Food Fight: What the Battle over School Lunch Policy tells us About the Power of Public Interests

Tyler Freeman
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Chapter 1: Introducing the Interest Group Battle, Material vs. Post-material Interests

Interest groups matter in politics. In a representative democracy citizens expect their elected officials to represent their interests. However, politicians cannot hope to meet the needs of each individual citizen. As a result citizens have taken it upon themselves to form groups based on common interests ranging from environmental protection to labor unions. By forming groups based on their interests, citizens gain an increased ability to shape the issues they care about in politics.

Interest groups shape politics in a variety of ways. Groups can use economic resources in the form of campaign contributions to try and convince politicians to represent their interests with future votes in Congress. Groups can also lobby Congress members to try to get new legislation passed or resist the passing of legislation they are against. The farther back legislation can be traced, the more apparent the role of interest groups is in pushing the legislation forward. Through these methods groups have been able to successfully influence politics to better represent their interests.

In addition to public groups that aim to meet the needs of a large group of citizens, corporations and other private organizations also represent a form of interest groups. Corporations generally do not represent the interests of a large group of citizens. Instead, they aim to influence politics in favor of their own interests. This can present problems as corporations often have greater resources than citizen groups and thus, have the ability to push politics in a direction that is not representatives of the views of the majority.

Historically, it has been argued that because of their vast resources, corporations tend to have greater influence in politics than citizen groups. However, Political Scientist Freeman 2
Jeffery Berry notes a dramatic shift in the number and effectiveness of citizen groups since 1960. The 1960s were a period of increased political involvement by citizens. Both the Civil Rights Movement and the protests of the Vietnam War led citizens to seek new avenues of political participation. Traditionally, many scholars have argued that when it comes to interest group politics, money and power go hand in hand. However, according to Berry’s *The New Liberalism: The Rising Power of Citizen Groups*, over the last 50 years public interest groups have closed the gap and increased their ability to get their interests represented. He found that Citizen interest groups had more influence in congress and garnered greater favorable media coverage than corporate groups. He argued that these findings were a result of the interest group boom of the 1960s and that post-materialist citizen groups have been able to “fundamentally change the nation’s political agenda” (“New Liberalism” 170). He argued that “Consumer groups, environmental groups, and many other kinds of citizen lobbies have enjoyed unprecedented prosperity” (“New Liberalism” 31). Because of the increase in the number and effectiveness of citizen groups Berry argues that, “the policymaking process is becoming more democratic” (“New Liberalism” 30). The rise of citizen interest groups, in opposition to larger corporate interests as shown in Berry’s book, has been a significant development in the field of interest group politics.

Berry’s study covered a wide range of issues and legislation. However, he did not track the development of specific policies over the course of his research, choosing instead to look at legislation that occurred in the years, 1963, 1979, and 1991. While this provides a broad overview of citizen group influence during the last 50 years, it does not take into account the battles that occur within one specific policy area. In doing so he limits his
ability to measure the historical development of an interest group or groups. By testing Berry's theory, through looking at the development of one specific policy, we can more completely understand the increasing power of citizen interest groups.

Berry focuses mostly on looking at post-materialist issues, those that are designed to fulfill citizen's desires that go beyond their basic needs. He cites environmental, and consumer protection as goals of post-material interest groups. Problems occur when these types of interests conflict with the material interests of private interests and result in a power struggle between the two groups. Berry's look at the development of interest group politics is comprehensive in that it covers a wide variety of policy areas, but examining the development of the interest group battles in one specific policy area could strengthen his argument.

The politics of food and nutrition present an interesting area to test Berry's theory. Food politics has long been a battleground between business interests, who want consumers to buy their products, and nutrition or consumer protection groups who oppose the selling of unhealthy or unnatural foods. Historically, businesses have been successful in achieving their interests by citing consumer's ability to choose what foods they want to eat for themselves. However, when these interests have conflicted with the nutrition of children, citizen interests have taken a stand.
Prevalence of overweight among children and adolescents ages 6-19 years

![Bar chart showing prevalence of overweight among children and adolescents ages 6-19 years](http://aspe.hhs.gov/health/reports/child_obesity/)

Children's nutrition in the United States has been in decline over the last 40 years (See Fig. 1). Statistics show that as of 2010, nearly one third of children in the United States are currently obese or overweight (Obesity Report 4). This fact is especially concerning because of the high association between obesity, diabetes and heart disease (the leading cause of death among Americans) (National Vital Statistics Report 57). A leading reason for the obesity epidemic is the low nutritional value of food found in school lunches. This was demonstrated in a University of Michigan study that looked at sixth graders in Michigan. They found that students who regularly ate the school lunch were 29 percent more likely to be obese than those who brought lunch from home (Eagle, Gurm et al 1185-1189).

The National School Lunch Act was enacted in 1946 as a way to improve the nutrition status of America's low-income youth. The program provides meals at low cost to students, as a way to ensure that they are getting enough to eat during the day. This NSLA has often come under fire for the low nutritional value of the meals it provides, and its tolerance of the sales of competitive foods (Nestle 208). As children do not have the ability to vote, they have no influence over how this policy affects their lives. It is left then, to the

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citizen interest groups to combat the obesity epidemic. Despite efforts to increase the nutrition level of school lunches through education and research, obesity statistics among children continue to rise.

Berry's research neglects the National School Lunch Program because legislation relating to it did not occur in the three years he examined. The NSLP ranks as the nation's second largest domestic food welfare program after food stamps, with a 2010 budget of 10.8 billion dollars to spend on school lunch and breakfast (NSLP Fact Sheet). In addition, the fact that obesity rates have continued to rise despite the efforts of citizen groups to improve school lunch nutrition would seem to go against Berry's theory that citizen groups are rising in power.

Bills like the recent agriculture appropriations bill that made it easier to count tomato sauce (often found in pizza) as a serving of vegetables, raise doubts about the ability of citizen groups to prevent agribusiness from determining what ends up on the school lunch menu. While Berry acknowledges that citizen groups have not achieved total dominance, their apparent lack of ability to influence a significant policy that affects the health of a large portion of American citizens raises questions about the validity of Berry's claims.

In order to bring greater clarity to Berry's claim that the interest group boom of the 1960's led to a "system that is more open, democratic and responsive to its citizens" ("New Liberalism" 170) this thesis will test Berry's theory of New Liberalism by looking at the development of the National School Lunch Program. This can be accomplished by looking at several major legislative moments in the history of the program including: the inception of the NSLA in 1946, The Child Nutrition Act of 1966, and the Obama administration's

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recent efforts to improve nutrition, including Michelle Obama's Lets Move campaign and the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010.

Chapter two will give an overview on significant literature on interest group politics that preceded Berry's New Liberalism. James Madison pioneered interest group theory with his explanation of pluralism in the Federalist Papers. Shattschneider's Monolith theory, Lowi's Interest Group Liberalism, and Berry's New Liberalism followed Madison's work.

Chapter three will entail a short look at the history of interest group involvement in food policy. There are three major players in the battle over school lunch policy: large agribusinesses that provide the food that goes into school lunches, Food Service Companies that run school cafeterias for profit and introduce unhealthy competitive foods to the lunchroom, and the post-materialist nutrition groups that fight for more nutritious school lunches.

Chapter four will outline the research design of the thesis and introduce the case studies. Berry's theory of a shift in power will be examined by looking at the formation of the policies to see how they got on the agenda, what evidence was used to support or prevent the goals of the group, and whose interests came out on top.

Chapters five through seven will comprise the case studies detailing the formation of today's school lunch policy. Chapter five will give an account of the formation and structure of the National School Lunch Program. Chapter six will look at the Child Nutrition Act of 1966 and its subsequent reform. Lastly, Chapter seven will examine the Obama administration's efforts to fight the obesity epidemic.
Finally, the conclusion will examine whether or not Berry's claim that the power of citizen groups has grown substantially is accurate. The low levels of nutrition in school lunches and the rising national obesity rates among children would seem to indicate that Citizen groups have not been able to accomplish their goal of providing affordable, healthy lunches for students that attend state funded schools. However, upon examining the development of school lunch policy, there is evidence to support the fact that post-materialist nutrition groups have been both active and effective in getting their interests realized in congress.
Chapter 2: A Review of Interest Group Literature

An examination of the literature surrounding the nature of interest groups should give a greater understanding of the nature of the conflict of special interests in this policy arena. Scholars have tended to fall in one of four schools of thought, Pluralism, Monolith, Interest Group Liberalism and New Liberalism. Pluralists believe that competition between special interest groups will nullify the potential negative effects they could have on politics. Monolithic theorists follow the Marxist idea that interest groups with greater resources will always succeed in influencing policy at the expense of those with fewer resources. This theory forms the bulk of the opposition to Berry’s theory of New Liberalism. The strength of private interests in controlling school lunch policy gives evidence to support this theory. The Interest-Group Liberalism theory further develops the previous two, arguing that while all interest groups find some measure of success, but do not accurately represent the interests of the greater population. Finally, New Liberalism outlines the rising impact of citizen interest groups in affecting policy decisions.

