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December 9, 2019

“A Little Encouragement in Pulling Themselves up by Their Own Bootstraps”: American Individualism and Georgia’s HOPE Scholarship

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An abstract of
a thesis submitted to the Faculty of Emory College of Arts and Sciences
of Emory University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of the degree of
Bachelor of Arts with Honors

History Department

2019

Abstract

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By Isaiah Sirois

In the mid-1990s, Georgia Gov. Zell Miller created the HOPE scholarship out of lottery revenue to reward high achievement, prepare the state for a shifting economy, and to increase college access. While the scholarship program earned high praise, and other states have even created similar programs, the scholarship’s story is much more complicated than its popularity would suggest. Miller created the scholarship in 1993 with both need- and merit-based components, but by 1995, it had become just a merit scholarship. Then, after a series of revenue shortages, Georgia increased the academic standards for HOPE in 2004 and 2011, explicitly declining to reinstitute any need-based provisions. This thesis situates HOPE in the broader context of the 1980s and 1990s to argue that the individualist framing through which politicians described the program, and through which the public understood it, allowed later lawmakers to make the scholarship harder to earn.

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Acknowledgements

I offer my sincerest thanks to my professors, friends, and family as they supported me throughout my time at Emory and during this project.

I need to thank Professor LaChance for working as my thesis advisor, for pushing me in new directions as I sought to tell a compelling story, and for giving me the structural guidelines that made everything possible.

I would like to thank Professor Crespino for serving on my committee. Thank you for being such a reliable source of advice throughout my time at Emory.

I would also like to thank Professor Dinner for serving on my committee and for her guidance, not only as I completed the project, but also as I completed graduate-level coursework.

Thanks to Becky Herring for the constant support and help throughout my undergraduate career, and thanks to Lakesia Hayes for the encouragement as I crossed the finish line.

I must extend my sincerest thanks to Stacey Evans for both inspiring this project and for taking some time to talk to me about it.

Lastly, thanks to everyone who has supported me during my time at Emory – family, friends, bosses, co-workers – my experience here was all the better for it.

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Introduction

At Ringgold High School's 1996 National Honors Society banquet, Stacey Evans realized that she could earn a college degree. Gov. Zell Miller, who had created his landmark HOPE scholarship just three years before, came to speak at the event. He had been invited by one of Evans' history teachers, Ms. Laura Henderson, who had attended Young Harris College when Miller was a professor there. Although Evans always thought that she would go to college, she never had a plan to pay for it. Evans grew up moving between 16 homes in Ringgold, Georgia, a half-hour drive south of Chattanooga, and money had never been a guarantee. "We didn't have any professionals in my family," Evans said, "all I knew was that there had to be a better way to live." And in 1996, there was – Miller's Helping Outstanding Pupils Educationally (HOPE) Scholarship would cover four years of her college tuition if she kept up a B average. "That's when it became real for me that I can afford college," Evans said. Through HOPE, Evans earned an undergraduate degree at the University of Georgia. Evans went on to attend law school and serve in the Georgia House of Representatives, and her desire to preserve HOPE for students like her would become the foundation for her 2018 gubernatorial campaign.¹

Miller established the HOPE scholarship in 1993, three years after he staked his gubernatorial campaign on funding education through the Georgia Lottery. At the HOPE scholarship's inception, the scholarship covered two years of tuition at public universities for students from families who earned less than \$66,000, and HOPE Scholars attending in-state private colleges received a grant of \$1,500. Students just had to make a B-average in high school

¹Stacey G. Evans, "16 Homes," n.d., Ringgold, GA, 1:00-1:45, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h0Kfk1DkC1U>; Stacey G. Evans, "Interview with Stacey Evans," telephone interview by author, February 28, 2019.

and maintain it in college, and even with the income cap, the scholarship still extended to most Georgians – in 1993, the state had a median family income of \$33,394. Lawmakers designed the scholarship conservatively because they were unsure how much revenue the lottery would generate, but after it exceeded projections, they expanded its reach. In 1994, Miller extended the scholarship to cover four years of tuition, and he raised the income cap to \$100,000. He would abolish the income cap in 1995.²

The program emerged out of political and cultural individualism. Individualism encompasses Americans' disposition to turn toward themselves and away from traditional social structures of dependency, like aristocracy. In the 1830s, Alexis de Tocqueville coined the term, which he defined as the "mature and calm feeling [in America], which disposes each member of the community to sever himself from the mass of his fellows and to draw apart with his family and friends." Because equality was America's "ruling passion," Tocqueville argued that Americans believed their destiny rested "in their own hands," and that they would succeed if they acted responsibly. The HOPE scholarship's merit-based structure reflected Miller's political desire to improve access for hardworking students, and its subsequent popularity demonstrated individualism's prevalence in American culture.³

Individualism became a larger part of the Democrats' political platform in response to the Reagan administration. Although the American economy had grown under Reagan, Americans had not forgotten the painful recessions of the 1970s and late 1980s, which helped him get into office. Some Democrats, who would later be called "New Democrats," embraced some of the

²Michael Lanford, "The Political History of the Georgia HOPE Scholarship Program: A Critical Analysis," *Policy Reviews in Higher Education* 1, no. 2 (2017): 9-12.

³Cal Jillson, *The American Dream: In History, Politics, and Fiction* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2016) 88-89.

president's economic policies, like his supply-side economic policy, which slashed taxes and regulation to encourage growth. Reagan had embraced supply-side economics to deal with "stagflation," the presence of both high unemployment and high inflation. Stagflation challenged the Keynesian theories that liberals subscribed to at the time, as it assumed unemployment and inflation were negatively correlated. However, the future "New Democrats," who included Georgia Sen. Sam Nunn, still supported a social safety net and other government-funded public goods. They thought that America's post-war, industrially-driven prosperity was coming to an end because of international competition. So they sought to push the American economy in new directions instead of passing another Keynesian stimulus. They argued that more individuals would need college degrees to pursue post-industrial careers, and they believed that America's technology and service sectors would be sources of future employment growth.⁴

Miller's HOPE scholarship reflected the New Democrat half-embrace, half-rejection of Reagan. On the one hand, the scholarship offered an individualist solution to large-scale economic problems through a small-government measure. Miller hoped to develop the state's workforce by giving Georgia's students "a little encouragement in pulling themselves up by their own bootstraps." Miller's scholarship required students to earn a B-average throughout high school, and it required them to maintain it once they got to college. Students were to be personally responsible for their financial aid, and they would not receive assistance for financial need alone. The scholarship's funding mechanism also reflected Miller's appreciation for limited government. He explained that the Georgia Lottery, created to fund the scholarship program,

⁴David Greenberg, "The Reorientation of Liberalism in the 1980s," in *Living in the Eighties*, ed. Gil Troy and Vincent J. Cannato (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009) 55-6; Kenneth Baer, *Reinventing Democrats: The Politics of Liberalism from Reagan to Clinton* (Lawrence, University Press of Kansas, 2000) 1-8, 32-4.

would be privately operated and would not take any state tax revenue. That Miller chose to fund his scholarship through a new and privatized source of revenue, not increased taxation, also reflects how the New Democrats had embraced both Reagan's philosophy of government and some of his economic policies.⁵

On the other hand, Miller offered the HOPE scholarship as a response to the Reagan Era's economic inequality. In 1992, he argued that "during the 1980s, a new economic order has been emerging in this nation that is more unequal, more divided than ever before." Data from the Census Bureau backed Miller's claims, as income inequality had increased 18 percent between the most and least affluent 20 percent of Americans through the 1980s. The wealth gap, Miller argued, meant that poor Americans kids would "have no hope of escaping poverty," and without any chance of advancement, students would have no reason to study or to avoid drug abuse. Miller framed his HOPE scholarship as Georgians' way out of economic despair. Both Miller's public stance against the wealth gap and his decision to frame HOPE as a way out for poor Georgians reflects that while New Democrats had embraced some of Reagan's policies, they remained critical of their unequal results. Miller would even come to embrace some Republican values so thoroughly that he would deliver the keynote address at the 2004 Republican National Convention.⁶

Georgians like Stacey Evans embraced the HOPE scholarship, and it soon achieved national acclaim. Steve Lopez, a columnist for the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, described HOPE as

⁵Zell Miller, "Speech at the Democratic National Committee Southern Caucus," June 22, 1991, in *Zell: The Governor Who Gave Georgia HOPE*, by Richard Hyatt (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1997) 446; Lanford, "The Political History..." 11-12.

⁶Zell Miller, "University of Georgia Commencement Address," June 13, 1992, in *Zell: The Governor Who Gave Georgia HOPE*, by Richard Hyatt (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1997) 460; Jonathan D. Cohen, "The Democratic Program that Killed Liberalism," *The Washington Post*, March 28, 2018.

“the kind of thing you look at half in amazement and half in anger, and wonder why your own bonehead state didn’t think of it,” in 1996. HOPE spawned similar gambling-funded programs in other states, including New Mexico’s Success Scholarship in 1996, West Virginia’s PROMISE Scholarship in 2001, and Tennessee’s HOPE scholarship in 2003. By 2004, other states had created 14 “HOPE-like” state-sponsored merit scholarships. Before Miller left office, Columbus Ledger-Inquirer journalist Richard Hyatt penned his hagiographic *Zell: The Governor Who Gave Georgia HOPE*. President Bill Clinton, another New Democrat, proposed the national Hope scholarship tax credit in 1996, and he modeled it after Miller’s program. Because of HOPE, Miller’s approval rating hit 85 percent by October 1998.⁷

HOPE’s popularity among the press and regular Americans aligned with American culture’s inward turn to personal responsibility. Lopez explained that HOPE “not only [solved] the college expense for a lot of people, middle-class on down, but it gives students another reason to pay attention in school.” In the 1980s, Reagan appealed to the American individualist tradition. He tied success to hard work and responsibility, and he presented the federal government as the enemy of individual achievement. His philosophy appealed to the majority of American voters, and it earned him two landslide elections. As Americans embraced individualism at the ballot box, they also turned to it in their personal lives. Between 1991 and 1996, sales of self-help books skyrocketed by 96 percent, and in 1994, Oprah Winfrey remade

