war veterans, to competitive employment. Between 1945 and 1949, Congress established National Employ the Physically Handicapped Week and authorized appropriations for a presidential commission to promote the hiring of people with disabilities. Ives couched earnings exemptions in terms of this larger effort and, on the Senate floor, lauded his bill as “a short step” toward making sure that “blind persons may have every encouragement to be self-supporting.”¹⁶⁹ Sensing political opportunity, in 1949, the NFB teamed up with the two leading professional organizations, the AFB and the AAWB, to secure exemptions for the working blind, one of the few issues on which they could agree. The AFB and AAWB muted their calls for bringing AB

and blind services under the aegis of state blind commissions, a move the NFB adamantly opposed. The NFB, meanwhile, dropped demands for flat grants and set aside its attacks on workers for the blind.¹⁷⁰ The SSA was also ready for compromise. Elevated to the position of commissioner, Altmeyer indicated to the AFB's Robert Irwin his willingness to allow a small exemption for earnings and other income.¹⁷¹ Altmeyer had become dismayed by the lack of progress on major reforms during the "terrible 80th Congress" and anticipated that 1949 would be a "decisive year" for Social Security.¹⁷² In addition, the APWA had endorsed part-time work for older but healthy workers and people with impairments that were not entirely disabling. During congressional hearings on the Forand bill, SSA officials had urged lawmakers to reimburse states for funds spent on welfare and medical services used to "prevent or remedy ... dependency" among the able-bodied poor.¹⁷³ The SSA's evolving position toward rehabilitation of the poor made denying the working blind the ability to keep some of their earnings untenable. Confluence among the two flanks of blind organizations and the SSA paved the way for the far-reaching provisions in the 1950 amendments to the Social Security Act.

The 1950 amendments marked the demise of the SSA's aspirations for comprehensive but residual public assistance. The amendments created an exemption for earned income of up to \$50 per month for working recipients of AB. States had the option of instituting the income exemption for two years, after which time it became mandatory.¹⁷⁴ Though it would be another twelve years before Congress would add an earnings exemption to ADC, the amendments authorized federal spending on social services to facilitate employment and prevent dependency among mothers whose children received ADC.¹⁷⁵ Throughout the 1950s, lawmakers repeatedly bolstered the rehabilitative aspects of public assistance. In 1952, they extended the earnings exemption to blind individuals who were enrolled in ADC or OAA and added "self-support" and

“self-care” as stated purposes of public assistance. Later they expanded the generosity of the exemption in AB, broadened it to include working recipients of Aid to the Permanently and Totally Disabled, and greatly increased the federal resources available for social services designed to avert dependency.

By introducing exemptions for earnings into public assistance, the 1950 amendments breeched residual welfare and, in its place, laid the foundation for public assistance programs that rehabilitated the poor through financial incentives and social services. The development was a setback for the maternalist vision of professionally managed programs for the poor. This vision had guided social workers through the New Deal, but by the 1950s, they were internally split between those who served families and those who served the adult blind. Additionally, they faced withering criticism both from local and state officials, who by the 1950s had tired of federal limits on local discretion, and from low-income blind activists, who, organized by the NFB, rejected casework management was antithetical to equal dignity.¹⁷⁶

TenBroek sensed the shifting of the political landscape. In 1950, at the NFB’s annual convention in July, tenBroek issued “A Declaration of Independence by the Blind,” a speech that, by weaving together themes of inclusion and autonomy, portended many of his later ideas about welfare rights, ideas that exploded onto national politics in the 1960s. The blind, he proclaimed, sought “full integration into the life of the community,” which included “the same realm of personal choice and individual judgment as is the right of all other citizens.” Independence in this sense required “the highest premium be placed on the efforts of recipients to get themselves off the relief rolls” but also adequacy for the blind who were aged and infirm. It also meant ridding public assistance of “all of the devices of control and inhibition,” including needs determination and casework, which presume “the blind are paupers and incapable of

deciding” for themselves what was in their interests. All of these initiatives served as the forerunner of later claims for the rights of welfare recipients.¹⁷⁷ A few years later, looking back over the NFB’s decade of accomplishments, tenBroek declared that public assistance was no longer “supplementary” to social insurance, as it had been in 1940; instead, it had taken on “an independent reason for existence”—the rehabilitation of the self.¹⁷⁸

The Limits of Collective Identity

The NFB advanced blindness as an individual’s primary political identity over competing affinities predicated on class, gender, and race, a stance that led it to adopt surprisingly progressive positions for its time. The NFB refused to admit chapters that barred female members, and it permitted women to head state chapters and occupy the lower ranks of organizational leadership. The NFB also accepted African Americans who applied for individual membership in the national organization. Though black Federationists remained few and far between, the NFB rebuffed segregated chapters that petitioned to join.¹⁷⁹ The NFB, however, did not escape the racial and gendered stratification of opportunity present in American society; nor did it challenge that stratification. The top leadership of the NFB was overwhelmingly male and exclusively white. Though state and local organizations of blind African Americans existed, there is no evidence that the NFB sought to bring these groups into its federation, or that it invited members of such groups to speak at its annual conventions, as it did the leaders of labor unions and blind veterans’ groups.

Furthermore, the NFB had a difficult time accommodating intersectional differences among the blind given its framing of inclusion and its masculine conception of blind identity. In his “Declaration of Independence of the Blind,” tenBroek spoke of the blind seeking “full

integration into the life of the community,” but he was speaking of integration as enjoyed by white Americans. The NFB did not object to the segregation from white spaces experienced by African Americans who were blind. Though the NFB protested employment discrimination against the blind, it did not contest racial or gender discrimination in workplaces or state laws that forbade interracial marriages or marriages among the blind. Instead, it voiced a distinctively gendered understanding of independence and a sexist disdain for social workers and female philanthropists.

Federation leaders, moreover, struggled to articulate exclusion predicated on the intersection of blindness and gender. “A girl could become a lawyer, I guess,” Perry once said when asked to compare the accomplishments of his male students with those of his female ones. “Girls, I don’t think have as many opportunities,” he admitted, but he nevertheless underscored the imperative “to keep opening up opportunities” for all of the blind.¹⁸⁰ Yet within the very organization tasked with opening up these opportunities, labor itself was deeply gendered. Many NFB officers relied on the assistance of their sighted wives, who dutifully typed correspondences, took minutes, and traveled with their husbands to meetings and conventions.¹⁸¹ The significance of unpaid feminine labor cannot be overstated. During the 1940s, Braille materials and guide dogs were not widely available, and some bus and rail systems refused to seat blind passengers unless they were accompanied by a sighted companion.¹⁸² Because they were much less likely to be married than either sighted women or blind men, blind women were frequently bereft of the help of a sighted spouse.¹⁸³ Not surprisingly, there was no feminine or African American equivalent of Perry’s Boys.

Grappling with intersecting claims of identity was further complicated by the fact that, in its efforts to make blind identity salient to its members, the NFB pursued what it called

“separatism” at a time when black civil rights organizations pursued alliances with labor unions, civic and women’s groups, and religious organizations. TenBroek explained that the NFB would cooperate with allies in “any group ... if they believe in our program and the principles for which we are fighting,” but the NFB eschewed coalitional politics unmoored from the discrete legislative issues it wished to advance.¹⁸⁴ The NFB’s brief partnership with the AFB and AAWB during the 1948–1950 campaign for earnings exemptions represented one of these fleeting moments. Long term, however, tenBroek steered the NFB clear of alliances that risked subordinating blind identity to other forms of affinity. For instance, during the 1940s, labor organizer Randall Strachan of the American Federation of the Physically Handicapped tried to build a cross-impairment organization of the physically disabled, one of the goals of which would be to consolidate government programs for the civilian disabled under one agency. Strachan hoped a single agency would be much more responsive to the disabled than the many agencies across which disability programs were scattered. The NFB resisted Strachan’s invitation to join forces, pursuing instead blind-specific programs and blind-specific agencies.¹⁸⁵

The NFB embraced separatism for two reasons. First, thick organizational alliances opened the door to the sighted speaking for the blind despite the federation’s founding tenet that only the blind could speak for the blind. In his 1950 “Declaration of Independence by the Blind,” tenBroek told Federationists, “In founding the National Federation of the Blind, the blind found themselves.” Alliances with the sighted could once again be “the easy prey of private charities” and “the unresisting objects of domination and manipulation by agencies.”¹⁸⁶ In this regard, the NFB’s approach to labor is telling. Throughout the 1940s, labor unions provided most of the financial support for the NFB, and in in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the NFB fought for the rights of sheltered workshop employees to collectively organize and strike.¹⁸⁷ While it seemed

obvious for blind activism to join forces with labor, the NFB alienated labor feminists. Both the labor feminists and the NFB championed the rights of women and the blind, respectively, to achieve full citizenship through participation in the competitive labor market, and they also fought for the social rights that provided security outside the world of wage work. Yet the federation's masculine ways of conceptualizing labor foreclosed alliances with the labor feminists. For the latter, labor in the home was still labor, but for Federationists, the home was a place of "idleness."¹⁸⁸ More significantly, in the same way that tenBroek did not think of the needs of blind women as distinct from that of blind men, he did not conceive of labor as representing the blind. Rather, he praised organized labor for "trying to do for its people" what the NFB was "trying to do for our people."¹⁸⁹ Unions were for sighted workers; the NFB spoke for the blind—"all" of them.

