Chapter Seventeen

LBJ and the Conservative Movement

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Barry Goldwater lost. Huge. And that was supposed to be the end of it. After a little over a decade of bizarre and sudden outbursts from an increasingly noisy right, the conservative "movement" had put forth their Chosen One and he got thumped. The 1960s edition of the chattering class breathed a *sotto voce* sigh of relief and chuckled (perhaps) a little too loudly; they had watched with increasing discomfort as an alarming number of Americans took the Cold War just a mite too seriously. From Joe McCarthy to William F. Buckley to the secret membership of the John Birch Society, these ultraconservatives, to use at least one contemporary description, threatened to disrupt the political order. In the name of fighting communism they questioned an agreed upon collection of ideas about modern government and political behavior. Finally, on November 4, 1964, the question was answered: There was no viable conservative movement; it turned out that what one critic called "irritable mental gestures" had indeed produced the clamor (Trilling, 1950, ix). What had passed for conservatism really was just a bunch of pissed off "little old ladies in tennis shoes."[1]

Except it wasn't. What most contemporary political experts missed – and scholars continued to miss for decades – was the fact that Barry Goldwater didn't lead a movement; he'd been created by one. It was slow to build and most of the construction took place far from the corridors of national power, but it was there. Like any construction site, the movement, in the Johnson years, was a mess. To be sure, it had its share of cranks and nuts. Over the course of the next decade and a half however, conservatism emerged as a viable political alternative to Johnson's brand of liberalism. It was housed primarily within a Republican Party that had, in many places, been built by and for those on the far right. The project was so successful that within just a few years, millions and millions of Americans who could not, would not, and did not vote for Goldwater were delighted to have the opportunity to vote for any number of candidates who preached pretty much the same sermon.

Historians only recently have begun drafting the history of Johnson Era conservatism but we have a well-rounded set of characters and enough of a plot to begin to outline the story. We certainly have what dramatists call an inciting incident – the 1964

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presidential election. There is little doubt, now, that that contest marked a crucial moment in the political history of the United States. This realization, like much of the historiography, is also recent; for many years, the Goldwater campaign was seen as a gasp (but not the last) of an irrational, irritable segment of society rather than as a coherent, logical phase in movement building. This essay will introduce readers to some of the reasons for this interpretive transformation and offer brief descriptions of some of the more important texts that consider the history of conservatism during the Johnson Era, roughly a span of time between 1954 and 1974.[2]

While recently, many remarkably attentive and inventive scholars have cheerfully adopted a topic that, in the mid-1990s historian Alan Brinkley called an "orphan" in historical scholarship (Brinkley, 1994), any serious historian who had the audacity to suggest in, say, early November 1964, that conservatism was a legitimate topic would have been laughed out of the room. The liberalism of the 1960s was barreling full bore down the highway, with LBJ at the wheel.

Consequently, scholars spent the next few decades describing and analyzing the catalysts and consequences of that liberalism. There are obvious reasons that the academy first turned its focus to the political left: First, after the Goldwater defeat, it was even more difficult to take conservatism seriously. Second, in terms of the potential larger picture, many saw Johnson's overwhelming victory and subsequent domestic policies as a logical extension of a linear political/historical narrative that began with Populist/Progressive efforts to redress social and economic injustices. This meant that the actions of those who sought redress for social injustice or demonstrated against what they believed was an unjust war were critical stories that needed to be placed within the larger trajectory of twentieth-century liberalism. Third, the national media, especially television, had provided a visual feast of public spectacle that captured the nation's attention. Scholars were certainly not immune to the allure of a narrative with those marching or even fighting in the streets at its center. Fourth, historians and others were perhaps more inclined to consider the stories of those political actors whose political sympathies were more in line with their own (Roche, 2001b). Lastly, and perhaps less obviously, one must take into consideration the intensity of a historiographic paradigm that grew up alongside Goldwater conservatism. The first generation of scholars who considered those conservative activists who made the Goldwater campaign possible vigorously dismissed them as psychologically maladjusted crackpots who had no ideas worthy of study.

This "consensus" interpretation no longer has a death grip on conservative historiography, but it remains important to understand both the consensus scholars and their arguments. These people were more than some professorial faction with its own take on a historical phenomenon; instead, they became, over time, The Voice of Authority. In an era where public intellectuals rather than cable television ideologues shaped public opinion, big time scholars' take on modern politics or society mattered, within the hallowed halls of the Ivory Tower and beyond. Since, over time, the consensus school became the starting line for any interpretation of postwar conservatism, let's begin there.

To understand the Consensus School's take on conservatism, one must first grasp its understanding of postwar American political culture. Put too simply, scholars like sociologist Daniel Bell, historian Richard Hofstadter, literary critic Lionel Trilling, and others believed that Americans had come to a . . . well, consensus: Government, in

consultation with "experts," should enact policies to insure economic stability through growth and national safety through a rational foreign policy. While they recognized that a few nagging problems like racism, poverty, and other forms of social and economic discrimination remained, they also assumed the continuing expansion of the economy along specifically targeted state action would resolve these issues as well. Importantly, this optimistic view of government was coupled with a fear of an emotionally charged public. After witnessing the previously unimaginable terror that fascism had inflicted on the world, they were, logically, cool to popular political movements that fed on fear. Thus, their belief that American political culture was defined and should be defined by a large and dispassionate political center.

