Science and Society in the Early Career of H.F. Verwoerd

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The early career of Hendrik Frensch Verwoerd has rarely received either scholarly or political attention. Yet the period between 1924, when he was awarded a PhD in Psychology at Stellenbosch, and 1936, when left academia to become editor of Die Transvaler, was critical in providing him with the organisational and political experience that later made him so successful as a National Party politician and administrator. Equally important, Verwoerd was neither a strident Afrikaner nationalist nor a doctrinaire white supremacist during these years. He played a central role in the campaign against white Afrikaner poverty in the 1930s and sought to encourage joint English-Afrikaner co-operation in this work. He was also instrumental in shaping the early South African social welfare movement, where he drew heavily on American experience and research. These activities, combined with his ambition and energy, gave him both the prominence and the platform for launching his political career after 1936.

In the lead editorial of the first issue of Die Transvaler in 1937, H.F. Verwoerd announced that the paper would ‘Serve a people by making the voice of true and sublime nationalism resound wherever that voice can reach.’ Verwoerd had just moved to the Transvaal to become chief editor of the newly formed paper, after having spent nearly two decades at the University of Stellenbosch as both student and professor. His move to the north involved more than a change in careers, however. It also signalled a radical break with many of the social and political positions he had previously advocated. The nationalism Verwoerd espoused as a newspaper editor differed considerably from the nationalism he promoted as an academic. In this, as in other significant areas, the disjuncture between the positions he took in his early and his later careers raises new questions about the nature and sources of his political beliefs.

This paper examines Verwoerd’s social and political beliefs in the context of his early career. Specifically, it assesses his activities from 1924, when he received his doctorate in psychology at the University of Stellenbosch, to 1936, when D.F. Malan, the head of the Gesuiwerde Nasionale Party (Purified National Party), offered Verwoerd the position of chief editor of the Party’s new newspaper, Die Transvaler.

There are several reasons for looking closely at Verwoerd’s career during this period. First, there has been little serious scholarship on his early life. Because Verwoerd became so influential in South African political life after 1948 and because his political legacy of apartheid dominated the country’s history after his death, his influence continues to be perceived in terms of contemporary politics rather than history. Most historical studies of Verwoerd have tended to focus on his activities during the 1950s and 1960s, when he was a powerful politician, rather than critically examining his activities over the full course of his life.

Just as Verwoerd’s policies have remained politically controversial long after his death, so too the historical scholarship on Verwoerd has been highly politicised. Those who share his politics have tended to produce works that show uncritical and unidimensional admiration for Verwoerd, and those who oppose him tend to produce equally uncritical and unidimensional condemnation. Thus on one side, we have the laudatory and lengthy entry on Verwoerd in the Dictionary of South African Biography by his student Erika Theron and others and the hagiography by G.D. Scholtz, Dr Hendrik Frensch Verwoerd, 1901-1966. Painting an entirely different portrait is Verwoerd, a critical biography by the leader of the South African Labour Party, Alexander Hepple, and Architect of Apartheid: H.F. Verwoerd — An Appraisal by Henry Kenney. Whether supporting or attacking Verwoerd, these historical examinations slide quickly over his early life. When they discuss his career prior to his entering politics, it is generally to search for the roots of his later policies and for the personal characteristics he showed as a politician. Given this orientation, his biographers, not surprisingly, find that both Verwoerd’s politics and his ideologies were remarkably consistent throughout his life.

2 This paper is part of a broader study of the role of the social sciences in the development of Afrikaner political nationalism and apartheid. I have benefitted greatly from the comments of many people in writing this paper. Terence O. Ranger, Stanley Trapido, and Dian Joubert were particularly generous in providing guidance. I received assistance in translations from the Afrikaans from Milde Weiss Jordaan, Alasdair Ruiters, and Laetitia Combrink; any errors in translation, however, are my responsibility.

A related problem introduced by the political cast of much of the Verwoerd scholarship is that this work frequently substitutes assumptions for evidence. Verwoerd’s early intentions are inferred from his subsequent activities, and he is often quoted out of context to demonstrate the connections between his early and later beliefs. For example, Verwoerd’s public statements in the early 1930s are selectively mined to prove his consistent Afrikaner nationalism and his enduring support for apartheid-like policies. This tendency to read backwards from the later to the early Verwoerd takes place regardless of the political perspective of those writing about Verwoerd.

A second reason for looking at Verwoerd’s early career is that historians have begun to question the monolithic interpretation of his political beliefs. Both Posel in her recent book, *The Making of Apartheid, 1948-1961*, and Lazar in his doctoral dissertation suggest that there was no overarching blueprint for grand apartheid during the 1950s and that Verwoerd and others shaped apartheid in response to conflicts within the party and the bureaucracy. Similarly, Ashforth argues that Verwoerd had no plans for implementing the recommendations of the Tomlinson Commission, which was formally charged with recommending social and economic policies for the ‘homelands’ under apartheid. These interpretations raise questions about the conventional view that Verwoerd was a consistent ideologue. Wilhelm Verwoerd, in an Oxford B.A. Honours thesis that reviews this literature, calls him instead a ‘principled pragmatist.’

Finally, a historical examination of Verwoerd’s early life can shed light on the political, social and economic mobilisation of the Afrikaner population in the 1930s. Quite apart from his central role in South African politics and in the development of apartheid after the 1948 electoral victory of the National Party, Verwoerd played a leading role in the much earlier Afrikaner-led attempt to reduce white poverty through the development of social welfare policies and programmes in South Africa. These activities established a model for the social and political activities that were so influential in the Afrikaner ascendancy of the 1940s. In addition, Verwoerd established the first department of sociology and social work in the country at the University of Stellenbosch. Because of the range and centrality of his activities during this period, an examination of Verwoerd’s early career is a prerequisite for understanding the history of white South Africa in the late 1920s and 1930s.

**Background**

Verwoerd was born in the Netherlands in 1901 but in 1903 travelled with his family to South Africa, where his father hoped to become a missionary. His family

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moved frequently, so Verwoerd attended a number of different schools and was educated in both English and Afrikaans. After spending four years at Milton Academy in Bulawayo, Southern Rhodesia, he completed secondary school in the Orange Free State, where his family moved in 1917. He then entered the University of Stellenbosch and by 1924, at the age of 23, had earned the Ph.D. (cum laude) in psychology.

Verwoerd was immediately appointed lecturer in the Psychology Department at Stellenbosch, and his dissertation, ‘The Blunting of the Emotions’ (‘Die afstomping van gemoedsaandoeninge’, was published by the University. He was offered a bursary to study at Oxford, but rejected it to accept a smaller grant for post-graduate study in Germany, where he studied at the universities of Berlin, Leipzig, and Hamburg. As part of his return trip to South Africa in 1927, he visited Great Britain and the United States. In December of that year, while in the United States, he received word that he had been appointed Professor of Applied Psychology and Psychotechnics at Stellenbosch, and he and his wife cut short their visit to return to South Africa in time for the beginning of the academic year in February, 1928. He retained this position until 1932, when he was appointed professor in the University’s newly formed Department of Sociology and Social Work, the first such department in South Africa.

During his five-year tenure in this position, he was active in a number of social welfare organisations in nearby Cape Town. In 1934, he played a leading role in the Kimberley Volkskongres or national conference convened to discuss the growing problem of poverty among South Africa’s white population. Verwoerd served as chairman of the Socio-Economic Committee of the conference, and then was appointed to head the Continuation Committee charged with following up its recommendations. In this capacity, he led a successful lobbying and public relations effort to persuade the government to establish a national Department of Social Welfare. It was because of his growing prominence in these activities that Malan offered him the position of chief editor of Die Transvaler. To prepare himself for his new role, he resigned his professorship at Stellenbosch in late 1936, and in January, 1937, began a short apprenticeship at Die Burger in Cape Town. Later in the year, he moved to the Transvaal.