Second, the NFB recognized the privileged status of the blind and was wary of diluting it, even when most of the blind stood to benefit materially. The SSA's plan for comprehensive welfare, for example, would have raised blind benefits in several states because it included provisions that increased the federal matching rate for state grants. Yet in a 1949 bulletin to the membership explaining the organization's opposition, tenBroek warned against allowing the blind to get "lumped, scrambled and confused" in a program that gave "aid to the aged, to juvenile delinquents, to the unemployed, as well as to the city prostitute, the town derelict, and the village idiot."¹⁹⁰ In seeking to distinguish the blind from other groups of the poor, Federationists were following a path trod by social feminists, who, between 1890 and 1930, tried to reserve, first, mothers' pensions and, later, ADC for "deserving" (white) mothers. Yet because the NFB rejected casework and professional supervision, the hallmark of how these reformers approached antipoverty work, Federationists alienated women's organizations and their allies in

the Children's Bureau. Although provisions in Forand's bill creating a universal category of public assistance would have gone a long way toward aiding "undeserving" mothers as well as other poor and marginally employed groups, the NFB focused exclusively on the needs of the working-age blind. Moreover, by positing femininity as the antithesis of the vigor and aspirations of the blind, it fostered relational oppositions to clarify its claims of political identity and shared interests. In this manner, Federationists subscribed to a pattern scholars have observed among other movements making rights-based claims for equal citizenship. By challenging only some practices of subordination while leaving much of the existing social hierarchy intact, they risked deepening the subordination of people of intersecting identities, whose exclusion, because it became indiscernible, escaped unchallenged.¹⁹¹

Unity around blind identity, however, did not last. With the enactment of the 1950 amendments, the NFB secured the legislative victory that had bound Federationists in common cause for the better part of a decade. Thereafter the contours of blind identity became elusive. The mass protests of the African American civil rights movement and the cross-disability organizing efforts of the American Federation of the Physically Handicapped aroused interest in coalitional politics among some Federationists. At the 1953 convention, Earl Scharry, president of the Iowa Association of the Blind, chastised delegates for rebuffing that organization. Accusing his fellow Federationists of seeking to become the "Brahmins in the caste system of misfortune," Scharry argued, "Our slogan [is] 'Help the blind to help themselves' [but] a healthy interest in the welfare of *others* is the first attribute of a good citizen." A few years later, George Howeiler, the president of the Oregon Council of the Blind, expressed similar dismay: "We advocate integration on the one hand and isolate ourselves on the other. We contend that we're

relegated to a second-class citizenship, while at the same time we enjoy special services and privileges.”¹⁹²

Unity was further eroded by the very success that Federationists achieved in asserting that only the blind could know the problems of the blind. The NFB had come into being under the belief that the blind shared a common identity and interests that put them at odds with the sighted professionals who staffed public agencies for the blind. But in the 1950s, several high-ranking Federationists, including tenBroek, were appointed to these same agencies. TenBroek believed that rehabilitation of the blind could not be done by the sighted or by individuals who were merely blind. It required instead “persons who are themselves blind and who are in addition well adjusted and independently successful.” In other words, public agencies for the blind needed Federationists running them.¹⁹³ For other Federationists, though, it was unclear what blind activism meant when the blind became the very social workers and public decision makers they had condemned.¹⁹⁴

By the late 1950s, the NFB was deeply divided over several issues, including the strategy of separatism, the organization’s militancy against agencies, and the power of dissenting members to challenge leadership decisions. Unable to resolve differences between members, in 1962, the federation split into two competing organizations, the NFB and the American Council for the Blind. The fracture dismayed activists who had devoted much of their adult lives to mobilizing the blind around a shared political agenda and establishing the right of the blind to speak for themselves in policy debates. Writing to the executive committee and presidents of state chapters on the eve of the NFB’s collapse, tenBroek lamented, “What all of our external enemies together have been unable to do to us ... we have now done to ourselves: we have

brought our organization to the brink of ruin.”¹⁹⁵ Speak they might, but the blind would no longer speak with one voice.

Conclusion

The legacy of the NFB is a rich but complex one. Moving along existing channels of mobilization, Federationists tied blind identity to the social roles that policymakers valued—that of the white, male worker who stood at the head of a traditional family. In that sense, they did not escape the inequities that pervaded the breadwinning welfare state. Their campaign to reform Social Security was motivated by the desire to open the doors of the office and the factory floor to the blind, but they rarely mentioned the other forms of prejudice that foreclosed opportunities to many Americans, including women and people color who were blind. Even its bequest for poor people’s politics is ambivalent. During the 1940s, the NFB unapologetically spoke for the blind poor, not the poor in general. Although, in the 1960s, tenBroek praised the NFB as “unquestionably the best organized and most active ... of welfare recipient groups,” by then, the organization was no longer vocal in policymaking for Social Security or welfare.¹⁹⁶ It would be a mistake, however, to dismiss the NFB as a political dead end, a once mighty organization riven apart and no longer consequential. To do so would be to miss something consequential about the development of civil rights and social welfare policy in the United States.

Although Federationists could not sustain a unified political organization, their reimagining of liberalism was far-reaching. Experience with blind activism, no doubt, shaped tenBroek’s thinking with respect to rights and equality. Even as the NFB descended into discord, tenBroek directed his energies into his legal scholarship and revived the abolitionist origins of the Fourteenth Amendment. When Thurgood Marshall crafted the NAACP’s legal challenge to

segregation in *Brown v. Board of Education*, he drew deeply from tenBroek's work. When welfare rights activists in California came together in the 1960s, they adopted the organizing strategies pioneered by the CCB and the NFB.¹⁹⁷ Indeed, tenBroek's "Declaration of Independence by the Blind" laid out a list of demands that presaged the welfare rights movement—grants adequate to the dignity of the poor, liberal earnings exemptions, the ability of the poor to own property and accrue savings, and the right of the poor to decide where to live and how to spend their grants.¹⁹⁸ When wheelchair-using activists in Berkeley sought to build alliances with other groups of the disabled in the early 1970s, they found an already robust activist blind community, making the organized blind one of the earliest pillars of the emerging independent living movement. Although some of these late-century activists would eventually embrace a pan-disability, cross-racial movement for civil rights that regarded welfare as the antithesis of equal citizenship, for mid-century Federationists, the right to public assistance was deeply intertwined with their civil rights.

By tracing the formation of political identity among the blind, we are able to see further back in time, to discern how and why the blind came to collective awareness and then elaborated on the nascent vocabulary of rights to insist that the New Deal live up to its promise. The NFB introduced into American politics changing social ideas about welfare, participatory democracy, and identity long before these became staples of the New Left, and it tied these concerns to an imaginative agenda for redistribution that challenged the primacy of the SSA and its allies in the social work profession. That this challenge originated in a vision of public assistance that privileged the breadwinning roles of white men, however, calls attention to the contradictions inherent in New Deal liberalism. By underscoring productive employment as the fount of human dignity and civic equality, Federationists participated in their own form of liberal

marginalization, obscuring both the labor that women did as caregivers and the public and private supports that made white, male labor materially and spiritually fulfilling. It may be the case that “new policies make new politics,” but the politics of blind assistance remind us that both new policies and new politics can nevertheless reinscribe old hierarchies.

NOTES

¹ The Social Security Board was renamed the Social Security Administration in a reorganization of the executive branch in 1940. In this article, for the sake of clarity and consistency, I refer to the agency as the Social Security Administration unless quoting a document or person who refers to the Social Security Board.

² James I. Charlton, *Nothing About Us Without Us: Disability Oppression and Empowerment* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 3, 16.

³ See, however, Anna Kresmer, “How the First Self-Advocacy Organization of the Blind Met the Challenge of Social Security, 1940-1950,” *Braille Monitor*, February 2016, <https://nfb.org/images/publications/bm/bm16/bm1602/bm160209.htm>.

⁴ Sheryl R. Tynes, *Turning Points in Social Security: From ‘Cruel Hoax’ to ‘Sacred Entitlement’* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 87; Larry W. DeWitt, “Social Security Policymaking: An Examination of Select Policies in the U.S. Social Security System” (PhD diss., University of Maryland, Baltimore County, 2014), 305, 314.

⁵ Beth Linker, *War’s Waste: Rehabilitation in World War I America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011); Ruth O’Brien, *Crippled Justice: The History of Modern Disability Policy in the Workplace* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2001); Martha Derthick, *Agency Under Stress: The Social Security Administration in American Government* (Washington, DC:

Brookings Institution Press, 1990); Edward D. Berkowitz, *Disabled Policy: America's Programs for the Handicapped* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Deborah A. Stone, *The Disabled State* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984); Jerry R. Cates, *Insuring Inequality: Administrative Leadership in Social Security, 1935-1954* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1983); Edward D. Berkowitz, *Rehabilitation: The Federal Government's Response to Disability, 1935-1954* (New York: Arno, 1980); Martha Derthick, *Policymaking for Social Security* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1979).

⁶ Quoting Karen Orren and Stephen Skowronek, *The Search for American Political Development* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 123. For a summary of this literature, see Julie Novkov, "Identity and Law in American Political Development," in *Oxford Handbook of American Political Development*, ed. Richard Valelly, Suzanne Mettler, and Robert Lieberman (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 662–81.

⁷ John David Skretny, *The Minority Rights Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 263–27; Thomas F. Burke, "On the Rights Track: The Americans with Disabilities Act" in *Comparative Disadvantages: Social Regulations and the Global Economy*, ed. Pietro Nivola (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1997), 242–18; Joseph P. Shapiro, *No Pity: People with Disabilities Forging a New Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1994); Diane Driedger, *The Last Civil Rights Movement: Disabled Peoples' International* (New York: Hurst and Company, 1989); Richard Scotch, *From Good Will to Civil Rights: Transforming Federal Disability Policy* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984).

⁸ See Karen M. Tani, *States of Dependency: Welfare, Rights, and American Governance, 1935–1972* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," *The Journal of American History* 91,

no. 4 (March 2005): 1233–63; Dorothy Sue Cobble, *The Other Women’s Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004); Stephen M. Engel, *The Unfinished Revolution: Social Movement Theory and the Gay and Lesbian Movement* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Terry Anderson, *The Movement and the Sixties: Protest in America from Greensboro to Wounded Knee* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Sara Margaret Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women’s Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left* (New York: Vintage, 1979). On early twentieth-century disability activism specifically, see Audra R. Jennings, *Out of the Horrors of War: Disability Politics in World War II America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016); Felicia Kornbluh, “Disability, Antiprofessionalism, and Civil Rights: The National Federation of the Blind and the ‘Right to Organize’ in the 1950s,” *Journal of American History* 97, no. 4 (March 2011): 1023–47; Thomas A. Krainz, “Transforming the Progressive Era Welfare State: Activists for the Blind and Blind Benefits,” *Journal of Policy History* 15, no. 2 (2003): 223–64; Paul K. Longmore and David Goldberger, “The League of the Physically Handicapped and the Great Depression: A Case Study in the New Disability History,” *Journal of American History* 87, no. 3 (December 2000): 888–922; Paul K. Longmore, “Disability Policy and Politics: Considering Consumer Influences,” *Journal of Disability Policy Studies* 11, no. 1 (Summer 2000): 36–44.