When Senator Joseph McCarthy whipped segments of the population into an anticommunist frenzy, these men were motivated to explain it away. In 1955, just a year after the Senate censured McCarthy, Daniel Bell published an anthology of essays that identified McCarthy's followers as *The New American Right* (Bell, 1955). The book, among the earliest scholarly takes on that subject, is largely a dismissal. Essay after essay explains that McCarthyism was simply the latest in a long string of irrational, but temporary fits within the American public. The book's common argument stated that certain segments of the population, because of a sudden change in status, had come to feel anxious about the state of American society and lashed out against some form of shadowy "other."[3] Moreover, those affected by this "status anxiety" sought out authoritarian leaders who reaffirmed their values in times of chaos. The book was widely cited and hugely influential. And the status anxiety argument, in any number of guises, became the go-to explanation for right-wing behavior.[4]

Spurred by the initial intellectual heft provided by Bell's books (he published an update to the original text in 1963) and fascinated by the sudden swell in right-wing activism, the early 1960s witnessed a surprising popular and academic interest in conservatism in general and ultraconservatism especially. Major newsweeklies and newspapers published widely read stories on the vanguards of this radical right featuring exposes on the scarily secretive John Birch Society, the rotund fire-breathing anticommunist preacher and radio personality out of Tulsa Billy James Hargis, the "crusade" of the odd Australian physician-turned-expert-on-communism Fred Schwarz and his "schools" of anticommunism, and other minor league personalities and organizations. Books about the right flooded local bookstores. Few offered any real analysis, other than rehashing status anxiety, rather opting for colorful descriptions of the more outrageous events and public figures. Perhaps the most influential of these books was *Danger on the Right.* Written by Arnold Forster and Benjamin Epstein, the book walked a fine line between trying to dismiss the right as fringe and playing up the danger that it posed to American society (Forster and Epstein, 1964). These books, and there were dozens, further served to cement, in the American imagination – especially among those in the academy - the notion that the right was not a serious movement, rather a collection of angry oddballs led by raving (or cynically opportunistic) paranoiacs who fed their fears with stories of secret communist plots to take over America from within.

Within the academy, a slew of sociologists and political scientists rigorously tested the status anxiety hypothesis. These narrow studies offered few conclusions as to the motivation of grassroots conservatives, but painted a more nuanced portrait of right wing activists and their belief systems. They determined that most of these activists were white, educated, middle-class (often professional), and were either fundamentalist

Protestants or conservative Catholics. They prized individualism and individual responsibility, supported a strong military, rejected efforts to guarantee equality, praised strong communities, and looked to some fuzzy utopian past for their model of bedrock Americanism. But few outside those in Departments of Sociology or Political Science ever read them.[5]

The primary early exceptions to the they-are-all-a-bunch-of-nuts interpretation of conservatism were those scholars (and any number of insiders) who focused on the movement's intellectual moorings. For them, the rise of the right was about ideas. It was not a coincidence, they argued, that within a few years after the publication and popularization of a few key texts, a groundswell of support for a variety of conservative principles had transformed American political culture. But there were serious divisions within the conservative intellectual movement that continue to play a part in the interpretation of the modern right. In one corner was the libertarian approach and in the other the traditionalists. The former places individual freedom at the center of its ideology, in other words, government should not seek to regulate behavior and should impose only the bare minimum of restrictions on society needed to prevent total chaos. The latter, believes that society should be based on a shared sense of morality and tradition. In the immediate postwar years, libertarians were probably most influenced by the work of Friedrich von Hayek, especially his *Road to Serfdom* (Hayek, 1944), a devastating critique of state planning that argues all efforts at state intervention, no matter the righteousness of original intent, bear the risk of creating a totalitarian state. The book gained a wide audience when it was popularized by a condensed version in *Readers' Digest*. Even more popular were the novels of Ayn Rand, particularly *The Fountainhead* (Rand, 1943) and *Atlas Shrugged* (Rand, 1957) which placed naked self-interest as the key to societal advancement. Rand gathered a host of disciples who called themselves objectivists, the most famous of which was economist Alan Greenspan. The traditionalists, on the other hand, put God and community at the center of their philosophy. Richard Weaver's *Ideas Have Consequences* (Weaver, 1948) and Russell Kirk's *The Conservative Mind: From Burke to Santayana* (Kirk, 1953) celebrate tradition, order, and religion and reject notions of equality.

The most crucial development in the marriage of conservative thought to political action, however, was the founding of William F. Buckley's weekly *National Review*. The *NR* brought together libertarians and traditionalists to join Buckley in his quest to stand "athwart history, yelling Stop." The magazine was hugely influential in creating a "fusion" between those who believed that the central tenet of conservatism should be the protection of tradition and morality and those who believed that individual freedom, especially from state power, was its *raiseon d'etre* (Hart, 2005).

It is this suggestion that modern conservatism's creation story begins with the fusing of these two intellectual positions lies at the heart of the first serious challenge to the consensus interpretation. The crucial book is George Nash's *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America since 1945* (Nash, 1976). In this work, Nash traces the political trajectories of what he describes as the three principal strands of conservatism: traditionalism, libertarianism, and anticommunism and explains how they merged into a movement in the 1950s and 1960s. It's a historicized version of the fusionist principle that guided the early editorial vision of the *National Review*. As importantly, by focusing on the ideas that guided many of the right's leading thinkers, Nash contested notions of status anxiety and placed the intellectual side of the right within a longer and

more established set of political traditions. It should be little wonder, then, that so many scholars who followed Nash came to rely on the strand/fusion explanation.

After the election of Ronald Reagan, a new wave of scholarship on the intellectual right probed the depths of Nash's three strands more deeply. Naturally. Reagan was a longstanding and outspoken foe of communism, he espoused a serious streak of antigovernment libertarian thought, and he became the darling of a new and powerful religious right (more on these guys and gals later) that put traditionalist thought into everyday action. Paul Gottfried and Thomas Fleming (Gottfried and Fleming, 1988), along with Melvin Thorne (Thorne, 1990), followed the strands of conservative thought across a wider and longer historical plane. Patrick Allitt, in one of the most important studies in recent years, posits that one crucial branch of traditionalism – Catholicism – was essential in the articulation of multiple facets of modern conservative thought (Allitt, 1993). Southern and intellectual historian Eugene Genovese considered the world-view of the anti-capitalist antebellum southern slave-holders as the inspiration for more recent ideas about community and hierarchical order that seemed to inform more modern traditionalists (Genovese, 1994). Paul Murphy also looked to the South and specifically the Southern Agrarians' celebration of a mythic community of self-sufficient farmers as the model for a conservatism that actively promotes both individual freedom and the primacy of community (Murphy, 2001). Those 1960s-era intellectual heroes, William F. Buckley and Ayn Rand have been the subjects of two very good recent biographies. John Judis offers interesting insight on how William Buckley's Catholic faith informed his political ideas and made possible his subject's adherence to fusionism. Jennifer Burns's work on Rand explains how her novels, even while dismissed by contemporary literary critics and even many intellectuals on the right, played an enormous role in creating a generation of political activists.