Pluralism:

James Madison first theorized the Pluralist theory of how interest groups influence the formation of policy, in his Federalist Papers #10. Madison and fellow authors John Jay and Alexander Hamilton wrote the federalist papers, as a collective argument for the ratification of the new constitution. In Federalist no. 10 Madison outlined his fears that competing factions could derail the fledgling US State. Madison defines a faction as:

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A number of citizens, whether amounting to a minority or majority of the whole, who are united and actuated by some common impulse of passion, or of interest, adverse to the rights of other citizens, or to the permanent and aggregate interests of the community. (Federalist 10)

Madison feared the possibility that factions (special interests as we know them today) would use their influence to shift government away from what was best for the whole of the country. He also feared that factions that controlled more resources would wield greater influence than those without, thus creating a government run by an oligarchy. While Madison worried about the negative effects factions could potentially have he also acknowledged their unavoidability, "liberty is to action what air is to fire." In order for the new nation to have the liberty the founding fathers desired, it would also have to accept the existence of factions.

Accepting that the influence of factions was unavoidable, Madison set out his argument, explaining how the negative influence of factions could be avoided. Madison argued that in a pure democracy factions could not be controlled as "A common passion or interest will, in almost every case, be felt by a majority of the whole" (Madison Federalist 10). Instead, Madison felt that a republic could better resist the effects and influence of factions. He argued, "Under such a regulation, it may well happen that the public voice, pronounced by the representatives of the people, will be more consonant to the public good than if pronounced by the people themselves" (Madison Federalist 10). Here Madison states his belief that a republic will be more resistant to the influences of factions because it would become more difficult for factions to gain control of a majority due to the variety of conflicting interests. Interest groups would always have an opponent to fight against, and Freeman 10
people would ally themselves with multiple interests encouraging competition and
discouraging dominance. He felt that this would lead to an incremental implementation of
policy, which would prevent swift change from upsetting the balance of power.

Madison’s theory that a large republic would nullify the effects of factions was
expanded upon in Robert Dahl’s *Who Governs*. Dahl questions Madison’s theory that
competing interest groups would counter one another’s effects saying where, “there are
great inequalities in the conditions of different citizens, must there not also be great
inequalities in the capacities of different citizens to influence the decisions of their various
governments” (Dahl 3)? From this statement Dahl asks the titular question of his book, who
governs? He tries to answer this question by looking at the citizens of New Haven and
trying to examine the extent that citizens can influence government. He felt that New Haven
would make a good case study because it "offered analogies with national politics that few
other cities could provide" because of its "highly competitive two-party system" (Dahl V)

Dahl argues that New Haven gradually transitioned from oligarchy to pluralism.
Evidence for this shift, he argues, can be found in “changes in the social characteristics of
elected officials” (Dahl 12). He notes a shift from patrician families holding political power
to the newer politicians “rising out of working-class or lower middle class” (Dahl 12-13).
Dahl pinpoints the political sphere, i.e. the mayor and his aides as being the main source of
political power and instigators for change. He argued that while the business sector of New
Haven would sometimes attempt to block policies they didn’t like, they almost never
attempted to initiate new policies. In addition, the other source of wealth and political
knowledge, Dahl’s own Yale University, rarely took a front seat in influencing local politics.
Noting who was leading politics in New Haven, Dahl laid out his main argument for a pluralist society. Dahl claimed that the political stratum drives politics in New Haven and in the US. He defines the political stratum as those who are “much more highly involved in political thought, discussion, and action than the rest of the population” (Dahl 90). Dahl also states that individuals in the political stratum hold “a good deal of steady, direct and active influence in government” (Dahl 91). However, he makes the distinction that this does not mean that an elite few control politics. Instead he argues that:

In fact, the political stratum is easily penetrated by anyone whose interests and concerns attract him to the distinctive political culture of the stratum. It is easily penetrated because elections and competitive parties give politicians a powerful motive for expanding their coalitions and increasing their electoral followings (Dahl 91)

Here Dahl describes how any member of society can become a part of the political stratum and that politicians are encouraged to try and encourage people to enter in order to gain more support in elections. The actors who operate inside the political stratum can form groups according to their interests, however, just because there is an interest group with resources and support, “does not insure that the groups problems will be solved by political action” (Dahl 93). Dahl’s point is the heart of pluralist theory, that despite differences in resources and support competing interests prevent one another from dominating politics

David Truman supports this hypothesis in his book The Governmental Process. Here Truman attempts to build a “consistent conception of the role of interest groups in the political process... their functions, and the ways in which their powers are organized”
which he feels is lacking in the literature (Truman viii). In order to accomplish this task Truman sought to examine the data on political interest groups and use the research and work of other political scientists to fill the gap he felt was missing. His findings pointed towards several conclusions. First, that as humans are social animals they are bound to form groups and that those interactions form power relationships. The group itself exerts power over its members in that someone who is allied with a certain group may shift their views in accordance with the shifting views of the group itself. There is also a power relationship between different interest groups in competing with one another for influence.

Truman also notes, as Dahl did that “a characteristic factor of the governmental system of the United States is that it contains a multiplicity of points of access” (Truman 507). This means that there are a variety of ways for interest groups, once formed; to gain influence that Truman calls “a flexible stabilizing element” (Truman 519).

Truman, allying himself with Dahl, then moves to the issue of lobbying and resources. He argues that while lobbying can be a problem, “official reports of a groups sources of financial support and of unusually large expenditures in connection with legislation may be an advantage to those representing opposing interests” (Truman 528). Here Truman gives additional evidence to support the idea that interest groups do not threaten governmental process because of their ability to counteract one another.

In defining pluralist theory Dahl and Truman both make a departure from Madison’s conclusions in Federalist No. 10. While all three reach the same conclusions, that ease of access and inter-group competition counter the possibility of one or several groups gaining too much influence, and that it is the government’s responsibility to discern which groups most closely represent the public’s best interests Dahl and Truman do not hold the same
distrust that Madison does. Both authors place interest groups in a largely positive light, citing their ability to activate members of society who are not normally politically active, while Madison paints them as having views adverse to the majority of the population. It is this point that draws the most contention from members of the second school of thought.

**Monolith Theory:**

The monolith school of thought essentially sides with Madison's fear that gaps in resources would lead to certain interest groups consistently gaining influence over groups with fewer resources. Scholars of this school of thought note the habitual political victories of some larger interest groups whose interests are not congruent to those of the larger population. These "monoliths" are able to dominate politics with greater resources and greater ability to avoid conflict.

E.E. Shattschneider outlines this theory in his book *The Semi-Sovereign People*. Shattschneider outlines what he feels is the basic pattern of politics. Politics he says "is rooted in conflict" (Shattschneider 2). He argues that conflicts in politics are made up of two parties the fighters and the audience. The audience can be drawn to a conflict but it is the actors who determine the outcome. Shattschneider states that the actor that is able to increase the scope of the conflict, i.e. involve the most observers, is able to control the outcome of the conflict.

Here Shattschneider begins to distance himself from pluralist theory claiming that there is a bias for who is able to influence outcomes. First, Shattschneider flatly refutes the claim of pluralists that it is fairly easy to gain access to politics through participation in interest groups. Shattschneider argues that, "The flaw in the pluralist heaven is that the
heavenly chorus sings with a strong upper-class accent" and that “about 90 per cent of the people cannot get into the pressure system” (Shattshneider 35). Because attention to politics is a trait biased towards the upper class he argues that this limits who can control an interest group.

Shattschneider continues to explain why businesses tend to win in policy conflicts. Shattschneider argues the importance of scope in determining who comes out successful in conflicts between interest groups. Businesses and other large special interests are largely able to dominate because of their ability to limit scope. They do so through lobbying to ensure that their conflicts are decided on a small scale without involving the larger population. By limiting the scope of a conflict businesses are able to succeed in influencing politics though their policies do not always benefit the larger population.

C Wright Mills supports Shattschneider's idea that businesses and large special interests tend to succeed in politics in his book *The Power Elite*. In his book Mills argues that the interests of several large groups, the military, and large corporations are interwoven. Because of their tremendous resources and ability to influence politics, citizens are rendered powerless to the needs of these groups.

The segment of *The Power Elite* that is most salient to the discussion of interest groups is Mills’ critique of the theory of balance. The balance Mills speaks of is essentially pluralism. Mills states, “in the old liberal society, a set of balances and compromises prevailed among congressional leaders, the executive branch of the government and various pressure groups” (Mills 265). He argues that viewing American government this way is dated and notes a shift in the dynamic of power in politics. Mills’ argues that, “there is no effective countervailing power against the coalition of the big businessmen” and that

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“those having real power in the American state today are not merely brokers of power, resolvers of conflict, or compromisers of varied and clashing interests” (Mills 265). Instead, he continues, corporate chiefs are now dominating the issues of the state.