⁹ Noting but disputing the dichotomy between identity and class politics are Eric Hobsbawm, “Identity Politics and the New Left,” *New Left Review* 217 (May/June 1996): 38–47; Nancy Fraser, “Social Justice in the Age of Identity Politics: Redistribution, Recognition, and Participation,” in *Culture and Economy after the Cultural Turn*, ed. Larry Ray and Andrew Sayer (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1999), 25–52; Sharon Kurtz, *Workplace Justice: Organizing*

Multi-Identity Movements (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), xxvii–xxviii, 29.

¹⁰ Quoting Durward McDaniel, “National Federation of the Blind Annual Convention,” 1949, in James J. Megivern and Marjorie Megivern, *People of Vision: A History of the American Council of the Blind* (Bloomington, IN: American Council of the Blind, 2003), 62; A. L. Archibald, U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Ways and Means, *Amendments to the Social Security Act: Hearings before the Committee on Ways and Means, 79th Congress, 2nd Sess., 1946*, 1018 (hereinafter, U.S. House, *Hearings on the 1946 Amendments*).

¹¹ Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014); Cybelle Fox, *Three Worlds of Relief: Race, Immigration, and the American Welfare State from the Progressive Era to the New Deal* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012); Kimberly Johnson, *Reforming Jim Crow: Southern Politics and State in the Age before Brown* (New York: Oxford University Press 2010); Peggy Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Margot Canaday, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009); Philip A. Klinker with Rogers M. Smith, *The Unsteady March: The Rise and Decline of Racial Equality in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

¹² Stuart Hall, “Ethnicity: Identity and Difference,” *Radical America* 23, no. 4 (December-January 1989): 16; see also Francesca Polletta and James M. Jasper, “Collective Identity and Social Movements,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 27, no. 1 (August 2001): 285.

¹³ Katherine J. Cramer, *The Politics of Resentment: Rural Consciousness in Wisconsin and the Rise of Scott Walker* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016); David M. Engel and Frank Munger, “Narrative, Disability, and Identity,” *Narrative* 15, no. 1 (January 2007): 85–94;

Rawi Abdelal, Yoshiko M. Herrera, Alastair Iain Johnston, and Rose McDermott, "Identity as a Variable," *Perspectives on Politics* 4, no. 4 (December 2006): 695–711; Rogers M. Smith, *Stories of Peoplehood: The Politics and Morals of Political Membership* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003); David M. Engel and Frank W. Munger, *Rights of Inclusion: Law and Identity in the Life Stories of Americans with Disabilities* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Rogers M. Smith, "Citizenship and the Politics of People-Building," *Citizenship Studies* 5, no. 1 (2001): 73–96; Mary P. Ryan, Anne Norton, and George M. Shulman, "Conference Panel: On Political Identity," *Studies in American Political Development* 6, no. 1 (Spring 1992): 140–55; Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso Books, 1983).

¹⁴ Quoting Ryan, Norton, and Shulman, "Conference Panel," 45; see also Jane J. Mansbridge, *Beyond Adversary Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 27.

¹⁵ Michael C. Dawson, *Behind the Mule: Race and Class in African-American Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 61, 77.

¹⁶ Engel and Munger, *Rights of Inclusion*, 43–44 (emphasis in original). See also Hall, "Ethnicity," 15–16; Elizabeth R. Cole and Zakiya T. Luna, "Making Coalitions Work: Solidarity across Difference within U.S. Feminism," *Feminist Studies* 36, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 81, 94–95; Floya Anthias, "Beyond Feminism and Multiculturalism: Locating Difference and the Politics of Location," *Women's Studies International Forum* 25, no. 3 (May-June 2002): 275–86.

¹⁷ Dara Z. Strolovitch and M. David Forrest, "Social and Economic Justice Movements and Organizations," in *Oxford Handbook of American Political Parties and Interest Groups*, ed. L. Sandy Maisel, Jeffrey M. Berry, and George C. Edwards, III (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 468–84; Dara Z. Strolovitch, *Affirmative Advocacy: Race, Class, and Gender in*

Interest Group Politics (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 63; Frank R. Baumgartner and Bryan D. Jones, *Agendas and Instability in American Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 16–18; Deborah A. Stone, “Causal Stories and the Formation of Policy Agendas,” *Political Science Quarterly* 104, 2 (1989): 281–300.

¹⁸ Kurtz, *Workplace Justice*, 29; Cole and Luna, “Making Coalitions Work,” 77.

¹⁹ Abdelal et al., “Identity as a Variable,” 698–99; Ryan, Norton, and Shulman, “Conference Panel,” 147; Polletta and Jasper, “Collective Identity and Social Movements,” 292–97; Zakiya Luna, “Truly a Women of Color Organization: Negotiating Sameness and Difference in Pursuit of Intersectionality,” *Gender and Society* 30, no. 5 (October 2016): 772; Evelyn Nakano Glenn, “Constructing Citizenship: Exclusion, Subordination, and Resistance,” *American Sociological Review* 76, no. 1 (February 2011): 2–9; Verta Taylor and Nancy E. Whittier, “Collective Identity in Social Movement Communities: Lesbian Feminist Mobilization,” in *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory*, ed. Aldon D. Morris and Carol McClurg Mueller (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 117.

²⁰ Maureen Scully and W. E. Douglas Creed, “Subverting Our Stories of Subversion,” in *Social Movements and Organizational Theory*, ed. Gerald F. David, Doug McAdam, William Richard, Scott Mayer, and Nathan Zald (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 310–22.

²¹ Cole and Luna, “Making Coalitions Work,” 95; Strolovitch and Forrest, “Social and Economic Justice Movements and Organizations,” 483.

²² Jal Mehta, “The Varied Roles of Ideas in Politics: From ‘Whether’ to ‘How,’” in *Ideas and Politics in Social Science Research*, ed. Daniel Beland and Robert Henry Cox (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 23–46; B. Guy Peters, Jon Pierre, and Desmond S. King, “The

Politics of Path Dependency: Political Conflict in Historical Institutionalism,” *Journal of Politics* 67, no. 4 (November 2005): 1283–84.

²³ Novkov, “Identity and Law in American Political Development,” 662–81; Carol Nackenoff, “The Private Roots of American Political Development: The Immigrants’ Protective League’s ‘Friendly and Sympathetic Touch,’ 1908-1924,” *Studies in American Political Development* 28, no. 2 (October 2014): 129–60; Allison M. Martens, “Working Women or Women Workers? The Women’s Trade Union League and the Transformation of the American Constitutional Order,” *Studies in American Political Development* 23, no. 2 (October 2009): 143–70.

²⁴ Eric M. Patashnik and Julian E. Zelizer, “The Struggle to Remake Politics: Liberal Reform and the Limits of Policy Feedback in the Contemporary American State,” *Perspectives on Politics* 11, no. 4 (December 2013): 1071–87; Daniel Béland, “Reconsidering Policy Feedback: How Policies Affect Politics,” *Administration and Society* 42, no. 5 (September 2010): 568–90; Suzanne Mettler and Joe Soss, “The Consequences of Public Policy for Democratic Citizenship: Bridging Policy Studies and Mass Politics,” *Perspectives on Politics* 2, no. 1 (March 2004): 55–73. Ryan, Norton, and Shulman, “Conference Panel,” 150, note that identity is forged “from materials available within the culture” though the perspective here emphasizes the degree to which culture is institutionalized in policy.

²⁵ Desmond S. King and Rogers M. Smith, “Racial Orders in American Political Development,” *American Political Science Review* 99, no. 1 (February 2005): 75–92.

²⁶ Evelyn Nakano Glenn, *Unequal Freedom: How Race and Gender Shaped American Freedom and Labor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 13–14.

²⁷ Aimi Hamraie, *Building Access: Universal Design and the Politics of Disability* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 50–51, 65–70.

²⁸ Canaday, *The Straight State*; Kim E. Nielsen, *A Disability History of the United States* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2012); Gretchen Ritter, “Gender as a Category of Analysis in American Political Development,” in *Political Women and American Democracy*, ed. Christina Wolbrecht, Karen Beckwith, and Lisa Baldez (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 12–30; Gretchen Ritter, *The Constitution as Social Design: Gender and Civic Membership in the American Constitutional Order* (Stanford University Press, 2006); Douglas C. Baynton, “Disability and the Justification of Inequality in American History,” in *The New Disability History: American Perspectives*, ed. Paul K. Longmore and Lauri Umansky (New York: New York University, 2001), 33–57.

²⁹ Ritter, “Gender as a Category of Analysis,” 12–30; Ritter, *The Constitution as Social Design*, 6–7.

³⁰ Kurtz, *Workplace Justice*, 35–36.

³¹ Quoting Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (2nd ed., New York: Routledge, 2014), 18. See also Luna, “Truly a Women of Color Organization,” 772.

³² See, among others, JoNel Newman, “Identity and Narrative: Turning Oppression into Client Empowerment in Social Security Disability Cases,” *Albany Law Review* 79, no. 2 (April 2015): 373–402; Vesla M. Weaver and Amy E. Lerman, “Political Consequences of the Carceral State,” *American Political Science Review*, 104, no. 4 (November 2010): 817–33; Sarah K. Bruch, Myra Marx Ferree, and Joe Soss, “From Policy to Polity: Democracy, Paternalism, and the Incorporation of Disadvantaged Citizens,” *American Sociological Review* 75, 2 (2010): 205–

26; Joe Soss and Sanford F. Schram, "A Public Transformed? Welfare Reform as Policy Feedback," *American Political Science Review* 101, no. 1 (February 2007): 111–127; Suzanne Mettler, *Soldiers to Citizens: The GI Bill and the Making of the Greatest Generation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Anne L. Schneider and Helen M. Ingram, eds., *Deserving and Entitled: Social Constructions and Public Policy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005); Mettler and Soss, "The Consequences of Public Policy for Democratic Citizenship," 55–73; Andrea Louise Campbell, *How Policies Make Citizens: Senior Political Activism and the American Welfare State* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003); Abdelal et al., "Identity as a Variable," 695–711; Rogers M. Smith, "Identities, Interests, and the Future of Political Science," *Perspectives on Politics* 2, no. 2 (June 2004): 301–12; Ryan, Norton, and Shulman, "Conference Panel," 140–55.