⁷Steve Lopez, “A tuition gamble that just might pay off,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 3, 1996; Erik C. Ness, *Merit Aid and the Politics of Education* (New York: Routledge, 2008) 6-7; Christopher Cornwell and David B. Mustard, “Georgia’s HOPE Scholarship and Minority and Low-Income Students: Program Effects and Proposed Reforms,” in *State Merit Scholarship Programs and Racial Inequality*, ed. Donald E. Heller and Patricia Marin, (Cambridge: The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University, 2004) 79; Peter Applebome, “Aid Plan That Inspired Clinton Is a Success,” *The New York Times*, June 6, 1996; Terry M. Neal, “Georgia’s Centrist of Attention,” *The Washington Post*, October 16, 1998.

her show in light of Marianne Williamson's individualistic spiritualism. Since individuals could work their way to success, HOPE only needed to encourage Georgians to pull up their bootstraps, as Miller had said. The scholarship was not unanimously supported, as some liberals pushed back against the Georgia Lottery and the exclusivity of its merit-based nature. However, their critiques fell on deaf ears and achieved little political change.⁸

While Georgia's neighbors created similar programs, the lottery earned less out-of-state revenue, and state lawmakers were forced to make cuts. In 2004, Republican Gov. Sonny Perdue signed House Bill 1325 to limit the classes that could count for HOPE eligibility to English, math, social studies, foreign languages, and science. Before, elective courses in other subjects had counted for HOPE, which lawmakers thought were too easy and inflated grade-point averages. They hoped to reduce the number of eligible students and to preserve the program's financial solvency by counting just core subjects. Yet after the 2008 recession, Georgia officials had to cut HOPE spending once again. In 2011, Republican Gov. Nathan Deal created the new, harder-to-earn Zell Miller Scholarship out of lottery revenue. He reduced Miller's HOPE to "HOPE Lite," and these scholarships no longer covered full tuition and fees for B-average students. Students seeking full-tuition scholarships would have to pair a 3.7 grade-point average with at least 1200 on the SAT or graduate first or second in their high school class. House Minority Leader Stacey Abrams extended her support to Deal's reforms because she believed that they would preserve the scholarship and other educational services moving forward.⁹

⁸Lopez, "A tuition gamble..."; Jillson, *The American Dream...* 227-9; Micki McGee, *Self-Help Inc., Makeover Culture in American Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005) 11-2; Janice Peck, *The Age of Oprah: Cultural Icon for the Neoliberal Era* (Boulder, Colorado: Paradigm Publishers, 2008) 4-5.

⁹Lanford, "The Political History..." 12-3; Evans, "Interview with Stacey Evans..."

Stacey Evans, also a Democratic state representative in General Assembly, opposed the cuts, and she began a gubernatorial campaign seven years after their passage. “It gutted the program that was responsible for everything that’s good in my life,” she told the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* when she announced her campaign. Evans graduated high school with a 3.8 GPA, but she did not earn the SAT score necessary for a full scholarship in 2011. “I could not make up for the fact that I didn’t have 18 years at a dinner table with educated parents sharing vocabulary, talking about reading, giving me the tools I would need to score high on an SAT,” she said after the cuts. In 2017, she explained that she was running for governor because “the Stacey Evans born today doesn’t have the same opportunity that the Stacey born in 1978 had.”¹⁰

These changes to the HOPE scholarship – and the scholarship more broadly – have not received adequate attention from historians. In a *Washington Post* op-ed, Jonathan D. Cohen described HOPE as the “the Democratic program that killed liberalism.” He explained that it “embodies the transformation of liberalism that reshaped the Democratic Party and, ultimately, exacerbated economic inequality” because the scholarship benefited mostly middle-class students. No full-length work has tried to situate HOPE within this transformation of liberalism by the New Democrats, which was itself a reaction to both economic scarcity and inequality. Although Cohen may be correct to argue that HOPE ultimately “deepened the inequity of the American educational system,” that was not inevitable in 1993 – HOPE lost its need-based component, and despite later pushes from other Democrats, it would never be restored. In a rebuttal published by *New York Magazine*, New Democrat Ed Kilgore emphasized that

¹⁰Greg Bluestein, “Georgia 2018: Stacey Evans launches a HOPE-themed campaign for governor,” *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, May 25, 2017; Kathy Lohr, “Georgia’s HOPE Scholarship Dwindles Amid Cutbacks,” *National Public Radio*, April 5, 2011; Bluestein, “Georgia 2018...”.

Democrats' electoral success depended upon middle-class support, not just support from low-income workers and minorities, and that Miller's scholarship had been limited since its implementation. Additionally, while Cohen acknowledged that programs like HOPE were popular with voters, he failed to explain why its popularity persists despite the problems that he identifies.¹¹

Both writers would have benefited from reading education scholar Michael Lanford's "The Political History of the Georgia HOPE scholarship Program," published in 2017. He argues that the scholarship regressed over time, concluding that it demonstrates how political pressures can worsen a once-positive policy. Lanford's article, which draws heavily on the critical left's marginalized critiques of the scholarship, would have benefited from deeper examinations of the New Democrats' emergence and American individualism to explain the scholarship's continued popularity. That said, his article offers a good starting point for further historical inquiry.¹²

Gov. Miller's arguments in favor of the HOPE scholarship demonstrate the New Democrats' marriage of Reagan's pro-growth, individualist economic policy with concerns about economic inequality – however misguided their solutions were – in a time of economic constraints. In addition, the public's embrace of Miller and the meritocratic scholarship itself reflect the scholarship's ties to the American individualist tradition. Unfortunately, HOPE's individualist foundation allowed later Georgia officials to weaken it. Lawmakers in the 2000s made it harder to earn, and they could do so without ensuring that HOPE offered as equal of an opportunity for students to earn it, even as they faced opposition from folks like Stacey Evans along the way.

¹¹Cohen, "The Democratic program..."; Ed Kilgore, "No, the HOPE Scholarship Didn't Kill Great Society Liberalism," *New York Magazine*, March 30, 2018.

¹²Lanford, "The Political History..." 17.

Chapter One: New Democrats, Old Strategies

Georgia Gov. Zell Miller rose before Georgia's General Assembly on January 25, 1992, to deliver his annual State of the State Address. After acknowledging both houses' hard work in the past year, the gentleman from Young Harris, Georgia, began. "The ancient Chinese had a saying," he said, "that went, 'may you live in interesting times.' The Chinese considered it a curse. I prefer to think of it as a blessing." The first year of Miller's administration had certainly been interesting. The first-term Democrat had guided Georgia through a nationwide recession that tanked economic growth and forced statewide budget cuts. But Miller was not finished with his aphorisms. "As Benjamin Franklin used to say, 'necessity is the mother of invention,'" he said, "in that respect, this national recession has been quite a mother." Miller paused, smirking, and the legislature erupted in laughter.¹³

Miller used his 1992 State of the State address to present his response to an economic recession in the early 1990s, and he had designed his agenda to assist working-class families. Dubbed "Georgia Rebound," Miller shaped it around the Georgia Lottery for Education Act (GLEA), which would create a statewide lottery. Miller explained that it would be "run strictly as a business," taking a swing at the state officials who would have otherwise been in control. The lottery revenue would fund three education initiatives: pre-kindergarten, equipment for K-12 schools, and what would become the HOPE scholarship. Miller described his scholarship as "the most all-inclusive... to be found in any of the fifty states," and he said that it would assist students in funding their college educations. Miller would have to run a political gauntlet to pass

¹³Miller, "State of the State Address," filmed January 25, 1992 at the Georgia State Capitol, Atlanta, GA, video, 1:45-8:00, <https://www.c-span.org/video/?23964-1/georgia-state-state-address>.

Georgia Rebound, however, as creating the lottery would require a statewide referendum after passage in the General Assembly.¹⁴

The governor's response to economic scarcity was a good fit for the Reagan Era. While Miller had based his 1990 gubernatorial campaign upon the lottery and education funding, which meant the proposals were not written in direct response to the recession, the programs had still been formulated as the economic woes of the 1970s and early 1980s lingered in the minds of some politicians. Miller's actions even mirrored Reagan's supply-side response to the stagflation that proved unsolvable to Keynesian liberals, and these similarities demonstrated both men's skepticism of government's ability to solve problems.¹⁵

One similarity between Miller and Reagan was that both men cut bureaucratic red tape. While Reagan failed to cut programs like Social Security, he could choose to hamstring executive agencies and not to enforce existing regulations. He accomplished the former by appointing figures like Thorne Auchter to the head of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), whose personal construction business had routinely been penalized by the agency. Under Auchter, OSHA reduced both its fines and its inspections. One program that Reagan did succeed in cutting through Congress was education. In 1981, Congress passed the Educational Consolidation and Improvement Act, which slashed federal education expenses by 10 percent and curtailed the scope of the federal bureaucracy's involvement in schools to return power to state governments. Like Reagan, Miller also went after bureaucracy. In 1991, he cut 3,000 state jobs in response to the struggling national economy. This anti-bureaucratic outlook extended to Miller's design of the HOPE scholarship. Since it was to be funded by an external

¹⁴Miller, "State of the State..." 12:10, 17:00.

¹⁵Kevin M. Kruse and Julian E. Zelizer, *Fault Lines: A History of the United States Since 1974* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2019) 107-9.

lottery corporation, Miller limited the ability of state officials to interfere with revenue creation. Not only was it to be run “strictly as a business,” Miller wanted a “board of proven business leaders, not state bureaucrats” to be in control.¹⁶

Second, Miller’s HOPE scholarship also mirrored Reagan’s decision to avoid funding public goods like education through taxation. In 1981, Reagan’s first priority was to push for tax cuts. He hoped that reducing taxes on America’s wealthiest would spur them to invest that money back into the economy, creating a “trickle-down” effect through which everyone would benefit. Reagan pushed Congress to pass the Economic Recovery Tax Act that August, which mostly benefited the wealthy, but Reagan framed the bill as a way for the government to relieve workers. Reagan’s tax cuts also served his anti-bureaucratic ends, as although he could not convince Congress to reduce spending, taking away the money that would otherwise fund these programs would help his case. Unlike Reagan, Miller chose to find an alternative to taxation to fund education: the lottery. The governor emphasized that he would not divert any other state revenue for his programs. “We’re not going to take the first red cent of state tax revenues away from other programs to operate it,” Miller said in his 1992 address, demonstrating his commitment to avoiding taxation as a revenue stream.¹⁷

But Zell Miller was not the first Democrat to incorporate some of Reagan’s ideas into the party’s political strategy. The early “New Democrats” urged the party to make sweeping concessions after Walter Mondale’s embarrassing defeat in the 1984 presidential election, in which Democrats only won Mondale’s home state of Minnesota and Washington, D.C. These

¹⁶Kruse and Zelizer, *Fault Lines*... 120-2; Gareth Davies, *See Government Grow: Education Politics from Johnson to Reagan* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2007), *Ibid.*, 250-8; Miller, “State of the State...” 7:30; Miller, “State of the State...” 12:15.