Mills’ theory of a power elite is further supported by Leslie Wayne’s article *800-Pound Guests At the Pentagon*. Here Wayne describes how corporate downsizing of the military sector had led to three large corporations controlling 70 percent of the nation’s military business. These three companies: Boeing Company, Lockheed Martin and Raytheon Company, have been able to increase their influence in government through increased campaign contributions and lobbying efforts. While one might expect that corporate downsizing might lead to the military industry having less of an influence in politics, “Their campaign contributions are as strong as ever and they continue to engage the best of the K Street lobbyists. Their grass-roots support has grown and they have gained the upper hand over a Pentagon that once could pit one contractor against another” (Wayne). Wayne sees this as a negative development arguing that the pentagon has lost the power to cancel certain weapon systems and is now at the mercy of these large corporations.

Having fewer companies to compete counters the pluralist belief that competition would reduce the ability of interest groups to influence government. While big companies in the same markets may compete with one another, they generally have the same political goals and the resources to see that those goals are met. The food industry shares many similarities with the military industry; a few large companies control most of the resources and wield tremendous power in politics. Advocates of the monolith theory would point to
this as evidence for the belief that when interest groups try to influence politics those with the most resources generally win.

**Interest Group Liberalism:**

In 1969 Theodore Lowi set out a new theory for the influence of interest groups in politics. Lowi used his book, *The End of Liberalism*, to explain his new theory called interest group liberalism. Like the monolith theory, interest group liberalism also disagreed with Madison's idea that competing interest groups would counter each other's effects but differed in one significant way. Lowi believed that while all interest groups were able to influence politics, not all were effectively represented. Rather, "there exists in many instances only the appearance of representation" (Loomis and Cigler 6). This important difference places Lowi's theory in opposition to both pluralists and monolith thinkers.

To explain this theory Lowi analyzes how the decline of the US' ideological relationship with capitalism and pluralism has allowed for the rise of Interest Group Liberalism. He begins by stating his feeling that capitalism has "become irrelevant and error-ridden" (Lowi 6). He felt that the American society was one where "selfish interests produced the public interest" (Lowi 7). Lowi moves on to describe how, as the government grew in power during the rise of industry, capitalism declined as government and private entities increased administrative personnel.

With the rise of administration, came the rise of pluralism. Lowi is initially supportive of the pluralist model using it to debunk Marx's critique of capitalism, "groups amount to far more than a façade for class" (Lowi 33). He then argues that the move...
towards administration has also led to increased strength of interest groups, consolidating their power and enabling them the ability to "perpetuate [themselves]" (Lowi 33).

However, Lowi notes several problems with the pluralist model that he argues have led to the "destruction of the principle of separate government" (Lowi 40). He argues that as liberalism has fallen a new kind of liberalism has taken its place, New Liberalism. New Liberalism demanded for the expansion of government, as "the means for conscious inducement of social change" (Lowi 42). Here Lowi essentially sets the left as New Liberals in opposition to the conservatives of the right. However, Lowi notes that this dialogue died out because "elites no longer disagreed about whether government should be involved" (Lowi 49).

Without this dialogue the public lacked a political philosophy. Lowi believed that Interest-Group Liberalism is what filled the void. He defines Interest-Group Liberalism as: Liberalism because it is optimistic about government, expects to use government in a positive and expansive role, is motivated by the highest sentiments and possesses a strong faith that what is good for government is good for the society... and Interest-Group Liberalism because it defines the public interest as the result of an amalgamation of various claims. (Lowi 51)

Lowi felt that this model more accurately fit the philosophies of the modern Democratic and Republican parties. The difference in ideologies between the two parties was really just the difference in which interests they allied themselves with. While this provides an accurate model, Lowi did not feel that it was without flaws. He found that some of the flaws seen in Pluralism undermined Interest-Group Liberalism. Lowi argues the assumptions that all groups have an opponent group, that people have
multiple group allegiances and that both of these situations lead to competition, are
false or idealistic. In addition he sees Interest-Group Pluralism as little more than
sponsored Pluralism. He contends that by “favoring the best organized competitors and
building representation upon the oligopolistic character of interest groups”
participation in government by the public is limited (Lowi 63).

He concludes that rather than providing the representative government influence,
Interest-Group Liberalism creates “a sense of representation... at the expense of
legitimacy” (Lowi 62). The core of his argument here is that while interest groups have
the ability to influence government they are only symbolically representative of the
public’s desires and do not produce the competitive balance sought by Pluralists.

Lowi’s critique of Pluralism has found support among several political scientists.
Murray Edelman built on Lowi’s theory in his book The Symbolic Uses of Politics. Like
Lowi, Edelman believed that “The most cherished forms of popular participation in
government are largely symbolic and many of the public programs universally taught
and believed to benefit a mass public in fact benefit relatively small groups” (Edelman
4). Edelman argued that there was a symbolic conflict between government regulatory
agencies and special interests. He states that regulatory officials “typically act so as to
facilitate a high measure of evasion of the formal rules” (Edelman 188). By only
symbolically resisting interest groups, regulators become symbols of public protection,
while at the same time allowing interest groups to “win tangible benefits in line with
their bargaining power” (Edelman 189). This system creates a false sense of security in
the public while also undermining their ability to participate by allowing interest
groups to fight for what they want, away from the public eye.

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James Q Wilson further examined Lowi’s argument in his book *The Politics of Regulation*. Wilson saw two possible solutions to the problems Lowi’s Interest-Group Liberalism pointed out, specifically the problem of interest groups gaining control over regulative agencies. First, there is the idea that “new constitutional or legislative devices will allow the government to be both active and uncaptured” by special interests and second would be “to have the government do less, thus leaving a greater variety of decisions to the market or to private lawsuits” (Wilson X). He sees the first to be the preferred solution of the liberals and the second the preferred solution of the conservatives. These two solutions form the basis for his question does government need to be changed in order for regulatory agencies to resist capture.

Wilson sets out to accomplish this task by presenting several essays that looked at the way interest groups and agencies interacted in several important policy areas. He found that regulatory agencies operate with a large amount of autonomy and that despite the governments best efforts to limit discretion have backfired. In trying to limit discretion the government takes on a larger role but, as Wilson points out, “the larger the role of government, the more diverse the range of interests which it must reconcile and thus the greater the scope of administrative discretion” (Wilson 392). Wilson’s argument points out the simplicity of Lowi and Edelman’s arguments (Wilson 360) and tries to provide a better explanation for how regulatory agencies and interest groups interact. In doing so he corrects Lowi’s assumption of the capture phenomenon but finds himself in alignment with the idea that interest groups hold significant sway in influencing policy decisions that are not wholly representative of the publics interest.
Peter Navarro explores the nature of the capture-ideology presented by Lowi where regulatory agencies and public policies can be “captured” by special interests. Navarro argues that special interests, if left unchecked by the public and by the government, will exert control over the formation of public policy. He dismisses the “cynical myth of an American government totally corrupted by special interests and its competing pie-in-the-sky presumption that all government policies are in the public interest” instead favoring a more realistic approach (Navarro 281).

Navarro does not discount the power of interest groups but believed that they had been able to gain significant control because citizens have tolerated the groups’ capture of government. Navarro puts the onus on the citizens to become better informed and better organized in resistance to the influence of special interests. In pushing for greater citizen participation Navarro unknowingly lays the groundwork for the final school of thought, New Liberalism

New Liberalism:

Jeffery M. Berry developed the final and most recent school of thought over the course of several books. New Liberalism is Berry’s argument for the rising influence of citizen interest groups. Discussion of the influence of citizens had bee largely absent until Berry, most theorists have focused on corporate or labor interests due to their considerable resources. While not exactly pluralism, Berry’s theory stands in opposition to the idea that there is little competition among interest groups and that only groups with many members and resources can influence politics.

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His first book *The Interest Group Society* outlined the basic explanation for the behavior of interest groups and the ways that they influence policy. From the beginning Berry sets interest groups as neutral entities, stating that "they are no less a threat than an expression of freedom" ("Interest Group Society" 2). However, he notes that changes in the number of interest groups and their effectiveness in using numerous strategies to influence politics (lobbying and campaign contributions) present a new challenge to the political system. Berry does not feel this is a negative development but argues for the reform of campaign finance laws that allow the scales to be tipped in favor of larger interests.

Berry's theory was further focused in his book *Lobbying for the People*. Here Berry brought his full focus to the behavior of citizen interest groups. Berry defines public interest groups as ones "that seek a collective good, the achievement of which will not selectively and materially benefit the membership or activists of the organization" ("Lobbying" 7). Here Berry makes a significant shift from other interest group theorists by placing citizen interest groups in a decidedly positive light. These are not Madison's selfish factions who only sought to address their own political needs but truly representative groups who operate with the public good in mind.

To understand the political behavior of public interest groups, Berry combined surveys of lobbyists for public interest groups with two case studies. He felt that Berry's study aimed to fill a gap he felt was left in Truman's research on group origins. Truman focused only on groups from the farm, labor and business sectors "where material cycles are of critical importance," rather than on public interest groups ("Lobbying" 25-
In filling this gap Berry hoped to portray a more accurate representation of interest groups.

Berry’s findings showed that there were many similarities in the behavior of public interest groups and the more traditional interest groups with some notable differences. Berry observed that public interest groups often “perform a law enforcement function in obtaining new rulings or exacting compliance with old ones” (“Lobbying” 287). Unlike larger private interests, public interest groups also represent constituencies that have been “chronically unrepresented or underrepresented in American politics” giving members of these groups direct access to political participation.