³³ Patricia Hill Collins, *Fighting Words: Black Women and the Search for Justice* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 224.

³⁴ Strolovitch, *Affirmative Advocacy*, 60-1, 63; Luna, "Truly a Women of Color Organization," 772–73; Mary F. Rogers, and Phillip B. Lott, "Backlash, the Matrix of Domination, and Log Cabin Republicans," *Sociological Quarterly* 38, no. 3 (June 1997), 497.

³⁵ Kurtz, *Workplace Justice*, 29; Hall, "Ethnicity," 17. The quote is from E. E. Schattschneider, *Politics, Pressures, and the Tariff: A Study of Free Private Enterprise in Pressure Politics, as Shown in the 1929-1930 Revision of the Tariff* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1935), 288.

³⁶ Michael W. McCann, "Inclusion, Exclusion, and the Politics of Rights Mobilization: Reactions on the Asian American Experience," *Seattle Legal Journal for Social Justice* 11, no. 1 (2012), 117, 118–19; Rogers M. Smith, *Civic Ideals: Conflicting Visions of Citizenship in U.S.*

History (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), 247–48; Michael W. McCann, *Rights at Work: Pay Equity and the Politics of Legal Mobilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 246–47; Cathy Cohen, *The Boundaries of Blackness: AIDS and the Breakdown of the Black Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1999).

³⁷ Cathy Cohen, “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 3, no. 4 (May 1997): 437, 442–43.

³⁸ Dean Spade, “Intersectional Resistance and Law Reform,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 38, no. 4 (Summer 2013): 1040–41.

³⁹ Luna, “Truly a Women of Color Organization,” 770–71.

⁴⁰ Cohen, *The Boundaries of Blackness*, xi.

⁴¹ Sarah F. Rose, *No Right to Be Idle: The Invention of Disability, 1840s–1930s* (Chapel Hill: University North Carolina Press, 2017).

⁴² The phrase the “unhealthy disabled” was coined by Susan Wendell, “Unhealthy Disabled: Treating Chronic Illnesses as Disabilities,” *Hypatia* 16, no. 4 (November 2001): 17–33, and its converse, the “healthy disabled,” in Beth Linker, “On the Borderland of Medical and Disability History: A Survey of the Fields,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 87, no. 4 (Winter 2013): 499–535. On the stigmatization of physical disablement, see Susan M. Schweik, *The Ugly Laws: Disability in Public* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

⁴³ Conrad Berens, “What Organizations for the Blind Can Do in Preventing Blindness,” in *What of the Blind? A Survey of the Development and Scope of Present-Day Work with the Blind*, ed. Helga Lende (New York: American Foundation for the Blind, 1938), 23–31 (hereinafter, *What of the Blind?* ed. Lende). While young children could attend residential schools for the blind and a few matriculated to universities, prospects for industrial workers

blinded in adulthood were much poorer. The vast majority of the blind were elderly, who had little use for the educational and training programs designed to teach Braille or new trade skills. Harry Best, *Blindness and the Blind in the United States* (New York: MacMillan, 1934), 134, 181–82, 187–89; Robert B. Irwin, “The Blind and Resources for their Aid,” in *What of the Blind?* ed. Lende, 4–5.

⁴⁴ On the importance of space to the rise of collective consciousness, see Sharon Groch, “Free Spaces: Creating Oppositional Consciousness in the Disability Rights Movement,” in *Oppositional Consciousness: The Subjective Roots of Social Protest*, ed. Jane J. Mansbridge and Aldon Morris (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 65–98; Longmore, “Disability Policy and Politics,” 39; Ronald J. Ferguson, *We Know Who We Are: A History of the Blind in Challenging Educational and Socially Constructed Policies, A Study in Political Archeology* (San Francisco: Caddo Gap Press, 2001), 67–68.

⁴⁵ Evelyn C. McKay, “Functions of a State Agency for the Blind,” in *What of the Blind?* ed. Lende, 106–107.

⁴⁶ Best, *Blindness and the Blind*, 199–200, 218, 223, 244–45, 248.

⁴⁷ Ferguson, *We Know Who We Are*, 67; Catherine J. Kudlick, “The Outlook of *The Problem* and the Problem with the *Outlook*: Two Advocacy Journals Reinvent Blind People in Turn-of-the-Century America,” in *The New Disability History: American Perspectives*, ed. Paul K. Longmore and Lauri Umansky (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 187–213; Charles Edwin Buell, *The Education of the Negro Blind in the United States* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1945); Blanche Florine Smith, “Community Efforts Toward the Negro Blind and the Development of the Metropolitan Atlanta Association for the Colored Blind” (MA Thesis, Atlanta University, 1945).

⁴⁸ In the 1930s, based on the best available survey data, 44 percent of the blind were over the age of 65 and another 22 percent were between the ages of 50 and 64. Two-thirds lost their sight after school age and so had no opportunity to attend the residential schools. Irwin, “The Blind and Resources for their Aid,” 4–5. In 1946, the NFB claimed 25,000 active members and many more members who were designated as “inactive” because they were unable to pay annual dues but still wished to participate. Archibald, U.S. House, *Hearings on the 1946 Amendments*, 1017.

⁴⁹ Kudlick, “The Outlook of *The Problem* and the Problem with the *Outlook*,” 133–56; O. H. Burritt, “Work of the Uniform Type Committee: From the American Point of View,” *Outlook for the Blind* 8, no. 2 (July 1914): 72. The ABPHEGIA published *The Problem*, a magazine featuring the writings of blind men and women. In 1906, the ABPHEGIA allowed sighted members, at which point it became the American Association of Workers for the Blind (AAWB), a forerunner of the American Foundation for the Blind. The AAWB ceased publication of *The Problem* but a few years later created its own journal, *Outlook for the Blind*, which for many decades served as the primary professional journal for instructors and social workers specializing in work with the blind.

⁵⁰ Best, *Blindness and the Blind*, 535–36; Robert B. Irwin and Evelyn C. McKay, *Blind Relief Laws: Their Theory and Practice* (New York: American Foundation of the Blind 1929), 12.

⁵¹ Author’s calculations from state profiles presented in Irwin and McKay, *Blind Relief Laws*, 41–118.

⁵² Eileen L. McDonagh, “Race, Class, and Gender in the Progressive Era: Restructuring State and Society,” in *Progressivism and the New Democracy*, ed. Sidney M. Milkis and Jerome

M. Mileur (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999), 145–91; Gwendolyn Mink, *The Wages of Motherhood: Inequality in the Welfare State, 1917-1942* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995); Linda Gordon, *Pitied but Not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare, 1890-1935* (New York: Free Press, 1994); Molly Ladd-Taylor, *Mother-Work: Women, Child Welfare, and the State, 1890-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994); Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1992); Robyn Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion in American Reform, 1890-1935* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Barbara J. Nelson, “The Origins of the Two-Channel Welfare State: Workmen’s Compensation and Mothers’ Aid,” in *Women, the State, and Welfare*, ed. Linda Gordon (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 123–51. Some Progressive supporters of blind benefits attempted to link them to the military and industrial service of men, pointing out that many of the blind had lost their sight in war or in industrial accidents. Krainz, “Transforming the Progressive Era Welfare State,” 225, 239–40.

⁵³ Best, *Blindness and the Blind*, 534–36, 545; Irwin and McKay, *Blind Relief Laws*, 11. Much of the writings about and by workers for the blind refer to them as “blind workers.” In this article, I use the term *blindness professionals* or *blindness workers* to avoid confusing these almost exclusively sighted individuals with individuals who were both blind and employed.

⁵⁴ Regina G. Kunzel, *Fallen Women, Problem Girls: Unmarried Mothers and the Professionalization of Social Work, 1890-1945* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995); Gordon, *Pitied but Not Entitled*, 100–102, 220–23; Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion in American Reform*, 76–77, 81–88; Mimi Abramovitz, *Regulating the Lives of Women: Social Welfare Policy from Colonial Times to the Present* (Boston: South End Press, 1988), 198–200.

⁵⁵ Larry E. Rivers, "The Pittsburgh Workshop for the Blind, 1910-1939: A Case Study of the Blind System in America," *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* 61, no. 2 (April 1978): 135–86; Best, *Blindness and the Blind*, 419, 496–503; Harry Best, *The Blind: Their Condition and the Work Being Done for Them in the United States* (New York: Macmillan, 1919), 502–17.

⁵⁶ Best, *Blindness and the Blind*, 535–43; Irwin and McKay, *Blind Relief Laws*, 13, 26–29; "Principles of Relief Administration," *Outlook for the Blind* 29, no. 1 (February 1935): 29–30.

⁵⁷ Lillian Proctor, "Blind Relief Services in Cook County, Illinois, 1931-1935," *Outlook for the Blind* 29, no. 3 (June 1935): 95–102, 134.

⁵⁸ On Colorado, see Krainz, "Transforming the Progressive Era Welfare State," 243–47; on California, see Irwin and McKay, *Blind Relief Laws*, 41; Newel Perry, "The California Council for the Blind and Other Activities, 1881-1956," an oral history conducted in 1955 and 1956 by Willa Baum in *Organizations and Issues of the Blind, 1880s-1950s*, Oral History Center, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1956, 119–21 (hereinafter Perry, Oral History).

⁵⁹ Evelyn C. McKay, "The Blind Under the Social Security Act," in *What of the Blind?* ed. Lende, 144. For criticism of blind benefit programs run by the blind, see Best, *Blindness and the Blind*, 248; Irwin and McKay, *Blind Relief Laws*, 46.

⁶⁰ Megivern and Megivern, *People of Vision*, 24; Gayle Burlingame, "Introduction to an Address by Jacobus tenBroek, 1940," reprinted in the National Federation of the Blind, *The Blind and Social Security: A Collection of Addresses, Letters, and Other Documents Published by the National Federation of the Blind*, 1944, 2, Place 21, File Cabinet 1, Drawer 4, National

Federation of the Blind Institutional Records, Subcollection: National Federation of the Blind (NFB), 1940-2011: NFB Publications, Jacobus tenBroek Library, Jernigan Institute, Baltimore, MD (hereinafter, NFB, *The Blind and Social Security*).

⁶¹ Suzanne Mettler, *Dividing Citizens: Gender and Federalism in New Deal Public Policy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998); Mink, *The Wages of Motherhood*; Gordon, *Pitied but Not Entitled*.