¹⁷Kruse and Zelizer, *Fault Lines*... 106-8; Miller, “State of the State...” 12:25.

“New Democrats,” who included Virginia Gov. Chuck Robb, Georgia Sen. Sam Nunn, and Tennessee Sen. Al Gore, founded the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC) in 1985. The DLC’s membership came mostly from southern or western states. They hoped to save a Democratic Party that had moved too far left, and they thought that embracing some of Reagan’s politics would allow them to regain lost voters. Like Reagan, the New Democrats broke with New Deal liberalism that emphasized government-led economic redistribution to achieve equality of outcomes. Instead, they advocated for smaller government and freer markets to foster equality of opportunity. Unlike the Republicans, the DLC lacked institutions like think tanks that would translate their ideas from abstractions into either policies or a coherent public philosophy, and they failed to win control of the national Democratic Party in the 1980s.¹⁸

The New Democrats were a primarily Sun Belt phenomenon, and their focus on education reflected an earlier pivot toward the issue by Southern Democrats. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, moderate Democrats appealed to voters by focusing on education reform. These “education governors,” which included Jimmy Carter, sought to improve literacy rates along with their states’ economies. While these education reforms were often the result of the South’s delay in meeting the desegregation standards set by *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), the Southern Democrats expressed genuine faith in the ability for education to improve the region, laying part of the later New Democrat movement’s foundation.¹⁹

The New Democrats and the DLC gained legitimacy following Michael Dukakis’ 1988 electoral defeat. As Democrats grew frustrated with repeated electoral failures, the New

¹⁸Baer, *Reinventing Democrats* 64-68; *Ibid.*, 63.

¹⁹Gordon E. Harvey, *A Question of Justice: New South Governors and Education, 1968–1976* (Tuscaloosa, University of Alabama Press: 2002) 1-17; Tim L. Mazzoni, Jr., “Jimmy Carter: An ‘Education President’?” *The Phi Delta Kappan* 58, no. 7 (1977) 547-9.

Democrats founded a think tank, the Progressive Policy Institute (PPI). The PPI began to differentiate the New Democrats' ideas from the rest of the Party's. In 1990, the PPI's *Mainstream Democrat* opposed both liberal excesses and Reagan's expansion of the income gap. Renamed the *New Democrat* a year later, the PPI would then criticize America's "sluggish, centralized bureaucracies" for hindering the private sector's technological growth that represented the future of the American economy. The PPI explained that the DLC wanted "democratic capitalism" that supported economic growth through investments in fields including technology and public education. With the help of the PPI, New Democrat Bill Clinton secured the presidency in 1992.²⁰

Miller was an active member of the DLC, and his HOPE scholarship reflects their centrist political strategy and policy agenda. To create HOPE, Miller would have to earn support from the General Assembly and a majority of Georgia voters. The arguments he used to galvanize support for the lottery and scholarship demonstrated his investment in the New Democrats' rightward shift, as Miller framed his lottery in a way that could appeal to both conservatives and liberals. He explained the HOPE scholarship's goals in terms of the New Democrat's ideology, as he argued it would promote economic growth while reducing income inequality. Miller had to sell both the General Assembly and the public on HOPE because the state constitution forbade the operation of any lottery, and any state constitutional amendment required a statewide referendum. Lotteries had been banned in Georgia since 1868, when the state's Reconstruction-era government acted to stamp out a state-sanctioned private lottery supporting the Masonic Orphans' Home and Free School. Supporters of the ban argued that since Georgia would now

²⁰Baer, *Reinventing Democrats* 120; Jason Stahl, *Right Moves: The Conservative Think Tank in American Political Culture since 1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016) 142-146.

use general tax revenue to fund public schooling, lotteries that funded education were unnecessary and unchristian. By 1990, the lotteries were opposed by two different groups, conservative Christians and liberals. But Miller carved out an argumentative space between the two, as he played on equality of opportunity as a means to redress economic sluggishness and social inequality. His lottery would pass narrowly, by a margin of 52-48, but Miller had ceded enough ground to the right that the program would forever be tied to economic ends beyond equity.²¹

Conservative religious groups claimed the moral high ground to oppose gambling. “In this battle against the lottery, we are not involved in politics,” warned Dr. J. Emmett Henderson. Henderson, the executive director of the Georgia Council of Moral and Civic Concerns, told the audience of 800 at the Smyrna Community Center that they were “involved in the Kingdom of Christ against darkness.” Henderson’s council was associated with the United Methodist Church, and he traveled the state to deliver similar sermons. But Henderson explained his opposition to the lottery in more than just religious terms. He told the *Philadelphia Inquirer* that “[lottery advocates] are exploiting the poor, the minorities and those who are vulnerable to gambling addictions,” because the lottery “induc[ed] them to participate in self-destructive behavior.” Other Methodists attacked Gov Miller for his hypocrisy, as the governor also professed to be a Methodist. G. Ross Freeman, an editor of the *Wesleyan Christian Advocate*, the state United Methodist newspaper, wrote in 1991 that Miller “betrayed his church” by supporting the lottery. “His name will be blackened forever as the governor who connived to bring legalized, state sponsored gambling to Georgia,” Freeman added. The black clergy also attacked Miller’s

²¹Paul Bolster, “Georgia Plays the Numbers: A History of Lotteries in Georgia,” in *The Atlanta Historical Journal* 29, no. 4 (1985-6) 95-101; Randy Bobbitt, *Lottery Wars: Case Studies in Bible Belt Politics, 1986-2005* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2007) 73.

proposed lottery as the vote approached. The Rev. William Sheals, the pastor of Hopewell Baptist Church, lamented the lack of prior minority involvement in the anti-lottery campaign. He was especially upset because “[the lottery] affects our community,” since other state lotteries had previously targeted inner-city blacks with advertising. Sheals also expressed concern that a lottery would be a regressive tax and that it would cause some to trust in luck, not God.²²

Meanwhile, liberals also expressed their concerns about the lottery’s effect on low-income Georgians. The *Atlanta Constitution* editorialized against lotteries for that reason, as its staff argued that they “prey[ed] on the poor” through deceptive advertising tactics. The newspaper’s editorial staff conceded that studies did not show that low-income people played the lottery more frequently, but evidence still showed that they spent more on the lottery. The paper cited a study from Maryland and New Jersey that found that players who made less than \$10,000 spent close to 20 percent of their annual income on tickets. The paper strongly opposed lottery advertising, which encouraged such gambling practices. Miller’s predecessor as governor, Joe Frank Harris, sent a letter to the editor praising the editorial. “Georgia does not need to be in the gambling business,” he wrote, “there are less painful ways to generate more legitimate funds for education without setting the wrong example for our valuable children.” Cynthia Tucker, who had just been named editorial page editor of the *Atlanta Constitution* earlier that year, would wait until after the lottery’s passage to criticize the lottery from her column. As the paper’s original editorial had done, Tucker’s article protested targeted lottery advertising. “Just wait until interest in the games begins to wane, and the Georgia Lottery Corp. is forced to get more enmeshed in

²²David Corvette, “Churches’ rally against Ga. lottery draws 800,” *Atlanta Constitution*, July 27, 1992; Donna St. George, “Taking the Risk of Gambling: The South Will Prize Again: Lotteries Gaining a Foothold,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, January 20, 1991; Gayle White, “Miller, a Methodist, riles church on issue,” *Atlanta Constitution*, October 24, 1992; Celia Sibley, “Black pastors unite in opposition to lottery,” *Atlanta Constitution*, October 27, 1992.

the questionable business of enticing people to gamble,” she wrote the next year, warning that other states had “plac[ed] billboards in down-at-the-heels neighborhoods that say things like, ‘The lottery – your ticket out.’” As economic inequality worsened, Americans who felt stuck increasingly saw lotteries as the best path to upward mobility, as Tucker had noted. In a 1992 survey of a midwestern town, 45% of respondents identified the lottery as the best way to change their circumstances. Nationwide, Americans increasingly viewed winning the lottery as an alternative to more traditional pathways to success like entrepreneurship.²³

Liberals also framed the lottery as a regressive tax. Days after its previous editorial about advertising, Tucker’s editorial page ran an article condemning the lottery’s regressive nature. The article reiterated the editorial staff’s prior concerns about how much more lower-income players would spend on tickets than their high-income counterparts, and it quoted a pair of Duke University economists on the issue. As quoted in the newspaper, they concluded that “[w]ithout exception, the evidence shows that the implicit tax on lotteries is regressive. . . . An increase in the revenue from lotteries has exactly the same distributional impact as the imposition or increase of a similarly regressive tax.” Some of the *Atlanta Constitution*’s readers reached similar conclusions. Ira Kirkpatrick, a Clayton County teacher, wrote that the state government should fund education through more secure revenue streams, not the lottery. He wrote, “I am opposed to the lottery because it is an inefficient and regressive form of taxation, not because some consider it immoral.”²⁴

²³“No’ on the lottery,” *Atlanta Constitution*, October 20, 1992; Joe Frank Harris, “The Georgia Lottery: Is it a sin or our salvation?” *Atlanta Constitution*, October 23, 1992; Cynthia Tucker, “As lottery takes hold, hype hits new heights,” *Atlanta Constitution*, August 4, 1993; Jonathan D. Cohen, “State Lotteries and the New American Dream,” *Center for Gaming Research Occasional Paper Series* 33 (2016) 1-10.

