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CPAC: The Origins and Role of The Conference in the Expansion and Consolidation of the Conservative Movement, 1974-1980

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Abstract

The Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) is an annual event that brings conservative politicians, public intellectuals, pundits, and issue activists together in Washington, DC to discuss strategies for achieving their goals through the electoral and policy process. Although CPAC receives a great deal of attention each year from conservative movement activists and the news outlets that cover it, it has attracted less attention from scholars. This dissertation seeks to address the gap in existing knowledge by providing a fresh account of the role that CPAC played in the expansion and consolidation of the conservative movement during the 1970s. Audio recordings of the exchanges that took place at CPAC meetings held between 1974 and 1980 are transcribed and analyzed. The results of this analysis show that during the 1970s, CPAC served as an important forum where previously fragmented single issue groups and leaders of the Old Right and New Right coalitions were able to meet, share ideas, and coordinate their efforts. Through their discursive exchanges at CPAC, these actors united behind a common set of policy positions and political strategies. As they engaged with each other and shared their grievances, they also developed a stronger sense of collective identity rooted in opposition to a common enemy - modern liberalism.

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CPAC: THE ORIGINS AND ROLE OF THE CONFERENCE IN THE EXPANSION AND
CONSOLIDATION OF THE CONSERVATIVE MOVEMENT, 1974-1980

Daniel Parker

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For my parents, Danny and Brenda Parker

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ABSTRACT

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Daniel P. Parker

Rogers M. Smith

The Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) is an annual event that brings conservative politicians, public intellectuals, pundits, and issue activists together in Washington, DC to discuss strategies for achieving their goals through the electoral and policy process. Although CPAC receives a great deal of attention each year from conservative movement activists and the news outlets that cover it, it has attracted less attention from scholars. This dissertation seeks to address the gap in existing knowledge by providing a fresh account of the role that CPAC played in the expansion and consolidation of the conservative movement during the 1970s. Audio recordings of the exchanges that took place at CPAC meetings held between 1974 and 1980 are transcribed and analyzed. The results of this analysis show that during the 1970s, CPAC served as an important forum where previously fragmented single issue groups and leaders of the Old Right and New Right coalitions were able to meet, share ideas, and coordinate their efforts. Through their discursive exchanges at CPAC, these actors united behind a common set of policy positions and political strategies. As they engaged with each other and shared their grievances, they also developed a stronger sense of collective identity rooted in opposition to a common enemy – modern liberalism.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) – an event sponsored by the American Conservative Union (ACU) with the cooperation of a diverse array of political action groups – brings a large crowd of conservative activists, political leaders, pundits, and public intellectuals together in Washington, DC every year to discuss politics and strategy. Although CPAC is a national spectacle that always dominates media coverage during the single week in February when it is held, CPAC has, to date, received only modest attention from scholars working in the discipline of political science. Conference speeches and presentations are often quoted by political scientists and historians in order to document the ideas and concerns of the conservative politicians, public intellectuals, and activists who are in attendance.¹ However, at present, there is no definitive, theoretically grounded account of the historic role that the conference itself played in the life of the early conservative movement or in the reshaping of the Republican Party and its priorities.²

CPAC has, in fact, played a very important role in the life of the conservative movement and the contemporary Republican Party. The conference was created in conjunction with conservative movement-building efforts during the 1970s – at a time when the diverse coalition of politicians, public intellectuals, and political activists who now work comfortably together as part of the conservative movement were still learning to understand the nature of the common ground – and the common enemy – that they all shared. As the movement grew during subsequent years, the conference expanded along with it and continued to function as an important forum where a proliferation of conservative action groups convened to exchange ideas and coordinate their efforts. CPAC thus served as one site where important relationships were forged among conservative policy actors and where the discourses of various conservative constituencies were cross-pollinated and blended together.

¹ Donald T. Critchlow, *The Conservative Ascendancy: How the GOP Right Made Political History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 199; Donald T. Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism: A Woman's Crusade* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 273

² James C. Roberts, "CPAC Over 30 Years: Conservatives Have Come a Long Way" *Human Events* (2003), accessed March 15, 2015. <http://humanevents.com/2003/02/03/cpac-over-30-yearsbrconservatives-have-come-a-long-way/> This short article by James C. Roberts, who served as the Political Director of the ACU in 1974 and then as its Executive Director from 1975-1977, is one of the most comprehensive accounts published to date. In the article, Roberts provides a chronological history of CPAC.; For a comprehensive history of the American Conservative Union, see: L. Tom Perry Special Collections, "Register of the American Conservative Union: Biographical History," n.d., accessed March 15, 2015, <http://files.lib.byu.edu/ead/XML/MSS176.xml>

Analyzing CPAC Conference Proceedings, 1974-1980

In this dissertation, I seek to elaborate upon these points and establish in greater detail the role that CPAC played in the life of the conservative movement during the critical era of the 1970s. I aim to do so by investigating the history of the conference and by tracing the role that it played in bringing conservatives together, helping them to develop a sense of collective identity, and helping them to navigate the political opportunities and obstacles that they faced as they worked to expand their ranks and “transform the Republican Party into a vehicle for implementation of conservative ideas in government.”³ The study begins with the founding of the conference in 1974 and ends with the conference held prior to Ronald Reagan’s election in 1980.