⁶² June Hopkins, *Harry Hopkins: Sudden Hero, Brash Reformer* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 3, 60, 62; George T. McJimsey, *Harry Hopkins: Ally of the Poor and Defender of Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 20–21; Harry Hopkins, *Spending to Save: The Complete Story of Relief* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1936), 109.

⁶³ June Hopkins, “The Road Not Taken: Harry Hopkins and New Deal Work Relief,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 29, no. 2 (June 1999): 306–16; William W. Bremer, “Along the American Way: The New Deal’s Work Relief Programs for the Unemployed,” *Journal of American History* 62, 3 (December 1975): 636–52; Searle F. Charles, *Minister of Relief: Harry Hopkins and the Depression* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1963).

⁶⁴ Canaday, *The Straight State*, 130–34; Marissa Leigh Slaughter Stalvey, *Love Is Not Blind: Eugenics, Blindness, and Marriage in the United States, 1840-1940* (master’s thesis, University of Toledo, 2014); Longmore, “Disability Policy and Politics,” 37; Longmore and Goldberger, “The League of the Physically Handicapped and the Great Depression,” 898–99; A. E. Septinelle, “Employment for the Blind under the WPA,” *Outlook for the Blind* 29, 5 (December 1935): 211–12.

⁶⁵ Laurel Iverson Hitchcock, “The Creation of Federal Services for Crippled Children, 1890-1941” (PhD diss., University of Alabama, 2009), 96–100; Edwin E. Witte, *The Development of the Social Security Act* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1963), 171.

⁶⁶ Edwin E. Witte, U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Ways and Means, *Economic Security Act: Hearings on H.R. 4120*, 74th Congress, 1st Sess., 1935, 114; Arthur J. Altmeyer, *The Formative Years of Social Security: A Chronicle of Social Security Legislation and Administration, 1934-1954* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1966), 40–41; Witte, *The Development of the Social Security Act*, 189–90. It is not necessarily the case that the blind were better taken care of than other groups of the poor. Fewer states offered blind pensions than mothers’ or old age pensions, and in those most of those states, counties could refuse to make pensions available to residents.

⁶⁷ Frances A. Koestler, *Unseen Minority: A Social History of Blindness in the United States* (New York: American Foundation for the Blind, 1976), 191–92; Jacobus tenBroek and Floyd W. Matson, *Hope Deferred: Public Welfare and the Blind* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959), 60; McKay, “The Blind Under the Social Security Act,” 140; U.S. Senate, Committee on Finance, *Economic Security Act: Hearings on S. 1139*, 74th Congress, 1st Sess., 1935, 726. The text of the proposal can be found in “Federal Aid for the Blind,” *Outlook for the Blind* 29, no. 2 (April 1935): 69–71, 78. The enactment of the Hill-Burton Act of 1943 finally authorized state agencies for the blind to offer blind applicants vocational rehabilitation and job training services.

⁶⁸ *Congressional Record*, 74th Congress, 1st Sess., 1935, 11328; tenBroek and Matson, *Hope Deferred*, 59; Jacobus tenBroek, *Blindness: Legislative History of Social Security*, no date, Place 21, File Cabinet 1, Drawer 4, National Federation of the Blind Institutional Records,

Subcollection: National Federation of the Blind (NFB), 1940-2011: NFB Publications, Jacobus tenBroek Library, Jernigan Institute, Baltimore, MD.

⁶⁹ *Congressional Record*, 74th Congress, 1st Sess., 1935, 9269.

⁷⁰ *Congressional Record*, 74th Congress, 1st Sess., 1935, 11324; Koestler, *Unseen Minority*, 191–92; Witte, *The Development of the Social Security Act*, 191–92; tenBroek and Matson, *Hope Deferred*, 60–61; McKay, “The Blind Under the Social Security Act,” 139–41.

According to Koestler, Irwin blamed state welfare directors for the defeat of the Wagner amendment; Witte, however, attributes its demise to the conferees’ skepticism about social work.

⁷¹ ADC grants were for children, not their adult caregivers. Congress amended the program in 1962, renaming it Aid to Families with Dependent Children and making adult caregivers formally eligible for grants. When Congress established Aid to the Permanently and Totally Disabled in 1950, it made impoverished working-age people with disabilities other than blindness eligible for cash assistance. According to Anne E. Geddes, “Who Are the People Receiving Aid to the Blind and How Much Assistance Are They Receiving?” *Social Security Bulletin* 3, no. 9 (September 1940): 16–18, states preferred moving their aged onto OAA because if they left them on AB, they would need to conduct an eye exam to demonstrate eligibility.

⁷² For instance, nationwide, in December 1939, approximately 1.9 million individuals were aided by OAA; 757,000 children or 315,000 families received ADC, but only 70,000 persons were enrolled in AB. Bureau of Research and Statistics, Social Security Board, *Trends in Public Assistance, 1933-1939*, Bureau Report No. 8 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1940), 11.

⁷³ Cates, *Insuring Inequality*, 26–27, 105–106; Altmeyer, *The Formative Years*, 60; McKay, “The Blind Under the Social Security Act,” 144; “Blind Pensions in Wisconsin, 1907-

1934,” *Outlook for the Blind*, 30, no. 2 (April 1936): 119. There were two kinds of state flat grants that the Social Security Board found objectionable. In the first, states paid a flat monthly grant to any individual who was blind or aged and needy. For instance, Missouri and Illinois simply gave a uniform annual payment of \$300 and \$360, respectively, to any poor individual who met those states’ categorical definition of blindness. In the second, states provided a grant to individuals under a certain income threshold sufficient to bring them up to the threshold. Rather than treating these forms of payment as mutually exclusive, some states combined them. Blind pensions in Pennsylvania, the state with the most generous blind pension in the nation, was an example of this kind of combined flat grant. Pennsylvania set an income threshold of \$840. Any recipient with an annual income below the threshold received a payment of \$360. Individuals with an income over \$840 but less than \$1,200 received a payment sufficient to raise their annual income to \$1,200. Generous states also combined flat grants with a showing of “economic blindness,” meaning, rather than undergoing a thorough investigation of need, the applicant simply showed that he or she was not working and had limited income. Many states also allowed recipients to keep what earnings they could secure from intermittent jobs or low-wage work in sheltered workshops to supplement their assistance checks. The SSA objected to how need was determined and how grants were calculated, as well as to the disregarding of income derived from earnings or gifts, even if these occurred only sporadically.

⁷⁴ Kenneth D. Davis, *FDR: The New Deal Years, 1933-1937: A History* (New York: Random House, 1979), 401–404; Gordon, *Pitied but Not Entitled*, 225–34.

⁷⁵ Altmeyer, *The Formative Years*, 60–61; Correspondence from Robert Beasley, Regional Public Assistance Representative, to the Executive Director, “Attn: Bureau of Public

Assistance, Denver, CO,” 4 May 1937, Box 235, Record Group 47: Records of the Social Security Board, Central File, Master File, 1935-1947, National Archives, College Park, MD.

⁷⁶ Altmeyer, *The Formative Years*, 80; Correspondence from Edwin E. Witte, Department of Economics, University of Wisconsin, to Merrill G. Murray, Director of Unemployment Compensation Division, Social Security Board, 11 December 1935, Box 273, Record Group 47: Records of the Social Security Board, Office of the Commissioner, Executive Director’s File Unit, 1935-1940, National Archives, College Park, MD.

⁷⁷ Cates, *Insuring Inequality*, 26–27; Tani, *States of Dependency*, 10, 88–89.

⁷⁸ TenBroek and Matson, *Hope Deferred*, 74–75; American Public Welfare Association, *Suggested State Legislation for Social Security: Administrative Organization, Old-Age Assistance, Aid to the Needy Blind, Aid to Dependent Children, Drafts and Explanation*, Chicago, IL, November 15, 1935. Blindness professionals resented the SSA’s use of APWA model legislation for Aid to the Blind, which they believed undercut their sheltered workshops by presuming that the blind were incapable of work. Correspondence from Jane Hoey to Frank Bane, “Program for the Blind,” 12 May 1936, Box 232, Record Group 47: Social Security Board Central File, Master File, 1935-1947, National Archives, College Park, MD; Correspondence from Ivan Asay to Ruth Blakeslee, “Current Misconception of the Meaning of ‘Budgeting’ in Relation to Aid to the Blind,” 9 November 1936, Box 236, Record Group 47: Social Security Board, Central File, Master File, 1935-1947, National Archives, College Park, MD. Nonetheless, blindness workers also opposed flat grants and accepted the need for casework. “Principles of Relief Administration,” 29–30.

⁷⁹ Tani, *States of Dependency*, 71–80.

⁸⁰ Altmeyer, *The Formative Years*, 79. On social workers and their desire for a scientific system of resolving questions of redistribution and applying a distinctively maternal approach to helping the poor, see Hopkins, *Harry Hopkins*, 58; Gordon, *Pitied but Not Entitled*, 96–97, 102–104; Kunzel, *Fallen Women, Problem Girls*, 63–64, 137–39; Abramovitz, *Regulating the Lives of Women*, 198–200.

⁸¹ Cates, *Insuring Inequality*, 108–109.

⁸² During debate over the Social Security Act in 1935, Senator Harry Byrd (D-VA) had struck references to need in the operative sections of the law though they remained in the preamble of the legislation. Between 1935 and 1939, the SSA relied on audits of state decisions conducted by its Bureau of Public Assistance to overturn cases in which the state had not conducted a proper investigation of need. In some states, audits overturned thousands of individual cases, but the reasons remained hidden from public scrutiny. Cates, *Insuring Inequality*, 110; Altmeyer, *The Formative Years*, 60–61, 79; Correspondence from Emmett P. Delaney, Office of the General Counsel, to Thomas H. Eliot, Office of the Executive Director, “Memorandum re: Power of Social Security Board in Approval of State Plans for Old-Age Assistance,” 19 November 1935, Box 232, Record Group 47: Social Security Board Central File, Master File, 1935-1947, National Archives, College Park, MD.

⁸³ Altmeyer, *The Formative Years*, 129; Cates, *Insuring Inequality*, 117; tenBroek and Matson, *Hope Deferred*, 83–92.

⁸⁴ Cates, *Insuring Inequality*, 118–19; tenBroek and Matson, *Hope Deferred*, 93–94.