²⁴“Lottery adds regressivity,” *Atlanta Constitution*, October 28, 1992; “Ira Lee Kirkpatrick, III,” *Legacy.com*, n.d., <https://www.legacy.com/obituaries/name/ira-kirkpatrick-iii->

One strategy that both liberals and conservatives employed was to cite the struggling Florida Lottery. Created in 1988 as a public agency, the Florida Lottery originally contributed around \$2 billion to the state budget in its first years of existence. But the lottery revenue went into the state's general funds, which meant that officials could reallocate lottery revenue to other needs, including prisons and health care. In 1990, the director of communications for the state's oldest teacher's union, denounced the lottery as a "fraud and a scam," and even Florida Gov. Lawton Chiles agreed. As a result, Georgians were skeptical of Miller's lottery. The *Atlanta Constitution* ran an editorial entitled "'Lottery for education' is called a fraud in Florida," to highlight Floridians' regrets. The next day, the paper officially editorialized justifying its opposition by arguing that "the lottery did not produce extra money for education in Florida." Religious officials also cited the Florida Lottery to explain their opposition. Rev. Sid Hopkins, director of the Gwinnett Metro Baptist Association, claimed that the lottery "proved a failure for education," and Rev. Malone Dodson, a United Methodist Minister, cited time he had spent vacationing in Florida to explain his opposition.²⁵

Gov. Miller made his case for the lottery in between conservatives' moral opposition and liberals' concerns about exploitation. In response to conservatives, Chuck Reece, a spokesman for Miller, explained that "it's immoral for a kid who comes out of high school with a B average or an A average to not be able to attend college because his or her parents can't afford it." In response to liberals, Miller emphasized the public benefits achieved by increased funding for

obituary?pid=155523859; Ira Kirkpatrick, "More on the lottery," *Atlanta Constitution*, October 24, 1992.

²⁵Bobbitt, *Lottery Wars* 59-61; "'Lottery for education' is called a fraud in Florida," *Atlanta Constitution*, October 19, 1992; "'No' on the lottery,"; Gayle White, "The church vs. the lottery Deeply divided by a host of issues, denominations find a rallying point," *Atlanta Constitution*, October 26, 1992.

education. In an *Atlanta Constitution* op-ed, Miller wrote that the lottery “will help families pay for college tuition, get their kids ready to start school and make sure they have modern classrooms and equipment.” While the lottery and scholarship program had its flaws, Miller could present his policies in the same language that critics used against it, which lowered the moral high ground from where anti-lottery advocates could argue.²⁶

Miller had also designed the Georgia Lottery to avoid Florida’s mistakes, which made it even easier for him to argue in favor of the measure. First, unlike Florida, lottery revenue would not enter general treasury funds. Miller began his op-ed by specifying the exact provision that would prevent this, which read, “net proceeds shall be used to supplement, not supplant, existing resources.” Miller even took to the airways to push this narrative. Television commercials launched in October offered explained the law as an “ironclad guarantee” that would prevent misuse of lottery revenue. But the *Atlanta Constitution*’s editorial staff were still skeptical, and in their editorial, they wrote that “the law is not enshrined in stone—or in the state constitution. Georgia lawmakers can change it; they will be tempted to do so after Mr. Miller leaves office.” But the newspaper could not argue that Miller himself would allow lottery revenue to supplant funding for education, which weakened their position. Second, the Georgia Lottery would be privately-run, not administered under the governor’s office as in Florida. Although the newspaper could not attack a bloated, state-run bureaucracy before the lottery vote, the *Atlanta Constitution* did express some concern with the risk of corruption after its passage. The paper’s editorial board wrote that Miller “must be ever vigilant” to prevent corruption, but it conceded that the governor “seems to be off to a good start,” after he announced who would be assigned to

²⁶Gayle White, “Miller, a Methodist, riles church on issue,” *Atlanta Constitution*, October 24, 1992; Zell Miller, “Gov. Miller: Why Georgia needs a lottery,” *Atlanta Constitution*, October 20, 1992.

head the lottery corporation. Through the Georgia Lottery's careful design, Miller had avoided the potential pitfalls of budgetary misallocation and bureaucracy that could have sunk his agenda. He struck a middle way between conservative and liberal moralism, which shows how the New Democrats had shifted the Party toward the center in the wake of Reagan's success.²⁷

Miller's stated goals for the HOPE scholarship program also demonstrate how the New Democrats had turned rightward, but that they did so with an eye still toward economic inequality. HOPE's main goal was to increase Georgians' access to college. In his 1992 speech, Miller began explaining his future scholarship program as "the most all-inclusive scholarship program to be found in any of the fifty states, for bright students who otherwise would find it difficult to go to college." Per Miller, the cost of tuition was "soaring out of the reach [of] most of our citizens," and HOPE was intended "not only for those who are minorities or who come from lower-income families, but also those middle-income families who are devastated with the cost of education and training beyond high school." Miller wanted his scholarship to help Georgia catch up with national trends in college graduation, as the state lagged behind the 21 percent national average of residents with a college degree by age 25. Although at least 18.7 percent of Georgians had completed four or more years of college, Miller claimed that number rested around eight percent in the southern, rural part of the state, showing his concern for inequality between rural and urban areas. Even if the HOPE scholarship did not resolve economic inequality in Georgia, Miller had presented the scholarship as a way to address it.²⁸

²⁷Miller, "Gov. Miller: Why Georgia needs..."; Charles Walston, "Governor, lottery allies begin final TV ad blitz," *Atlanta Constitution*, October 14, 1992; "'No' on the lottery," "Lottery board must avoid scandal," *Atlanta Constitution*, November 29, 1992.

²⁸Zell Miller, "State of the State..." 16:50; *Ibid.*, 17:40; *Ibid.*, 18:25; *Ibid.*, 17:05; United States Bureau of the Census, "Educational Attainment in the United States: March 1991 and 1990," in *Current Population Reports P-20*, No. 462 (U.S. Government Printing Office: Washington, D.C., 1992) 83.

In the early 1990s, Miller explained his larger political thinking in terms of economic inequality. At the Democratic National Committee's 1991 Southern Caucus, Miller attacked Dukakis' and Mondale's focus on social issues instead of economic ones. He explained that the Democratic Party's strength rested in "economic populism," and that if the party wanted to start winning again, it would need to court economically anxious "Middle Americans." He reiterated this belief a year later when he delivered the University of Georgia Commencement Address in 1992. Held in mid-June, the event took place mere weeks after the Rodney King Riots in Los Angeles. But Miller did not see things that way. "Far too often race has been used to distract our attention away from the fact that the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer," Miller told those in attendance. He continued, "during the 1980s, a new economic order has been emerging in this nation that is more unequal, more divided than ever before." Not only were America's poorest suffering, so were average Americans. A month later, Miller delivered the keynote address at the 1992 Democratic National Convention, where the governor praised Bill Clinton's focus on "everyday working people." While it is fair to argue that Miller's focus on equality of opportunity may not have been the best solution to economic inequality, his rhetoric demonstrates a clear focus on the issue.²⁹

Aside from just his speeches, Miller's own experiences in college may help explain his views on its importance and on economic inequality. His father was a teacher, but he passed away shortly before Miller's birth. After graduating from Young Harris College, then a junior college, Miller briefly studied political science at Emory University, but the future governor felt

²⁹Miller, "Speech at the Democratic National Committee Southern Caucus," 435; Miller, "University of Georgia Commencement Address," 460; Zell Miller, "Keynote Address, Democratic National Convention," July 13, 1992, in *Zell: The Governor Who Gave Georgia HOPE*, by Richard Hyatt (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1997) 467.

alienated by the school's privileged culture. "A feeling of inferiority permeated my whole being," he wrote of his time at Emory, which ended after he feared running out of the partial scholarship funds that had got him there. After leaving Emory, Miller enlisted in the United States Marine Corps. Upon completion of his three years of service, he enrolled at the University of Georgia with funding from the GI Bill and odd jobs that he picked up along the way. Since Miller personally experienced economic inequality's effects on education and the transformative effect of the GI Bill, it makes sense why he would want to extend all Georgians a similar opportunity.³⁰

The second expressed goal for HOPE was the revitalization of the state's economy in the face of increased global competition, which represented the New Democrats' appropriation of Reagan's pro-growth outlook. Without education measures like HOPE, he argued that Georgians would be vulnerable in the future. "The most critical, long-term need Georgia faces is a better-educated workforce," Miller had explained in 1992. He told the General Assembly that if they wanted to ensure future economic growth in Georgia while alleviating inequality, then they must back his scholarship. Although Miller did not discuss the significance of post-secondary education to growth in that speech, he had done so in his inaugural address a year prior. He argued that while Georgia had previously been able to rely on cheap energy, industry, and agriculture, the state's future in a "new economy" would be determined by individual productivity. Two factors made the economy of the early 1990s "new" to Miller, as revealed by later speeches. First, he concluded that old-fashioned industrialization had given way to a "world of modern technolog[ies]." Such a society required higher-skilled workers to produce and design

³⁰Richard Hyatt, *Zell: The Governor Who Gave Georgia HOPE* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1997) 15-6; *Ibid.*, 80-5.

goods like microelectronics and satellites. Second, economic competition was now global in scope, and Miller explained that Georgians now battled for work “not only with Alabama and North Carolina, but with Germany and Japan.” Though these economic changes had been well underway before Miller’s time, he sought to prepare Georgia for their consequences.³¹

Some critics have misunderstood Miller’s goals as contradictory, but he did not see a conflict between promoting social equity and economic competitiveness at the same time. Michael Lanford claims that Miller’s rhetoric pivoted away from his lower-class support and toward the middle class. As the lottery referendum approached, Lanford argues, Miller began to emphasize economic growth at the expense of social equity. Specifically, Lanford says that in September 1992, he pandered to the middle class by enumerating the educational programs that the lottery would fund and by explaining them as measures to strengthen the state’s economy. But Miller had done all of this before September – he already announced his educational agenda during the State of the State Address in January, and the General Assembly had passed the Georgia Lottery for Education Act that codified his agenda in the spring. Miller had also already explained the scholarship in terms of economic competitiveness, and he had already made restoring Georgia’s economy a key part of his agenda in his Inaugural Address. These sequencing issues undermine Lanford’s argument about the shifts in Miller’s political messaging.