I also seek to document and analyze the substantive content of the discourses at CPAC during its early years. Through a discourse analysis of recordings that were made of conference proceedings between 1974 and 1980, I seek to identify the problem and solution frames, characterizations, narratives, and other ideas that were central components of the conservative discourses of the day. By examining recordings of unscripted dialogue from CPAC panels and question and answer sessions, I argue that it is possible to capture the ideas that were critical for helping actors relate to each other and make sense of the political situation that they faced. Of course, the blending of groups that happened at CPAC meetings was just part of a process of coalition formation that spanned many years and played out at many different sites of discourse. Since CPAC was an integral part of that ongoing process, an investigation of its proceedings also sheds light on the nature of broader trends.

Finally, through an analysis of the discourses at CPAC, it is possible to discern with greater clarity how the conference as an institution structured the expression and flow of ideas among those actors who were involved and to generate fresh hypotheses about the role that action conferences play in processes of coalition formation generally. These insights are particularly pertinent to current politics, given the creation of new action conferences in recent years that are loosely based on the CPAC model. Examples include the Values Voter Summit for Christian conservatives, the Liberty Political Action Conference for libertarians, and the Netroots Nation action conference for progressive bloggers.

Core Findings

Looking ahead, the results of this analysis yield a number of fresh insights about the importance of CPAC as an institution and about the ways that ideas and discourse

³ John S. Buckley, in discussion with the author, November 2014. Buckley, who was actively involved in the planning of CPAC 1978 as the Chairman of Young Americans for Freedom, describes the goal of the conservative movement at that time as an effort “to transform the Republican Party into a vehicle for implementation of conservative ideas in government.” I have adopted his definition, which is broadly consistent with the way that most conservatives who were active in movement politics during the 1970s describe their primary goal as a movement.

helped to unite the conservative movement during the 1970s. My core findings may be summarized as follows.

CPAC as an Instrument

By 1974, the conservative movement had become badly fragmented. CPAC was designed to remedy this problem by bringing leading conservative politicians, public intellectuals, coalition-builders, strategists, and issue activists together and by providing a forum in which they could coordinate their efforts and unite behind a common policy agenda and strategic plan for achieving their political goals. The conference can therefore be described as an *instrument* originally created by the political and intellectual leaders of Old Right in order to encourage cooperation, coordination, and communication among a select group of politicians, intellectuals, and activist communities and in order to also structure discursive exchanges among those actors.

During the 1970s, conservative leaders also used CPAC to advance four interrelated coalition-building tasks. Specifically, they used it to purify, expand, rationalize, and guide the development of the conservative movement. When I say that leaders used CPAC to advance these four tasks, I do not mean to suggest that they necessarily established the conference with the goal of achieving them. I am making a more limited claim that the conference came to serve these purposes over the years as the actors who were involved in planning it made a series of choices.

Purifying the Movement First, during the 1970s, I argue that CPAC helped to purify the conservative movement— to cleanse it of actors (and, by extension, ideas) that leaders feared could derail it and/or lead it down pathways that were not constructive. For instance, the John Birch Society, which had become associated with support for certain conspiracy theories not shared by Old Right conservative leaders, was not invited to serve as a CPAC sponsor.⁴ Conference organizers also decided not to invite libertarian

⁴ William Rusher, *Rise of the Right*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: National Review, 1993). In his autobiography, Rusher includes a lengthy description of the John Birch Society, the views of its founder, Robert W. Welch, and the conscious steps taken William F. Buckley and the *National Review* to disassociate themselves from the organization. This mentality carried over to CPAC planning sessions, as well, and it is reflective of broader efforts undertaken by conservative leaders to carefully include and exclude groups from participation in movement activities. Also see: Congressman Philip Crane, letter from Dawne Cina, n.d. MSS 176; Register of the American Conservative Union; 20th and 21st Century Western and Mormon Americana; L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Series III, Box 6, Folder 6; John S. Buckley, letter to ACU/YAF CPAC Steering Committee. MSS 176, LTPSC, Series III, Box 6, Folder 6. The letter from Dawne Cina, who worked in James L. Buckley's office, included a list of possible sponsors for the CPAC conference. The list was then evaluated by ACU staff, and a select group of those listed were invited to serve as conference sponsors. The John Birch Society, libertarian groups, and the Christian Crusade were among the many groups on the original list from Cina that conference organizers ultimately decided not to invite. The letter from John S. Buckley documents the groups that were approved and who received invitations. By cross-referencing the lists, it is possible to determine the groups that were considered and rejected.

groups. The Libertarian Forum, the Libertarian Party, the Liberty Amendment Committee, *Reason* magazine, and the Society for Individual Liberty were all considered but never given the opportunity to register as conference sponsors. Right-wing groups that adhered to racist ideologies, such as the Christian Crusade, were also excluded.⁵

Expanding the Movement In contrast, emerging New Right and New Religious Right political action groups, as well as newly elected conservative leaders in the House and Senate, were actively recruited to attend the CPAC conference, serve as sponsors, and deliver addresses. By 1980, the Christian Voice and the Moral Majority were both on the invitation list, and speakers and thought leaders affiliated with the Christian school movement, such as Rev. Robert Billings, were recruited to participate in CPAC proceedings alongside the economic and foreign policy conservatives of the Old Right. Newly elected conservative leaders such as Orrin Hatch were invited to give keynote CPAC addresses in February only a few weeks after they first entered Congress. Thought leaders from the *National Review* and American Enterprise Institute, as well as Catholic scholars and attorneys who provided thought leadership to the New Right coalition, were invited to speak about matters that were of concern to them. Although CPAC was mostly a conservative Republican gathering, it was also used to bring conservative southern Democrats into the movement. For instance, Senator Russell Long of Louisiana and Congressman Phil Gramm of Texas were both invited to speak during the 1970s (see appendix).