While Berry points out the benefits public interest groups provide to the political system, he also cautions that public interest groups are not the savior to the problems of interest group participation. Public interests are still underrepresented and their views are not necessarily representative of the national will. Berry closes by arguing that government should “encourage and ease the participation” of public interests because the people and issues they represent generally favor the greater good.

Berry development of New Liberalism theory is completed in his next book The New Liberalism: The Rising Power of Citizen Groups. Here Berry argued that, despite the weakening of the welfare state and the labor unions and conservative dominance in Washington, Liberalism was not dead. Instead Berry argued it had shifted to the growing power of citizen interest groups. Berry defines citizen groups as those that aim to support post-materialist values. Groups that aim to influence environmental policy, religious advocacy groups, and consumer protection groups could all be considered
Berry notes that citizen groups represent only a small portion of the lobbies in Washington, he notes that they have had tremendous success in influencing public policy ("New Liberalism" 2). Though these groups do not have the financial support of the larger corporate interest groups they have still been able to influence policy and compete. Berry sets out to find out whether power has begun to shift towards a more equal balance, rather than the corporate dominance described by most other scholars.

Initially Berry examines how citizen groups fare in traditional methods of influencing politics. He finds that they are effective in getting their issues on the agenda and in battling businesses through traditional lobbying methods. In researching the influence of citizen interest groups in comparison to that of private groups Berry found several significant results. Citizen interest groups testified more during congressional hearings (20) and received more press coverage (24), than their counterparts. These two differences demonstrate citizen interests recent success in gaining an audience in government and in the public. They are making sure that their voices are represented on all fronts and have been able to influence policy as a result. Their success indicates that, "congressional committee chairs and reporters must regard these groups as representative of important and broadly held views" ("New Liberalism" 33).

Berry also notes that citizen interest groups have been better at mobilizing grassroots campaigns than their conservative counterparts largely because of their strong representation in the media and strong organizational structure ("New Liberalism" 142). While they may lack the economic resources of corporate interests citizen groups, citizen groups make up the difference by using their strong
organizational structure to "convert resources into legislative victories" ("New Liberalism" 152). Though government did not welcome them, citizen groups generated conflict and essentially performed the role Madison sought in outlining Pluralism.

Berry’s New Liberalism theory counters the negative views of interest groups expressed by in the Monolith theory and the Interest-Group Liberalism theory. New Liberalism also presents a solution for the competition between interest groups that had been lacking from pluralist theory. By increasing citizen participation through post-materialist interest groups there is a greater balance between the influence of citizen and corporate groups on the formation of policy. Ideally, Berry hopes this will provide a more accurate representation of the public good in politics.

Berry’s claims in The New Liberalism form the basis of this thesis. Through the examination of the development of the National School lunch program we can better understand the interest group battles that occur. By looking at the success or failure of citizen groups in achieving their goals for a more nutritious school lunch for all we can determine whether or not Berry is correct in hypothesizing the rise of citizen interest groups. Before outlining the design for this study, we will first examine the different types of groups that battle over school lunch policy to gain a better understanding of who they are and how they operate.
Chapter Three: The Rise of Agribusiness, Food Service Companies, and Post-materialist Opposition Groups

The theory on interests groups provides conflicting views about the power of private and public groups. In examining the development of the National School Lunch Program it is important to examine the history of the groups that play a part in its formation. Two parties wage the battle for school lunches. The first encompasses industrial food corporations that seek to sell their surplus to the government and get more consumers to buy their products. The second is comprised of nutritionists and citizen groups that want a school lunch that is both healthy and affordable. These two factions constantly compete through the media and through congress in order to ensure their interests are achieved.

Large food corporations lead one side of the food fight. Companies like Cargill (grains), The Florida Citrus Industry (fruit), Dean Foods (dairy), Tyson Foods (poultry and eggs), and various other corporations produce, distribute and sell mass quantities of the food that ends up on our plates. These companies form the business sector known as agribusiness. Agribusiness is defined as “the businesses collectively associated with the production, processing, and distribution of agricultural products” (dictionary.com).

Agribusinesses try to maximize profits through a strategy known as vertical integration. Vertical integration is a microeconomic strategy whereby a company tries to incorporate all aspects of the production and distribution of a product into their business. Rather than only earning profits by producing food, agribusinesses will handle the farming,
transportation, packaging and many other aspects of food production right up until it is sold to consumers. In buying up each section of the chain of production, companies ensure there are no roadblocks or markups along the way. This allows them to spend less time and money getting the food from the farm to the consumer with maximum efficiency (The Economist). By following this business model large food corporations have streamlined production and reaped huge profits. Naturally their interests then become maintaining and increasing those profits.

Problems can arise when the interests of corporations conflicts with consumers. In the case of the School Lunch Program, the policy that was initially designed to give producers somewhere to sell their surplus goods had a problem. Surpluses varied from year to year so schools could not count on the same products. Schools become dependent on receiving quality foods for their meals, putting food corporations at a significant advantage in negotiation.

While the Secretary of Agriculture ultimately determines which foods are surplus, food corporations use their significant resources to try and influence his/her decision. Food industries would often use lobbying to claim "their commodities to be 'in surplus' if market prices were low" (Levine 94). Generally the USDA would bend to the will of corporations. For example, when the Georgia farm bureau tried to substitute peanut butter for butter in the type A lunch, "fearing the wrath of the dairy farmers even more than that of the peanut growers [the deputy administrator of Consumer Food Programs] said 'there is a very definitive place for both foods" (Levine 94).

Because of their significant resources and control over where the food comes from, agribusinesses hold significant power in determining what ended up going in school.

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lunches. This creates conflict when the foods that are the most profitable for agribusinesses, are not the most nutritious for children. Besides lobbying corporate groups will often attempt to use research to prove that their foods are healthy, or at least healthy in moderation. This tactic is designed to try and convince consumers that their products don't need to be regulated. The validity of this research is often called into question and its results are often vague, giving an inaccurate representation of a healthy diet.

One reason agribusinesses have been so successful in influencing school lunch policy is because the NSLP is run by the USDA. The USDA was created with the goal of the protection of the interests of American farmers in mind. Thus, many of the efforts of nutrition groups are thwarted by the USDA's loyalty to the producers it is supposed to protect. This two pronged objective for the USDA, to both run a welfare program and support the interests of farmers through subsidies creates conflict within the USDA.

In addition to the efforts of large food providers, food service companies also provide a major source of opposition for nutrition advocates. During the 1990s companies like Marriott, Aramark, Sodexo and DAKA moved in to take control of failing school cafeterias. These companies sought to shift school lunches away from food that was nutritious toward foods that were profitable. By the mid-1990s Marriott "managed lunch programs in over 350 school districts" while Sodexo claimed to have served "360 million school lunches in 2002" (Levine 182).

Following legislation in the mid-1990s congress permitted the sale of the products of nine fast food chains in schools (Pizza Hut, Little Caesar's, Domino's, Taco Bell, Subway, Chic-Fil-A, McDonald's, Blimpie's and Arby's) and food service corporations jumped at the opportunity to sell the products in schools (Levine 182). Despite the poor nutritional

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quality of these foods the USDA did not feel they were a threat to nutrition. USDA spokesman Phil Sanholtzer pointed out that "nutrition guidelines are judged over a week's menu cycle rather than each individual meal so schools can offer a high fat item one day and make up for it on other days" (Alexander). But, schools continued to make these products available 5 days a week. Pizza Hut even came up with a specially formulated pizza that met the standards set by the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, allowing pizza to be served more often. Food management corporations have used these methods to subvert the efforts of nutrition advocates and have made huge profits in the process. The school food service industry was estimated to represent a 15 billion dollar market in the mid-1990s (Levine 181).

Despite the apparent power of the corporate interests, post-materialist groups also have a role to play in determining school lunch policy. These groups are mostly made up of nutritionists, school lunch officials, and concerned parents who are upset with the nutritional quality of food available at schools and with the stranglehold corporate groups have on what ends up on the school lunch menu. Examples of these types of interest groups include: The Food Research and Action Center, The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, The School Nutrition Association, The American Academy of Pediatrics, The American School Food Service Association and various women's groups that try and encourage good nutrition for children who do not have the ability to select what goes on their plate.

While they may lack the resources of larger special interests, nutrition groups are still able to get proposals on the agenda though the same kind of lobbying that corporations use. In this way the two types of groups are similar, both work hard to get their issues on the agenda and to support those views as they move through the process of becoming laws.
However, despite businesses’ significant advantage in financial resources, post-materialist groups are still able to go toe to toe with them in congress. This is because they are good at converting the resources they have into political power. Citizen groups have been able to obtain more media attention and greater credibility in their research. Large groups like ASFSA “have the resources to mount effective lobbying efforts” operating at both the grassroots level and in Washington. They employ the services of well-known lobbyists like Marshall Matz who have a record of “key bipartisan accomplishments with various food and nutrition programs” (Sims73).