Lanford’s misinterpretation of Miller’s linked goals of growth and equity seep into his interpretation of the scholarship’s purpose and the significance of later cuts to the program. To

³¹Miller, “State of the State,” 17:27; *Ibid.*, 18:40; Zell Miller, “Inaugural Address,” January 14, 1991, in *Zell: The Governor Who Gave Georgia HOPE*, by Richard Hyatt (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1997) 430; Miller, “University of Georgia Commencement Address,” 462; Zell Miller, “Statewide Television Address,” August 18, 1991, in *Zell: The Governor Who Gave Georgia HOPE*, by Richard Hyatt (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1997) 454.

him, HOPE's goals were rewarding high achievement, increasing in-state college enrollment, promoting social equity, and ending intrastate "brain drain." While these were all goals of the program, Lanford misses Miller's broader appeal to revitalize Georgia's economy amidst globalization, which was one way Miller hoped to improve both equity and growth. Further, Lanford adds:

This haziness between the original goals of social equity implied by the income cap, campaign rhetoric that portrayed the scholarship as much-needed financial assistance for lower- and middle-income families, and the merit-based nature of the scholarship requirements would continue to bedevil philosophical debates about the program in future years.

While Lanford is correct that these apparent contradictions can be "bedeviling," situating Miller's speeches within the broader context of the New Democrat movement demonstrates that the governor would not have seen the tension that Lanford identifies. For Miller, preserving the state's economy in the face of change would benefit every Georgian, while the HOPE scholarship – without an income cap – would give every Georgian a chance to contribute in the state's revitalization. A 1997 interview with Miller illustrates this point. When asked if he had any concerns that HOPE benefited wealthier students and not needier ones, Miller said that he had none. He added, "What I wanted to do was help anybody who was willing to make that B-average. The beauty of the HOPE scholarship is that it's based on merit." Miller had intended for HOPE to provide all Georgians an equal opportunity to afford college, and he did not change his approach just to court middle-class voters as Lanford contends. Instead, his strategy was embedded within the centrist New Democrat movement, which left the scholarship vulnerable to future cuts that prioritized some of Miller's more conservative goals over his others. Even the

income cap that Lanford emphasizes as strictly equity-focused was instead a cost-saving measure based on a conservative estimate of lottery revenue.³²

Miller's HOPE scholarship demonstrated how New Democrats had latched onto Reagan's pro-growth, anti-government outlook while seeking to address the economic inequality it had enabled. Although Miller offered solutions based upon equality of opportunity, not of outcome, his rhetoric evinces some genuine belief that such measures would improve the lives of his constituents. More importantly, his ideas earned him victories at the ballot box at a time when Democrats were struggling to challenge the Reagan Revolution. While historians like Jonathan Cohen can dismiss HOPE as an illiberal reform, doing so ignores how the Miller and other New Democrats were confined by and responsive to a new and harsher economic reality. Worse, it downplays the significance of Georgia's drift rightward under Republican Governors Sonny Perdue and Nathan Deal, who chose to protect some of Miller's goals for the scholarship over others.

But aside from income inequality and economic changes, Miller was also concerned with Georgia's image. Miller wanted HOPE to improve the state's appearance in the public eye, especially as Atlanta's 1996 Olympic Games approached. "When the eyes of the world are on us in 1996," Miller said in his 1992 address, "I want them to see a Georgia that is thriving, vibrant, and growing toward greater prosperity. A Georgia whose young people are being educated and trained for the jobs of the future." By the late 1990s, the HOPE scholarship had helped Miller achieve that goal.³³

Chapter Two: Giving America Hope

³²Lanford, "The Political History..." 5-8; Ibid., 8; Mary Beth Marklein, "HOPE scholarship built on merit, faith," *USA Today*, November 19, 1997.

³³Miller, "State of the State..." 9:30.

Steve Lopez was born into a working-class California family in 1953. By 1985, he had become a columnist at *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, and his readers would champion him as a hero for regular Philadelphians. When he left the paper for *Time* in 1997, Ileen Cook, a local nurse, wrote in a letter to the editor that he had been “a voice for the people of Philadelphia.” In another letter, Ellen Moats, from nearby Berwyn, asked: “who will go to bat for the ordinary Janes and Joes who are getting battered by the system?”

One way that Lopez stood up for regular Philadelphians was by endorsing Georgia’s HOPE scholarship. Lopez chose to look into Miller’s signature program after President Clinton proposed its namesake tax credit in 1996. Lopez decided that he liked HOPE, and his glowing endorsement of it has become the most-quoted newspaper column about the scholarship program. “It’s the kind of thing you look at half in amazement and half in anger, and wonder why your own bonehead state didn’t think of it,” he wrote, calling for Pennsylvania to enact a similar measure. New Mexico had taken similar steps in 1996, and West Virginia and Tennessee would soon follow suit. Lopez explained that he supported HOPE because it addressed economic equality while fostering personal responsibility. “Not only does [HOPE] solve the college-expense problem for a lot of people, middle-class on down,” he wrote, “but it gives students another reason to pay attention in school.”³⁴

That Lopez tethered his concerns about inequality to students’ own responsibility reflects America’s individualist tradition. It also shows that HOPE’s popularity was embedded within

³⁴Steve Lopez, “Bringing an end to a long conversation with Philadelphia,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, January 22, 1997; Ileen Cook, “Good luck, Steve Lopez,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, January 29, 1997; Ellen Moats, “Good luck, Steve Lopez,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, January 29, 1997; Lopez, “A tuition gamble...”; Ness, *Merit Aid... 7*; Lopez, “A tuition gamble...”.

this culturally individualist ethos, which would color future expectations of what the scholarship's purpose when cuts to it became necessary.

America's individualist tradition dates back its early history. Alexis de Tocqueville, writing in the 1830s, thought that Americans tended to draw inward to solve their problems because the young nation lacked a stable aristocracy that could offer poorer Americans an alternative solution through networks of dependency. As a result, Americans saw themselves as both responsible for and in charge of their destinies. Tocqueville believed that Americans thought themselves able to climb their way out of poverty, and if they failed to do so, they would blame themselves, not their circumstances.³⁵

This individualistic ethos persisted in American popular culture. In the 19th-century Gilded Age, Horatio Alger's best-selling novels like *Ragged Dick* (1868) preserved up-from-nothing narratives in which poverty-stricken individuals changed their fortunes despite the rigid economy run by Robber Barons. During the Great Depression, self-help books like Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People* (1936) offered tips for Americans as to how they could save themselves from poverty in challenging economic times. Depression-era children's fiction like *The Little Engine that Could* (1930) taught young Americans that self-confidence and persistence could help them escape their circumstances through lines as simple as "I think I can, I think I can." Mass media reinforced these tropes, as films like *Knut Rockne, All American* (1940) presented individualist narratives on the new medium.³⁶

³⁵Jillson, *The American Dream*... 88-89; *Ibid.*, 123.

³⁶Kate Bowler, *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013) 37; Hyatt, *Zell*... 321-2; John Kennedy White, *The New Politics of Old Values*, 3rd ed. (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America), 1-23.

Those invested in cultural individualism felt threatened by an increased focus on equality of outcome in the American left in the late 1960s. With more wealth to go around in post-war America, liberals argued that traditionally excluded groups, like women and racial minorities, should have increased access to that wealth. President Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society programs sought to ensure that all Americans benefited equally from the nation's prosperity. To do so, Johnson embraced measures like affirmative action. In his 1965 commencement address at historically black Howard University, Johnson explained his reasoning for doing so: "[y]ou do not take a person who, for years, has been hobbled by chains and liberate him, bring him to the starting line of a race and then say, 'you are free to compete with all the others,' and still justly believe that you have been completely fair." To Johnson, American prosperity meant that the country could afford to prevent poverty, which was a systemic issue, not one caused by an individual's failure.³⁷

But Ronald Reagan rode the old individualist tradition to victory in 1980 as Americans became disenchanted with Johnson's Great Society. The prosperity upon which it rested had since faded during the 1970s, as Americans confronted energy crises, global competition, and rising crime rates. Americans had associated Reagan with individualism long before his presidential run, as the future president starred as the inspirational George Gipp in *Knute Rockne, All American* (1940). The film followed the football exploits of Knute Rockne, the son of a Norwegian immigrant, who had saved up his money to attend the University of Notre Dame. Rockne began his career a player for the Fighting Irish in the 1910s, but he then moved on to coach the team after his graduation. A few years later, he would coach George Gipp, or "the Gipper," an impressive freshman halfback who would tragically die after a successful season. In

³⁷Jillson, *The American Dream*... 210-2; Ibid, 193-6.

his memory, Rockne's Fighting Irish would fulfill Gipp's deathbed wish that they "win one for the Gipper." Americans identified Reagan's character with individualist values like hard work, which Reagan emphasized in his 1980 presidential campaign.³⁸

Reagan contested the liberal assumption that the government had a role to play in preventing poverty, arguing instead that governments should not pick winners and losers. He asserted the value of American individualism during the period of post-war prosperity. However, the staggering American economy and threats on the streets gave his words new urgency in the 1970s and 80s. Personal responsibility offered a solution to both issues, as hard-working Americans also spurned lives of crime. Voters embraced Reagan, and he won two elections in landslide fashion as the American economy began to turn around. Reagan's job approval rating rested at or above 60 percent for most of his second term, and his Vice President, George H.W. Bush, would continue his legacy by beating Michael Dukakis in 1988.³⁹

The renewed cultural value of individualism in the 1990s could be felt in more than just the public's embrace of the HOPE scholarship. White Americans embraced talk radio shows like Rush Limbaugh's program because he ardently defended individualist "Middle-American" values. Meanwhile, Oprah Winfrey turned to Marianne Williamson's spiritualism to remake her show. Williamson, herself an advisor to Hillary Clinton, held that "individual thought[s]," which "determine[d] the experiences of our lives," had been corrupted by the media's negative, "societal thought forms." In other words, individuals needed to break free from negative collective thoughts to move forward. The individualist assumptions that underpinned their

³⁸White, *The New Politics...* 1-23.