Thus, CPAC was used not only to purify but also to selectively expand the conservative movement and encourage a merging of elements from the Old Right with the distinct New Right coalition that developed around Richard Viguerie and Paul Weyrich. This happened gradually, and there were some differences of opinion between conservative leaders along the way. Paul Weyrich was disappointed with the strategies that were emphasized and pushed for a greater emphasis on coalition-building.⁶ Some

⁵ Robert Heckman, in discussion with the author, February 2015; James C. Roberts, in discussion with the author, October 2014. Heckman, who was the Executive Director of Young Americans for Freedom in 1980, recalls that groups that were racist were consciously excluded, as were groups that were staunchly libertarian. Roberts recalls that groups that were considered to be racist were excluded from sponsorship.

⁶ Paul Weyrich, letter to Ross Wheaton, February 6, 1980. MSS 176, LTPSC, Series III, Box 9, Folder 9; Robert Heckman, letter to Paul Weyrich, February 20, 1980. MSS 176, LTPSC, Series III, Box 9, Folder 9. In his letter (copied to Heckman), Weyrich complained that his suggestion for a CPAC panel on coalitions had been dropped from the conference agenda. He wrote: "I am more than a little disappointed in the way CPAC's schedule has turned out...planners said the main thrust of CPAC was to brief people on the issues and coalitions have been covered in other conferences...As you know, I feel coalition politics will have a profound effect on conservative politics during the 1980's and therefore deserves close examination. Frankly, I don't think it will be worthwhile for CSFC, Inc. to participate in future CPAC's since our input is obviously limited to a monetary donation." In his reply, Robert Heckman wrote: Some people did not choose to take advantage of [the] opportunity to effect the [CPAC] agenda. Some did. Connie Marshner of your office was one of the latter. She made several concrete suggestions, all of which were incorporated into the agenda...Indeed, one veteran CPAC attendee chastised me for the heavy emphasis of the program on social and educational matters. Thursday's agenda covered in great

Old Right CPAC attendees balked at the fact that two social issues panels rather than one were included on the agenda at CPAC 1980. They felt the movement should emphasize economic and foreign policy issues and questioned whether New Right groups should be treated as part of the conservative movement at all.⁷

Still, these squabbles were byproducts of positive steps that were being taken to bring different types of conservatives into a dialogue with each other, and although conservatives sometimes disagreed over matters of emphasis and strategy, progress was certainly made toward greater unity. Writing in 1976, M. Stanton Evans, who served as Chairman of the American Conservative Union at the time, wrote with great satisfaction that CPAC demonstrated “the rising level of co-ordination among various elements loosely identified as conservative but not previously noted for working in common harness.” He added that they were beginning “to see the common thread that binds them all together... [resulting in] the development of a tentative new consensus among ... previously ... fragmented interests.”⁸

Rationalizing the Movement CPAC did more than simply bring diverse groups of conservative policy actors together in the same room. It also structured their deliberations, encouraged dialogue on issues that were important for the expanding coalition, and encouraged the development of greater unity among the participants.

The panel discussions held each year at CPAC represented the planks of what may be described as an unofficial platform for the conservative movement. For instance, at the first conference held in 1974, separate panel discussions were planned to address the budget, national health care legislation, energy issues, détente, busing, taxes, and

detail issues dealing with the schools and the American family; issues that I have found to be the major topics of discussion during the Friday morning meetings which you host in your office.”

⁷ Robert Heckman, in discussion with the author, February 2015.; Also see: William A. Rusher, *The Making of the New Majority Party* (Ottawa, IL: Green Hill Publishers, 1975). According to Heckman, there was some debate as late as 1980 regarding whether the New Right was “part” of the conservative movement. Some Old Right conservatives, who preferred to focus on economic and foreign policy issues, complained about their increased involvement and stressed that CPAC was “their conference.” Heckman recalls that there were objections to the inclusion of an extra social issues panel on the CPAC agenda. As the planner in charge of the 1980 conference, however, Heckman felt that it was important to include social conservatives in the planning stages of the conference. He visited the small meetings held in the Weyrich offices where New Right leaders gathered and invited them to attend CPAC planning sessions. Some did, and both of the panel sessions that were held in 1980, as well as the speakers who were scheduled to address the conference during those panel sessions, were specifically recommended by representatives from the Weyrich offices. It is important to note that social issues were also addressed in earlier years, though they were not prioritized to the same degree as economic and foreign policy issues. M. Stanton Evans and William Rusher, who exerted a significant degree of influence during the early years, were also coalition-minded and realized that conservative principles needed to be extended and applied to the social issues in order to develop a message that would appeal to detached Democrats and Independents. Rusher wrote about his views in *The Making of the New Majority Party*. In chapter 3, there is an expanded discussion of the relationship between the CPAC conference and the New Right conservatives.