If the election of Ronald Reagan cemented the legacy of fusionism into conservative historiography, it also helped usher in an important new line of thinking about the modern right – the backlash school. To the surprise of many, northern, working-class, urban ethnics proved crucial in calculating a winning algorithm for the Reagan campaign. (Less surprising were white southerners flocking to Reagan; white southerners been voting Republican in presidential campaigns for decades and Reagan had sent a clear message to the white South when he opened his campaign in Mississippi with a call for "states rights.") The loss of these formerly reliable members of the New Deal coalition created a mini-industry of "white backlash" books. Historians did not invent the backlash thesis; it had been around since at least the early 1960s to explain Goldwater's appeal. The popular version of the argument went something like this: urban ethnics grew steadily angrier over a radicalized civil rights movement, the attempted desegregation of their neighborhoods, the emergence of affirmative action programs at the plant or worksite, and cities defined by violent crime and seemingly annual riots. As the economy failed and taxes rose, they blamed Democrats who not only refused to address their fears and worries, but seemed to side with the criminals and technocrats. Joining the white urban working class were church-going folks across the nation who feared a women's movement that had disrupted traditional family structures and could not understand a sexual revolution that had thrown the rules of propriety out the window. Joining them were a whole lot of people fed up with unpatriotic antiwar protestors, hippies, and other punk kids who challenged the foundation upon which they had built their lives. Filling out the roster were millions

of white southerners who had finally had enough of a Democratic Party pushing legislation that would destroy the Southern Way of Life (read state-sponsored discrimination). All of this created a political world populated by furious voters looking for political candidates who publicly shared their anguish, nurtured their fears, and promised a return to normalcy.

By the time academics got to work, this basic argument was in place. Still, many of the books that focused on backlash increased our understanding of this remarkable transformation of the body politic. One of the most important contributions was that of Thomas and Mary Edsall (Edsall and Edsall, 1992). Their well-argued *Chain Reaction: The Impact of Race, Rights, and Taxes on American Politics* places the transformations of the Democratic and Republican parties within larger contexts of race, region, and economics. William C. Berman, on the other hand, in his *America's Right Turn*, makes a largely economic argument for backlash, emphasizing rising taxes and the growing expense of social programs as the catalyst for a rejection of liberal policy and politicians (Berman, 1994). A very good local study of backlash is Jonathan Rieder's *Canarsie*, an eloquent examination into the evolution of one New York City neighborhood's political culture (Rieder, 1985).

It was a powerful argument lent credence by everyday folks publicly expressing similar feelings. The backlash interpretation, even while disrupting the dominance of consensus interpretation, faced severe criticisms. First, most backlash scholars, even while offering a more nuanced versions of the story than often appeared in popular accounts, too often fell into lamentation mode. If only the civil rights movement had not turned so violent, if only certain activists in the women's movement had not been so aggressive, if only LBJ had been able to solve the riddle of the Vietnam War, if only the Democratic Party had not given in to its left wing, and so on. Then, they argue, the natural order of the New Deal Coalition could have survived. The overarching structure of much backlash scholarship was too often a declensionist account of the New Deal coalition, rather than an analysis of the rise of conservatism. Compounding this criticism was the fact that, as several scholars pointed out, racial politics and white anger over desegregation predated the Democratic Party's embrace of civil rights issues often by decades (Sugrue, 1996; Hirsch, 1995).

This is where the scholarship stood in the mid-1990s. A backlash thesis had begun to supplant a consensus interpretation, good work in the intellectual history of conservatism had created an interpretative framework that bound libertarians and traditionalists through their commitment to battling communism, and an exploration into the motivations of Reagan Democrats brought race, religion, and region into play. Then, to use a very tired, but totally apt metaphor, the study of the modern right simply exploded. It's almost ironic in a way, just months after Alan Brinkley's "orphan" essay, the good books started coming and kept coming and kept coming.

Among the first out the blocks was Mary Brennan's incredibly useful study of the conservative takeover of the Republican Party in the 1960s. Brennan not only documented the details of grassroots activism that created the Goldwater candidacy, but also (and more importantly) laid out a persuasive case that it was the 1964 election that served as the Key Event that linked Old and New Right (Brennan, 1995). That same year, sociologist Sara Diamond, utilizing a resource mobilization approach, mapped the links that connected the crucial nodes of the conservative universe and explained how key figures translated movement rhetoric into policy (Diamond, 1995).

Historian Michael Kazin, in a tour de force exploration of the "populist persuasion," demonstrated how the modern right had, in their use of language and symbol, made a "small p" populist appeal to the common man central to their mobilization (Kazin, 1995).

Accompanying these fine works were two *essential* political biographies and a trailblazing monograph. These three books would help guide scholarship for the next several years. Robert Goldberg's exquisitely researched and gracefully argued study of Barry Goldwater uses the career of the Arizona Senator to analyze the conservative movement from its origins in the 1930s well into the Reagan years (Goldberg, 1995). Placing Goldwater within the context of the massive economic and demographic growth of Phoenix specifically and the West in general, Goldberg moves the story of conservatism into the larger narrative of a rising Sun belt. Moreover, he explains how Goldwater's business-friendly free-market approach combined with carefully calculated appeals to a western mythology that celebrated self-sufficiency and a when-needed aggression made the Arizona Senator the ideal spokesperson for a brand of conservatism that was quickly taking hold across the West. But, as Goldberg, explains, Goldwater's philosophic vote against the 1964 Civil Rights Act also poised his subject to make a crucial first run of the southern strategy that would presage the Republican emergence in Dixie.