³⁹Jillson, *The American Dream* 225-30; "Presidential Approval Ratings – Gallup Historical Statistics and Trends," *Gallup*, n.d., <https://news.gallup.com/poll/116677/presidential-approval-ratings-gallup-historical-statistics-trends.aspx>.

success paralleled the wage stagnation most Americans felt during the period – as communications scholar Janice Peck argues, Americans “turn to self-improvement literature... in times of despair.” Although the American economy grew during the Reagan era, so did the income inequality – when the economy nosed downward in the early 1990s, self-help had even more appeal. Although economic circumstances had improved somewhat by the mid-1990s, the individualist moment persisted.⁴⁰

HOPE’s immense popularity in the 1990s demonstrates its links to the period’s individualist sentiment. The Georgian and national press offer insight into the scope of HOPE’s popularity. After the scholarship’s passage, local reception in Georgia was mostly positive, and its popularity only increased as Miller expanded the scholarship based on the lottery’s financial success. The *Atlanta Constitution*, once critical of Miller’s agenda, conceded that the governor should be “justifiably proud” of the scholarship by November 1994. The scholarship gained national attention in the summer of 1996 when fellow New Democrat Bill Clinton proposed a similar policy at the federal level.⁴¹

Publications across the country picked up the story, and while they remained lukewarm toward Clinton’s proposals, columnists like Steve Lopez lavished Miller’s scholarship with praise, and other states continued to enact similarly structured legislation. While such programs remained popular in the press and among voters, some liberals still criticized the scholarship program and the lottery that funded it, but most voters and lawmakers dismissed their viewpoints. Lanford attributes this silencing to a ‘Halo’ effect that prevented critical examination

⁴⁰Brian Rosenwald, *Talk Radio’s America: How an Industry Took Over a Political Party That Took Over the United States* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press: 2019) 31-5; Peck, *The Age of Oprah...* 4-5; McGee, *Self-Help, Inc.*, 11-7.

⁴¹“Miller’s next four years,” *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, November 9, 1994; Peter Applebome, “Aid Plan That Inspired Clinton Is a Success,” *The New York Times*, June 6, 1996.

of the scholarship. In turn, he argues that this effect allowed liberal concerns to materialize as the Georgia Lottery's revenue dried up.⁴²

Even though the lottery passed by a narrow 52-48 margin, the HOPE scholarship earned popular acclaim in Georgia. Miller won re-election in 1994 with help from the scholarship's popularity, and the Atlanta Urban League would give him an award for his work on the scholarship, which they deemed "the best example of affirmative action in education" in 1997. The scholarship's popularity in Georgia can be best felt through positive coverage of the program and Miller himself in the state's press.

First, the *Atlanta Constitution's* staff editorials began to look at hope more favorably, and they embraced its merit-based nature. While the *Constitution* had merged with the *Atlanta Journal* in 1982, the two organizations' editorial pages continued to operate separately. Cynthia Tucker served as the *Constitution's* editorial page editor, while Jim Wooten had her job at the *Journal*. As the Georgia Lottery's revenue grew and Miller extended the scholarship to more students in 1994 and 1995, the newspapers endorsed Miller for governor. The *Constitution's* editorial board named the HOPE scholarship his "crowning achievement," and they credited his understanding of the working class. "Miller understands working people," they wrote, "he knows what it's like to grow up poor, work hard, go to school, raise a family," and they praised the fact he tied government assistance to responsibility. The *Journal* was far more lukewarm to Miller, while the paper endorsed Miller in his primary race, they complained that "Georgians deserve more than just a lottery rerun," after his victory. In a column published two days later, Wooten complained that Miller and his Republican opponent were so politically similar that "only accent

⁴²Lopez, "A tuition gamble..." *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 3, 1996; Susan Dynarski, "Hope for Whom? Financial Aid for the Middle Class and its Impact on College Attendance," in *National Tax Journal* 53, no. 3 (2002) 629-663; Lanford, "The Political History..." 10-17.

distinguishes them.” The *Journal* even endorsed the Republican over Miller, one of the few major Georgia newspapers to do so.⁴³

The *Atlanta Constitution*'s editorial staff called out HOPE's flaws where they saw them, but their coverage of the scholarship remained mostly positive. More importantly, the issues that they chose to criticize showed how they had embraced the scholarship's merit-based structure. In September 1994, the *Constitution* argued that students should have a second chance if their grades dropped, but they conceded that HOPE was a “marvelous thing” regardless. When Miller proposed a second-chance pathway for students to earn the scholarship back after a year of paying their way, the *Constitution* concluded that he made the right decision. In January and November 1995, the newspaper attacked a loophole through which students at private colleges could retain their scholarships even without maintaining a B-average. When Miller and the General Assembly closed the loophole early in 1996, they wrote that Miller “deserve[d] applause,” because “giving students a false sense that merit is the same as mediocrity is cheating them and us.” And in May 1995, the newspaper argued that the number of HOPE scholars in remedial class meant that the program “often reward[ed] mediocrity.” The editorial concluded that without better standards, including ones that would assign more difficult courses more weight in GPA calculation, students would only learn that the minimum effort could have the same results as hard work. The *Constitution* also praised Miller's decision to abolish the income cap in 1995, as even though 95 percent of Georgians were eligible before its removal, “the policy would show that our state recognizes that higher education is almost a necessity in today's

⁴³“The Constitution Endorses Governor,” *Atlanta Constitution*, October 25, 1994; “Georgians deserve more than just a lottery rerun,” *Atlanta Journal*, August 10, 1994; Jim Wooten, “Look-Alike Campaigns: Which one of these guys is the Republican?” *Atlanta Journal*, August 12, 1994; Charles Walston, “Miller gets thumbs up from more major papers,” *Atlanta Constitution*, November 1, 1994.

world.” Although the newspaper once railed against Miller’s lottery, it championed the merit scholarship that it funded.⁴⁴

Readers of the *Atlanta Constitution* expressed their support for Miller’s scholarship as well, and they did so through letters to the editor. Recent college graduate and Georgia transplant Amy Walden praised HOPE for helping students attend college while “encourag[ing] personal responsibility.” Current Georgia State senior Andrea Crawford wrote that she was “sick and tired” of complaints from students about retaining HOPE. “HOPE is a privilege reserved for those students who can maintain a B average,” she wrote, “so close your mouth, crack open those books, and study!” In response to the private school loophole, Justin M. Ducote wrote that “I think only those students who do well in class should be allowed to get money from the HOPE program.” Ducote was 13 years old at the time. Terry Cullen, a car dealership owner from Morrow, Georgia, wrote that by 1996, Georgia had become a model for other states. When he told people from out-of-state about HOPE, he said, “people are amazed.” Georgians lavished praise upon the HOPE scholarship in individualist terms. While some letters to the editor acknowledged the scholarship’s ability to bolster the state’s economy and to improve college access, most of their praise concentrated upon how the scholarship program required individual effort from students to maintain, and why hard work was a good skill for them to develop.⁴⁵

⁴⁴“Keep HOPE standards, but give a second chance,” *Atlanta Constitution*, September 7, 1994; “Give Georgia more HOPE,” *Atlanta Constitution*, December 18, 1994; “All students receiving aid should have a B average,” *Atlanta Constitution*, January 20, 1995; “Inequity in tuition aid,” *Atlanta Constitution*, November 6, 1995; “Give Georgia more HOPE...”.

⁴⁵Amy Walden, “Lottery scholarships a wonderful godsend” *Atlanta Constitution*, October 6, 1994; Andrea Cranford, “Stop whining,” *Atlanta Constitution*, September 15, 1994; Justin M. Ducote, “HOPE Should be a Reward,” *Atlanta Constitution*, November 23, 1995; Terry Cullen, “Schools deserve money,” *Atlanta Constitution*, March. 14, 1996.

That said, some prescient criticism came through in other letters to the editor. Marietta businesswoman Clarissa Windham complained about Miller's "obvious pandering to his middle-class constituents," attacking his proposal to raise HOPE's income cap to \$100,000. "Perhaps the middle class should consider making sacrifices for their children instead of thinking that the government owes them because they pay taxes," she wrote. Windham broke with the overwhelming pro-HOPE consensus, but her arguments would foreshadow those of academics who would research the scholarship in the late 1990s and early 2000s. For all the good HOPE purportedly did, the quick repeal of the income cap tied it to the already college-bound upper-middle class.⁴⁶

Praise for Miller and his scholarship extended to smaller Georgia newspapers as well. Before the 1994 election, just about every local newspaper of record endorsed the Democrat, from smaller city papers like the *Augusta Chronicle* and the *Macon Telegraph* to more rural ones like the *Valdosta Daily Times* and the *Walker County Messenger*. Although the *Augusta Chronicle* listed the scholarship after Miller's achievements in state finances and taxes, it called the program his "crown jewel," commending him "not only... for initiating HOPE, but for holding it to a responsible standard." The *Macon Telegraph's* endorsement lauded Miller for "[bringing] Georgia forward without betraying the state's essentially conservative nature." In the *Rome News-Tribune*, its editorial staff wrote that HOPE made Georgia "the only state in the Union that guarantees all its young people that if they work hard and have ability they can go to college." Miller earned similar praise in the pages of at least nine other Georgia newspapers, including the University of Georgia's *Red and Black*, the *Albany Herald*, and the *Times in Gainesville*. Local newspapers routinely praised Miller for his fiscal responsibility and for the

⁴⁶Clarissa Windham, "Real work at hand," *Atlanta Constitution*, January 19., 1994.

hard work that his HOPE scholarship fostered, in line with the prevailing individualist sentiment that characterized most other praise of the scholarship.⁴⁷

By the 1996-1997 school year, Miller's scholarship had achieved positive policy results to national acclaim. That year, 124,000 students received HOPE scholarships through \$159 million in appropriated lottery revenue. Both Republicans and Democrats acknowledged the program's popularity among the public. Miller explained that its popularity was a result of its visibility. "It's something that families and parents can see and touch and understand," he told the *New York Times*, "When families sit around the kitchen table, they're not talking about gays in the military or prayer in school. They're talking about things like whether they can afford to send Junior to college." Merle Black, then a professor of political science at Emory University, labeled the scholarship a "political masterwork." The *New York Times* acknowledged those who called HOPE regressive, but it concluded that "there has been little controversy over who pays