⁸⁵ Because of these restrictive provisions, even in states with liberal pension laws, only half of blind residents had received benefits. “Blind Pensions in Wisconsin,” 114.

⁸⁶ Koestler, *Unseen Minority*, 199–200; tenBroek and Matson, *Hope Deferred*, 68–72.

⁸⁷ “The Social Security Act and the Blind,” *Outlook for the Blind* 30, no. 4 (October 1936), 152–56. For documentation of the SSA’s disapproval of liberal provisions related to need and family responsibility in Missouri, Washington, California, Iowa, and Illinois prior to the 1939 amendments, see “Insecurity under the Social Security Act,” *University of Chicago Law Review* 9, no. 1 (December 1941), 129–33.

⁸⁸ TenBroek and Matson, *Hope Deferred*, 94–95; Burlingame, “Introduction to an Address by Jacobus tenBroek,” 1. Other states with high benefit levels, flat grants, and earnings disregards included California, Pennsylvania, Missouri, Illinois Washington, Wyoming, and Colorado. In terms of the amount of the grant, California was the most liberal state, with an average monthly check of \$48 per month; the second most generous state was Washington, with \$34. By comparison, the national average was \$26. Evelyn C. McKay, “Statistics on Aid to the Blind,” *Outlook for the Blind* 32, no. 2 (April 1938): 42–43. Following the 1939 amendments, the SSA found several states with previously approved Title X plans were no longer in compliance with the Social Security Act. These included Pennsylvania and California. “The Social Security Act and the Blind,” 148.

⁸⁹ The other three states represented at the founding meeting of the NFB were Ohio, Wisconsin, and Minnesota. In a letter to Perry two months after the inaugural NFB convention, tenBroek wrote that chapters from Pennsylvania, Minnesota, and California formed the “closely knit nucleus” of the new organization and were committed to ensuring that the organization attained permanence. Correspondence from Jacobus tenBroek to Newel Perry, 4 January 1941, Digital Maryland Collection: Jacobus tenBroek Library, National Federation of the Blind, Jernigan Institute, Baltimore, MD, <http://collections.digitalmaryland.org/cdm/singleitem/collection/nfnf/id/39>; Floyd W. Matson,

Walking Alone and Marching Together: A History of the Organized Blind Movement in the United States, 1940-1990 (Baltimore, MD: National Federation of the Blind, 1990), 24.

⁹⁰ The CCB went by the name the California Council *for* the Blind until 1956, when it changed its appellation to the California Council *of* the Blind.

⁹¹ Minutes of the First Meeting of the National Federation of the Blind, 16 November 1940, Digital Maryland Collection: Jacobus tenBroek Library, National Federation of the Blind, Jernigan Institute, Baltimore, MD, <http://collections.digitalmaryland.org/cdm/compoundobject/collection/nfnf/id/38> (hereinafter NFB Minutes, November 16, 1940); Megivern and Megivern, *People of Vision*, 39–42, 39 n. 1; Matson, *Walking Alone*, 16, 23. Age 50 at the time of the NFB’s founding, Burlingame was significantly older than tenBroek and initially had some doubts about the utility of a national organization, which may have been a reason why tenBroek, who was 29 years old, assumed the presidency. Burlingame also seemed reluctant to assume leadership. Although he had opened the meeting at which activists discussed the formation of the NFB, he promptly suggested that tenBroek serve as chair in his place. When Burlingame was nominated for the vice presidency, he declined.

⁹² NFB Minutes, November 16, 1940, 2–3.

⁹³ Perry, Oral History, 112–14, 116–18, 119–20, 126–28.

⁹⁴ NFB Minutes, November 16, 1940, 2.

⁹⁵ Jacobus tenBroek, “Have Our Blind Social Security?” Presidential Address to the 1940 Convention, reprinted in Matson, *Walking Alone*, 18.

⁹⁶ Raymond W. Henderson, “The Social Security Board Against the Blind: An Open Letter to Congressmen,” 1942, reprinted in NFB, *The Blind and Social Security*, 9.

⁹⁷ Matson, *Walking Alone*, 10.

⁹⁸ Franklin D. Roosevelt, “State of the Union Address,” January 7, 1943, in Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=16386>; Edwin Amenta and Theda Skocpol, “Redefining the New Deal: World War II and the Development of Social Provision in the United States,” in *The Politics of Social Policy in the United States*, ed. Margaret Weir, Ann Shola Orloff, and Theda Skocpol (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), 81–122.

⁹⁹ Jennifer Mittelstadt, *From Welfare to Workfare: The Unintended Consequences of Liberal Reform, 1945-1965* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 23.

¹⁰⁰ Arthur J. Altmeyer, U.S. House, *Hearings on the 1946 Amendments*, 785; Arthur J. Altmeyer, U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Ways and Means, *Social Security Amendments of 1949: Hearings on H. R. 2892*, 81st Congress, 1st Sess., 1949, 11–12 (hereinafter, U.S. House, *Hearings on the 1949 Amendments*).

¹⁰¹ Mittelstadt, *From Welfare to Workfare*, 30–39; Altmeyer, U.S. House, *Hearings on the 1949 Amendments*, 8–9, 91–92.

¹⁰² Altmeyer, U.S. House, *Hearings on the 1949 Amendments*, 7.

¹⁰³ Cates, *Insuring Inequality*, 29–30.

¹⁰⁴ Jacobus tenBroek, “A Bill of Rights for the Blind,” Presidential Address to the 1948 Convention, reprinted in Matson, *Walking Alone*, 39–40. On the ways in which disability “emasculates” men, see Russell P. Shuttleworth, Nikki Wedgwood, and Nathan J. Wilson, “The Dilemma of Disabled Masculinity,” *Men and Masculinities* 15, no. 2 (June 2012): 174–94; David Harley Serlin, “Crippling Masculinity: Queerness and Disability in U.S. Military Culture, 1800–1945,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 9, no. 1/2 (2003): 149–79; Tom

Shakespeare, “The Sexual Politics of Disabled Masculinity,” *Sexuality and Disability* 17, no. 1 (March 1999): 53–64.

¹⁰⁵ Ross M. Koen, “Handicap Compensation Needed instead of Present Social Security Act,” *Outlook for the Blind* 39, no. 6 (June 1945), 175, reprinting Koen’s pamphlet, *Proposed Handicapped Compensation for the Blind and Amendment to the Social Security Act*. Koen was a Wisconsin activist and a fundraiser for the NFB, having originated its White Cane Week.

¹⁰⁶ Jacobus tenBroek, “Memorandum of Legislative Proposals before the Ways and Means Committee House of Representatives, Attached: Suggested Draft Amendments to Title Ten, Social Security Act,” March 1946, Place 21, File Cabinet 1, Drawer 4, National Federation of the Blind Institutional Records, Subcollection: National Federation of the Blind (NFB), 1940–2011: Legislation Files, Jacobus tenBroek Library, Jernigan Institute, Baltimore, MD.

¹⁰⁷ Ferguson, *We Know Who We Are*, 67–69; Koestler, *Unseen Minority*, 15; Megivern and Megivern, *People of Vision*, 19, 25–26.

¹⁰⁸ Matson, *Walking Alone*, 26.

¹⁰⁹ Archibald, U.S. House, *Hearings on the 1946 Amendments*, 1017. A similar sentiment is echoed in Earl Wilcox, “Social Insecurity,” reprinted in the NFB, *The Blind and Social Security*, 16: “Only the blind can lead the blind.”

¹¹⁰ Perry, Oral History 39–40, 68, 76; “Dr. Perry Retires from California School for the Blind,” *Outlook for the Blind* 41, no. 9 (November 1947), 246. Most colleges accepted the blind, but made little provision for their learning, such as recorded or Braille books or sighted readers. Perry wrote and then lobbied for the New York reader stipend, which was enacted in 1907. He did the same once he moved to California in 1912, and by 1938, 29 states had similar stipends in place. Irwin, “The Blind and Resources for their Aid,” 5; Herbert H. Stroup, “The Practices of

American Colleges in Regard to Blind Students,” *Outlook for the Blind* 40, no. 6 (June 1946): 151–58.

¹¹¹ Elisabeth S. Clemens, “Organizational Repertoires and Institutional Change: Women’s Groups and the Transformation of U.S. Politics, 1890-1920,” *American Journal of Sociology* 98, no. 4 (January 1993): 755–98.

¹¹² Perry, *Oral History*, 60, 124. Other organizations of the disabled felt similar animosity to social workers, rehabilitation counselors, and other professionals who “cared” for them. See Jennings, *Out of the Horrors of War*; Robert M. Buchanan, *Illusions of Equality: Deaf Americans in School and Factory, 1850-1950* (Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press, 1999).

¹¹³ Jacobus tenBroek, “Newel Perry: Teacher of Youth and Leader of Men,” reprinted in Matson, *Walking Alone*, 1035–37.

¹¹⁴ Wilcox, “Social Insecurity,” 12.

¹¹⁵ Allen Jenkins, “Allen Jenkins on the Attitudes and Activities of the Organized Blind,” an oral history conducted in 1955 and 1956 by Willa Baum in *Organizations and Issues of the Blind, 1880s-1950s*, Oral History Center, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1956, 31, 37–39, 43–44 (hereinafter, Jenkins, *Oral History*).

¹¹⁶ TenBroek, “Have Our Blind Social Security?” 13–14, 18.

¹¹⁷ Matson, *Walking Alone*, 24; Correspondence from Jacobus tenBroek to Newel Perry, 28 November 1940, Digital Maryland Collection: Jacobus tenBroek Library, National Federation of the Blind, Jernigan Institute, Baltimore, MD, <http://collections.digitalmaryland.org/cdm/singleitem/collection/nfnf/id/39>; Correspondence from Jacobus tenBroek to Newel Perry, January 4, 1941, Digital Maryland Collection: Jacobus

tenBroek Library, National Federation of the Blind, Jernigan Institute, Baltimore, MD, <http://collections.digitalmaryland.org/cdm/compoundobject/collection/nfnf/id/29>; Matson, *Walking Alone*, 31.

¹¹⁸ Matson, *Walking Alone*, 28.