The other landmark biography was Dan T. Carter's examination of the political impact of George Wallace (Carter, 1995). Carter placed the Alabama governor's appeal within the larger trajectories of both southern and national politics. For Carter, Wallace represented an important step in the *southernization* of American politics. Tracing Wallace as he crashed through the American political scene in the 1960s and 1970s, Carter showed how the segregationist leader's thinly disguised racial appeals taught a generation of politicians how to tap into a latent racism that transcended regional boundaries. Wallace's popularity, as Carter demonstrates, was more than simple racism, however; his campaign's focus on law and order, the sanctity of family, and the importance of religious morality combined with his celebration of the self-reliant working stiffs and mockery of pointy-headed intellectuals helped to invent an political style that would come to characterize many of the conservative figures who followed.

The next year, Thomas Sugrue published *The Origins of the Urban Crisis* (Sugrue, 1996). This milestone study, which examines the roots of racial politics in Detroit, served as a model for much subsequent work that explored the intersection of race, class, and space. Sugrue argues that it was contests over access to housing between black and white workers who had begun to flock to the Motor City during the war that precipitated much of the conflict that would roil through that city for the next few decades. His story unveils complicity among real estate firms, banks, and the federal government that, in effect, created segregated northern cities. As white residents became even more fixated on maintaining residential segregation in the mid-1960s, they were prewired for a conservative message built on stoking anger over taxes, housing, and the demands of civil rights activists.

If 1964 represented perhaps *the* crucial year in the development of the modern right, it's not much of a stretch to make the same argument for 1995/1996 as *the* crucial year for the development of the study of the modern right. What's happened is that historians and others, using a variety of illuminating methodologies and fresh approaches, have finally placed conservative politics into the mainstream of scholarship.

Several things stand out about this decade and a half of new scholarship. First, much of what separates this recent work and the primary interpretative thrust of what had preceded it is tone. Newer scholarship takes conservatives and conservatism seriously without losing a critical stance. Unlike many who preceded them, these scholars do not seek to explain away conservatism, but rather to understand it on its own terms and within the larger contexts of American politics, society, culture, and, very often, economics. This approach is a welcome shift away from both the status anxiety and backlash approaches. The second is the lack of any dominant overarching interpretation that completely replaces that which came before. What has emerged is a historiography that offers competing approaches and that looks at the modern right through a variety of lenses. One group of tightly-focused works consider the emergence of conservative activism in specific places and address the particular set of circumstances that led one group of political actors into a larger national movement. Another group looks to the impact of regional political cultures (especially southern) on the building of that national movement. These scholars very often explore the interplay between the national and regional in describing the emergence of a political language and the articulation of a set of issues that fueled the movement's popularity. The sudden increase in interest and scholarship has led other historians to rethink the narrative of the entire movement. Several studies that consider the right across time have created new timelines and new explanations for the growth of the right. Many of these studies clearly link anti-New Deal sentiment with anticommunism to the Goldwater Right to the New Right and even up to the present day. This Long Conservative Movement approach also drives another group of studies under consideration that look the influence and impact of three crucial constituencies of the modern right. Women, who, looking to their self-described roles as wives and mothers, gendered a conservative message that put the protection of family at the center of their message. Business leaders who sought to overturn the regulatory state, destroy the power of organized labor, and return business to its Calvin Coolidge heyday. And lastly, the emergence of the religious right, which has emerged as perhaps the most vocal and powerful constituency in recent years.

Let us first consider those works that explore conservative politics in specific places. These works, building on the scholarship of Sugrue, demonstrate the importance that neighborhood spaces (both private and public) have played in the articulation of political values. Without underplaying race in modern urban politics, Kenneth Durr, in his *Behind the Backlash*, John McGreevey's *Parish Boundaries,* and *American Babylon* by Robert Self show that very often the protection of specific traditional cultural spaces among like-minded neighborhood residents, spaces that ranged from church buildings, schools, and community centers to factories and parks, as well as housing sparked locals into political action (Durr, 2003; McGreevey, 1996; Self, 2003). Moreover, they point out, when these people did finally leave the Old Neighborhood for that shiny suburban home, they calculated their move within a set of cultural contexts that included affordable housing, lower taxes, and newer and better schools and were not simply fleeing the city. Did race enter the equation? Of course it did, but as these studies show, race was only a part (an important part) of a more complex framework of postwar American life that included economic expansion, suburbanization, industrialization, and the Cold War.

While Durr, McGreevey, and Self focus on the transitions within established neighborhoods in primarily older cities, another set of scholars have turned their

attention to the suburban political culture of the Sun belt. In the suburbs of places like Atlanta and Los Angeles emerged an on-the-surface race-neutral group of political ideas that were all about protecting home values, evading crippling property taxes, and celebrating local school districts. With a focus on class, these studies reveal that although southern working class and middle class whites initially reacted differently to the civil rights movement, they very often ended up at the same place – a critique of the federal government and an embrace of a nostalgic political ideology that celebrated a fictional pre-1960s era of peace and stability.

Historians Kevin Kruse, Matthew Lassitter, and Becky Nicolaides offer nuanced and compelling stories of how home ownership coupled with a strong sense of place helped to create a conservative mindset among many former loyal Democrats (Kruse, 2005; Lassittter, 2006; Nicolaides, 2002). Kruse focuses on how the challenge to desegregate public spaces (including the workplace) in older Atlanta neighborhoods was a crucial step *before* any wholesale migration to that new housing development off the Interstate. Lassitter, on the other hand, concentrating on the New South suburbs of Atlanta and Charlotte, describes how the suburban middle-class rejected raw racism in favor of a more genteel form of racial moderation that better reflected their class-status. With that shift came a political interest in bread-and-butter issues like taxes and home values and an alliance with the business type of conservatives who had emerged within the southern Republican Party. Becky Nicolaides finds a similar set of circumstances in her study of one working-class California community that offered its residents (many of whom were former southerners or the children of southern transplants) a middle-class segregation rationalized using the race-neutral language of home values.