⁴⁷"Miller for Georgia Governor," *Augusta Chronicle*, October 30, 1994, Series IV, Subseries A, Box 35, Folder 18, The Zell Miller Papers, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, the University of Georgia; "A Vote of Confidence for a 'One-Term; Governor," *Macon Telegraph*, October 30, 1994, Series IV, Subseries A, Box 35, Folder 18, The Zell Miller Papers, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, the University of Georgia; "Miller better choice for state governor," *Valdosta Daily Times*, October 19, 1994, Series IV, Subseries A, Box 35, Folder 18, The Zell Miller Papers, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, the University of Georgia; "Miller for governor," *Walker County Messenger*, October 19, 1994, Series IV, Subseries A, Box 35, Folder 18, The Zell Miller Papers, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, the University of Georgia; "Miller for Georgia Governor,"; "A Vote of Confidence..."; "Miller for Governor," *Rome News-Tribune*, October 9, 1994, Series IV, Subseries A, Box 35, Folder 18, The Zell Miller Papers, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, the University of Georgia; "University should support HOPE by backing Miller," *The Red and Black*, November 3, 1994, Series IV, Subseries A, Box 35, Folder 18, The Zell Miller Papers, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, the University of Georgia; "Miller deserves another term," *Albany Herald*, November 4, 1994, Series IV, Subseries A, Box 35, Folder 18, The Zell Miller Papers, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, the University of Georgia; "Zell Miller needs a second term," *The Times in Gainesville*, October 19, 1994, Series IV, Subseries A, Box 35, Folder 18, The Zell Miller Papers, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, the University of Georgia.

for the program and who benefits.” The praise that HOPE had earned in Georgia led New Democrat President Bill Clinton to propose the Hope scholarship tax credit, which would provide parents with a \$1,500 write-off if their children were enrolled in college. His proposal catapulted Miller’s HOPE scholarship to the national stage.⁴⁸

From mid-1996 to 1997, HOPE earned increased praise across America, and Miller was even declared “America’s Education Governor” in 1996. The states that pursued similar legislation at this time and the positive news narrative that media organizations conveyed about HOPE further demonstrate the scholarship’s popularity. First, other states sought to capitalize on HOPE’s popularity, just as Clinton was trying to do. Florida moved to restructure its state lottery to fund a similar scholarship program in 1996, creating the “Bright Futures” scholarship in 1997. New Mexico created a merit-only scholarship for students with at least a 2.5 grade-point average in 1996. In February 1997, the Texas legislature had some HOPE-inspired programs on its legislative docket, and in Colorado, the state legislature was considering reallocating lottery funds to education programs. Michael Jones, a lottery consultant hired by Texas, concluded that the public made up its mind about what revenues should fund based on a series of focus groups. “The one thing where everybody came together with heat and fire is where Texas lottery money should go,” he told *USA Today*, “they want it to go to education.” But not all of these merit scholarship programs were to be lottery-funded. Mississippi created its Eminent Scholars Program in 1996 with general treasury funds, and Louisiana would take similar steps two years later.⁴⁹

⁴⁸Applebome, “Aid Plan That Inspired...”

⁴⁹Lanford, “The Political History...” 17; Haya El Nasser, “Ga. lottery's school fund a trendsetter: Other states also directing proceeds to education,” *USA Today*, February 18, 1997; Donald E Heller, “State Merit Scholarship Programs: An Overview,” in *State Merit Scholarship*

Second, the national news media framed Miller's HOPE scholarship in a positive light. Like the *Philadelphia Inquirer's* Steve Lopez and other columnists, news writers and anchors praised HOPE. The *New York Times* dubbed Miller's scholarship "a success" in the article that detailed Clinton's proposal, and the paper minimized the scope of disagreement around the program. On CNN, based in Atlanta, gave the scholarship similarly generous coverage. Correspondent Russ Jamieson told viewers that "anyone with a high school B average can go to college with the state picking up the tab," and he spoke to several Georgians who also praised the program. HOPE Scholar Carolyn Sheppard told him that "if they didn't have the HOPE then I'd be paying out of my pocket, because my mother she wouldn't be able to afford it." Jamieson only identified one issue with the scholarship, the risk of grade inflation, but he dismissed such fears because "researchers plan to track grades and SAT scores just in case." The ease with which CNN could do so reflects the "halo effect" that Lanford describes.⁵⁰

National Public Radio also painted Miller's scholarship in a similarly positive light. The radio station talked to Glenn Newsome, head of Georgia's Student Finance Commission, who argued that the scholarship had increased students' academic competitiveness. Unlike CNN, the station acknowledged that some students lost their scholarships due to poor academic performance. To do so, the station told the story of Justin Knepp. Knepp had lost HOPE, but he had earned it back after he "learned how to keep a B average in the future." By emphasizing the scholarship's ability to teach students personal responsibility, the brief NPR segment demonstrates the link between HOPE and individualism that helped make it so popular.⁵¹

Programs and Racial Inequality, ed. Donald E. Heller and Patricia Marin, (Cambridge: The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University, 2004) 16.

⁵⁰"Hope Scholarship in Georgia Allows Many to Attend College," *CNN*, February 6, 1997.

⁵¹"HOPE Scholarship," *National Public Radio*, February 5, 1997.

Networks loved Miller's scholarship, even though they did not feel the same way about Clinton's tax credit. For example, ABC's anchor labeled its effect "dramatic," concluding that "[t]he program has raised both standards and aspirations and proven that educators, parents and students can win the lottery." Despite ABC's praise for HOPE, the network distinguished Miller's scholarship from Clinton's tax credit on the grounds that "the Georgia college plan doesn't cost taxpayers a dime." NBC added to the major networks' praise of HOPE. In a report on state lotteries, reporter Stan Bernard concluded that "Georgia is showing the way" when it came to focusing lottery money on education, as the HOPE scholarship had opened college up to low-income and first-generation students. The positive narrative the media constructed demonstrated HOPE's national popularity, but the aspects that networks chose to emphasize revealed their individualist leanings. While they emphasized increased access to college under HOPE, they praised Miller for finding a way to do so while teaching students responsibility – all without burdening taxpayers or bloating the state government. In arguing that HOPE was a preferable measure because it inculcated personal accountability without imposing a burden on taxpayers, the two networks' coverage reveals how individualist and anti-welfarist expectations of responsibility were projected onto the government at this time.⁵²

Despite its popularity, HOPE began to receive criticism in the late 1990s and early 2000s. When Alabama proposed a lottery and scholarship modeled on Georgia's HOPE program in 1999, Cynthia Tucker urged Alabama to "pay for students' college costs without conning poor people." That said, Tucker did not criticize HOPE's results in Georgia, and she conceded the scholarship was "enormously popular." Blunt criticism of HOPE only came from academics, not

⁵²"Georgia's Hope Scholarship Program," *ABC News*, June 4, 1996; "Georgia Model For Using Lottery Money for Education," *NBC News*, January 8, 1997.

from journalists, and usually not from Georgians. In 1999, Swarthmore College's Thomas S. Dee published one of the first studies that critically examined the scholarship program. He approached the scholarship on its own terms from a meritocratic angle. He sought to identify what kinds of students were most and least likely to lose their scholarship by failing to maintain a B-average, and he found that differences did not correspond to ethnicity or race, but rather students' program of study. He argued that the scholarship's uniform B-average requirement penalized students for taking challenging coursework, especially those enrolled in science, engineering, and computer science. Although Dew was critical of HOPE, he remained optimistic that small reforms to the program could resolve his issues.⁵³

However, an onslaught of less optimistic critiques that rejected the scholarship's individualist premises followed Dee's article, although they would not affect policy change in Georgia. The first came in 2000 when then-Harvard public policy professor Susan Dynarski published "Hope for Whom? Financial Aid for the Middle Class and Its Impact on College Attendance." She criticized merit scholarships for breaking from the formula of need-based aid programs while disproportionately benefiting privileged students. Dynarski rebuffed Clinton's tax credit and statewide merit scholarship programs as "aimed squarely at middle- and high-income families" despite the equal opportunity rhetoric in which politicians had couched their support for such policies. She argued that HOPE had actually widened the racial and economic gaps in post-secondary education by using data from the Current Population Survey, which showed an increase in white enrollment relative to other southeastern states, but no such increase

⁵³Cynthia Tucker, "The Alabama Lottery: Pay for students' college costs without conning poor people," *Atlanta Constitution*, October 17, 1999; Thomas S. Dee and Linda A. Jackson, "Who Loses HOPE? Attrition from Georgia's College Scholarship Program," *Southern Economic Journal* 66, no. 2 (1999): 389-90.

in black enrollment. If HOPE and other merit-aid programs failed to achieve results in social equity, Dynarski questioned what their purpose was beyond pandering to the middle-class.⁵⁴

Similar critiques of HOPE followed Dynarski's article. In December 2001, Harvard University's Civil Rights Project sponsored a symposium about state merit aid programs, and it produced papers that were critical of them. Harvard Professors of Education Donald E. Heller and Patricia Marin edited the collection of papers, which were then published as "Who Should We Help? The Negative Social Consequences of Merit Scholarships." Heller wrote the first chapter, in which he warned that the programs "do little to provide financial assistance to the students who need it most." Three of the volume's later chapters focused squarely upon HOPE. First, Christopher Cornwell and David B. Mustard, a pair of University of Georgia economists, argued that HOPE was stratifying the state's public universities. Instead of promoting college access, HOPE mostly affected the schools that already college-bound students from Georgia chose to attend. And if earning spots at Georgia's flagship state colleges became more competitive, the students with the fewest resources could be crowded out. While Cornwell and Mustard conceded that HOPE had improved the enrollment rates of both black and white students at the state's colleges, they noted a downturn in black student enrollment at the University of Georgia and an increase of that rate at schools deemed "less competitive" by Barron's Selectivity Index. Even if the HOPE scholarship had given each student an equal opportunity to attend college, it did nothing to address both the inequality within the college

⁵⁴ Dynarski, "Hope for Whom? Financial Aid for the Middle Class and its Impact on College Attendance," in *National Tax Journal* 53, no. 3 (2000) 630-663.

application process and the unequal outcomes that students would reach through different post-secondary institutions.⁵⁵

In the second paper about HOPE, Susan Dynarski expanded upon her prior critique of HOPE's racially disproportionate results, broadening it to include income. Dynarski concluded that HOPE had little impact on poor or black youth by again using statistics from the Current Population Survey. She updated the conclusions she had drawn about race in 2000 with newer data, but her conclusions about income were new. She explained that HOPE's poor results for low-income students could have been because students from families who earned less than \$50,000 per year were required to file for federal financial aid, which complicated the process. In addition, Georgia subtracted federal grants from lower-income students' HOPE scholarships until 2001, which would have reduced the amount that these students received from the program. Dynarski also suggested that lower-income students' statistical unlikelihood to achieve a B-average and a reduction in state spending on need-based aid could be other proximate causes. Further, Dynarski examined tuition at Georgia's public schools, and she found that it had increased faster than the national rate after the HOPE scholarship's creation. Harvard Professor of Education and Economics Bridget Terry Long also wrote this trend in the volume's third chapter on HOPE, and she found that every \$1 of HOPE aid translated to a \$.09 increase in tuition at public four-year colleges, and a \$.12 increase at public four-year colleges with high levels of HOPE scholars. Since HOPE was already harder to earn for low-income and minority