In his early career, Verwoerd was neither a strident Afrikaner nationalist nor a doctrinaire white supremacist. He was, however, clearly ambitious, energetic, pragmatic, and opportunistic. Because his characteristic mode of operating in community activities ensured that he and his ideas dominated the discussion, Verwoerd became a central figure in the early South African social welfare movement, and this movement launched his political career. But if Verwoerd had a political vision during the period before 1937, it was not expressed in ethnic separatism but in his attempt to bring the English and the Afrikaners together in local and national social welfare activities. He gave no indication of wanting to alter the political system or to advance the cause of Afrikaner nationalism. Instead,

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For a brief summary of this period of his life, see the entry on Verwoerd in the Dictionary of South African Biography and Prinsloo, ‘Die Johannesburgse periode in dr. H.F. Verwoerd se loopbaan’. 
he encouraged co-operative welfare activities during a period when others were increasingly stressing the differences between the English and the Afrikaners rather than the similarities. When Verwoerd left academia to become the editor of *Die Transvaler*, however, he endorsed a very different set of political ideas and goals. He shifted his energies from advocating a politics of civic participation, based on co-operation between English and Afrikaner and between the institutions of civil society and the state, to professional party politics championing Afrikaner nationalism and exhibiting strident opposition to the party in power.

**Verwoerd the Academic Psychologist**

Before he became a politician or a social welfare activist, Verwoerd was an academic who chose to pursue his post-doctoral training in Germany rather than England. His biographers have interpreted this decision as evidence of his early Afrikaner nationalism and as a form of Anglophobia. Scholtz, for example, claims that the young Verwoerd refused the Abe Bailey bursary to Oxford because he disagreed with Bailey’s British jingoism, and Kenney also notes that Verwoerd ‘disapproved of Sir Abe Bailey, a man known for his strong imperial sentiments.’

It has also been suggested that Verwoerd’s strident nationalism (and his anti-Semitism in the late 1930s) derived from or was influenced by his stay in Germany. At times, this argument is advanced through a process of historical innuendo. For example, E.G. Malherbe, discussing academic rationalisations for apartheid, wrote that ‘Dr. Verwoerd ... had studied in Germany where there had been at that time a great emphasis on racial differences and on the superiority of the White Aryan race’. Others are more straightforward. Moodie writes that Verwoerd and other young Afrikaners came back from Europe inspired by what he calls Neo-Fichtean nationalism, and Davenport writes that the men who studied in German in the 1920s, including Verwoerd, returned to South Africa smitten by the ideal of the organic *Volk*.

However, a closer look at Verwoerd’s early career suggests that he went to Germany for professional rather than ideological or nationalistic reasons. Not only was German psychology considered to be outstanding, but a decade earlier, Verwoerd’s mentor at Stellenbosch, Professor R.W. Wilcocks, had studied at the University of Berlin. Verwoerd chose to study both at Berlin, where Wilcocks had preceded him, and at Wilhelm Wundt’s renowned psychology laboratory at Leipzig, which had provided the model used by Wilcocks when he established the psychology laboratory at Stellenbosch on his return from Germany.

The decision to go to Germany proved to be wise, for the quality of Verwoerd’s publications improved noticeably after his work there. Although he had distinguished himself before he left Stellenbosch and the university had published

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his dissertation in the *Annale van die Universiteit van Stellenbosch* in 1925, his work was technically and analytically unsophisticated.\(^{11}\) His dissertation involved a psychological experiment in which such emotions as satisfaction, anger, delight, and disappointment were induced in experimental subjects. In a related article published in the *American Journal of Psychology* in 1926, Verwoerd took considerable care to describe the apparatus for an experiment which involved presenting subjects with various arrangements of colours. The subjects were required to react when a certain sequence of colours appeared. Having stimulated emotions in his experimental subjects through a calculated system of rewards and punishments, however, Verwoerd’s analysis of the experiments consisted of little more than reiterating his subjects’ verbatim comments. There was little discussion of the nature of the theoretical problem or the possibility of bias, and no statistical analysis of his data.\(^{12}\)

After his study in Germany, Verwoerd’s work became more sophisticated and he began to explore the applications of his findings. His interest in the technology of laboratory experiments was stimulated by his access to new types of equipment in the psychological laboratories in Berlin and Leipzig. In particular, he conducted experiments using what was called an ‘Attention- and Fatigue-meter’ developed by H. Piorkowski in Berlin. But more importantly, his publications after this period show that he was becoming aware of possible biases that might be introduced by the experimental apparatus itself and that he had become more sensitive to the need for statistical analysis of his findings. In articles published after his study in Germany, he compared quantitative summaries of individual performance rather than merely reproducing selected narrative accounts by his subjects. He used statistical measures of central tendency and correlation coefficients in his analysis, even providing some sense of the confidence limits of the coefficients.\(^{13}\) Although German psychology had traditionally focused on basic research rather than the applications of research, Verwoerd cast his findings in terms of applied problems, such as what a vocational psychologist could (and could not) learn about the distribution of attention spans in vocational testing or the reliability of personal testimony.\(^{14}\) But despite these significant changes in his work, it is clear that the German influence on Verwoerd was technical and analytical rather than

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\(^{11}\) Verwoerd’s published work prior to his study in Germany compares unfavorably to the work of, for example, E.G. Malherbe, who did his graduate work in educational psychology at Columbia University in the early 1920s.


substantive or theoretical. After his study in Germany, neither his publications nor his later correspondence indicate any heightened nationalism, national socialism, or cultural nationalism.15

Verwoerd’s brief visit to the United States on his return trip to South Africa was far more important to his intellectual development than was his much longer stay in Germany. Although Heppel describes Verwoerd’s visit to the United States as a lecture and study tour, there is unfortunately little specific information available about Verwoerd’s American visit.16 He did, however, become acquainted with American psychologists’ use of psychometric testing and returned to Stellenbosch with a variety of mental, vocational, and ability tests that American psychologists had developed.17 He visited psychology laboratories at Harvard and probably at Yale and the University of Pennsylvania. He may also have visited the University of Chicago and commercial psychological laboratories in Detroit and Hamilton, New York. Given the extent of these visits, it is possible that some of Verwoerd’s growing statistical sophistication came from his American rather than his German experience.18 Verwoerd’s visit to New York was important in another respect, for it was there that he met the South African Trade Commissioner for North America, Eric Louw. The two men became friends and in 1948 served together in Malan’s first cabinet.

Verwoerd returned to Stellenbosch to become professor of what was called Toegepaste Stielkunde en Psychotechniek or applied psychology and applied individual psychology.19 He taught a variety of courses, including introductory psychology, business psychology, law and psychology (regspsigologie), the human personality, a laboratory course, and a course on community work. The course in business psychology was of particular interest to Verwoerd. He emphasised advertising and covered such topics as office personnel, vocational testing, and the psychology of sales (buyer and seller). Because there was very little social science or business management literature produced in South Africa at this time, it is not surprising that all the books that he assigned were by German and American authors, with the majority by Americans.20 It is understandable that he should use American texts, for the expanding business culture in the United States which he

15 For his correspondence, see the H. F. Verwoerd papers, Institute for Contemporary History, University of the Orange Free State.
16 Heppel, Verwoerd, p. 22.
18 For a discussion of the problems in determining the influence of short-term visits on intellectual transfer, see P. Hoch and J. Platt, ‘Migration and the Internationalization of Science’, forthcoming in the Yearbook of the Sociology of Science.
19 The term ‘psychotechnics’ was used at that time to describe applied individual psychology such as vocational and industrial psychology and child guidance and juvenile delinquency. For a contemporary discussion of the term, see Confidential Draft Report, University of the Witwatersrand, Social Sciences Sub-Committee, 3 August 1933, Department of Education Papers, Central Archives, Pretoria.
observed on his visit both influenced social science research and drew from the social sciences.21

The topical structure of Verwoerd’s courses at Stellenbosch, his reading lists and bibliographies, and his related publications during this period are notable in several ways. First, they reflect Verwoerd’s practical orientation, such as his interest in effective advertising techniques and vocational testing. He showed little interest in abstract or theoretical literature. Second, as mentioned above, they suggest that the lessons that Verwoerd learned in Germany were the scientific procedures and methods of analysis he was taught in the psychology laboratory. Here too, there is no sign in either his publications or his courses that he was influenced by cultural nationalism or national socialism. Third, this work shows Verwoerd’s tendency to look to American psychology and social science as much or more than the German psychology in which he was trained by Wilcocks at Stellenbosch and in Germany.22

Finally, these materials are of interest for what they do not cover. There is no mention of social engineering or scientific management, both major concerns of American social scientists at this time. Verwoerd’s later racial policies, particularly apartheid, are widely referred to as ‘social engineering.’ Davenport, for example, labels the period in which Verwoerd was Minister of Native Affairs and apartheid was designed ‘The Age of the Social Engineers.’23 Coincidentally, the first several decades of the twentieth century, including the years of Verwoerd’s visit, have also been called the age of social engineering in the United States. At the time Verwoerd was in the United States, American management had been greatly influenced by Taylorism and scientific management. This connection between social and behavioural research and managerial efficiency had also permeated American local government and social reform, where it was proudly called social engineering.24 Despite the fact that he taught courses in business psychology, however, Verwoerd did not refer to the American work on social engineering or to any of its concepts. In his practical approach to business psychology, with its focus on advertising and personnel work, Verwoerd ignored the larger issue of improving efficiency in business through the use of scientific methods and did not assign his classes the American social science literature that was most directly tied to social engineering.