These groups, similarly to the corporations, try to employ research based nutrition analysis to determine what ideal nutrition is and then find a way to ensure that their analysis is represented in the meals of citizens. The difference between the two types of research is that corporations use research to try and convince people that their products are healthy, whereas nutrition groups try to paint an accurate picture of what a healthy diet looks like overall. An example of this would be the Center for Science in the Public Interest’s efforts to inform the public about the nutritional quality of school meals (http://www.cspinet.org/nutritionpolicy/index.html).

The efforts of the private and public interests in this sphere make up the interest group conflicts that shape the national school lunch policy. This conflict is similar to interest group conflicts in other areas in that it pits private moneyed interests with profitability in mind, against public interests attempting to protect consumers. Both sides have had significant influence in the formation of school lunch policy and through a variety of strategies, tried to see their interests realized. We now move to the outline for this thesis
to demonstrate how the actions of these groups will be looked at to determine whether or not Citizen groups have gained power as Berry has claimed.
Chapter Four: Research Design

After exploring the developments found in the interest group literature and examining the major interest groups waging the war over food policy, we can now seek to paint a clearer picture of the effect that citizen groups have on influencing school lunch policy. This policy area puts the post-materialist interests of citizen groups, directly at odds with the materialist interests of corporate groups. This conflict between corporate and public interests can be seen in several other policy areas and demonstrates a consistent theme of modern politics. School lunch policy in particular can also be considered a significant issue as the NSLP forms one of the larger welfare programs currently available for children. Because this program influences the health of such a large number of citizens, and the profits of a large number of countries, both sides of the interest group battle have committed significant resources to ensure that their interests are represented.

By examining the historical development of the NSLP we can determine whether or not Berry is correct in claiming that citizen interests have grown in power and are able to effectively combat business groups with greater economic resources. This thesis hypothesizes that despite a history of concessions to private interests, recent developments in school lunch policy will support Berry's theory that citizen groups have gained power since the 1960s.

In order to determine the effectiveness of citizen groups in getting their interests represented this study will compare the differences between major legislation proposed and the outcomes of that legislation at three different time periods. The policies examined were chosen for their significance in the development of modern school lunch policy and

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because they occurred before, during and after Berry's theory of a post 1960 interest group boom. After examining the development of the National School Lunch Act, each of the two subsequent developments will be inspected to assess the influence citizen groups had on the formation of that policy. The outcomes of these policies will also be discussed to determine whether private or public group's interests were most closely represented.

While outcomes are important as they determine who wins and who loses, the power and influence of interest groups goes beyond. Berry claims that the effectiveness of the strategies that citizen groups use in getting their interests represented also demonstrate their power. The ability to get issues on the agenda, to effectively use the media and research, and to form strong organizational structures are tools that citizen interest groups can use to translate their views to the public and to the government. By examining the strategies citizen groups use the effectiveness of citizen groups in combating corporate groups can be determined.

This thesis will use congressional reports and other histories of school lunch policy to determine how major policies were formed. In looking at these sources we can see the fingerprint of the various groups involved in advocating for nutritional reforms. In addition, data from the USDA and other sources will be examined to determine the effect of these policies. Through examination of the outcomes, we can determine whether or not what was proposed by citizen groups and in congress, was actually represented in reality. Success will be determined by looking at the difference between the proposals and the outcomes. If the proposed bill and the outcome of the bill forward the goals of public interests, especially if it comes at the expense of private interests, the hypothesis that public interests have gained power will be supported.

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Possible problems with this design might be the fact that data on school lunches is somewhat difficult to find the further back one looks. Some states kept inconsistent records of how many and which children were receiving school lunches. In addition, records of interest group activity during the time period are somewhat hard to come by due to their age. Secondary sources will have to be relied upon to provide information about interest group behavior during that time. Lastly, the practice of monitoring the national government for transparency purposes has only recently been carefully tracked and made public through websites like opensecrets.org. Data on campaign contributions and lobbying from the early days of the NSLP would be able to further strengthen this study.
Chapter Five: The National School Lunch Program

The formation of the National School Lunch program laid the basis for the interest group conflict that we see today. The bill as designed with improving the nutrition of children and reduction of malnourishment in mind but has not been entirely successful in the former goal. This is largely due to the way the program was structured, as a response to the issues facing the country at the time. Both sides of the interest group conflict saw benefits to implementing an institutionalized school lunch program, but ultimately the program benefited agriculture more than the nutrition of the nation's youth.

The National School Lunch Program has its origins in the US Department of Agriculture. The USDA is the federal agency most concerned with "the nation's food supply" and therefore, "provided a natural home for nutrition research" (Levine 11). After World War I, nutritionists and defense leaders were concerned about the health of the nation. They found that almost one third of men who had been called up for military service were rejected for service either because they were underweight or because they suffered from another nutrition related condition (Markel and Golden 1129-1133). This demonstrated a need for better nutrition awareness among citizens. They sought to address two different populations, people who were malnourished and literally did not have enough to eat, and people who were nutritionally deficient and who did not know what to eat.

The proposed solution was to address both groups by offering meals in schools. They felt that these meals could be both nutritious, giving children the right foods that would keep them healthy, and a source of welfare, a way to prevent malnourishment. However, the USDA could not find an effective way to get school lunches in every school.
Cafeterias were expensive to build, and schools that had fewer funds to spend could not support affordable lunches on their own.

World War II continued to build upon the fears that the nation was undernourished. The *Ladies Home Journal* of October 1944 warned that "malnutrition sapped the nation's strength and threatened domestic as well as military security" (*Ladies Home Journal*). They urged congress and the USDA to invest in the nation's youth and find a way to solve the nutrition problem. The influence of these types of citizen groups alerted congress to the growing problem of child malnutrition in the United States, a problem that it would seek to address in 1945.

The creation of the new bill began in the Senate in February of 1945. Senator Allen Ellender from Louisiana was the leading sponsor for the bill. In his argument he noted the influence "doctors, educators, nutritionists, child-care agencies and the leaders of parent groups" in pushing for an organized school lunch program (*Congressional Record* Vol. 91, 924). He cited the opinion of a Dr. Parran who stated in a previous hearing that "a national School Lunch would have far-reaching influence on the nutritional habits of the child in later life" (925). The senator felt that much of the infrastructure for implementing a national school lunch was already in place, as the government had been encouraging the implementation of school lunch programs indirectly for several years. He then set out a plan allocating 100 million dollars to the USDA for "aiding school lunches through the distribution of surplus foods, or cash in lieu thereof" and 15 million to the Office of Education for "aiding school lunches through the distribution of funds for the development, administration, and supervision of school lunches, and for the training and employing of technical personnel" (925). School lunches would consist of 4 parts: ½ pint of milk, 2 oz.
protein, ¾ cup serving of two or more fruits and vegetables, and eight servings of bread pasta or grains (Sims 69). In addition, states were required to match a certain percentage of the federal funds allotted to them, depending on the per capita income of that state. The plan was then referred to the Committee on Agriculture and Forestry and subsequently ratified by the Senate.

The House also ratified the bill with the House Committee on Agriculture stating:

The need for a permanent legislative basis for a school lunch program, rather than operating it on a year-to-year basis, or one dependent solely on agricultural surpluses that for a child may be nutritionally unbalanced or nutritionally unattractive, has now become apparent. The expansion of the program has been hampered by lack of basic legislation. If there is an assurance of continuity over a period of years, the encouragement of State contribution and participation in the school lunch program will be of great advantage in expanding the program. (House Committee on Agriculture Report)

President Truman signed the bill into law in 1945 but the new law was not entirely successful in achieving its goals.

While the National school lunch act did help to ensure American children were getting enough food to eat, the success of the nutritional goals set out by Senator Ellender was more debatable. Nutrition rhetoric can be found consistently throughout the congressional discussion of the School Lunch Act. It was explicitly stated as a goal of the program in the bill, “a measure of national security, to safeguard the health and well-being of the Nation’s children and to encourage the domestic consumption of nutritious

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agricultural commodities and other food" (Austin and Hitt 93). However, Congressmen seemed to believe that merely by giving students a cheap meal they would also be facilitating “learning of what a good diet consists of” (House Committee on Agriculture Report). They believed that this was something that would occur naturally through contact with nutritious meals. The problem was that there were no provisions put in place to ensure that the food schools served would be nutritious; rather they only ensured that the food would be filling.

A possible reason for the lack of nutrition in school lunches was the USDA's conflict of interest that occurred with agriculture groups. For quite some time the USDA had viewed its purpose as “for the benefit of American farmers... and that it was the job of agricultural programs to keep those interests to the forefront” (Levine 109). While the School Lunch Program was designed as a welfare program, it favored the agriculture industry more than children as it gave them a direct route to consumers.

The agriculture industry had a serious vested interest in the success of a national institutionalized school lunch. They “viewed school lunches as an important element in the surplus commodity program” (Levine 75). The NSLP was initially intended to work as a chain. Farmers would produce various foods. The US Department of Agriculture would then buy up surplus food that the farmers are unable to sell. Eligible schools, public or nonprofit private, could then “choose to take part in the lunch program and get cash subsidies and USDA foods from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) for each meal they serve” (USDA 1). The price of the meals was split into three groups. Free meals were given to children at or below 130 percent of poverty, reduced price meals to children between 130 and 185 percent and full price for those above 185 percent (Sims 68). The Program was
seen as a win-win for both producers and consumers. Farmers would be able to make money on food they couldn’t sell at good prices, schools would be able to serve students a healthy meal and students would receive at least one meal a day at low cost.