⁸ M. Stanton Evans, “Getting Together,” *Battle Line* (February 1976): 12. MSS 176, LTPSC, Series XV, Box 109, Folder 9.

women's issues (see appendix). The issues slated for deliberation during CPAC panels spoke to the grievances of the diverse coalition of actors involved in the conference discourses as well as to the diverse grievances of the constituencies that conservatives recognized would be important for expanding their coalition, speaking to voters, and achieving political victory. In 1974, conference leaders recognized and stated explicitly that they needed to have a coherent stand on busing because it was important to voters.⁹ Experts on busing were therefore scheduled to speak at CPAC and reinforce the requisite policy positions in terms that resonated with and relied upon core conservative principles. Through the collection of panel discussions held at each CPAC, a comprehensive platform of positions on contemporary policy issues was developed, and select arguments and patterns of thinking were reinforced for the audience by the thought leaders who were assembled to speak.¹⁰

The way that the conservative movement platform emerged and was rationalized through panel discussions at CPAC differed in important respects from the way that party platforms are constructed. Party platforms almost always have a strong central focus, formally allocate influence among participants, and result in an explicit statement of positions that are codified in a written document. There was very little bargaining of this type on display at CPAC meetings. The key issues were decided far in advance, and influence was disproportionately allocated to those individuals who were pre-selected to address the audience. Also, no written movement platform was ever created. In 1975, attendees were asked to vote on a series of resolutions, but the resolutions that were proposed were drafted by leaders before the conference began.¹¹ Thus, while CPAC served as a forum for the exchange of ideas, the parameters of the discourse were set in advance by leaders, and the positions and arguments that were reinforced were not spontaneously selected. The discourses at CPAC were shaped to a substantial degree by the decisions that were made by leaders during the conference planning sessions. Of

⁹ M. Stanton Evans, Remarks at CPAC 1974, MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 113, Tape 11. During the panel session entitled "Strategy for '74," Evans noted: "We have got to start speaking to the American people about those issues... to get some kind of articulate presentation of our view on the energy crisis, busing, welfare, taxes, abortion, the whole litany of issues which have people out there steaming and about which we aren't saying anything so far as they can tell..." Evans' comments are quoted at length in chapter 4.

¹⁰ Frank Donatelli, in discussion with the author, July 2014. Frank Donatelli, who was involved in the planning sessions for CPAC 1974 as the Executive Director of Young Americans for Freedom, recalls that a great deal of attention went into determining the individuals who would be invited to speak. He also recalls that an important role of the conference was to "clarify thinking" on the important issues of the day. This is an important insight. Through their selection of speakers for panel discussions, the groups that sponsored CPAC sought to "clarify thinking." Beyond that, they were able to selectively decide which issues would be addressed and which ideas and arguments would be reinforced at CPAC gatherings.

¹¹ "Resolutions Passed by 75 CPAC Participants," February 16, 1975. MSS 176, LTPSC, Series III, Box 3, Folder 26

course, bias of this type is unavoidable within any conference structure that requires organizers to decide what topics will be discussed and who will speak.¹²

The pathways through which CPAC panel discussions encouraged unity are further clarified when considered in theoretical context. Scholars who study ideas have long noted that policy conflicts are often “frame conflicts” and that the ways that communities of actors choose to frame policy problems determine to a great extent which policy solutions they come to support. Over time and through repeated interactions, communities of actors can tend to settle upon a standard set of problem and solution frames.¹³

In this context, I argue that during CPAC issue panels, conference attendees were exposed to a select blend of problem and solution frames as they listened to the panelists and absorbed the rationales offered by the thought leaders who had been recruited to speak. In the process, common understandings of what was wrong with government, of what was wrong with the policies of modern liberalism, and of what should be done to create a better society were cultivated.¹⁴

Collectively, these frames helped to connect positions across a diverse range of issue areas to the core, underlying themes of freedom, ordered liberty, and personal responsibility. They also helped to tighten the coalition and make its members less susceptible to outside influence. Once members of a coalition have come to accept a specific collection of problem and solution frames, the policy solutions proposed by outside actors and coalitions that frame problems differently can seem foreign, irrelevant, and misguided.¹⁵ The members of a tightly knit community who come to see problems in a particular way are therefore unlikely to be persuaded to join rival coalitions.

Arguably, the greatest example of this was and still is conservatives’ insistence that liberal policy solutions— which emphasize a positive role for government in correcting for inequalities and trying to improve the health of the economy through government intervention— are not actually solutions but are rather the root cause of the

¹² Throughout the dissertation, I use the term “organic” to describe the ideational developments that happened through the discussions at CPAC. By organic, I mean that in the context of deliberations at CPAC, the ideas of diverse conservative constituencies were connected together in natural ways as the actors who were assembled shared ideas and reacted and responded to each other. At the same time, I argue that these organic discursive developments at CPAC were also structured, since the speakers and sponsoring groups were screened in advance.

¹³ Frank Baumgartner, *Agendas and Instability in American Politics* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2009); Jal Mehta, “The Varied Roles of Ideas in Politics; From ‘Whether’ to ‘How’,” in Daniel Béland and Robert Henry Cox, eds., *Ideas and Politics in Social Science Research* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011), 23-46; Donald A. Schön and Martin Rein, *Frame Reflection: Toward the Resolution of Intractable Policy Controversies* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1994).

¹⁴ Mark Blyth *Great Transformations: Economic Ideas and Institutional Change in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 38-39. Blyth notes: “[ideas] allow agents to define the solutions to their problems, and perhaps more importantly, to define the very problems that agents face in the first place.”