22 Verwoerd’s other courses exhibit a similar reliance on both German and American social science. His course on the human personality dealt with what was described as a genetic study of the personality at various points in the life cycle, as well as abnormal personalities, classification of personality types, and other topics. In this class, he used some of the psychological tests he obtained in the United States, and he classified personality types according to Heymans, Spranger, Jung, and Kretschmer.

23 Davenport, History, pp. 327-345.

Verwoerd as a Sociologist

American social science was to exert its strongest influence on Verwoerd’s work as a sociologist. The term ‘sociology’ had been used in South Africa for at least thirty years; however in most cases it was used as a synonym for social science or as a general term to describe the scientific study of society.  

Although a number of South African colleges began to offer introductory courses in sociology in the 1920s and a few universities provided some instruction in social work in the late 1920s, there were no formal departments in these fields until 1932, when Stellenbosch created the combined Department of Sociology and Social Work and appointed Verwoerd to head it.  

After his appointment, Verwoerd turned the energies he had devoted to research and publishing as a psychologist to teaching and community social welfare activities in Cape Town. As the country’s first Professor of Sociology and Social Work, Verwoerd had an unprecedented opportunity to play a central role in the fight against white poverty, a topic that attracted a great deal of national attention in December, 1932, with the publication of the report of the Carnegie Poor White Commission.  

The Poor White Commission was formed in 1928 when the Carnegie Corporation, an American philanthropic organisation acting through the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) and the Union government, provided financial support for a multi-disciplinary social science investigation of South Africa’s poor white problem. A management council appointed by the two sponsors organised the investigation into five separate components, dealing with the economic, psychological, educational, health, and sociological aspects of white poverty. Two Stellenbosch professors were involved, Wilcocks, who was secretary of the management council and wrote the psychology report, and J.F.W. Grosskopf, who wrote the economics report. However, although the management council found a physician to write the health report, and trained social scientists to write three of the remaining reports, there was no one in the country with professional training in sociology. Instead, the council selected the Rev. J. R. Albertyn, who was in charge of poor relief for the sponsoring DRC, to investigate the sociological dimensions of white poverty.  

Concerned about the impact that the lack of professionally trained sociologists might have on the report, the Carnegie Corporation sent two American sociologists to South Africa to work with the Commission and thus ensure that sociological considerations were effectively represented in the Commission’s deliberations.

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27 See the five volumes of the report, Carnegie Commission, The Poor White Problem in South Africa (Stellenbosch, 1932).  
One of the two, Professor Charles W. Coulter from Ohio Weslyean University, not only advised the Poor White Commission, but also served as a visiting professor at Stellenbosch. While there, he gave a series of lectures on ‘The Rise of Sociology as a College Discipline and its Application.’ Coulter’s enthusiasm for sociology was unfortunately not matched by practical wisdom or acuity. According to an economist who later served with him on an International Missionary Council commission to investigate industrialisation in Northern Rhodesia, Coulter knew ‘his subject backwards without … having the faintest glimmering of what it is all about … [H]e has no beginning of an understanding of the relations of governments to governments, or of governments to governed except in terms of the great American shibboleths.’

Nonetheless, Coulter seems to have been taken more seriously among the social scientists of South Africa than he was by British economists in Northern Rhodesia. At Stellenbosch, he argued that ‘scientifically trained technicians’ were needed for social welfare work and that untrained welfare workers were ‘like a layman in a chemical laboratory, hoping to assemble in an exact manner the ingredients of a high explosive and occasionally with as disastrous results.’ Verwoerd kept a copy of Coulter’s speech on the need for a school of sociology with his papers even after he left academia. It is reasonable to suspect not only that Coulter contributed to the impetus toward establishing a sociology department at Stellenbosch during his residence there, but also that his positivistic approach to sociology and his vision of sociology as a practical social analogue to applied physical science reinforced Verwoerd’s own predispositions when he was organising the Department of Sociology and Social Work at Stellenbosch in 1932.

Even more influential in the establishment of the Stellenbosch department was the Carnegie Commission’s recommendation that a department of social studies be created in a South African University to train social workers and conduct scientific studies on how to reduce white poverty. Since Wilcocks had both written the psychology report of the Commission and, in his role as Commission secretary, prepared the summary Joint Findings and Recommendations, the Stellenbosch faculty anticipated this recommendation and had already positioned the university to respond to it. The Department of Sociology and Social Work was established before the report was published, and Wilcocks’ former student was its head.

Verwoerd’s transformation into a sociologist led to a series of major changes in his career. Although he had been one of the most prolific members of the Stellenbosch faculty during his years as a psychologist, he now devoted his energies to organising the new department and supervising the research of his
students instead of writing scientific articles. Moreover, he sought financial support for his students by submitting research proposals to the newly formed South African Council for Educational and Social Research, a governmental body that disbursed research grants from funds supplied by the Carnegie Corporation.33 Because of the growing national interest in the role of social work in eradicating poverty, Verwoerd also became a spokesman for social work education and deeply involved in non-governmental efforts to reduce white poverty in South Africa. He was so immersed in these activities that when he finally obtained funding for one of his research proposals in 1935, he had no time to do the research, and the funds were turned over to his successor when he left the University.34

Since Verwoerd had no formal training in sociology, he was forced to educate himself in his new discipline. As a sociologist, Verwoerd was descriptive, empirical, and applied. He tended to describe social conditions rather than to look for patterns or regularities in social behaviour, and he was less interested in theories of social change than he was in social problems. He laced his lectures with social statistics, telling his classes that they must deal with the facts first — theory would come later.35 It is not clear, however, that he ever returned to a discussion of theory. The purpose of sociology as Verwoerd taught it was not to develop a general understanding of social phenomena, but rather to solve specific social problems in South Africa. He organised his department on the basis of such problems as poverty, crime, and juvenile delinquency. In addition, his department emphasised the methodology of social surveys or investigations that could be used to provide information for social policy and, fittingly, gave heavy emphasis to practical experience in social work and social investigation. The problem of poverty, Verwoerd believed, could only be alleviated by dealing with the poor on a case-by-case basis, with a sociologically trained social worker providing a scientific assessment of each case. Thus it is entirely consistent that although he frequently emphasised the need for scientific social work, he himself trained social workers instead of writing scientific papers.

Verwoerd’s general approach to sociology can be gleaned from the course he taught on ‘Armoede en sy Bestryding’ (poverty and its prevention). In this course, Verwoerd described white poverty in the context of changes in the national economy of South Africa. But Verwoerd differed from the South African historian