The inherent problem with this model was the fact that much of the food came from surpluses. This meant that the food received by the schools from farmers could not be consistently counted upon. For example, one year the USDA distributed six million dollars’ worth of beef and only half that amount the next year. The same thing happened with eggs; an increase in market price led to eggs not being on the surplus list after 6 million dollars’ worth had been allotted the previous year (Levine 94). Despite the protests of groups like those found in McCall's women’s magazine (“their playing politics with our children’s health” (Ratcliff)) Agriculture companies had too much influence as school lunches became a big business rather than a source for nutritional education.

The nutrition and women’s groups that had pushed for a nutritious school lunch welfare program had done an excellent job at getting the program onto the agenda but the program ultimately failed to deliver on the promise of nutritious school lunch for all. From 1947 to 1968 federal aid decreased from 31 percent of the program’s cost, to 23 percent (Levine 99). While the USDA “bragged that it fed over fourteen million children,” this amounted to only a third of all public school students (Levine 101). In addition the percent of lunches given for free also declined; fewer than 10 percent were offered for free in 1960.

The failure of citizen groups advocating for a more nutritious school lunch was further represented by the fact that the School Lunch Program was administered out of the Consumer Marketing Service Division of the USDA. This division was “concerned with the marketing and distribution of agricultural products” and was staffed by “men trained in

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economics and accounting who had little, if any, interest or knowledge of nutrition” (Levine 95). The department was more focused on the economic health of the nation’s agriculture companies than on providing nutritious meals for poor children. A white house Aide acknowledged the programs failure stating “the program is administered as a surplus food distribution activity and the methods of administration largely ignore the question of need” (Levine 110).

These issues reflected a lack of commitment on the government’s part to the nutritional meals for all message and represented a bill that was rooted more idealism than reality. The failure of the nutrition groups to successfully make their vision a reality represents the state of interest group politics in the 1940s and 50s. The USDA favored a program that was sold as welfare, but actually benefited agricultural business. For example, food companies could claim their products to be surplus if market prices were low like the Florida Citrus industry did in convincing the Secretary of Agriculture that the “state was in a surplus oranges situation” giving them an easy way to get large quantities of their products to consumers (Levine 94). Further evidence can be provided in the example from Chapter Three (p. 27) concerning the deputy administrator’s fear of upsetting the dairy peanut lobbies over the place of peanut butter in school lunches. In contrast, as demonstrated by the lack of support poor children were given, the interests of nutrition groups were not represented.

The creation of the School Lunch Program ultimately most closely resembled the Monolith theory that moneyed interests tend to get what they want in politics. Despite nutrition groups’ success in creating attention to a nutrition problem through various publications and studies, getting an institutionalized School Lunch on the agenda, and
passed through congress, not enough political will was created to ensure their goal of a healthy meal for all children. The outcome of the National School Lunch Program, decidedly favored private interests. This falls in line with Berry's theory as he argued that it wasn't until the 1960s that citizen interest groups began to gain a foothold in their competition with private interests. Coincidentally, the next major piece of legislation in the school lunch timeline would be in 1966 right at the height of Berry's interest group boom.
Chapter Six: The Child Nutrition Act of 1966 and the Influence of the Committee on School Lunch Participation

Having failed to see their vision of a National School Lunch welfare program instituted, Nutrition Advocacy groups set out with a new goal in mind. They sought to target the USDA, pointing out its conflict of interests in trying to run school lunch while also upholding the interests of agricultural business. Nutrition groups sought to reform the program so that lunches would be given to children that needed the food most. The rise in citizen activism during the 60s served as a backdrop for the renewed efforts of nutrition professionals and child welfare advocates. Berry argued that the interest group boom that occurred during this period paved the way for the increase in citizen group power. However, despite renewed activism nutrition groups did not quite achieve the goals they set during this time.

In attempting to create change nutritionists like Michael Latham hit out at the USDA arguing that “a department which has as its main aim the improvement of agriculture and the lot of the farmers suffers a conflict of interests when it’s second duty is to feed the poor” (Senate Select Committee 1968). Congressman Charles Godell of New York even went so far as to argue that the NSLP be moved “elsewhere than the department of agriculture” (Levine 110). Despite these efforts, Senators Ellender and Richard Russell maintained that the School Lunch Program should remain under the umbrella of the USDA. Russell even argued that “feeding poor children had never been the bill’s central intent” (Levine 112). This seems to run contradictory to the fact that provisions were specifically put in place to ensure that poor children would not only receive meals but would receive
them for free. While the USDA was able to resist the pressure of nutritionists, the message was heard loud and clear. The NSLP was flawed and was in serious need of reform.

As a response, The US Secretary of Agriculture Orville Freeman declared in order for his department to accomplish the task of feeding poor children, "congress would have to vote for "new authority" for the use of surplus food and federal resources" (Levine 113). Freeman got his wish when Congress passed The Child Nutrition Act of 1966. The bill was created as a response to the failure of the National School Lunch Program's to fulfill its promise of providing nutritious meals for all children. Allen Ellender once again championed the new bill presenting it to the Senate.

The bill was comprised of three major parts. First the Special Milk Program was made permanent and given additional funding for its upkeep. Second, the school breakfast program was implemented and appropriations were authorized for its implementation in "schools serving children from low- income areas and in schools drawing attendance from children who have to travel long distances" (Congressional Record vol. 112, 12335). Finally, a "permanent program for nonfood assistance to schools drawing from areas in which poor economic conditions exist" was also implemented with funds to be distributed to needy schools by the state governments (12335). This last piece seemed especially important as it was intended to ensure that schools would now have the money to support the free meals for poor children that had previously been ignored. In addition the implementation of the School Breakfast program seemed to represent a stronger commitment to public nutrition as children could now receive two meals a day instead of one.
Issues arose however, when the USDA continued to be reluctant to become involved in state level implementation of the program. Without enforcement, state governments spent their appropriations money haphazardly. In Alabama, Georgia, Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Denver and Florida money went to a minority of schools and poor districts, with high populations of black students, received little to none of the money (Senate Agricultural Committee 1966). The American School Food Service Administration estimated that in 1968 “at least six and a half million poor children still had no access to free lunches” (Levine 128). The issue of which children qualified for free lunches and how to ensure that they would get them became a part of the ongoing debate about poverty in America in the 1960s, with public interest groups collectively moving to oppose the USDA’s failure to ensure the success of the NSLP.

This second failure by congress to deliver on its promise of free or reduced price lunches for needy students occurred concurrent to the expansion and organization of citizen interest groups. During the 1960s, anti-poverty, anti-hunger and civil rights groups sought many of the same things including a more equitable distribution of resources through welfare programs like the NSLA. Several major groups emerged during this period, who tried to draw public attention to the problem at hand and to urge Congress and the USDA to better enforce the program. The Citizen’s Board of Inquiry, a group made up of labor unions and religious groups published Hunger U.S.A. a harrowing review of the state of families living in poverty in the Mississippi Delta. The article described the children as hungry, weak, in pain, and sick (Citizens Board of Inquiry). This publication sparked the national interest and inspired the formation of a second organization, the Committee on School Lunch Participation.
The CSLP was made up of a combination of Women's groups (National Council of Catholic women, National Council of Jewish Women, National Council of Negro Women, Church Women United, and the Young Women's Christian Association) whose initial goal was to assist in the implementation of free meal programs in schools. Upon discovering that poor children were not receiving the benefits they were entitled to under the Child Nutrition Act, they set out to force the USDA to make good on its promise of nutritious meals for all. Their strategy for accomplishing this goal was to take a nationwide survey of the School Lunch Program. They interviewed school lunch administrators, principals, teachers, and parents to learn how school lunches operated, who was served and who wasn't. They published their findings in a report titled *Their Daily Bread*.

The report argued that the 1966 Child Nutrition Act had not been able to change the administrative structure of the School Lunch Program and had not addressed "the root of the problem" (CSLP 24). The problem was that eligibility for free lunch was not determined "by any universal formula," rather "local decisions about administration and financing which may or may not have anything to do with the need of the individual child" (CSLP 13). The CSLP noted four major problems with the National School Lunch Program. First, there was not enough federal funding. Second, states and schools that counted children's payment of meals as their matching contribution to federal funds were unable to offer free meals (As of 1956 states were required to spend 3 dollars for every federal dollar spent (Gunderson)). Third, schools that did offer free lunch had no "uniform method of determining who was eligible" (CSLP 2). Lastly, older urban schools who largely served lower class populations lacked the facilities and the money to fund school lunch programs.
These problems prevented the NSLP from functioning and barred poor students from getting the free lunches they were entitled to.