¹⁵ Mehta, Varied Roles; Schön and Rein, Frame Reflection

problems that Americans face. As Reagan famously put it, “government is not the solution to our problem. Government is the problem.”¹⁶ Because liberals see government as a solution and principled conservatives see it as the cause of most problems, the two sides do not compromise or relate to each other easily. Conservatives made these distinctions at CPAC conferences during the 1970s and spoke openly about the competing definitions of problems and solutions espoused by liberals and conservatives.

Guiding the Movement Finally, I argue that thought leaders used CPAC as a forum to provide strategic guidance to the conservative movement—to build common understandings of the challenges conservatives faced in the political arena and of the long-term strategies that would help them to win. Each year at CPAC, leaders worked to identify current ideological and institutional obstacles to the movement’s success, explain changes in the structure of political opportunities that the movement faced, and chart the path that they felt conservatives needed to follow in order to restructure the party system and build a lasting electoral majority.

Through their interpretations of ideological and political context at CPAC, conservative leaders helped to define and characterize the friends, enemies, and target constituencies of the expanding conservative movement, and they helped to paint a rich portrait of the political landscape for conference participants that was replete with characterizations of the party system, of outside elites, and of other factions, movements, and political coalitions. They helped to elaborate narratives that explained how the various actors and institutions were related to each other, and they recommended political strategies that were based upon those narratives.

In doing so, leaders contributed to the organic development of a shared coalition identity based upon shared perceptions of the political world, and, by extension, they helped to further reinforce the movement's existence as a discrete entity.¹⁷ Discussions of strategy and context produced a dynamic that was complementary to the dynamic created by discussions during CPAC issue panels. Both cultivated a private language among participants and united them by reinforcing shared perceptions of the political world and shared understandings of the ways that core principles applied in a series of important issue areas.

Leaders also used the conference to guide the movement in very specific directions. In 1975, the leadership of the American Conservative Union sought to encourage the formation of a new party, and so they specifically scheduled discussions of the issue at CPAC and invited speakers who favored a break from the GOP to explain how it could be accomplished. In addition, leaders sought to position Ronald Reagan as the candidate of choice for the conservative movement. They consciously used the conference to reinforce Reagan’s stature by asking him to serve as the keynote speaker at

¹⁶ Ronald Reagan “Inaugural Address,” January 20, 1981, accessed March 12, 2015 <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1981>

CPAC 1974-75 and CPAC 1977-79. They also emphasized the importance of a Reagan candidacy repeatedly during conference proceedings.¹⁸

CPAC as a Mechanism

As I already noted, CPAC served as a forum for discussions of strategy and the development of an unofficial conservative movement platform. It is important to add that it allowed these discussions to take place specifically outside of formal Republican Party channels. At CPAC, conservative leaders and activists could openly discuss their approach toward the party without having to bargain with other competing factions and coalitions. For instance, they could have discussions about whether they wanted to remain in the party at all or leave it, and they could openly debate strategies for transforming the party and ousting current Republican leadership. It would have been far more challenging to hold these types of discussions at a formal party convention.

Discourse Analysis: Interpretations of Context

As I noted earlier, my objective is not just to explain the instrumental role played by CPAC in the development of the conservative movement. It is also to examine the content of the discourses at CPAC and to establish the ideas, frames, narratives, interpretations, and strategies that were actually discussed during meetings from 1974-1980. This exercise in discourse analysis yields several fresh insights.

Periodization First, I find that the 1974-1980 period may be divided into two segments. The first extends from 1974-1976 and the second from 1977-1980.

During the first (which, if the data were available, would likely extend backward into the 1960s), conference discourses were oriented around opposition to liberalism and the policies of big government as represented by Republican presidents and Republican leaders in Congress. This was important because it focused attention upon the intra-party roadblocks created by moderate and liberal Republicans and emphasized the need to transform the Republican Party into a vehicle for conservative ideas.

During the second segment, extending from 1977 until 1980, this dynamic gradually shifted. Conference discourses became more strongly centered around opposition to liberalism and the policies of big government as represented and supported by Democrats, liberal interest groups, the courts, and the bureaucracy.¹⁹ This shift, which

¹⁸ Frank Donatelli, in discussion with the author, July 2014. According to Donatelli, who served as the Executive Director of Young Americans for Freedom from 1974-1977, an important goal of CPAC 1974 was to position Reagan as the candidate of choice for the conservative movement. He was the first speaker recruited to appear at the conference. As I note in chapter 3, an earlier attempt to hold CPAC in 1969 was cancelled when Reagan was unable to appear.

¹⁹ Baumgartner and Jones, *Agendas and Instability*; Martha Derthick, *The Politics of Deregulation* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 1985). Baumgartner and Jones persuasively argue that ideas can become lodged in the institutional networks that are created to support and implement them. I argue that as conservatives became the dominant voice within the Republican Party, expressions of opposition became strongly targeted not only at liberals within both parties but

was precipitated by the departures of Gerald Ford and Nelson Rockefeller and the reshaping of the Republican Party's platform by Reagan supporters at the 1976 Republican National Convention, was an important one. It was ushered in by favorable changes in opportunity structure that weakened the influence of the northeastern GOP establishment, gave conservatives a more conservative platform to which they could point as a symbol of the party's conservative commitments, and allowed conservatives greater latitude to re-define the party and its priorities without the conflicting signals from the White House that had been common during the Nixon and Ford administrations. It also coincided with a major shift in which conservatives moved away from criticizing the Republican Party as an institution under Nixon and Ford toward claiming ownership of the party and working to re-brand it as the natural home of conservatism during the Carter years.