33 See, for example, ‘Maatskaplike Toestand op die Platteland’ and ‘Crime and Punishment in South Africa’ by Verwoerd, and ‘Misdadigheid onder die Kaapse Kleurlinge’, by H.F. Verwoerd and I. van Zyl Steyn (manuscript proposals in the H.F. Verwoerd Papers, Bloemfontein).
35 Some time after Verwoerd’s death, his family gave his lecture notes to Professor Erika Theron, Verwoerd’s colleague and former student at Stellenbosch. The notes were probably typed originally by Verwoerd’s secretary. However, Verwoerd himself made handwritten notations, corrections, and emendations in the typed text and kept the notes with his class reading lists. It is not clear if Verwoerd had some other purpose in mind for these lecture notes — possibly he intended to use them as the basis for a book. However as written, they do not constitute a polished document, they rarely present well-developed arguments, and they are often repetitive. Despite these problems, his sociology lecture notes, prepared for his own use rather than for public consumption, are a valuable source of information about his teaching in the early 1930s. I am deeply indebted to Professor Dian Joubert of the Sociology Department, University of Stellenbosch, for sharing these lecture notes with me.
William M. Macmillan, who by this time had published several works arguing that because poverty was the product of both structural problems and racially restrictive economic policies, its remedy required structural policy solutions, specifically, a single integrated South African economy. 36 Although Verwoerd also explained white poverty in terms of structural changes in the South African economy, he viewed the solution to poverty in the context of individual choices and behaviour. Thus, rather than prescribing economic policy changes that would improve both the national economy and the condition of those living in structurally induced poverty, Verwoerd focused his attention on the nature of the individual’s response to economic change and the need for individual uplift or opheffing. He admitted that some general economic measures, such as increasing wage levels, could help to reduce poverty but held that poverty could ‘only be prevented through attention to individual cases.’ 37 This concentration on individual behaviour may have been a legacy of Verwoerd’s training in psychology, but it was also consistent with popular thinking in South Africa at the time and was the approach taken by the Carnegie Poor White Commission. As a practical matter, however, Verwoerd’s emphasis on the individual provided him with a strong rationale for arguing that scientific social work should be deployed in the battle against the poor white problem. Moreover, by emphasising the social problems associated with white poverty and the need for social welfare measures in dealing with them, Verwoerd had identified a field where he and his students could make a contribution, as opposed to economic policy where they could not.

As indicated earlier, Verwoerd was indebted to American social science for his examples and for many of his views about sociology and social welfare practice. Much of his information came from the voluble American evangelist for sociology, Charles Coulter. Verwoerd also undoubtedly spoke with a number of the 74 South Africans who took study trips to the United States under the Carnegie Visitors Programme between 1930 and 1934. Among those who participated in the programme were Verwoerd’s advisor, Robert Wilcocks, who studied methods of social investigation that could be used in research on white poverty, and a number of close associates who served with Verwoerd on social welfare committees during this period, such as Rev. Pieter du Toit, Mrs. S.H. Pellissier, Miss L.M. Mackenzie, and Rev. A.D. Luckhoff. 38 Under the Carnegie programme, American social scientists also visited South Africa. One of these was John Dewey, an advocate of the use of positivistic social science to secure rational control over society who lectured at Stellenbosch in 1934. 39

It is clear from the references in Verwoerd’s lecture notes and research proposals that he also relied extensively on the research and the data of American social

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36 Verwoerd knew of Macmillan and in 1932 invited him to participate in the Kimberley Volkskongres, but if he was familiar with Macmillan’s writings, he ignored them in his discussions of white poverty. See W. M. Macmillan, Complex South Africa: An Economic Footnote to History (London, 1930).
scientists. For example, his proposal to the Council for Educational and Social Research in 1935 to study a rural district in South Africa was described as a South African Middletown. The reference was to the American sociological study of Muncie, Indiana, by Robert S. Lynd. Verwoerd viewed South Africa as a modern industrialised country and in his lectures made frequent statistical comparisons of South Africa to both Britain and the United States and often to such countries as Japan and Germany as well. But like other South African social scientists, he compared South Africa most often with the United States, which like South Africa — and unlike the European countries and Japan — had a mixed black and white population. In this respect, Verwoerd was also consistent with many of the South Africans who spoke with Lord Hailey in 1935, who noted in the private diary he kept during his visit that ‘South Africa regards itself as USA in the making.’

Eventually Verwoerd became recognised not only as an expert in American social science but also as a proponent of American social welfare systems, and his department at Stellenbosch was known as the place where one could learn about American social welfare. The city of Cape Town, facing problems in its relief work in 1933 because of the depression, established a commission to examine the state of its charities. Verwoerd, who testified before the commission, based his comments on American examples of social welfare work and stressed that the city’s charities would be more effective if their work were co-ordinated. Verwoerd’s testimony was well received and the commission, considering the adoption of some of the American practices described by Verwoerd, asked if he were willing to come to Cape Town to give lectures on American social welfare.

Instead of focusing on American-style social welfare, Verwoerd could have created a sociology programme at Stellenbosch that relied more heavily on French, British, or German sociology than on American social science. The earliest discussions of sociology in the country were based on the ideas of French sociology. For example, in 1903, the first article to discuss sociology published in South Africa drew from the work of Durkheim, and in the discussions about sociological theory in the Politics class attended by the young Nicolaas Diederichs at Grey University College in Bloemfontein in the early 1920s, as much attention was devoted to the French sociologists as to American sociologists.

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40 See notes to Verwoerd’s lectures in his courses ‘Inleiding tot die Sociologie’ (sic) and ‘Socio-Psyzologie (sic) van Misdaad’.
42 See, for example, E.G. Malherbe, ‘Teachers College and South Africa’, typescript prepared for Paul Monroe, International Institute, Teachers College, 1936.
44 See Capetown Charity Commission, Summary of Evidence, in H.F. Verwoerd Papers. According to O.J.M. Wagner, the commission agreed with Verwoerd’s proposals and recommended they be adopted. However, as late as 1936, when Wagner published his dissertation, this had not been done. See O.J.M. Wagner, ‘Poverty and Dependency in Cape Town’, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Stellenbosch, 1938.
45 H.E.S. Fremantle, ‘The Sociology of Comte with Special Reference to the Political Conditions of Young Countries’, Report of the South African Association for the Advancement of Science (1903), pp. 462-479. See also N. Diederichs’ class notes for Politics I at Grey University College, 1922-23, in the N. Diederichs Papers, Institute for Contemporary History, University of the Orange Free State.
Alternatively, Verwoerd, like other South Africans concerned about poverty, could have relied on British social science with its tradition of reform Fabianism and investigative social surveys. The historian William Macmillan, for example, had explicitly based his early poverty research in Grahamstown on the social survey methods used by Rowntree in York. Verwoerd could also have used the model of German social science, not only because he himself studied in the country, but also because there were an increasing number of South Africans studying in Germany by the early 1930s and a vigorous tradition of social research in that country that fitted comfortably within Verwoerd’s preference for applied social research. Nonetheless, Verwoerd maintained his allegiance to American social science, as Geoff Cronje learned to his regret in 1933. Cronje, a young Afrikaner nationalist who was later to write a series of books that used social science research to argue for apartheid, applied for a job in Verwoerd’s new department at Stellenbosch. Although Cronje had just been awarded a doctorate in sociology from the University of Amsterdam and was the first South African to hold a Ph.D. in sociology, Verwoerd refused to hire him, explaining to Cronje that he wanted American social science and not continental sociology at Stellenbosch.

Certainly the general approach of American sociology sat well with Verwoerd’s own mild socio-political ameliorism. American sociology in the early twentieth century was marked by a pragmatic positivism, an impulse toward the amelioration of social problems rather than structural social change, and a methodological reliance on empirical data. The social and cultural similarities between South Africa and the United States might also have suggested to Verwoerd that the two countries should have a common approach to social science. Even more important in motivating Verwoerd to adopt American sociology, however, may have been the size, vigour, and institutional connections of the social science community in the United States. There were more sociologists and more sociology being written in the United States than in other countries. As a psychologist, Verwoerd had already chosen to publish in American rather than German journals, and thus it is not surprising that he looked to American research when he became a sociologist.

Another critical factor in the development of Verwoerd’s American orientation was undoubtedly related to the influence of the Carnegie Corporation in the establishment of sociology and social research in South Africa. The American foundation not only provided financial support for the Poor White Commission, but it also used the Commission to strengthen sociology in South Africa. As a

49 Cronje recounted his interview with Verwoerd in conversations with both Dirk van Zyl Smit in 1987 and C.G. Groenewald in 1983; I am indebted to both for sharing this information with me.
result, the Poor White Commission advocated a public policy role for social science based in large part upon the ideas of social scientists in New York, particularly those at Columbia University in the first two decades of the twentieth century. The Carnegie Corporation furthered the ties between social scientists in the two countries by bringing American sociologists to South Africa to lecture and South Africans to the United States to study American social research methods and social welfare system. Finally, the Carnegie Corporation gave funds to the South African government to provide a social science research grants programme through the Council for Educational and Social Research in the 1930s. One of the results of the variety of programmes supported by the foundation in South Africa at this time was that Verwoerd and other Afrikaner social scientists in South Africa who were trying to alleviate white poverty were in constant contact with the American face of sociology.