But, as other scholars might suggest, the injection of southern racial politics (and not the suburban race-neutral kind) into national politics was the crucial moment that created the modern right. In the postwar South, an exploding economy and massive urbanization ran headlong into the revolutionary changes created by civil rights activists and transformed southern politics. Newly franchised African Americans moved into a Democratic Party willing to make concessions to civil rights to remain relevant while business conservatives and angry whites moved into the empty shell that was the 1960s southern Republican Party. Important work by Kari Frederickson, Alexander Lamis, Merle and Earl Black, and David Lublin, Byron Shafer and Richard Johnston describe many of the consequences and details of this process (Frederickson, 2000; Lamis, 1984; Black and Black, 2002; Lublin, 2004; Shafer and Johnston, 2006).

It is understanding the relationship between southern conservatism and national conservatism that explains not only the modern right, but also the last fifty years of American politics. As civil rights victories accumulated in the courts, a generation of white politicians engaged in a desperate attempt to save The Southern Way of Life. Their political strategy, which would become known as massive resistance, was predicated on contesting every demand to dismantle segregation and unleashing a brutal variety of racist politics that had not been seen in decades.[6] As resisters passed absurd legislation to protect segregation, they threatened the unprecedented economic growth that most southern cities of any size had enjoyed since World War II. This threat caused a new generation of pro-business and "sensible" segregationists to step in and remake southern politics. This remodel featured southern politicians borrowing a race-neutral language of national conservatives about limiting the power of the state and preserving moral values in the service of protecting as much of the racial status quo as

possible. The men and women who led this movement abandoned the Democratic Party to promote their ideas within a southern Republican Party that they were able to build from the ground up. Much of the recent literature on "massive resistance" tells some version of this story. Numan Bartley followed up his still-the-standard survey of massive resistance with a case study of Georgia politics that confirmed the role of working-class white southerners in the resurrecting the southern GOP (Bartley, 1969; 1973). George Lewis's recent work makes the connection between massive resistance and conservatism more explicit (Lewis, 2006; 2004). Studies that emphasize the connections between massive resistance business leaders include Jeff Roche's *Restructured Resistance* and Matthew Lassitter and Andrew Lewis's edited volume, *The Moderates' Dilemma* (Roche, 1995; Lassitter and Lewis, 1998). Joe Crespino's *In Search of Another Country* is the best of the recent books that link massive resistance to conservatism (Crespino, 2007). Crespino shows how one group of political elites transformed the reactionary resistance into a type of conservatism recognizable anywhere in the nation.

Yet another group of scholars, following the work of Dan Carter, argue that the barely disguised racism that characterized the career of George Wallace remained Dixie's primary political export. This "southernization of American politics," they argue, lies at the heart of the modern right's appeal. Carter followed up his Wallace biography with a short text that demonstrated the role of race in the "conservative counterrevolution" (Carter, 1996). In his recent biography of Jesse Helms, William Link reveals how this former journalist/activist-turned-politician transformed a 1960s political message founded on protecting segregation into a 1970s form of anti-liberalism that blamed crime, abortion, drugs and other social issues on a permissive state and culture (Link, 2008). William Hustwit has recently penned a political biography of James J. Kilpatrick that shows how the Virginia journalist and pundit stripped his message of obvious racism and become a national intellectual figure in conservative circles (Hustwit, 2008).

Although western history as a field, lacks the long tradition of political history that seems to characterize much of southern historiography, the West has proven central to the creation of the modern right. The home of the more libertarian wing of the movement, the entire region was, for generations, largely a political and economic colony of the East. Consequently, western political culture is perhaps best characterized by a distrust of centralized outside power, which makes it more susceptible to an anti-state message. During the Cold War, even as the region experienced unprecedented economic and demographic growth because of the federal government, the mistrust of Washington (and New York) remained. Interestingly, the people who constructed western conservatism came to rely on a frontier mythology to historicize their devotion to rugged individualism, self-reliance, and an aggressive defense of freedom. Weaving through their philosophy was an intense defense of free enterprise, tax relief, and deregulation of industry.

The California right has been the subject of several excellent studies. In one of the earliest books on the subject, Kurt Schuparra demonstrates how Golden State conservatism, despite its reputation for bizarre crankiness, was really about taxes and home values (Schuparra, 1998). And Matthew Dallek's *The Right Moment* describes how Ronald Reagan's articulation of a mid-1960s conservatism that had been stripped of much of its nuttiness led to his election to the governorship in 1966 (Dallek, 2000).

Lisa McGirr's *Suburban Warriors* is perhaps the best book on California and among the most important books on conservatism published in the last few years (McGirr, 2001). Among the first to answer the longstanding call for more research into the modern right, what emerges from her study is an examination of the right that is grounded in a western political culture and tempered by the reality of the amazing transformation that the military-industrial complex, massive population growth, and an almost unbelievable rise in personal income of an exploding middle class. The result is a study that reveals the maturation of a movement that moved from a blind lashing out at communism to one concerned with specific issues, a concrete agenda, and armed with tested strategies for success. Western conservatism is central to several other studies as well. As I have mentioned, Robert Goldberg's brilliant biography of Barry Goldwater placed Arizona's favorite son within the context of that state's political tradition and its massive economic and demographic growth (Goldberg, 1995). Peter Iverson, on the other hand, sought to place Goldwater within both the modern and mythic West (Iverson, 1997). Ellie Shermer helps us better understand the role of business elites in the Phoenix conservative movement (Shermer, 2011). My own work in Texas posits that the modern conservative movement relied upon the myth and language of the frontier to articulate a set of longstanding beliefs about individualism and community (Roche, 2001a; 2003).

In addition to seeing the modern right through the lenses of particular spaces or more widely considered regions, another major interpretive shift has been an expansion of thinking through conservatism across time. Understanding the trajectory of conservatism, its wellsprings, and the connections between personalities and movements across the decades has transformed our understanding of the modern right. One clear example is the collapse of the barriers that scholars had created to separate Goldwater "Paleoconservatives" and the blow-dried technocrats of the "New Right." Most recent scholarship argues that any differences between the "New" and "Old" Right were more matters of degree rather than of kind. Once the barriers came down, scholars began seeing the emergence of a movement across greater and greater expanses of time.