The Conservative Majority Thesis Second, I find that the characterization of the American electorate as containing within it a "conservative majority" played a critical role and structured conference discourses throughout the entire period. Although the role of the conservative majority idea has been recognized by other scholars, I argue that it played an even more important and multi-dimensional role in structuring 1970s conservative discourses than has hitherto been acknowledged.

The conservative majority concept was important because it justified the efforts of conservatives. It framed conservatives' fight as one made on behalf of a majority of the American people.²⁰ It helped to structure discussions of strategy, since it guided discussions of the target groups that were conservative but not yet attached to the Republican Party and that conservatives should therefore work to mobilize. It also came to structure explanations of the pathways through which conservatives would succeed and the reasons why the Republican Party was so poorly represented in Congress. In the

also at the institutional networks that were seen as bastions of the liberal ideas and the policies of modern liberalism (including the courts and the bureaucracy). Although criticisms of the courts and bureaucracy were certainly evident in conference discourses prior to 1977, expressions of opposition to these institutions grew in intensity after the 1976 election, as expressions of opposition shifted away from the intra-party roadblocks posed by Nixon, Ford, and the northeastern establishment of the GOP. Events also encouraged this discursive shift. The IRS attack on private school tax exemptions in 1978 drew the ire of social conservatives and targeted their anger at liberal regulators seeking to engineer social change and reshape educational curricula. As religious conservatives became increasingly mobilized into politics in the late 1970s, they became active participants in the discourses at CPAC and voiced strong criticisms of social engineering initiatives pursued by the IRS, the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, and the coalition of liberal interest groups such as the National Education Association (NEA) that were seen as being strongly aligned with those bureaucratic networks. Of course, there was a broader push toward de-regulation that was embraced by neoliberals and that was manifested within the Democratic Party, as well. See the discussion extended discussion of this issue in chapter 8.

²⁰ Jeane Kirkpatrick, "Why the New Right Lost," *Commentary* (February 1977): 39. Kirkpatrick makes this argument. The article includes a critical examination of the conservative majority thesis, including its core assumptions and assertions. I describe her arguments extensively in chapter 6.

discourses at CPAC, the failure of the GOP was linked to the stranglehold on the GOP by moderate and liberal leaders. As the reasoning went, because these moderate and liberal factions failed to articulate bold conservative stands, they were unable to harness and mobilize the conservative majority. They allowed Democrats to preempt it, and so they were directly responsible for Republican losses. In a similar vein, the importance of nominating a strong, principled conservative candidate was defended on the grounds that such a candidate was essential in order to send a strong signal necessary to reach and mobilize the latent conservative majority and bring it into the Republican Party as the support base for the platform of ideational and policy commitments represented by the conservative movement.

Today, conservatives often repeat Reagan's call for language emphasizing bold colors and not pale pastels at CPAC 1975 and stress the fact that it is a tried and true method for winning elections.²¹ In fact, this strategy was not of Reagan's invention at all. It was a strategy that was commonly recited in movement discourses throughout the 1970s. In that context, it was also inextricably linked to the conservative majority thesis, was strongly rooted in interpretations of trends in 1970s public opinion, and implied taking bold stands on the specific platform of issues on which the public supported conservative policy positions during the 1970s. Today, public attitudes have shifted, important aspects of the conservative majority thesis are no longer repeated in movement discourses, and yet the associated "bold colors" strategy that grew from it is still recited with regularity.

The conservative majority thesis also came to structure interpretations of electoral outcomes during the era and, by extension, to serve as the organizing basis for narrative descriptions of events. In situation after situation, the conservative majority was characterized by leaders as shifting back and forth between the parties in response to the signals sent to it by various party elites and presidential contenders.

What exactly was the conservative majority? Within the discourses at CPAC, the conservative majority in essence came to be characterized as consisting of voters who were united in their opposition to big government. When discussions of the idea are carefully analyzed, it becomes clear that any form of opposition to big government was treated as sufficient for classifying a particular voting bloc as conservative and including it as a part of the conservative majority. Leaders glossed over the fact that voters who oppose government in some areas very often support it in others.²² In hindsight, the conservative majority— as depicted in conference discourses— was quite obviously full of moderates. Nevertheless, I argue that the perceptions of politicians and activist leaders are ultimately all that mattered. They treated the construct as if it were a cohesive bloc of voters that could be mobilized as a cohesive whole by articulating the right platform and the right language, and that philosophy and approach strongly guided their words and actions.²³

In short, I argue that the characterization of the electorate as conservative was an idea that lived within the discourses of the expanding conservative coalition. It was

²¹ Reagan, Inaugural Address

²² Kirkpatrick, *Why the New Right Lost*

²³ *Ibid.*

repeated over and over again by the speakers at CPAC throughout the entire 1974-1980 period. In that time, it was used often and extensively to characterize and explain political context, interpret events, and chart a path forward for the coalition. As a widely accepted idea, it became an integral part of the coalition's language and collective identity.

Explaining Events and Updating Narratives Third, I find that by examining conference discourses from year to year, it is possible to discern at an even greater level of specificity how events were explained by leaders and how the conservative majority thesis was applied in order to preserve and build unity.