The presentation of Their Daily Bread to USDA president Orville Freeman occurred on the same day Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated. Subsequently the report was released to the public, and the impact was significant. Numerous civil rights groups such as the Poor People’s Campaign, the Black Panthers, and even the Catholic Church pointed to Their Daily Bread as evidence that poverty and malnutrition in the United States was a serious problem (Levine 139). They used the report to pressure congress into making good on the promises of the Child Nutrition Act of 1966. In the end, President Freeman invited leaders from the CSLP to serve on a liaison committee to “help draft new school lunch guidelines” (Levine 140). The result was an expanded budget of 50 million dollars in 1969 and, Congress now required the states to “provide free meals for children whose family incomes were up to 25 percent above the poverty line and reduced price meals for those families with incomes up to 50 percent above poverty level” (Levine 141).

As a result of these amendments to the 1966 act participation in the NSLP program increased dramatically along with the number of free and reduced price lunches distributed (see Table 1).
### Table 1

<table>
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<th>Year</th>
<th>Total number of participants</th>
<th>Number of free and reduced-price participants</th>
<th>Percentage of free and reduced-price participants</th>
<th>School enrollment</th>
<th>Percentage of enrollment participating</th>
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<td>27.18</td>
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<td>46.21</td>
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<td>52</td>
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<tr>
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<td>24.1</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>44.94</td>
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<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>25.7</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>50.75</td>
<td>50.75</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>52.81</td>
<td>52.81</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>29.6</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>53.26</td>
<td>53.26</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>31.7</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>55.85</td>
<td>55.85</td>
<td>56</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

(Levine 155 with additional data from USDA, National Level Annual Summary Tables, National School Lunch Participation and Meals Served, http://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/cnpmain.htm and USDE, Enrollment Statistics)

The increase we see occurs as a result of the efforts of the Committee on School Lunch Participation's efforts in congress. Through the publication of Their Daily Bread, this public interest group was able to mobilize support for changes to the 1966 Child Nutrition Act. They did so through meticulous research and patient communication with the USDA and Congress, rather than by spending exorbitant amounts of money to win votes. In doing so they succeeded in accomplishing their goal of making affordable school lunches available to needy school children, overcoming opposition from the USDA over National involvement in a state administered program. Berry's interest group boom is certainly present here as demonstrated by the way the commitment to reform the NSLP was swept up by the civil rights movement and the war on poverty. With the rising number and power Freeman 47
of citizen groups and the reform of the Child Nutrition Act, it would seem that citizen interests had struck a blow against the age old theory that only moneyed interests win in politics. However, this was not entirely true.

While the reforms to the Children's Nutrition Act were successful in making free and reduced price school lunches available to the children that needed them, the end result did not dramatically shift the power Agriculture corporations had over school lunch policy. Much of the food still came from subsidies and, while the USDA had become in its role as a welfare agency, it remained the department that represented the interests of America's farmers. In fact, it could be argued that the Child Nutrition Act actually favored agriculture corporations. An increase in the number of schools participating in the NSLP and in the number of students receiving the lunches meant more direct contact with a greater number of consumers. The expansion of the school lunch program also put greater strain on cafeterias. As more children were offered free lunch "the number of paying children precipitously declined... creating a huge shortfall in lunchroom budgets" (Levine 151) schools had to seek new ways to fund their cafeterias. As a result many turned to agribusiness or other private companies to run their lunchrooms. Privatization turned what was once a program designed to serve nutritious meals to all children, into a for profit enterprise that cared more about sales than nutrition.

Public nutrition groups had solved one problem only to create another. They now faced a new battle; children now had more than enough food to eat but were being provided with unhealthy foods. Obesity and diabetes rates rose through the seventies and eighties to reach the dangerously high numbers we see today (see Fig 1 p. 7). Large companies like Marriott, Sodexo, Aramark and Daka entered into food service operations
agreements with schools promising to keep their cafeterias in the black. These companies served for profit foods with little attention paid to the nutritional value of the meals they served. By 1996 “about 1,000 of the 15,000 school districts in the United States had contracts with such companies” (Nestle 193).

These developments all occurred despite opposition from nutrition advocacy groups, a disappointing sign for Berry’s theory of their increasing power. However, they occur in very close proximity to Berry’s interest group boom. Berry argued that the “outgrowth of angry impassioned social movements that began in the 1960s” paved the way for public interest groups to gain respect through “pursuing more conventional forms of participation” (New Liberalism). Recent developments in the form of increased regulation on what goes into school lunches, may lend more support to the idea of an open democratic system where both private and public interests have a voice.
Chapter Seven: The Threat of Private Interests on Nutrition in the 90s and the turnaround of the 2010 Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act

The success of citizen groups like the Committee on School Lunch Participation in reforming the Child Nutrition Act of 1966 demonstrates public interest group’s power as agenda setters. Not only were they able to motivate the creation of the Act but, realizing that the USDA had not done an adequate job implementing it, took it upon themselves to ensure further legislation would do a better job providing meals for needy children. However, during the sixties, public interest groups were not in direct competition with private groups. They were successful in getting the USDA to represent their interests but incidentally paved the way for private interests to grow in power.

The growth of the NSLP in the 60s 70s and 80s (See Table 1), helped assuage the issue of hunger in the United States. However, as more children participated in the School Lunch Program, producers were granted greater access to a larger number of consumers. School cafeterias, unable to cope with the increasing cost of producing free and reduced price lunches, began to cut corners to save costs. They did so through two different strategies. First they adopted fast food style menus and policies to try and attract more paying students who they felt objected to the “notoriously poor taste and appearance” of the meals (Nestle 192). The best example of this would be that of Las Vegas Businessman Len Fredrick who took over the city’s school lunch program in 1972 (Levine 168). Frederick rebuilt the menus to appear more similar to fast food menus, offering shakes and combo meals. He pioneered the practice of interpreting the Type A lunch requirements as flexible guidelines.
Milkshakes contained the required eight ounces of milk but also were high in fat and chemical additives... Pickles and lettuce on burgers were counted as vegetables... buns contained wheat germ... French fries were fortified with vitamin A and iron. (Levine 169)

By sacrificing nutritional value and cheating the Type A standards, Fredericks was able to boost participation rates to 90 percent and “claimed a profit of over a million dollars” (Levine 169).

The second strategy schools used to cope with budget difficulties was essentially to implement Frederick's strategy on a larger scale. This occurred as a result of the changing role school lunches played for Agricultural companies. What had once been a program that served as a surplus commodity outlet was now a major consumer market, targeted by food service industries. Companies like Marriott led the charge for privatization of school lunch. They would take over operation of school lunches and management of the programs in an attempt to increase profits and efficiency. School lunch was a lucrative business; according to the American School Nutrition Association, “school food service represented a 15 billion dollar market or ten percent of all food purchased away from home” (ASNA). Other companies like Aramark, Sodexho and Daka followed Marriott into the school lunch business, making lucrative profits in the process.

Both of these strategies, the changing of menu and the privatization of school lunch programs, led to an increased focus on profitability at the expense of nutrition. As a result Child Obesity Rates hit record highs in the 90s (See Fig 1 P. 4). This new problem shifted the focus of nutrition groups away from ensuring that poor children got enough to eat, to ensuring that the lunches students received were healthy.
In order to combat the rising obesity trends, nutrition groups again relied on scientific publications to try and incite political change. Nutrition experts expressed concern that the USDA “relied too much on the food industry in setting nutritional standards for children” (Levine 173). Under pressure from health professionals the USDA published the first Dietary Guidelines for Americans in 1980 to be reassessed every five years. These were wildly inaccurate, ketchup and other condiments like relish could be considered a vegetable, jam could count as a fruit serving, eggs used in cakes could count as a meat serving, and cookies and corn chips could count as bread servings (Dietary Guidelines 1980). This battle over the dietary guidelines would continue every five years as the influence of private interests and the USDA’s reluctance to strictly police lunches according to the Dietary Guidelines would continually subvert the efforts of public interests to raise the nutrition standards of school lunches. A pattern emerged; nutrition groups like the American School Food Service Association would work together with health professionals to produce an the most accurate representation of a healthy diet which would then be poked full of holes in an effort to appease commodity groups.

For example in 1994 when Congress required the USDA to enforce the previous set of dietary regulations in the School Meals Initiative for Healthy Children, the USDA complained that the proposed changes would “displace as much as 55 million pounds of butter, 90 million pounds of cheese, and 126 million pounds of beef annually” (USDA 1994). Obviously this upset agricultural groups who lobbied for and won several amendments. Despite the fact that 50% of children’s fat intake came from whole milk “The former rules required school lunches to offer it and dairy industry was able to block any change in that rule” In addition, soft drink producers were able to block restrictions on the
sales of their products and fast food companies “won the right to continue selling items that had to meet nutritional standards only if they were sold as part of a reimbursable school meal” (Nestle 193). As a result of these loopholes, Marriott was able to lead the charge of “bringing the food court into the cafeteria” and making more “fast foods” (Price and Kuhn 55).

These repeated losses by advocates for child nutrition would again seem to suggest that despite their repeatedly successful efforts as agenda setters, public interests could not overcome the power private interests had over the USDA and Congress. However, through repeated persistence public interest groups were able to get the growing obesity problem on the national agenda, and finally convince the USDA to put more restrictions on what foods go into school lunch. While these efforts may not have been entirely successful through the 80s and 90s they laid the groundwork for future success. That success has come with the Obama presidency’s strong commitment to fighting obesity and reforming child nutrition policies.