Verwoerd on Race

As a politician in the 1950s and 1960s, Verwoerd was responsible for the establishment of apartheid, a repressive socio-economic system that ran contrary to the main currents of international thinking about race in the years following World War II. Yet as an academic, Verwoerd’s views on race were more liberal than those of many sociologists of his time. In his 1928 book, Contemporary Sociological Theories, the American sociologist Pitirim Sorokin summarised the results of a number of academic studies of physical and mental differences among the races and concluded that there were significant and demonstrable differences between whites and blacks. In regard to intelligence, for example, he cited seventeen social science studies comparing black and white I.Q.s, each of which showed that whites performed better than blacks. The inevitable conclusion, according to Sorokin, was that whites were more intelligent than blacks.51 In contrast to Sorokin and those whose research he cites, Verwoerd took the position in his sociology lectures at Stellenbosch in the early 1930s that there was no demonstrable difference in the intelligence of whites and blacks.

The issue of race and the differences between Africans and Europeans were not issues of great importance to Verwoerd during his years as an academic. As a psychologist, Verwoerd was more interested in individual behaviour as revealed in experimental settings and in the applications of ideas about individual behaviour in applied settings. Moreover, his psychological research and publications all focused on the behaviour of white South Africans and thus implicitly placed Africans outside his area of interest. Once he became a sociologist, he concentrated his attention on the social problems of the country, although his primary interest was in the problem of poverty within the white population. Despite this focus, Verwoerd clearly conceived of South African society and its economy in the 1930s as a single unit consisting of multiple racial groups — in sharp contrast to his

vision in the 1950s of the cultural/racial groups in South Africa as distinct and separable social entities.

Verwoerd was not alone in concentrating his attention on the problems of the white population of South Africa. When first established in South Africa, sociology tended to deal exclusively with the white population. This was partly because of its tie to the Carnegie Poor White Commission, which focused on white poverty rather than poverty in general. However, it was also due to the fact that South Africa already had a vigorous tradition of social science research on African societies in social anthropology and linguistics. The distinction between the ‘Native Social Sciences’ and the ‘Social Sciences’ was explicit in the organisation of sections and in the programmes for the annual meetings of the South African Association for the Advancement of Science.52 Perhaps because of this distinction between native social science and generic social science, the only mention of race in the Stellenbosch sociology syllabus during Verwoerd’s years as Professor was in the introductory course, where Verwoerd listed domestic and foreign racial friction as one of the subjects to be covered. In his introductory lectures, however, Verwoerd discussed the South African native population and the issue of differences among the races at great length.53

Underlying Verwoerd’s treatment of Africans at this time was the assumption that the country’s white, black, and coloured populations were economically interdependent. He discusses these groups as if they were subject to the same overriding economic forces. For example, Verwoerd saw rural poverty as an outgrowth of the failure of both black and white farmers to adjust to changes in agriculture. The remedy was also the same. In some areas, Verwoerd argued, the rural problem was a result of the fact that ‘the indigenous [African] population cannot adjust fast enough to leave the overpopulated rural areas and join the urban industries.’54

Verwoerd also viewed non-Europeans as operating within the same social framework as Europeans. In a memo to the Research Committee at Stellenbosch, he and a colleague proposed a study of criminals in South Africa that would examine the socio-psychological, psychiatric, and penological aspects of juvenile and adult criminal behaviour. They planned to look at European, coloured, and native South Africans, not because of any intrinsic difference in criminal behaviour across these groups but because they intended to conduct a comprehensive study of the South African population. Verwoerd and his collaborator planned to investigate the intelligence, education, personality, temperament, character, type of offence, recidivism, and attitude of the criminals. Only after discussing the role of these factors in their research did they note that they would also, in the case of coloured

52 See the reports of annual meetings in the South African Journal of Science.
53 See ‘Sociologie’ (sic), Jaarboek (Stellenbosch, 1933), p. 144, and Verwoerd’s lectures, ‘Inleiding tot die Sociologie’ (sic). The racial friction mentioned in the syllabus was undoubtedly a reference to friction between the country’s Afrikaner and British-origin white populations, rather than friction between black and white South Africans. For a discussion of the development of the latter, see S. Dubow, ‘Afrikaner Nationalism, Apartheid and the Conceptualization of ‘Race’, in Journal of African History, 33 (1992), pp. 209-237.
54 Verwoerd, ‘Poverty and its Prevention’.
and native criminals, examine social customs and the influence of European
civilisation.55 It is clear from the proposal that Verwoerd believed that coloured
and native South Africans were influenced to some extent by the fact that they had
different social customs, but it is equally clear that he saw these differences as
subordinate to the common influences of personality, education, character, and
other factors mentioned above.

Most significantly, Verwoerd did not believe that there were any biological
differences between the racial groups. He clearly recognised the distinctions
between whites, coloureds, and natives that were made in South Africa and often
presented population statistics in terms of the major racial groups in the country. In
the context of discussions of population growth, for example, Verwoerd presented
his classes with population statistics on natives, Asians, coloureds, and Europeans,
and occasionally Jews. But although many South Africans argued that biological
factors contributed to the development of civilisation, Verwoerd did not. 'There are
no biological differences among the big race groups as was argued earlier,' he told
his classes, adding that because there were no differences, 'this was not really a
factor in the development of a higher social civilisation by the Caucasian race.'56

Verwoerd also disagreed with the argument that anatomical differences between
blacks and whites indicate that blacks were uniquely related to apes and noted that
'Caucasians also have certain characteristics that the Negroids do not have but that
are ape-like. They have so much hair. Their legs are short in comparison to their
upper body.' Yet apart from the fact that these traits are not important in
themselves, Verwoerd repeats that they are not related to the development of a
'higher civilisation.'

Verwoerd rejected the idea that there were differences in the innate abilities
of Africans and Europeans. What appear to be differences in skills are simply
differences in experiences, he argued. In support of this view, Verwoerd claimed
that the rural African can recognise small differences in the brightness of a fire
from a great distance which the European, who is used to city life, cannot discern.
This, he concluded, demonstrates that 'there is no fundamental difference between
the abilities of the various races and people.'

Verwoerd did not deny that there were measurable differences between the
performance of blacks and whites in intelligence tests, but he told his classes that it
was difficult to compare test scores across groups of people with different
backgrounds and experience. The critical issue, he argued, was not whether there
were differences in underlying intelligence, but rather whether the differences in
the test scores of various groups were due to inadequate tests and differences in
living conditions. This approach to intelligence tests was consistent with the ideas
of other South African academics at Stellenbosch at the time. For example,
Eiselen, who was taught anthropology at Stellenbosch, was very cautious about
assuming that intelligence tests could be used to show differences across cultures.

55 'Memorandum re: Research Project on "Crime and Punishment in S.A"' and 'Misdadigheid onder
die Kaapse Kleuringe' in the H.F. Verwoerd Papers.
56 These and other quotations are taken from notes to Verwoerd's lectures for his course called
'Inleiding tot die Sociologie'.
Similarly, Wilcocks recognised that US intelligence tests were not directly transferable to South Africa, and he and his students in psychology had been standardising American tests so that they would be applicable in South Africa.\textsuperscript{57} Verwoerd was also aware of the argument that living conditions — diet, education, and the home environment — influenced performance on intelligence tests, since in its report, the Carnegie Poor White Commission held that the low scores of poor white children on intelligence tests were due to problems of poverty, nutrition, and crowded living conditions rather than to any innate deficiency in intelligence.

Although Verwoerd rejected the idea that there were differences in intelligence among the races, he claimed that specific personality traits distinguished various nationalities. For Verwoerd, ‘the Arab is a fatalist; the southern Italian is emotionally unstable; the Japanese and French are philosophical; and the Scandinavian is boring.’ These characteristics were not necessarily inherited, however, for, according to Verwoerd, previous arguments ‘for the importance of physical or psychological traits of race or volk are unsubstantiated.’\textsuperscript{58} In his refusal to endow the idea of a people or volk with special characteristics, Verwoerd took the same position as the liberal spokesman R.F. Alfred Hoernle took at that time.