The result? The Long Conservative Movement. The proponents of this interpretation share a tendency to see the origins of conservatism within a set of shared (if often poorly articulated) ideas about politics, economics, morality, the role of the individual in a community and nation, and the national character that stretch as far back as the 1930s and in some instances even earlier. The narrative structure of these stories is organized around ascendance, with the twenty years between the Rise of Goldwater and the Triumph of Reagan as the primary focal point. In locating the motivations for the organization of the Right farther back in time, these histories have finally put to bed the consensus argument that flare ups from the right were mere temporary disruptions along the march toward progress. Remember, the consensus version of American political history centers upon the idea of a broad middle who have accepted the premise that government should be administered by largely non-ideological experts for an agreed upon public good and outliers on the far left and far right were not central to the story. The Long Conservative scholars outline an alternate political universe that managed to remain hidden in plain sight for much of twentieth century. In this universe, Americans are barely tolerant if not actively hostile to any expansion of state power. In this universe, Americans clamor for a moral order to provide guidance in a

rapidly changing world. In this universe, society need only provide an equality of opportunity rather than any redress of previous social injustices. In this universe, law and order was more important than civil liberties. In this universe, communism (and most other isms) was to be defeated not tolerated. This universe was about individual freedom, community responsibility, free enterprise, God, and nation.

One focus of the Long Conservative Movement has been looking to the past for the roots of the fear and anger that seemed to motivate so many on the right. In his 1988 book, David Bennett argued that the progenitors to the modern right could be found mid-nineteenth-century Americans' fear of a foreign "other" (Bennett, 1988). By the twentieth century, he argues, this concept morphed from a fear of specific people to an intense distrust of foreign ideas. M. J. Heale traces Americans' fear of one of these ideas in his longview history of anticommunism in America (Heale, 1990). David Horowitz, who examines challenges to the political status quo in his *Beyond Left and Right*, argues that an initial distrust of corporate power that seemed to dominate earlier in America's history was, during an era of mass media and a powerful federal government, gradually replaced by anitstatism and anger over an immoral cultural permissiveness (Horowitz, 1997).

Allan Lichtman, in his engaging survey of the twentieth century, pushes that narrative even further back. He argues that the right is best defined by its anti-pluralism, which emerged as a response to the cultural crises of the 1920s to preserve and protect a *White Protestant Nation* (Lichtman, 2008). Greg Schneider, in a mostly intellectual survey, argues that conservatism is largely characterized by its protean nature in which strains of the right can be found scattered across the first half of the century. These strains only found each other in the postwar years within a movement flexible enough to provide it strength and durability (Schneider, 2009).

Most recent surveys, however, locate the birth of the modern right sometime during the 1930s, emerging from critiques of various New Deal measures. One of the first to argue for a direct link between the 1930s and 1960s was Jerome Himmelstein (Himmelstein, 1990). New Deal opponents, he argues, dreamed up a utopian fantasy world from the past as an alternative to the reality of new and massive state power. Once the Cold War began, anticommunism lent great power to their Manichean view of the pre-New Deal world of good and the postwar world of creeping socialism. Donald Critchlow, in his intricate survey of the movement, also finds the genesis of the right in the 1930s, but focuses primarily on the implications of the complexity of modern politics (Critchlow, 2007). He argues that the New Deal set the Democratic Party down the road of creating policy to negotiate the issues of an industrial world. Conservative Republicans, on the other hand, in their long years out of power, negotiated the philosophic and practical issues of building a movement and, in the process, hammered out an agenda, language, and set of policies that proved powerful in a post-industrial America. David Farber, on the other hand, locates the origins of modern conservatism with Americans' search for some form of moral order to accompany the massive change they endured over the course of the twentieth century. Describing the "rise and fall" of the movement in six acts, each with a different protagonist, he describes the creation of a conservative program that encompasses moral tradition, a laissez-faire economic agenda, and a hard line foreign policy (Farber, 2010). In the book's final act, Farber argues that conservatism worked as a set of organizational principles, but had failed as a governing policy. Another important

survey of the postwar right, by Godfrey Hodgson offers a fusionist interpretation laced with a strong dose of backlash (Hodgson, 1996). The right, he argues, made overtures to previously liberal or even largely apolitical groups by exploiting the fears wrought by a radicalized civil rights movement, a rise in violent crime, and an apparent breakdown in traditional moral culture. An extremely useful survey and synthesis of recent scholarship by Niels Bjerre Poulsen explores the political world that produced the Goldwater candidacy (Poulsen, 2002).

Even this Long Conservative books (and most local studies under consideration) tend to see the 1960s as a crucial, if not *the* most important period in the emergence of the modern right. Not surprising then, that a host of books focusing on that particular decade have appeared in recent years. Two very good books on the conservative youth organization Young Americans for Freedom cover that organization's influence on the development of conservative activism. John Andrew offers an institutional history that focuses primarily on the first half of the decade (Andrew, 1997). Gregory Schneider, on the other hand, has written an intellectual history that covers the philosophical conflicts within YAF (Schneider, 1999). Both, however, demonstrate how YAF members were instrumental in guiding the movement, in forming and staffing many of the think tanks that emerged in the 1970s, and becoming important political actors in their own right. How the Republican Party became the primary vehicle for implementing conservatism is the subject of two surveys by Nicol Rae and David Reinhard respectively (Rae, 1989; Reinhard, 1983). In a more focused monograph, Laura Gifford examines the 1960 election season and concludes that the right was all but in power an election cycle before the Goldwater nomination (Gifford, 2009). In his superbly written and wide ranging history of the Goldwater Phenomenon, Rick Perlstein thoroughly discredits the notion of any consensus (Perlstein, 2001). In its place, he demonstrates an alternative political world inhabited by and created for those dissatisfied and disgusted with the direction of the country. In organizing for Goldwater, they created a movement that was primed for political activism and eager to turn out political and cultural elites. He also points out that the candidate's campaign was also the crucial turning point in the transformation of the politics of anticommunism to a brand of cultural politics that previous historians have located in the next decade.