In order to do so, I trace conservative reactions at CPAC to important events of the era— Watergate, Nixon's resignation, the Republican Party's devastating defeat in the 1974 election, Ford's ascension to the Presidency, the bitter intra-party nomination battle between Reagan and Ford in 1976, and a string of electoral defeats delivered to the Republican Party throughout the decade. An important insight that grows out of this analysis is that an important task of speakers at CPAC every year was to develop elaborate, ideologically tinted interpretations of these events and to preserve the notion that the people really were as conservative as they claimed (even though this did not always register in election results). Changes in historical context thus *disciplined* conservative discourses--- they forced conservative leaders to use flexible logic to continually update movement narratives, clarify why recent developments were consistent with the strategies and predictions that they made in the past, and reinforce the ways that strategies applied to new realities. In doing so, conservative leaders relied upon various elements of the conservative majority thesis to structure their explanations and recommendations, and the idea became even more strongly embedded in conservative movement narratives. Of course, as I noted earlier, these were activities in which leaders were constantly engaged. An analysis of the discourses at CPAC therefore offers a window of insight and suggests the nature of work in which public intellectuals and politicians were involved in the broader field of coalition discourse.

Discourse Analysis: Platform Development

A Common Enemy I also seek to characterize the substance of the policy discussions that took place during CPAC issue panels. My primary finding is that through conference discourses, an image of modern liberalism was *socially constructed* through the separate contributions of multiple speakers representing multiple branches of the conservative movement. The image that emerged was of an entity that did bad things— to individual freedoms, to the economy, and to the traditions of society.

The general notion that big government as conceived, constructed, and managed by liberals was a bad thing was so pervasive that it was even invoked to support aggressive, anti-Communist foreign policy and— in the tradition of fusionism— the defense of a large national security state. Communist regimes were cast as big, oppressive states— more extreme versions of the liberal state that conservatives opposed on the domestic front— that were hostile to freedom. In this vein, the fight against Communism abroad was an extension of the domestic fight against big, oppressive government. Support of

those fighting for freedom from government abroad was cast as an extension of the fight against liberal big government policies at home.

I do not find that this frame was the only one coursing through conference discourses. I do find, however, that it was this broad image of big government as supported by liberals as a bad and dangerous thing that was consistently reinforced and painted with rich detail as multiple actors expressed their grievances at CPAC conferences. It was a frame that was, in retrospect, extraordinarily effective. This was so because it spoke to the grievances of a wide range of activist constituencies, all of whom had diverse types of complaints, and it focused them upon a single, common enemy. Precisely defined, the enemy was not government itself. Rather, it was big government and the series of big government policies supported and advocated by liberals.

In this vein, M. Stanton Evans wrote of CPAC 1976: "...issue groups appearing on the program... have focused in the past on single-issue areas of major concern to their members, and of course will continue to do so. But they seem increasingly aware these days that they confront a common adversary and are thus embarked upon a common venture--- whether the issue up for discussion be forced busing, limited government, objectionable textbooks, abortion or so-called 'child development.'"²⁴

It is significant that in the discourses at CPAC, blame was very rarely placed on individuals for their shortcomings. For the most part, individuals who were dependent upon government were cast in the role of victims of liberal policies designed to mislead, take advantage, and create dependency.

The Transformative Aspects of Modern Liberalism Finally, I argue that at an even deeper level, there was a common thread that linked various conservative arguments against modern liberalism together. This was the notion that it was *transformative*. Liberal tax and welfare policies were opposed on the grounds that they were intended to redistribute income and eradicate natural inequalities. Liberal social engineering initiatives were opposed on the grounds that they were intended to transform gender roles and make everyone the same. Liberal social policies were opposed on the grounds that they sought to redefine the traditional family and impose a state religion of secularism. In a similar vein, a strong anti-communist foreign policy was justified on the grounds that communism was a dangerous ideology that sought to transform societies.

While I recognize that freedom was the core theme that tied together free market, traditionalist, and anti-communist strands of conservatism, I argue that it was actually this negative frame oriented around opposition to the transformative aspects of modern liberalism (and communism) and the threats to tradition and order that were posed by them that were just as essential for bringing different kinds of conservatives together.

Theoretical Framework

Before proceeding with an empirical analysis of CPAC proceedings, I argue that it is first necessary to first take a step back and develop a strong theoretical foundation that will help to contextualize the role of the conference and explain where it fits in a broader theory of coalition formation. Specifically, what is needed is a theoretical

²⁴ Evans, *Getting Together*

framework that suggests: 1) the role that ideas and discourse play in the life of a political coalition; 2) the conditions under which institutions such as CPAC are likely to be created by a coalition; and 3) the ways that institutions such as CPAC structure discursive interactions. I propose such a framework in chapter 2.

CHAPTER 2

Political Coalitions: A Framework for Analysis

To a person who... insists upon preoccupying himself with principles, working within either major party must necessarily be irrelevant at best and, at worst, self-defeating. Such people (I will call them “political activists” for want of a better name) simply cannot expect to prevail politically until and unless there is a major change in public opinion. Their only sensible course is to work for such a change—not within the Republican Party, where they will forever be forced into enervating compromises, but in the field of pure opinion, through journals like National Review. It may well be that, if and when such a massive change in public opinion occurs, it will manifest itself in both major parties, and that one or the other will succeed in absorbing the new viewpoint—as the Democratic Party, in and after 1932, transformed itself in order to become the vehicle of the triumphant leftists. But such an event is an effect, rather than a cause. I have never heard that Debs, Villard, etc. spent long years in the Democratic Party, trying to pull it leftward. They built their better mousetrap; and when they had built it, the Democratic Party bought it.¹

–William Rusher
Memo to William F. Buckley
October 10, 1960

In this chapter, I propose a broad theory of coalition formation that emphasizes the role of ideas in holding diverse groups of interests together. I suggest that the strength of political coalitions – as measured by their ability to facilitate the election of the candidates that they openly support – is shaped in important ways by the alignment, configuration, and flow of ideas within them.