¹¹⁹ Jacobus tenBroek, “The Work of the National Federation of the Blind,” Presidential Address to the 1944 Convention, reprinted in Matson, *Walking Alone*, 31. Among the last to join the NFB as affiliates were states in the Deep South, mid-Atlantic, and Southwest, where assistance programs for the blind did not exist before the Social Security Act or where organizations that featured cooperation between blindness professionals, charitable workers, and the blind were prevalent.

¹²⁰ Alice Kessler-Harris, *In Pursuit of Equality: Women, Men, and the Quest for Economic Citizenship in 20th Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

¹²¹ Matson, *Walking Alone*, 23.

¹²² TenBroek, “A Bill of Rights for the Blind,” 39.

¹²³ TenBroek, “Have Our Blind Social Security?” 33; tenBroek, “The Work of the National Federation of the Blind,” 38.

¹²⁴ Jenkins, Oral History, 22.

¹²⁵ TenBroek, “Newel Perry,” 1028–29.

¹²⁶ Archibald, U.S. House, *Hearings on the 1949 Amendments*, 508.

¹²⁷ Matson, *Walking Alone*, 41. See also Archibald, U.S. House, *Hearings on the 1949 Amendments*, 510; Jenkins, Oral History, 16.

¹²⁸ TenBroek, “A Bill of Rights for the Blind,” 40–41. Sports metaphors were common in Federationist discussions about rehabilitation. See, for instance, tenBroek, “The Work of the

National Federation of the Blind,” 31, 32; Henderson, “The Social Security Board Against the Blind,” 8.

¹²⁹ “Constructive” is how tenBroek and Matson described the NFB’s approach to rehabilitation and public assistance. TenBroek and Matson, *Hope Deferred*, 100–101.

¹³⁰ Matson, *Walking Alone*, 24–25; the episode is recounted in Wilcox, “Social Insecurity,” 13–14. As early as December 1940, one month after the inaugural convention, the NFB prepared legislation to overturn the needs provisions of the 1939 amendments with respect to the blind, legislation that had been modeled on CCB proposals to protect California’s earning exemptions for the blind. Correspondence from Jacobus tenBroek to Raymond W. Henderson, 13 December 1940, Digital Maryland Collection: Jacobus tenBroek Library, National Federation of the Blind, Jernigan Institute, Baltimore, MD, <http://collections.digitalmaryland.org/cdm/compoundobject/collection/nfnf/id/26>.

¹³¹ Megivern and Megivern, *People of Vision*, 54.

¹³² Perry, Oral History, 135–37; tenBroek and Matson, *Hope Deferred*, 94–95; Archibald, U.S. House, Committee on Ways and Means, *Hearing on the 1946 Amendments*, 1019; “California Council Marks Legislative Gains,” *Outlook for the Blind* 39, no. 9 (1945): 267. Illinois also had a blind pension plan very similar to those in California, Pennsylvania, and Missouri; however, rather than fight the SSA, the state legislature capitulated and enacted a blind assistance plan that met with SSA approval.

¹³³ U.S. House, *Hearings on the 1949 Amendments*, 462–96. For the activists’ criticism of the SSA over the Missouri and Pennsylvania plans, see U.S. Senate, Committee on Finance, *Social Security Revision, Hearings on H. R. 6000*, Part 2, 81st Congress, 2nd Sess., 1950, 348, 382. In 1950, Congress enacted a compromise allowing the Missouri and Pennsylvania plans to

receive federal funds on a temporary basis, which lawmakers repeatedly extended until 1967. No

Author, *Blindness: Legislative History of the Social Security Act*, no date, Place 41, File 1, Drawer 1, National Federation of the Blind Institutional Records, Subcollection: National Federation of the Blind (NFB), 1940-2011: NFB Publications, Jacobus tenBroek Library, Jernigan Institute, Baltimore, MD; “End of the Missouri Compromise,” *Braille Monitor*, September 1967, <https://nfb.org/images/nfb/publications/bm/bm67/bm67-sept.html#a19>.

¹³⁴ Mittelstadt, *From Welfare to Workfare*, 21–39.

¹³⁵ Altmeyer, U.S. House, *Hearings on the 1946 Amendments*, 785; Altmeyer, U.S. House, *Hearings on the 1949 Amendments*, 11–12.

¹³⁶ Harry S. Truman, “Message to the Congress on the State of the Union and on the Budget for 1947,” *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Harry S. Truman*, Volume 2, January 21, 1946, 36; Altmeyer, U.S. House, *Hearings on the 1946 Amendments*, 155.

¹³⁷ Altmeyer, *The Formative Years*, 159–63.

¹³⁸ Altmeyer, U.S. House, *Hearings on the 1946 Amendments*, 813.

¹³⁹ Aime Forand, U.S. House, *Hearings on the 1946 Amendments*, 1045–47; Loula Dunn, President of the APWA, U.S. House, *Hearings on the 1946 Amendments*, 1115. See also Altmeyer, U.S. House, *Hearings on the 1949 Amendments*, 7, 109; Elizabeth Wickenden, U.S. House, *Hearings on the 1949 Amendments*, 225, 230; Jane Hoey, U.S. House, *Hearings on the 1949 Amendments*, 396–98, 405. “Dependency” is the word Wickenden used; see U.S. House, *Hearings on the 1949 Amendments*, 225.

¹⁴⁰ U.S. House, *Hearings on the 1949 Amendments*, 232, 236. See also Forand, U.S. House, *Hearings on the 1946 Amendments*, 1047.

¹⁴¹ U.S. House, *Hearings on the 1946 Amendments*, 798–99.

¹⁴² On the animosity between general social workers and workers for the blind, see Koestler, *Unseen Minority*, 257–61. Blindness workers saw the Forand bill as an APWA bill designed to enhance the power of social workers at the expense of blind professionals and state commissions of the blind. See testimonies of Helen Reinhardt and Roma S. Cheek, Secretary, National Council, State Executives for the Blind, U.S. House, *Hearings on the 1946 Amendments*, 1099, 1101. Meanwhile, social workers agreed that the Forand bill represented much of what the APWA considered good policy. Loula Dunn, Commission, Alabama State Department of Public Welfare, and President of the APWA, U.S. House, *Hearings on the 1946 Amendments*, 1115. On the arguments for specially trained blindness social workers, see E. R. Magdiel, “The Need for Special Workers for the Blind in Social Security Administration,” *Outlook for the Blind* 30, no. 5 (December 1936): 173–76; McKay, “Functions of a State Agency for the Blind,” 102–108; Robert B. Irwin, “Amendments to Social Security Act Endanger Welfare of the Blind,” *Outlook for the Blind* 40, no. 4 (April 1946): 109–11.

¹⁴³ Roma S. Cheek, U.S. House, *Hearings on the 1946 Amendments*, 1101.

¹⁴⁴ U.S. House, *Hearings on the 1946 Amendments*, 1099. Similar arguments were made by Judge Sam M. Cathey, Chairman of the State Commission for the Blind, Asheville, NC, U.S. House, *Hearings on the 1946 Amendments*, 1058–60; McKay, “The Blind Under the Social Security Act,” 146.

¹⁴⁵ U.S. House, *Hearings on the 1946 Amendments*, 1066, 1068. The AFB amendments can be found in U.S. House, *Hearings on the 1949 Amendments*, 1078–87.

¹⁴⁶ U.S. House, *Hearings on the 1946 Amendments*, 1099.

¹⁴⁷ TenBroek, “Have Our Blind Social Security?” 21. On NFB opposition to unified blindness programs, see Jenkins, Oral History, 46–47, 178, 180–81.

¹⁴⁸ TenBroek, “The Work of the National Federation of the Blind,” 33; tenBroek, “A Bill of Rights for the Blind,” 36, 39.

¹⁴⁹ U.S. House, *Hearings on the 1946 Amendments*, 1018. See also tenBroek and Matson, *Hope Deferred*, 135–42, for criticism of the means test as an attack on the dignity of the blind and antithetical to rehabilitation.

¹⁵⁰ Archibald, U.S. House, *Hearings on the 1946 Amendments*, 1018.

¹⁵¹ Archibald, U.S. House, *Hearings on the 1949 Amendments*, 509–10.

¹⁵² Wickenden, U.S. House, *Hearings on the 1949 Amendments*, 235, 236, 238.

¹⁵³ U.S. House, *Hearings on the 1949 Amendments*, 396–97, 398, 405.

¹⁵⁴ Altmeyer, U.S. House, *Hearings on the 1949 Amendments*, 15; Tani, *States of Dependency*, 32–33, 67–69, 71.

¹⁵⁵ Wickenden, U.S. House, *Hearings on the 1949 Amendments*, 232; also voiced by Thomas J. S. Water, Director, Baltimore Department of Public Welfare, U.S. House, *Hearings on the 1946 Amendments*, 1118. SSA officials hoped to incorporate a recognition of employment among the poor through the needs test rather than earnings exemptions. They noted that individuals who worked had increased expenditures for transportation, meals, and clothing, and that these expenses can and should be taken into account during budgeting to offset a portion of their earnings. Correspondence from Oscar M Powell, the Office of the Executive Director, Federal Security Agency, Social Security Board, Washington, DC, “To State Agencies Administering Approved Public Assistance Plans,” 11 February 1941, Box 1, Record Group 47: Bureau of Public Assistance, State Letters, Policy, and Regulations Relating to Public Welfare

Programs, 1942-1971, National Archives, College Park, MD; Correspondence from Oscar M Powell, the Office of the Executive Director, Federal Security Agency, Social Security Board, Washington, DC, "Facilitating Employment of Assistance Recipients Through Means of Sound Determination of Need," 11 February 1941, Box 1, Record Group 47: Bureau of Public Assistance, State Letters, Policy, and Regulations Relating to Public Welfare Programs, 1942-1971, National Archives, College Park, MD; Board Minutes, 17 November 1942, Box 18, Record Group 47: Minutes of the Social Security Board, 1935-1946, National Archives, College Park, MD. The NFB found this proposal unacceptable because it still left welfare caseworkers in charge of budgeting and needs assessment.