Goldwater was also the host of a party that brought together the votaries of the far right, the braniac essayists and philosophers, and the functionaries of the GOP. Jonathan Schoenwald's *A Time for Choosing* describes the complications of this sort of arrangement very well (Schoenwald, 2002). He demonstrates that while an element of the radical right could claim responsibility for helping nominate Goldwater, that election also proved the necessity of purging them from what was, by 1965, a legitimate national enterprise. The result was a smarter and definitely savvier party. David Farber and Jeff Roche, along with some of the most prominent scholars of the right, explored many of these same themes in the edited volume *The Conservative Sixties* (Farber and Roche, 2000).

Another interesting development into the right of the Johnson Era has been a group of investigations that examine the transition of conservatism from the Goldwater/ Wallace era into the sort of institutionalized right that emerged in the 1970s. One very good example is Michael Flamm's intellectual/political history of "law and order" (Flamm, 2005). He demonstrates how conservatives manipulated a legitimate fear of violent crime by linking this social phenomenon to liberalism. Similarly, Philip Jenkins

shows how politicians and the media played up fears about child abuse, terrorism, drug dealers, and serial killers to create an almost Manichean view of good and evil operating in contemporary culture (Jenkins, 2006). Rick Perlstein in *Nixonland*, an engaging and sweeping survey of the Nixon years, adroitly explores the interplay between a frustrated public and the cynical and exploitative tactician in the White House (Perlstein, 2008). And in a wonderful collection of essays gathered together by Bruce Schulman and Julian Zelizer, contributors further break down the divisions between the Old and New Right (Schulman and Zelizer, 2008).

The last of the major historiographic developments under consideration is the work of those scholars whose work across disciplines has greatly expanded our understanding of how certain elements within the modern right contributed to its evolution. Three of the most important of these ingredients were Corporate America, women activists, and the religious right. Finally picking up the ball from contemporary critics of 1960s ultraconservatives, the relationship between the right and corporate America has been the basis of several recent studies. The business world has been crucial not only in funding a conservative infrastructure, but it has also put its considerable marketing talents to work selling a pro-business, anti-union, deregulatory, and free-enterprise message. As several scholars under consideration have demonstrated, the business right's efforts ran the gamut from the basic and practical: overturning the regulatory measures put into place during the 1930s and rolling back the influence of organized labor; to the sly and manipulative, funding those who sought to link liberalism and communism, and convincing everyday working Janes and Joes that unfettered free enterprise, minimal corporate taxes, right-to-work laws, and deregulation were as American as apple pie. Three important books by Elizabeth Fones-Wolf, Kim Phillips-Fein, and Wendy L. Wall investigate the links between the right and this business world and show that a large section of the business community has waged a longstanding, multi-pronged, and multi-staged attack to return to the business climate of the 1920s, when corporations ruled, the state and unions were weak, and business executives were heroes (Fones-Wolf, 1994; Phillips-Fein, 2009; Wall, 2007). The intense public relations campaign designed to define any debate on the postwar economic structure has been central to several recent studies. The marriage of grassroots conservatism politics to anti-union corporatism is explicit in another set of studies by Jefferson Cowie, Thomas Evans, and Elizabeth Shermer (Cowie, 2001; Evans, 2006; Shermer, 2008).

That women drove much of the conservative activism that emerged in the postwar years was obvious to anyone who was paying attention at the time or has studied it since, but until recently, historians have paid too little attention to how women helped define conservatism. As several historians have recently demonstrated, at the grassroots, it was an army of self-described homemakers who led the movement. Locally, they managed telephone trees, stuffed envelopes, canvassed door-to-door, and coordinated coffee klatches. They held key leadership positions within local organizations and were largely responsible for the day-to-day creation and direction of the movement. Perhaps more importantly these conservative women brought a gendered identity to the articulation of the right's ideology. Activist women walked a strange tightrope, occupying a forthright stance in the public sphere even while occupying reassuring (to male leaders and outsiders) gender roles that in many ways buttressed an emerging collection of ideas about the role of women and family in the political arena. It was as wives and

mothers that they came to embrace anticommunism, anitstatism, and the cultural politics of the 1960s and 1970s.

Several works stand out. Mary Brennan explains how women within the movement interpreted their anticommunist ideology through their own gendered experience (Brennan, 2008). Lisa McGirr, in *Suburban Warriors* keeps women activists at the front of her story (McGirr, 2001). Don Critchlow's biography of conservative uberactivist establishes that Phyllis Schlafly was *the* crucial conduit between the national players and local conservative women and, in their role as mothers and moral guardians helped transform the movement's message from anticommunism to "family values" (Critchlow, 1995). Catherine Rymph, in her history of women within the Republican Party, offers a revealing glimpse into the way that conservative women came to prominence within that organization, but also the way that the party responded to women's political activism throughout most of the twentieth century (Rymph, 2006). Michelle Nickerson's work in recent years has done a magnificent job at delineating not only the role of women within the conservative movement, but also through careful analysis of how these activists' gendered identity constructed many of their political beliefs (Nickerson, 2001; 2003a, 2003b; 2011). As she explains, these women embraced their role as the spiritual and social arbiters of Americanism.

Women were also a key player in the emergence of the religious right, one of the most interesting, powerful, and misunderstood aspects of Johnson Era conservatism. What recent work on this political phenomenon has shown is that the Christian Right was central to the organizing of modern conservatism from the start. For many grassroots activists, faith had informed their political beliefs for decades, but most simply hadn't laid claim to this separate *political* identity until sometime in the 1970s. But, as one observer noted as early as 1962: "Fundamentalism today supports a super-patriotic Americanism; the conflict with communism is not one of power blocs but of faiths, part of the unending struggle between God and the devil" (Danzig, 1962).