⁵⁵Donald E. Heller, "State Merit Aid Programs: An Introduction," in *Who Should We Help? The Negative Social Consequences of Merit Scholarships*, ed. Donald E. Heller and Patricia Marin, (Cambridge: The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University, 2002) 21; David B. Mustard and Christopher Cornwell, "Race and the Effects of Georgia's HOPE Scholarship," in *Who Should We Help? The Negative Social Consequences of Merit Scholarships*, ed. Donald E. Heller and Patricia Marin, (Cambridge: The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University, 2002) 59-71.

students, these tuition hikes made college even less accessible if they failed to earn the scholarship. With these findings in mind, Dynarski concluded that “Georgia [had] stacked the deck against low-income youth,” instead of offering them an equal opportunity to succeed.⁵⁶

Although Miller’s scholarship had once earned praised for promoting equal opportunities to Georgia’s students, research began to cast doubt upon such assumptions. Harvard Education Professor Patricia Marin wrote that “the original intent of providing publicly funded scholarships to increase access to higher education has gone awry,” but the paper’s findings achieved few effects in Georgia. In 2003, a University of Georgia poll showed 80 percent of Georgians continued to support HOPE, and the state legislature would not enact measures to correct for any issues the scholars had identified. That HOPE’s positive legacy continued despite such damning criticism demonstrates the significance of its individualist roots. If HOPE had been a redistributive policy, officials would have called it a failure. But because the scholarship was intended to give some students a chance at college while rewarding all students’ hard work and improving the state’s economy, it could remain popular despite these flaws.⁵⁷

HOPE’s popularity across Georgia and the United States reflected America’s individualist tradition. Since the nation’s founding, American culture has framed people as powerful enough to change their circumstances. After American politics began to shift away

⁵⁶Susan Dynarski, “Race, Income, and the Impact of Merit Aid,” in *Who Should We Help? The Negative Social Consequences of Merit Scholarships*, ed. Donald E. Heller and Patricia Marin, (Cambridge: The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University, 2002) 75-81; Bridget Terry Long, “Do State Financial Aid Programs Cause Colleges To Raise Prices? The Case Of The Georgia HOPE Scholarship,” in *Who Should We Help? The Negative Social Consequences of Merit Scholarships*, ed. Donald E. Heller and Patricia Marin, (Cambridge: The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University, 2002) 104-5; Dynarski, “Race, Income...” 87.

⁵⁷Patricia Marin, “Merit Scholarships and the Outlook for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education,” in *Who Should We Help? The Negative Social Consequences of Merit Scholarships*, ed. Donald E. Heller and Patricia Marin, (Cambridge: The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University, 2002) 59-71; Bobbitt, *Lottery Wars...* 77.

from this principle during the Johnson Administration, the cultural trope rebounded during the Reagan Era, and Miller's HOPE scholarship became embedded within that legacy. HOPE gained statewide and national popularity for rewarding hard work while purportedly assuring equal access to college. While liberal critics pointed out that HOPE did little to promote social equity as intended, their arguments failed to overcome its popularity or to influence public policy.

Conclusion

Nineteen years after Miller rose before the state legislature to present the HOPE scholarship, Stacey Evans stood up to defend it. "We have little girls growing up in Ringgold who are going to be hurt by these cuts," she warned the legislature. At the session, lawmakers considered two changes to HOPE proposed by Gov. Nathan Deal. First, Deal's plan would reduce the B-average scholarship to "HOPE Lite," a lottery-pegged, partial scholarship that would only cover partial percent tuition the next year. The amount it covered could even tick downward should demand increase. In 2011, HOPE Lite would have forced recipients at Georgia State University to fork over \$1,800 to cover the difference. Second, Deal's plan would create the new full-tuition Zell Miller Scholarship for students who earned at least a 3.7 GPA and a 1200 SAT score out of existing lottery revenue. Only after pressure from Evans, Democratic Sen. Jason Carter and rural Senate Republicans did Deal include a clause ensuring that HOPE extended to all of Georgia's high school valedictorians and salutatorians. While Georgia's dire economic straits could justify the cuts to some lawmakers, that they chose to make the scholarship harder to earn, instead of ensuring that it remained accessible, demonstrates how the scholarship's individualist roots had left it vulnerable.⁵⁸

⁵⁸Maureen Downey, "The Politics of HOPE," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, March 21, 2011; Evans, "Interview with Stacey Evans."

Funding problems had forced Georgia to scale back the HOPE program once before, back in 2004. These cuts pushed the scholarship in a more merit-based direction, but while they did not re-impose the income cap, they also did not impose an SAT requirement. They came after other states like Tennessee created lottery-funded programs similar to Georgia's HOPE scholarship. Because more folks could stay in their home states to play the numbers, the Georgia Lottery's revenue began to decline. Republican Gov. Sonny Perdue designated a state commission to investigate how to preserve the program, and the commission presented their findings late in 2003. They advised legislators to condition the scholarship upon a 3.0 GPA in students' core courses, instead of a B-average. The proposal included math, English, social studies, science, and foreign languages among core classes, and its higher standards would disqualify one-third of students. The commission explicitly declined to recommend a re-institution of the income cap.

In addition to what the commission had recommended, Perdue advised lawmakers to create an SAT requirement, and the 14 of the commission's 20 members endorsed the idea. But his proposal received fierce opposition from black lawmakers. State Rep. Tyrone Brooks, from Atlanta, argued that "[we] are absolutely opposed to any link between HOPE and the SAT," and he promised to fight against it. Had the scholarship come with an SAT requirement of 1000 in 2000, two-thirds of eligible black students would not have qualified, compared to one-third of white students. But in 2004, lawmakers set the precedent that the way to fix HOPE was to reduce the number of eligible students based on merit, paving the way for Nathan Deal's 2011 cuts.⁵⁹

⁵⁹Lanford, "The Political History..." 12-3; James Salzer, "HOPE's retooling can save \$1 billion," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, November 14, 2003; Andrea Jones, "HOPE Scholarship: Numbers confirm it: Big cuts can't wait," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, January 11, 2004.

The cuts to Miller's scholarship program occurred alongside large-scale cuts to Georgia's public university system. In the early 2000s, funding fell from just under \$16,000 per full-time student to around \$10,000 per full-time student. These cuts briefly paused until the 2008 recession, after which funding per full-time student fell to \$7,000. With added fiscal constraints and less governmental support for higher education, the state government prioritized economic recovery over educational quality and access.⁶⁰

Since then, scholarship support has become disproportionately out of reach for low-income and minority Georgians. In 2016, the Georgia Budget and Policy Institute researched who was receiving HOPE, similar to what Harvard's Civil Rights Project had done several years prior. They found that low-income students receive just 21 percent of Zell Miller scholarships and 43 percent of "HOPE-Lite" scholarships, even though they make up 48 percent of Georgia's undergraduate students. While 78 percent of Zell Miller scholars are white, white students count for only 54 percent of Georgia's undergraduate enrollment. And only 20 percent of black students qualify for either the HOPE or the Zell Miller scholarships. While lawmakers were justified in cutting costs to preserve the program, HOPE's strong legacy of individualism made it easier for them to scale back Miller's program based on merit, not need.⁶¹

The most apparent connection between Miller's HOPE scholarship and the individualism integral to understanding it may rest on some Georgian families' bookshelves. In 1996, Miller ordered 60,000 copies of *The Little Engine that Could* for Georgia's pre-kindergartners, a book his mother had read to him as a child. He asked the publisher if they could include a personal

⁶⁰Jennifer Lee, "Georgia Higher Education Budget Primer for State Fiscal Year 2018," *Georgia Budget and Policy Institute*, July 12, 2017, <https://gbpi.org/2017/georgia-higher-education-budget-primer-state-fiscal-year-2018/>.

⁶¹Claire Suggs, "Troubling Gaps in HOPE Point to Need-based Solutions," *Georgia Budget Policy Institute*, September 2016.

message from him, and they agreed. “I believe persistence is an instinct with which all babies are born,” Miller wrote. “Unfortunately, society conditions us by the time of adolescence to equate ‘failing’ with ‘quitting’ and quitting is life’s greatest failure, bar none,” he continued, “that is why the lesson in this story of continuing to try is so important.” Through his education initiatives, Miller, who had dropped out of Emory University only to graduate from the University of Georgia and become governor, worked to ensure that all Georgians had equal opportunities to the ones that he had.⁶²

The HOPE scholarship is best understood through individualism, as it colored Miller’s goals for the scholarship as well as public expectations for it. Miller exploited individualism’s revival in the Democratic Party as seen through the New Democrat movement, and the public embraced New Democrats because of that rightward shift. That the program emerged in this context also allowed future lawmakers to more easily change it in ways that superficially preserved its premise of equal opportunity while decreasing access for large swaths of Georgians. Because most Georgians saw HOPE as a reward for high-achieving students, not an entitlement, the state could raise academic standards with minimal backlash for how those changes affected access.

Present-day debates about HOPE, whether they take place between the state Democratic Party or in the pages of national newspapers, would benefit from grappling with HOPE’s individualist baggage. For those concerned with Miller’s intentions, individualism offers insight into how the scholarship fell apart over time. Instead of “killing liberalism” at its inception, HOPE declined from a good faith but imperfect measure to promote educational access into a program that helped mostly middle-class students after Miller’s two terms in office. Both

⁶²Hyatt, *Zell*... 320-322.

Miller's rhetorical framing of the program and the terms in which the public embraced it tied HOPE to America's individualist tradition. Miller benefited from this relationship in the 1990s, and his lottery-funded scholarship may have never been created if he failed to embrace individualism. Unfortunately, this connection also created vulnerabilities that later officials would exploit. And only understanding the scholarship in this way offers explains why liberal criticism of HOPE failed to change policy and to reduce the program's popularity among Georgians. For those concerned with promoting educational access, a new need-based aid program might offer a better alternative. Such a policy would be a way around the precedent that the best way to preserve HOPE is to make it more challenging to earn in ways that disproportionately affected lower-income and minority students.

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