Using information from the Academy of Sciences The Obama Administration passed two important pieces of legislature that are already shaping the future of school lunch policy. When her husband entered office Michelle Obama made it her mission to attack childhood obesity. She stated that “We have everything we need right now—we have the information, we have the ideas, and we have the desire to start solving America’s childhood obesity problem. The only question is whether we have the will” (Obama 2010).

Nutrition advocates certainly had the will and through their consistent research like the Trust For America’s Health’s Obesity report, grassroots efforts by large organizations like the School Nutrition Association and books like nutritionist Marion Nestle’s *Food*
Politics they have seen a marked improvement in the representation of their interests in recent legislation.

First, the passing of the 2010 Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act implemented a number of new school lunch initiatives. The new bill “doubled the amount of fruits and vegetables served in schools, set limits on damaging trans fats and salt, increase the amount of whole grains served, and establish suitable ranges for daily caloric intake” (Bittman). Most importantly it required the USDA to “establish national nutrition standards for all food sold and served in schools at any time during the school day” (Healthy Hunger-Free Kids 39). This crucial piece of the law would restrict the ability of schools participating in the NSLP to sell competitive fast foods and sodas to their students. In addition the bill was finally able to remove whole milk as an option for school lunch, removing one of the lunch’s main sources of fat (34). In changing these key aspects of school lunch policy, the power of citizen groups has been affirmed. Here a direct blow is struck both to the companies who try to privatize and sell competitive foods in school lunchrooms, and to the agribusiness lobbies who seek special treatment and defense of their products.

The second major movement has been Michelle Obama’s Let’s Move campaign. The initiatives set forth in Let’s Move have inspired state legislatures to improve their nutrition standards. As of 2010, 20 states and D.C. have set nutritional standards that are stricter than the USDA standards, 5 times the number that had them in 2004. 28 states also now have nutritional standards restricting the sale of competitive foods like soda and fast food, up from only 6 states in 2004 (Obesity Report 29-30). In addition BMI screening of children has become a common practice in schools to try and prevent the onset of obesity earlier.
In addition, a major part of the Lets Move campaign has been the implementation of a new visual aid to help parents and children understand what goes into a healthy diet. MyPlate ended the Food Pyramid's 18 year run as the symbol for good nutrition. Nutritionists have praised the plate for its simple design and increases to the amount of recommended fruits and vegetables as well as the removal of the fats and oils section. While the plate is not perfect (the dairy section has been criticized as unnecessary), it represents a significant improvement over the pyramid and will give parents and children an easier way to understand what goes into a healthy meal. It also addresses a significant lack of nutrition education that should go hand in hand with healthy lunches to promote good eating habits.

These developments have reflected the efforts of the Nutrition groups over the past 50 years to improve the standards of the school lunch program. While private food companies have enjoyed dominance in the field of food politics, citizen groups have struck a blow with this new legislation. While it may have taken a long time, citizen groups have been able to use the rising health crisis to partner with the government to try and ensure American students have healthy meals available to them. In doing so, they have demonstrated significant ability as agenda setters and have struck a blow to the theory that private interests only win in Politics.
Chapter Eight: Conclusion

Many might argue that investigating the relationship between private and public interest groups in American Politics is a futile experiment. A commonly held belief is that when the interests of these two groups come into contact, the interests of private groups are generally favored. Jeffrey Berry's theory of New Liberalism represents a stark departure from that school of thought. Evidence in his book New Liberalism suggested that citizen groups, emerging after the social movements of the 1960s, have developed significant power in politics through effective organization, use of science in the media and the mobilization of millions of Americans. Citizen groups, Berry argued "represent large constituencies and their success is the mark of a system that is open, democratic, and responsive to its citizens" (New Liberalism 170).

This thesis chose to test that theory by observing the development of the National School Lunch Policy through the lens of interest group politics. The NSLP was chosen both because it represents one of the largest welfare programs for children and because it has been a battleground for competing interests. It is both distributive in its subsidies for farmers and in its redistribution to schools while at the same time being promotional by giving "government endorsement to a particular way of eating" (Sims 92). This study chose to look at the interest group efforts surrounding three important milestones in the formation of the NSLP: its inception in 1946, its reform in 1966 in the form of the Child Nutrition Act, and recent efforts by the Obama presidency to further improve the nutritional standards through the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act. The three cases occur both before during and after, Berry's proposed interest group boom of the 1960s giving us a good timeline to measure the effects of interest group politics on the formation of policy.

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In looking at the effectiveness of citizen groups in particular two themes emerged. First, throughout the history of the NSLP citizen groups demonstrated their power as policy advocates and agenda builders. In each of the three cases, it was citizen groups who noted a problem with the nation's nutrition and it was largely through their activity and publications that politicians gained the motivation to make changes to the program. It was rare that private interests acted as policy entrepreneurs (an exception would be the ongoing pouring rights debate over the selling of competitive foods), instead acting responsively and seeking amendments to legislation that had already been passed. However, throughout the early history of the NSLP and in both of the first two cases the work of citizen groups in advocating for policy change was not entirely reflected in the outcomes of the bills. However, early signs (see below) are favorable for new legislation and while dietary regulation of school lunches still has many obstacles, the modern school lunch represents a marked improvement to the lunches of the past.

The difficulties that have plagued school lunch legislation are largely due to the second theme that emerged. School lunch's relationship with USDA has been a double edged sword. By having school lunch operate under the USDA, nutrition groups are put in contact with one of the higher powered government agencies with significant resources and ability to institute reform. However, this relationship is also conflicted by USDA's responsibility to protect agricultural interests. By having to support two conflicting interests in regard to School Lunch Policy the USDA is left with the unenviable job of both "providing nutritious lunches for children while at the same time providing a ready outlet for agricultural commodities," and having to protect both of those interests (Sims 69). Initially the USDA was reluctant to side with nutrition advocacy groups, instead feeling that

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"the USDA existed for the benefit of farmers... and that it was the job of agricultural programs to keep those interests in the forefront" (Levine 109). This led to consistent concessions being made to the agricultural and food service industries, damaging the effectiveness of nutrition legislation. However, more recently they have come around to support better nutrition stating "improving nutrition and health by providing food assistance and nutrition education and promotion" as a goal in their mission statement (USDA Mission). As a result of this shift in policy the partnership between government and nutrition groups has been much more effective in creating and enforcing nutrition legislation.

(Fig 2 via Opensecrets.org <http://www.opensecrets.org/industries/lobbying.php?cycle=2012&ind=A>)

Perhaps the biggest evidence that private interests are losing control of school lunch policy is the large amount of money agribusinesses have spent over the course of the Obama presidency. They spent over 120 million dollars lobbying in each of the last four years (see Fig 2) and spent heavily to support the campaigns of both John McCain in 2008 and Mitt Romney in 2012 (Open Secrets). The Increase in spending is partially representative of the loss of control they have experienced in influencing school lunch policy. In order to try and wrest back that control they have spent heavily but if Berry's
theory holds true, regardless of spending citizen interests will continue to wield influence policy.

In New Liberalism, Berry argued that "citizen groups have transformed liberalism in America... groups advocating post-materialist concerns have become much more powerful than those groups focused on issues pertaining to economic equality" (New Liberalism 153). He cites a primary explanation for this as that they have existed for a long time.

Nutrition advocacy groups certainly fulfill this classification. Throughout the existence of the School Lunch Program there have been numerous advocacy groups, championing the cause of nutritious meals for students. Whether it was the small women's and health groups of the forties concerned for the health of America's soldiers, the committee on school lunch participation's efforts to reform the program or the more recent efforts of larger organizations like the School Nutrition Organization or the American Dietetic Association (with nearly 70,000 members) who have used research and education to help forward the goals of the nutrition community, these groups now wield significant influence in shaping politics (Sims 72).

The actions of agribusinesses in response to changes in school lunch policy suggest one of the possible flaws in this study. The recent successes of public interests in the field of school lunch pose a chicken or the egg problem. Have citizen interests been successful only because of the Obama administration's willingness to make nutrition a priority, or have they wrested control of policy away from private interests on their own? Further research during future presidencies could shed more light on this issue.

In the past two years, childhood obesity rates in the United States have begun to stabilize (Obesity Report 93). This stabilization is a testament to the efforts of nutrition Freeman 59
groups in partnership with the US government to reform School Lunch Policy. Repeated awareness campaigns have finally encouraged new legislation in Washington aimed at improving the quality of the food our students eat. These developments demonstrate the power that citizen groups now have in shaping politics. While private groups still win concessions in congress, the loopholes are becoming smaller rather than larger and the requirements placed on school lunches have made them healthier. The recent success of citizen groups in shaping school lunch policy support Berry's hypothesis that citizen interests now wield significant influence in affecting the formation of new policies. The implications of this for interest group politics as a whole are that these groups have provided a model for others to follow in order to influence public policy. Through publication of research and critiques on concessions and policies that favor private interests public interests have made the system more democratic and closed the gap between private and public interests.
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