In a paper on ‘The Concept of the Soul of A People’ presented to the South African Association for the Advancement of Science in 1933, Hoernle criticised the Nazis, and especially Dr Goebbels as Minister for the Enlightenment of the People and Propaganda (Volksaufklaerung und Propaganda), for the heavy emphasis they gave to the concept of the soul of a people (volk).\textsuperscript{59}

Despite his refusal to use the idea or race of volk to interpret individual or national differences, Verwoerd did not advocate a reduction in the social or economic barriers between the races. He was acutely aware of economic and cultural differences between Africans and whites, and he opposed social interaction among blacks and whites, particularly the idea of intermarriage. He thought race relations a legitimate field of study, but to him this did not imply racial mixing. As an example of research on race relations, he suggested that a study be conducted on whether the educated white and the educated black were more likely to marry than if they were both uneducated. If educated whites and blacks were not more likely to marry than uneducated whites and black, he concluded, there was therefore no reason to oppose the education of blacks. At bottom, Verwoerd saw differences between blacks and whites in a social rather than a biological or intellectual context. For example, despite his disavowal of intellectual differences between African and white South Africans, Verwoerd publicly cautioned the South African Institute of Race Relations that if it showed prejudice in favour of the Africans, it would evoke opposition from the country’s white population. To avoid this, he suggested that the Institute initially concentrate on gathering scientific data, which

\textsuperscript{58} ‘Inleiding tot die Sociologie’, p. 26.
he considered innocuous, rather than on research, which could be used to promote particular views.  

Verwoerd was not entirely consistent in his discussion of policies involving black and white. For example, although he told his classes that blacks were partly to blame for their economic problems in rural areas because they did not move to the cities, he also complained that black urban migrants were taking jobs that would otherwise have gone to whites or coloureds and thus were promoting white poverty. Like the members of the Carnegie Poor White Commission and the delegates to the Kimberley Volkskongres, Verwoerd supported the idea that certain jobs should temporarily be reserved for whites as an anti-poverty measure. Rather than holding urban jobs that could be given to poor whites, Verwoerd argued that unemployed natives should be employed in the mines or should improve their capacity to support themselves on the rural reserves and that the migration of blacks from other parts of Africa should be stopped.

Nationalism

Although one of his biographers characterises Verwoerd as having ‘a total identification with the Afrikaner nationalist outlook on life’ during these years, this characterisation is not consistent with Verwoerd’s writing, teaching, or other activities during his years at Stellenbosch. He was clearly associated with the cause of eradicating white poverty, which disproportionately affected rural Afrikaners, and he advocated the use of Afrikaans in scientific and technical fora. But Verwoerd’s positions on these issues — positions he shared with Afrikaner nationalists — conflicted with his own vigorous attempts to forge an alliance between English and Afrikaner social welfare activities under the direction of the state. Moreover, Verwoerd, as we have seen, differed from most nationalists in rejecting the concept of a volk with inherited national traits.

Verwoerd can justifiably be called a linguistic nationalist for championing the use of Afrikaans in academia at a time when English was the dominant language in higher education. Since he attended an English high school for four years in Bulawayo, he wrote as fluently in English as in Afrikaans and his support for the use of Afrikaans in education was not a result of his inability to write in English. He chose to write his doctoral dissertation at Stellenbosch in Afrikaans, completing it in 1925, the same year Afrikaans became an official language in South Africa. Verwoerd’s advisor, Robert Wilcocks, was one of the leaders of the movement to develop Afrikaans as a technical language, and in 1928 and 1930, he and Verwoerd both presented papers in Afrikaans at the South African Association for the Advancement of Science and published these papers in the English-language South

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60 See Verwoerd’s presentation to the Second Annual General Meeting of the South African Institute of Race Relations in Race Relations, 1 (1934), p. 37.
61 See ‘Armoede en sy bestryding’, Verwoerd’s address to the Kimberley Volkskongres in 1934, and the Cape Argus, 2 October 1935.
62 Kenny, Architect of Apartheid, p. 35.
Verwoerd also spoke Afrikaans rather than English in other public settings, such as the annual meeting of the South African Institute of Race Relations in 1934. Yet despite Verwoerd’s preference for using Afrikaans in his academic pursuits, he formally addressed the use of Afrikaans only once in his scholarly publications. In a paper on the psychology of newspaper advertising (originally presented to the South African Association for the Advancement of Science in July, 1928), Verwoerd discussed the problem of using English captions or titles in advertisements placed in Afrikaans newspapers. Although he attributed this practice to the extra cost of printing advertisements in two languages in South Africa, he suggested that the use of English could undermine the impact of the advertisement. This paper, given in Afrikaans, presented Verwoerd with a perfect opportunity to express nationalist ideas. Instead, his response to the use of English advertisements in Afrikaans newspapers was pragmatic — if the English language advertisement did not stimulate sales because Afrikaans-speaking readers took offence or did not understand the English words, it was a false economy to use English. In short, Verwoerd was reluctant to exploit this opportunity to develop a nationalistic justification for the use of Afrikaans.

The same reluctance to transform an issue of concern to Afrikaners to an overtly ethnic nationalist issue can be seen in Verwoerd’s social welfare activities. Although he became deeply absorbed in social welfare issues and the problem of the country’s poor whites when he moved to the Department of Sociology and Social Work at Stellenbosch in 1932, Verwoerd always discussed white poverty as a South African rather than an Afrikaner problem. In his highly publicised opening address to the 1934 Kimberley Volkskongres, Verwoerd said that white poverty was largely a problem of the Afrikaner population, noting that roughly one in four Afrikaners was impoverished. However after pointing out that with the exception of four women’s groups, the voluntary organisations that tried to meet the needs of the poor in the cities were ‘English oriented,’ he immediately proclaimed, ‘This meeting must mean the beginning of a new era in our participation in social upliftment.’

This statement has been interpreted by Hepple both as a reproach to Afrikaners for allowing the English to take charge of Afrikaner social welfare and as an attempt ‘to cast a socio-economic evil in a racial mould.’ Verwoerd, wrote Hepple, ‘saw poverty not as the common distress of the poor but as a problem requiring a racial solution.’ (The term racial, as used in South Africa in the 1930s, referred to the distinction between the English-speaking and the Afrikaner populations.) Similarly, Kenney sees Verwoerd’s position in this address as ‘unashamedly sectional.’ He singled out Verwoerd’s reference to the English orientation of Afrikaners.
charitable organisations and explained that Verwoerd meant that ‘Afrikaner problems require Afrikaner solutions. The Afrikaans-speaking poor had a right to be uplifted by their own people. The risk of Anglicisation was immense.’

Rather than promoting racialism between the English and the Afrikaners, however, Verwoerd’s speech, taken in its entirety, suggests that Verwoerd was instead anticipating a new approach to dealing with poverty in which the English and the Afrikaner worked together in social welfare programmes. His goal was to ensure that the Afrikaner became a part of the country’s welfare activities rather than to eliminate English participation in welfare. This approach can be seen in his correspondence and activities after his late-1934 appointment as chairman of the Continuation Committee, the body which was to be responsible for ensuring that the resolutions passed at the Kimberley Volkskongres were implemented. This was also consistent with his work in organising the Kimberley conference. As chairman of the Socio-Economic Committee, one of the three planning groups for the Volkskongres, Verwoerd had invited as many English speakers as Afrikaners to join the committee. He even invited the liberal historian William Macmillan, although Macmillan never answered Verwoerd’s letter, possibly because he had already left South Africa and did not receive it.

Verwoerd’s various efforts to establish a Union Department of Social Welfare and to co-ordinate all social welfare activities in the country — English and Afrikaner — are compatible only with an interpretation that emphasises joint English/Afrikaner welfare activities. The litany that Verwoerd continually repeated when discussing social welfare was not focused on the plight of the poor Afrikaner nor on the problems faced by the Afrikaner community. Instead he emphasised a national agenda, specifically, that there must be scientifically trained social workers, co-ordination of all charitable work among poor whites, and a government Department of Social Welfare. To promote this agenda, he proposed the establishment of a national network of co-operating welfare organisations. He proposed that this network be co-ordinated by a Union department, arguing, in effect, that the joint English/Afrikaner approach to social welfare should be directed not by an Afrikaner group, but by the government.