In recent years, the story of the religious right has captured the imaginations of several scholars.[7] In 1992, Clyde Wilcox and Paul Boyer produced two of the first important books on the subject. Wilcox, through his study of three different historical moments, demonstrated that the Christian Right was rational, modern in approach, and had great diversity in ideas and approaches (Wilcox, 1992). Paul Boyer, in his insightful cultural history of the modern incarnations of prophecy writing, illustrates that this belief system leads its adherents to interpret contemporary political events through the filter of apocalyptic visions and creates a political urgency among many on the Christian Right (Boyer, 1992).

More recently, we have seen an array of interpretations telling this story across wider swatches of time. William Martin's *With God on* Our *Side* provides a useful overview of the issues that brought the religious right into politics; from worries about godless communism to battles over sex education, he demonstrates how his subjects maintained a dual focus on national events and local concerns (Martin, 1996). In more focused works, media scholar Heather Hendershot explores the consequences of a religious culture that brings together media, consumerism, politics, and religion (Hendershot, 2004; 2007). And Oran Smith details the road toward political conservatism taken by the leadership of the Southern Baptist Convention (Smith, 1997). Steven Miller's superb biography of Billy Graham casts him as a sort of religious/cultural/political broker who mainstreamed southern evangelicalism (2009). Kevin

Kruse downplays the southern roots of the Christian Right, arguing instead that it was a national phenomenon reaching power when conservatism's emphasis shifted from anticommunism to cultural issues (Kruse, 2010). Daniel K. Williams, on the other hand, asserts that divisions within the Christian Right over the Civil Rights Movement long stifled any possibility of national power. After white southern fundamentalists reconciled themselves to the reality of a New South, they turned their attention to cultural issues and their political allegiance to the Republican Party (Williams, 2010). And most recently, Darren Dochuk in his carefully argued and persuasive study of evangelical conservatism in Southern California, contends that the modern Christian Right represents a blend of southern religious culture and western-style economic conservatism forged in the competitive heat of go-go Cold War Los Angeles. This Sun belt evangelical conservatism that celebrated God, free enterprise, community, and America proved remarkably popular across the nation (Dochuk, 2011).

As I mentioned at the outset of this essay, we are likely in one of the early acts in the study of the American right. It has surely captured the imaginations of some incredibly dynamic, ambitious, and imaginative scholars. And while I have focused primarily on scholarship that traces the emergence of the grassroots right that seemingly came from nowhere to transform the body politic in the Johnson Years, there remains much to do. For example, we would certainly benefit from extending the Long Conservative Movement forward (and perhaps even back) a few decades, continuing the exploration into how conservatives have governed at every level of government, further exploring the ongoing evolution of both a conservative infrastructure and ideology, and investigating how conservatism and its ideas responded to different challenges at different times to different generations will surely drive the scholarship for a new generation. Expanding our interpretations far beyond treating conservatives as freaked out provincials or enraged hard hats has created a nuanced if sometimes scattered view of the American right. Looking back across time, exploring the importance of place and space, and peering through the lenses of gender, business, and religion has helped place conservatism and conservatives at the center of our study of twentieth century American political culture. And while no dominant interpretation has emerged, this fact has perhaps helped renew interest in political history and reopened conversations about the nature of the American political system.

Historians should be among the most respected arbiters of this dialogue. In the time I have spent writing this essay, the national media has become obsessed with the post-Obama incarnation of grassroots conservatism – the Tea Party Movement. As the Talking Heads stumble over one another to Get To The Root Of It, it's obvious what historians can contribute to contemporary discussion. As historian Sean Wilentz pointed out in a *New Yorker* article published on the eve of the 2010 midterm elections, and I'm sure many of the people mentioned in this essay have been explaining at faculty dining rooms for months now, there is little new about the Tea Party.[8] While it has emerged in the national consciousness with an amazing rapidity, at its core lie the central tenets of the right that have driven the conservative movement since the 1920s and that so captured, if only briefly the national media's attention in the years before the 1964 election. The trajectory and message of the Tea Party fits so naturally into the literature described in this essay, it brings to mind the words of Mark Twain: "History doesn't repeat itself, but it does rhyme."

Notes

1 This phrase was widely used to describe those involved in the pre-Goldwater conservative movement, especially in California. For more on its origins see Safire, 2008: 395–6.
2 There are several reasons for framing the topic within the rough chronological boundaries of these dates. The first is to keep it tied to the subject of this volume, in other words to keep the historiography of the conservative movement within a boundary that roughly corresponds to the prime years of Johnson's political life. The second is to draw a distinction between the conservative *movement* – the building of a political infrastructure capable of delivering (or at least promising) policy change based on ideology – from many of its precursors, including what is commonly referred to as the Old Right (prewar) and the Era of McCarthyism, each with its own set of rich literature. Moreover, it stops in the mid-1970s, a little beyond the end of Johnson's life, again not only to fit within the parameters of the larger subject of the volume, but also because the movement entered a new phase of organizational and infrastructural maturity, a direct result of the organizing of the 1950s and 1960s, that was different enough in practice to legitimately adopt the label New Right. Lastly, I would like to remind the reader that this essay treats the conservative *movement* rather than *conservatism*, the former with its focus on political action and the latter on intellectual engagement. And while these two topics most assuredly inform one another in history and in practice, our focus will be on the way that scholars have considered the political movement rather than its underlying principles.
3 As William B. Hixson points out (as did some reviewers), the concept of status anxiety is used in so many different ways by the seven contributors that its meaning lacks coherence (1992: 13–14).
4 For a recent example see Jacob Weisberg, "The Right's New Left" *Slate* 18 September 2010, which argues that the Tea Party Movement is driven by status anxiety.
5 The results of these studies (pre-1987 anyway) are gathered in the absolutely remarkable book by Hixson (1992), an essential starting point for understanding both conservatism and the state of historiography in the period considered.
6 1956's "Southern Manifesto", a document written by Strom Thurmond and Richard B. Russell, lambasted the Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* as an "unwarranted" abuse of federal power, was signed by the entire congressional delegations of Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, South Carolina, Virginia (including it's two Republican representatives), Louisiana, and Arkansas. Lyndon Johnson was one of only three southern senators who refused to sign.
7 For more on the historiography of modern religion see Butler, 2004: 1357–78.
8 Wilentz, 2010.

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