¹⁵⁶ Correspondence from Frank Bane, Executive Director, to H. Z. Lauffer, 17 June 1938, Box 273, Record Group 47: Office of the Commissioner, Executive Director's File Unit, 1935-1940, National Archives, College Park, MD. The SSA had also encountered situations in which states, under pressure from the senior citizen lobby, had abolished either ADC or AB, or both, in order to fund OAA without increasing overall state spending on the poor. Correspondence from Geoffrey May to Helen R Meter, Expenditures for Public Assistance from State and Local Funds Before and After Plans Approved by the Social Security Board Became Effective," 14 September 1936, Box 234, Record Group 47: Social Security Board, Central File, Master File, 1935-1947, National Archives, College Park, MD; Bureau of Public Assistance to Office of the Executive Director, "Policy Concerning the Adequacy of State Public Assistance," 31 December 1936, Box 234, Record Group 47: Social Security Board, Central File, Master File, 1935-1947, National Archives, College Park, MD.

¹⁵⁷ NFB presidential bulletin of February 28, 1949, quoted in Megivern and Megivern, *People of Vision*, 60.

¹⁵⁸ U.S. House, *Hearings on the 1946 Amendments*, 1020. See also Irving Selis, President, Associated Blind of New York, U.S. House, *Hearings on the 1946 Amendments*, 1032.

¹⁵⁹ TenBroek, “Have Our Blind Social Security?” 20.

¹⁶⁰ Megivern and Megivern, *People of Vision*, 62.

¹⁶¹ The bill can be found in U.S. House, *Hearings on the 1946 Amendments*, 1029-1030. Several organizations of the blind (but not organizations for the blind) endorsed the Voorhis bill; see U.S. House, *Hearings on the 1946 Amendments*, 1017, 1029, 1087.

¹⁶² Quotes from Archibald, U.S. House, *Hearings on the 1946 Amendments*, 1018, 1019; Burlingame, “Introduction to an Address by Jacobus tenBroek,” 2; Archibald, U.S. House, *Hearings on the 1949 Amendments*, 513. The same sentiments were voiced by Victor W. Buttram, Treasurer, Central Committee of the Blind of Illinois, affiliate of the NFB, U.S. House, *Hearings on the 1946 Amendments*, 1062; Archibald, U.S. House, *Hearings on the 1946 Amendments*, 510–11; tenBroek, “Have Our Blind Social Security?” 20; Henderson, “Future Congressional Legislation for the Blind,” 37.

¹⁶³ U.S. House, *Hearings on the 1949 Amendments*, 509.

¹⁶⁴ Archibald, U.S. House, *Hearings on the 1946 Amendments*, 1018.

¹⁶⁵ U.S. House, *Hearings on the 1946 Amendments*, 803.

¹⁶⁶ U.S. House, *Hearings on the 1946 Amendments*, 803.

¹⁶⁷ Koestler, *Unseen Minority*, 206–207; tenBroek and Matson, *Hope Deferred*, 96–97; Wilbur J. Cohen and James L. Calhoun, “Social Security Legislation, January–June 1948: Legislative History and Background,” *Social Security Bulletin*, July 1948, 12–13.

¹⁶⁸ Harry S. Truman, “Memorandum of Disapproval of Bill Relating to the Social Security Coverage of the Blind,” *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Harry S. Truman*, Vol. 4, July 2, 1948, 395; Koestler, *Unseen Minority*, 206.

¹⁶⁹ “Statement by U.S. Senator Irving M. Ives re: H. R. 6818 on June 18, 1948, on the Floor of the Senate,” *Outlook for the Blind* 42, no. 8 (September 1948), 221.

¹⁷⁰ Correspondence from Robert Irwin, Executive Director of the American Foundation for the Blind; Jacobus tenBroek, President, and A. L. Archibald, Executive Secretary, National Federation of the Blind; and Alfred Allen, Secretary General, and Peter J. Salmon, Chair of the Legislative Committee, Association of Workers for the Blind, to Representative Robert L. Doughton, U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Ways and Means, 17 March 1949, Place 41, File Cabinet 1, Drawer 1, National Federation of the Blind Institutional Records, Subcollection: National Federation of the Blind (NFB), 1940-2011: NFB Publications, Jacobus tenBroek Library, Jernigan Institute, Baltimore, MD; Robert Irwin, U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Ways and Means, U.S. House, *Hearings on the 1946 Amendments*, 488–89.

¹⁷¹ Koestler, *Unseen Minority*, 207.

¹⁷² Altmeyer, *The Formative Years*, 163, 169.

¹⁷³ Wickenden, U.S. House, *Hearings on the 1949 Amendments*, 225, 244; Hoey, U.S. House, *Hearings on the 1946 Amendments*, 396–97.

¹⁷⁴ Indicative of the NFB’s militant stance, the organization had wanted to hold out for an additional discount of half of all earnings above the \$50. After Altmeyer told Salmon he was ready to walk away from their deal, the NFB relented lest it derail the measure. Koestler, *Unseen Minority*, 207. Nonetheless, the NFB was pleased; another provision temporarily allowed

Pennsylvania and Missouri to receive federal matching grants even though the SSA had not certified their AB programs. Yet even after the enactment of the 1950 amendment, animosity between the NFB and the SSA continued, as the NFB challenged the SSA's rules interpreting and implementing the earnings exception. TenBroek and Matson, *Hope Deferred*, 97–99.

¹⁷⁵ Koestler, *Unseen Minority*, 210–211; Eva Bertram, *The Workfare State: Public Assistance Politics from the New Deal to the New Democrats* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 35–37.

¹⁷⁶ On growing opposition to federally developed limits on state and local administrative discretion and the casework practices of the social work profession, see Tani, *States of Dependency*, 109–11, 155–60.

¹⁷⁷ Jacobus tenBroek, “A Declaration of Independence by the Blind,” *Outlook for the Blind* 44, no. 8 (October 1950): 211, 213.

¹⁷⁸ Jacobus tenBroek, “The 1956 Amendments to the Social Security Act: After the New Look—The First Thought,” *Journal of Public Law* 6, no. 1 (Spring 1957): 125, 134, 136.

¹⁷⁹ Megivern and Megivern, *People of Vision*, 110–11, 116, 120.

¹⁸⁰ Perry, Oral History, 116–17.

¹⁸¹ Kornbluh, “Disability, Antiprofessionalism, and Civil Rights,” 1023–47.

¹⁸² Jacobus tenBroek, “The Right to Live in the World: The Disabled in the Law of Torts,” *California Law Review* 54, no. 2 (May 1966): 841–919.

¹⁸³ Best, *Blindness and the Blind*, 204–205.

¹⁸⁴ Jacobus tenBroek, “On the Organization and Philosophy of the National Federation of the Blind,” an oral history conducted in 1955 and 1956 by Willa Baum, in *Organizations and*

Issues of the Blind, 1880s-1950s, Oral History Center, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 2012, 45–47; Matson, *Walking Alone*, 30.

¹⁸⁵ Jennings, *Out of the Horrors of War*, 112.

¹⁸⁶ TenBroek, “A Declaration of Independence by the Blind,” 212, 213.

¹⁸⁷ George Card, “The Greeting Card Program in Review,” *The Braille Monitor*, March 1960, <https://nfb.org/Images/nfb/Publications/bm/Abm/bm1960/BrailleMonitorMarch1960.html>.

¹⁸⁸ On the labor feminists and the differences between them, social feminists, and equal rights feminists, see Cobble, *The Other Women’s Movement*, 3–4, 11–49. On the exclusion of blind men from the world of wage work as constituting “idleness,” see Archibald, U.S. House, *Hearings on the 1949 Amendments*, 510.

¹⁸⁹ TenBroek, “The Work of the National Federation of the Blind,” 34.

¹⁹⁰ Megivern and Megivern, *People of Vision*, 60.

¹⁹¹ Kimberle Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color,” *Stanford Law Review*, 43, 6 (July 1991): 1241–99; McCann, “Inclusion, Exclusion, and the Politics of Rights Mobilization,” 116; Spade, “Intersectional Resistance and Law Reform,” 1037.

¹⁹² Megivern and Megivern, *People of Vision*, 77 (emphasis original), 207.

¹⁹³ TenBroek, “A Declaration of Independence by the Blind,” 214.

¹⁹⁴ Perry Sundquist became the head of rehabilitative services in California, and Kenneth Jernigan was appointed the director of the state commission for the blind in Iowa. Jacobus tenBroek became head of the California board on social welfare. On the tensions these appointments created within the NFB, see Megivern and Megivern, *People of Vision*, 213.

¹⁹⁵ Megivern and Megivern, *People of Vision*, 231.

¹⁹⁶ Correspondence from Jacobus tenBroek to Edward V. Sparer, 22 October 1965, Digital Maryland Collection: Jacobus tenBroek Library, National Federation of the Blind, Jernigan Institute, Baltimore, MD, <http://collections.digitalmaryland.org/cdm/singleitem/collection/nfjt/id/10/rec/4>.

¹⁹⁷ Joseph Tussman and Jacobus tenBroek, “The Equal Protection of Laws,” *California Law Review* 37, no. 3 (September 1949): 341–81. His scholarship also informed the NAACP’s argument in *Brown v. Board of Education* concerning the original meaning of the Fourteenth Amendment. Felicia Kornbluh, “Turning Back the Clock: California Constitutionalists, Hearthstone Originalism, and *Brown v. Board*,” *California Legal History* 7 (2012): 287-318. On the ways in which the NFB’s organizing strategy informed the strategies of California welfare rights groups in the 1960s, see Felicia Kornbluh, *The Battle for Welfare Rights* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 30–32.

¹⁹⁸ TenBroek, “A Declaration of Independence by the Blind,” 213. When crafting his Bill of Rights for the poor in the 1965, Edward Sparer consulted extensively with tenBroek and his writings. See Gary F. Smith, “Remembering Edward V. Sparer: An Enduring Vision for Legal Services,” *Clearinghouse Review* 39, no. 5–6 (September–October 2005): 331. See also Correspondence from Jacobus tenBroek to Edward V. Sparer, 23 July 1965, Digital Maryland Collection: Jacobus tenBroek Library, National Federation of the Blind, Jernigan Institute, Baltimore, MD, <http://collections.digitalmaryland.org/cdm/singleitem/collection/nfjt/id/15/rec/3>; Correspondence from Jacobus tenBroek to Edward V. Sparer, 1 June 1965, Digital Maryland Collection: Jacobus tenBroek Library, National Federation of the Blind, Jernigan Institute, Baltimore, MD, <http://collections.digitalmaryland.org/cdm/compoundobject/collection/nfjt/id/71/rec/8>.