In his Kimberley address, Verwoerd firmly tied social welfare to the democratic state rather than to any social or ethnic group in the state. ‘In the past,’ he said, ‘charity had been the task of a few self-appointed philanthropists; welfare work is now the task of the democracy. New times bring new problems and need new tools.’ Later Verwoerd wrote, ‘Anyone who addresses audiences, English or Afrikaans, in various parts of the country, in cities or rural areas, will be struck by the unanimity with which the nation believes in the programme set before it by this Conference.’ His goal, he said, was that ‘every social organisation, from the State

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66 Hepple, Verwoerd, p. 27; Kenney, Architect of Apartheid, p. 29.
67 Verwoerd’s records of the invitations he extended and the answers he received are in the H.F. Verwoerd Papers.
to the smallest Welfare Society, will carry out of its own accord, or will be forced by the nation to carry out, that for which we now have to fight.'70 Afrikaner organisations were clearly a part of this effort, but in Verwoerd’s conception they were not conducting this work alone, nor were they dominating it.

Verwoerd’s emphasis on joint English and Afrikaner charitable work also pervades his correspondence and committee work. For example, in Verwoerd’s participation in such groups as the Cape Town Charities Commission, the Provisional Council for the Co-ordination of Charities, and the Citizens Housing League Utility Company, he worked with numerous English-origin colleagues. He showed no indication of preferring Afrikaner organisations or working with Afrikaners. Similarly, as vice-chairman and then chairman of the Continuation Committee, Verwoerd included both English and Afrikaans speakers on lobbying delegations to meet with ministers. He required that all the publications, correspondence, and minutes of the Continuation Committee meetings be available in both English and Afrikaans, even though this frequently required him to do the translation into English himself.71 In fact, when Verwoerd was elected chairman of the Continuation Committee, he introduced a motion to thank the English members of the committee for their moral support, co-operation, and loyalty.72

In 1936, Verwoerd drew up plans for a new social welfare research journal. Tentatively titling it the South African Journal for Social Service, Verwoerd envisioned that the journal would provide information on social welfare research and practice in both South Africa and overseas and intended it to serve an audience of social workers and the lay public. The title, echoing the South African Journal of Science and the South African Journal of Economics, emphasises Verwoerd’s approach to social welfare as a South African rather than an ethnic concern, and he saw the journal as an instrument to bridge English and Afrikaans social work. According to a memorandum he prepared, the journal ‘must be non-political, and non-denominational, and non-racial. For the latter reason it is suggested to issue separately an English and an Afrikaans edition with the same contents.’73

At the time that Verwoerd wrote these words, there was growing opposition to bilingualism within the Afrikaner community. E.G. Malherbe, who was severely criticised by Afrikaner nationalists for his research on bilingualism in the schools in the mid-1930s, described the period as ‘so shot through with racial and political suspicion and prejudice, that it becomes very difficult to conduct scientific investigations of an objective nature.’74 Given this atmosphere, it is not surprising that when a social welfare journal was finally launched by the Continuation

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70 First Annual Report of the Activities of the Continuation Committee, p. 31.
74 E.G. Malherbe, address to the National Research Council and Board, Cape Town, 25 July, 1938 in Malherbe, Educational and Social Research, p.17.
Committee after Verwoerd resigned as chairman, it was published entirely in Afrikaans. Titled *Volkswelstand* (meaning the people’s or the national welfare), the journal was produced by Afrikaner social scientists who were strident ethnic nationalists and its articles reflected their nationalism. The new journal contrasted sharply with Verwoerd’s original proposal and shows the distance between him and the Afrikaner nationalists who succeeded him in the social welfare movement.75

**Social Engineering and the State**

The application of social science to social problems was a dominant concern of Verwoerd’s during his early career, but this did not mean that he advocated social engineering either by the state or in management. At various times, he was interested in the uses of social science in business and social welfare, and he was deeply involved in lobbying for the creation of a Union Department of Social Welfare. Yet far from advocating that the state attempt to reform or change society in concert with social scientists, Verwoerd showed little interest in expanding the activities of the Union government except as the co-ordinator of local and private welfare activities.

Instead, Verwoerd envisioned the state as a tool of the institutions and organisations of civil society. The memorandum he presented to the Minister of Labour and Social Welfare on the establishment of a State Service of Social Workers in 1936 suggests that Verwoerd saw the state playing a very limited role in social welfare.76 He proposed that the Union establish a corps of social workers who would work closely with local councils of social welfare and health. The local councils were to be comprised of representatives of local welfare organisations and civic organisations and a limited number of welfare and health officials. He was willing to consider, though he did not think it necessary, that one representative of the Provincial Administration serve on each local council. The councils would co-ordinate welfare work in the locality, exchange information as needed, keep the public informed about welfare needs, and act in an advisory capacity to the Department of Labour and Social Welfare. Although they were advisory, Verwoerd also intended the councils to be key actors at the local level, where all of the welfare work would take place. In Verwoerd’s plan, the role of the state was clearly subordinate to informed local bodies that were themselves dominated by representatives of religious and civil welfare organisations.

There is no evidence that Verwoerd showed any interest in or even had any knowledge of social engineering as it was discussed in the United States during the period he was a social scientist. As we have seen, Verwoerd drew on the work of many American social scientists, including research on the use of social science in


modern business management when he taught psychology, but he did not refer to the substantial American literature on scientific management and social engineering. Somewhat later, as a sociologist, Verwoerd’s interest in social welfare and the reduction of white poverty led him to claim a significant role for social science in social policy, bringing him closer to what was defined in US. social welfare circles as social engineering. For example, he told his classes that certain detrimental psychological traits in the poor would take a long time to disappear, but the process could be hastened through social work.77

Verwoerd often repeated that social work should be conducted scientifically, by which he meant that it should be based on social science investigations of the conditions and causes of poverty and should employ scientifically trained social workers. Although this approach is consistent with the concept of social engineering that had been widely discussed in reform movements in the United States, Verwoerd did not himself use that term. He was undoubtedly influenced by the scientific rationale for professional social work training used by the American sociologist Charles W. Coulter in his tenure at Stellenbosch.78 But Verwoerd did not use the science or engineering metaphors that peppered Coulter’s writings, nor did he show much interest in stimulating in South Africa the national-scale social planning that was increasingly associated with social engineering in the United States and Europe in the 1930s.

Instead, as we have seen, Verwoerd emphasised the need for ameliorating white poverty through changes in individual behaviour, that is, through the uplift (opheffing) of the poor. Both as an academic sociologist and as a social welfare activist, he stressed the need for individual rather than collective solutions to the problem of white poverty. In his lectures, he argued that the causes of white poverty differed from family to family and that social workers should treat each individual case separately, an approach which cannot be reconciled with the idea of utilising social engineering on a national scale.79

In sum, although Verwoerd’s approach to applied social science shared some of the reform characteristics of the early social engineering movement in other countries, this developed in response both to specific social and political conditions in South Africa and to his own central position in social work education in the country rather than through contact with the social science literature on social engineering. What Verwoerd did learn from his years as a social scientist, however, is that research and the aura of science could effectively be used both to shape and to defend social policies. Thus, when he became Minister of Native Affairs in 1950, he immediately established a research division to provide him with the information he needed to devise policy.80

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77 Verwoerd, ‘Armoede en sy bestryding’.
79 See Verwoerd, ‘Armoede en sy bestryding’.
80 Posel, Making of Apartheid, p. 64.
Modus Operandi

Verwoerd’s rapid rise from a junior professor of psychology to the central figure in South African social welfare activities at a time when white poverty was seen as a critical national problem was a product of many factors, including his professorial position at a prestigious university and his participation in many committees and civic associations. However there were other professors at Stellenbosch who also served on civic committees but did not attain his prominence. What distinguished Verwoerd from others was his tendency to dominate the activities in which he took part. For example, as a committee member, Verwoerd displayed great energy and a willingness to assume a variety of committee tasks. He also dominated committee discussion and attracted the attention of the press — thus expanding his influence within civic groups — by defining the problem to maximise what he himself could contribute to the group’s effort. Thus in 1932, when he testified on the need for modelling Cape Town’s charities on the American social welfare system, he was the local expert on American social welfare. Two years later, when his department at Stellenbosch was the principal training centre for social workers in the country, he argued at the Kimberley Volkskongres for the importance of scientifically trained social workers. His plan for a state service of social workers, which he would train, provides another illustration of this tactic. Similarly, his proposal that the Continuation Committee emphasise public advocacy — which he called propaganda — drew on his own experience and competence. Not only had he taught advertising methods at Stellenbosch, but he also had been quite successful in publishing articles in the newspapers. In short, Verwoerd’s growing responsibilities and ultimately his national reputation in the battle against white poverty were due in large part to his skill at defining problems in ways that emphasised the need for his own participation.

Verwoerd’s tendency to develop comprehensive plans that subsequently dominated the debate also contributed to his prominence in civic organisations. For example, in 1932 he proposed that the Cape Town Charity Commission establish a research institute within the Department of Sociology and Social Work at Stellenbosch to conduct scientific investigations of social welfare problems and to supervise and co-ordinate public and private social welfare activities in the Cape Peninsula. Although the institute would require a subsidy, it would provide, Verwoerd said, ‘a system of service similar to that which is provided by similar institutions of the Universities in the United States.’ Newspapers labelled the proposal the Verwoerd Plan and discussion in the Cape Town Charity Commission centred on Verwoerd’s idea. Similarly, shortly after the Continuation Committee

81 See Cape Town Charity Commission, Summary of Evidence, H.F. Verwoerd testimony, H.F. Verwoerd papers; Cape Times, 22-23 September 1932; and Die Burger, 21-22 September 1932. Verwoerd’s methods were viewed by some with suspicion. An editorial in the Cape Times supporting Verwoerd’s plan for a State Service of Social Workers noted that despite the wisdom of the plan, ‘There will still be people — unfortunately their concentration is fairly high in the Union — who will subject Professor Verwoerd’s suggestions to suspicious analysis and will conclude that his insistence on training is a disguised attempt to secure jobs for his own pupils’.

82 See Cape Town Charity Commission, Summary of Evidence, H.F. Verwoerd testimony, H.F. Verwoerd papers; Cape Times, 22 and 23 September 1932; Die Burger, 21 and 22 September 1932.
was appointed at the end of 1934, Verwoerd developed a comprehensive plan for its activities that focused on what he called propaganda. The Continuation Committee adopted his plan and a few months later elected Verwoerd, probably the youngest member of the Committee, to serve as chairman when the appointed chairman resigned. Another example of this pattern is Verwoerd's plan for a state service of social work, which he presented both to the Union Minister for Labour and to the press. This plan was widely reprinted and discussed, although by this time Verwoerd's methods were becoming recognised.

A third element that added to Verwoerd's public recognition during this period was his heavy emphasis on the need for what was called 'propaganda.' This encompassed a wide range of activities directed at informing, educating and persuading both the public and those in high political positions. Because it involved public relations and government lobbying, propaganda — or advocacy — was central to the task of the Continuation Committee as Verwoerd defined it. In fact, he characterised the Committee’s activities as ‘prolonged propaganda, such as is carried out by all nationally organised welfare organisations.’

Verwoerd was an able practitioner of what he preached. For example, he first attracted attention outside the academic community in 1932 by writing a series of newspaper articles reviewing four of the five volumes of the report of the Carnegie Poor White Commission. These reviews came out within weeks of the publication of the report and thus served to define the report for many people who would never read it. By late 1933, Verwoerd, who had taught classes and published a paper on newspaper advertising, was deeply involved in press relations for the Kimberley Volkskongres. He was knowledgeable enough to request that Reuters News Agency time the release of an announcement so that it would appear in the morning papers first.

Verwoerd was also very prolific and skillful in securing newspaper coverage of the work of the Continuation Committee when he was chairman. In the first six months of 1936, the Cape Town newspapers ran 60 articles on the Committee’s work; two-thirds of these were in Die Burger and the rest in the English papers. Even Verwoerd’s academic work was permeated by his awareness of the importance of public relations. In teaching his students how to conduct a survey, he advised them to use the local press, public speeches, and other means of propaganda to make the public aware of the significance of the survey and to ensure its co-operation.

**Conclusion**

At the end of the academic year in 1936, Verwoerd resigned his position at Stellenbosch and, after an apprenticeship at Die Burger, began work as chief editor...
of Die Transvaaler. The establishment of this newspaper was part of a larger expansion of Malan's Gesuiwerde Nasionale Party into the Transvaal. Malan had been planning for some time to create a northern equivalent to Die Burger and had raised funds for the new paper in the Cape. An announcement describing the publication as a 'feather in the hat of Afrikanerdom' referred to the new chief editor as renowned for his work on the poor white problem. Verwoerd was also lauded as an interpreter of the volksgevoel or national sentiment 'regarding undesirable elements from overseas streaming into our land.'

After Verwoerd left Stellenbosch, he abandoned the non-partisan politics of civil society that had previously consumed his energies and became deeply involved in party politics. The man who had insisted on joint English and Afrikaner welfare activities emerged as a strong Afrikaner nationalist. The professor who had denied that there were intellectual and biological differences among Africans and Europeans and who had proposed research that assumed them both to be part of the same South African society ultimately became an advocate of apartheid as the means to encourage and protect the differences between these groups. Finally, the academic who had commended the Jews for their contributions to world culture espoused strongly anti-Semitic sentiments.

Prior to 1937, there were only faint clues that such a transformation in Verwoerd's positions might take place. In October 1935 he wrote a series of three articles on white poverty for English newspapers in Cape Town, Johannesburg, and Durban in which, contrary to his usual practice, he did not mention American social welfare practices at all. Instead, Verwoerd uncharacteristically praised Germany, noting that pride in manual work can be encouraged, as is done in the German 'Arbeitsdienst'. He also suggested that natives should be cared for outside the cities, either in the mines or by 'increasing their chances of self-maintenance on the reserves.' In addition, in late 1936, he took part in anti-Semitic protests in the Cape Province. His conflicting impulses were demonstrated in his appearance as a featured speaker at the congress of the Afrikaanse Nasionale Studentebond, an exclusively Afrikaner group under the leadership of P.J. Meyer which had broken away from the National Union of South African Students in 1933. Although Verwoerd took part in what was a nationalist meeting, he used the occasion to speak about social work and the need for a Union Department of Social Welfare.

Although it is unclear why the transformation in Verwoerd's attitudes took place, it is obvious that the man who was chief editor of Die Transvaaler in the late 1930s held very different views from the man who worked so effectively as an academic psychologist and sociologist and as a social welfare activist earlier in the decade. Nonetheless, in this new setting, much of Verwoerd's early experience proved useful. He had already learned how to mobilise civic and political resources.

88 Die Transvaalse Nasionale Dagblad (Cape Town, no date); Directors, Voortrekkerpers, Beperk, 10 February 1937.
89 Cape Argus, 2, 3, 4 October 1935.
90 Cape Argus, 2 October 1935.
Combining his understanding of the importance of using propaganda to gain public support, his capacity to gain the confidence of the leaders of civil organisations, his knowledge of lobbying, and his public writing and speaking, Verwoerd had developed and honed the skills necessary to be an effective political figure. Moreover, his commitment to applied social research, his technique of dominating policy making by preparing comprehensive administrative plans, and his strategic arguments for the co-ordination of previously independent activities served him well when he emerged as a national political figure after 1948.

This still does not explain why Verwoerd seems to have changed his political positions so dramatically after 1937. There are several possible explanations. First, Verwoerd may always have held the views he expressed after 1937 in the editorials of Die Transvaler but was reluctant to express them when he was an academic at Stellenbosch dependent upon people in the liberal Cape for promotions and civic standing. Second, Verwoerd may have sincerely held the positions he took as an academic and social welfare activist but had a conversion to Afrikaner nationalism and its associated panoply of beliefs, like some latter-day Saul on the road to Damascus, after which he abandoned his more liberal views for the new religion.

Third, and most likely, Verwoerd’s early successes in both academic and social welfare activities may have spawned ambitions that he eventually recognised could only be fulfilled in the context of national politics. To this end, Verwoerd might have decided to take advantage of opportunities to advance his career in the fluid and developing Gesuiwerde Nasionale Party in the Transvaal. Although this interpretation differs from the traditional view of Verwoerd as a rigid ideologue and a steadfast nationalist, the ideologue and the nationalist are difficult to locate in Verwoerd’s thought and behaviour before 1937. Instead, what can be discerned in the years between 1924 and 1937 is his energy, his growing prominence, and his evolving organisational and political skills. This third interpretation suggests that Verwoerd was strongly influenced by the political context within which he sought to succeed. If so, he should not be viewed as an ideologue, but rather as a pragmatist and opportunist whose ambitions guided his actions and ultimately shaped his beliefs.