Political Coalition: A Definition

I define a political coalition as an organized group of elites and activists who cooperate with each other on a repeat basis in order to achieve common goals through the electoral and policy process. Under this definition, a political coalition is not an alliance that is narrowly or opportunistically constructed for a specific tactical purpose. Its members cooperate with the expectation that their alliance will continue in the future and that it will extend to include collaboration policy issues that are not yet salient.

Elites include: politicians, public intellectuals and pundits, businesspeople (as well as their proxies and representatives), and the leaders of movement organizations, interest groups, and other organized communities of issue activists. Activists are non-elites who work in roles that shape and support the development of a political coalition's

¹ William Rusher, Memo to William F. Buckley (October 10, 1960). William A. Rusher Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. Box 121, Staff correspondence and memoranda, 1957-1960, 1966-1969

electoral and policy agenda. This includes the rank and file members of interest groups and movement organizations.

A political coalition is a distinct discursive community. Its members interact and communicate with each other, and they do so through distinct channels and in the context of distinct organizational settings that are specific to the coalition.²

As a coalition's members interact within the context of distinct organizational structures, they naturally engage with each other and learn to coordinate their efforts. The substance and terms of a political coalition's discourse are therefore shaped in important ways by the structure and configuration of a coalition's organizational structures and by the mechanisms that are established by members to facilitate their own cooperation and coordination. Organizational structures also influence the flow and transmission of ideas among various coalition partners and, consequently, influence the degree of cohesiveness that develops among the various actors who are cooperating as part of a single coalition.

The Incorporation of Groups into Political Coalitions

For elites and activists, membership in a political coalition is easily obtained. Membership is simply dependent upon active participation and engagement in the coalition's discourse. Coalitions soak up new groups of actors in a highly organic way by simply interacting with them and involving them in their coalition's collaborative efforts.

Political coalitions are heterogeneous. They consist of multiple groups, factions, and/or movements which may also be organized coalitions and whose members may also have their own highly developed discourses.³ As distinct movements and factions become connected together within the context of a single political coalition, the frequency of the shared discursive interactions among their members in faction/movement-specific settings relative to the frequency of shared interactions with partners at the coalition level and in coalition-specific settings comes to be of great importance.

² Vivian A. Schmidt, "Discursive Institutionalism: The Explanatory Power of Ideas and Discourse," *Annual Review of Political Science* (2008): 310. Schmidt uses the term "discursive community" in her writing, as well. She notes that "coordinative discourse may be the domain of individuals loosely connected in 'epistemic communities' in transnational settings on the basis of shared cognitive and normative ideas about a common policy enterprise... alternatively, it may consist of more closely connected individuals who share both ideas and access to policy making. Examples include 'advocacy coalitions' in localized policy contexts... 'discourse coalitions' in national settings across extended time periods... [and] 'advocacy networks' of activists in international politics focused on issues of human rights..." She also notes that "the coordinative discourse may also contain 'entrepreneurs'... or 'mediators'... who serve as catalysts for change as they draw on and articulate the ideas of discursive communities and coalitions."

³ I argue that movements are coalitions. Movements can become integrated into larger political coalitions and still retain their organizational and discursive distinctiveness. As I explain in the text, the extent to which a movement or faction retains its distinctiveness when it joins a broader coalition depends upon whether the community maintains a separate infrastructure and separate lines of communication to coordinate its efforts.

The more that a faction or movement's members become engaged in a coalition's discourse, the more strongly their ideas and beliefs are likely to become dispersed and transmitted throughout the coalition. Also, the coalition identity is likely to become more salient for them than their sense of identity as a distinct faction or movement.

Over time, as the diverse groups within political coalition interact and coordinate with each other over and over again, the flow of ideas between them tends to enhance the salience of the coalition identity formation at the expense of faction-specific identity formations that pre-dated their entry into the coalition.

Discursive interactions (which also include all coordinative and collaborative interactions, not just the exchange of language or ideas) with coalition partners can also serve as a powerful impetus for primary identification with the coalition and for the development of a sense of unity among coalition partners. As the boundaries between factions break down in shared settings and as ideas flow predominantly through coalition rather than faction-specific channels, this can greatly encourage the ideological homogenization of a coalition.

In the section on intellectuals, found later in this chapter, I expand upon this argument by emphasizing that the locus of discursive interactions and the relative degree to which groups are engaged in a discourse can have a powerful influence on the very substance of political ideology. Philosophical principles and idea chains that are assembled by intellectuals are refined and altered as they are articulated by elites and activists who are engaged in organic discursive interactions. Popularly understood definitions of ideologies, as well as the popularly understood meanings of political philosophies, are shaped and refined organically through a coalition's discourse. Changes in the various actors who are engaged in a discursive community (as well as changes in the extent to which various actors are engaged) can have the potential to shape the contours and understood meanings of the principles to which participants in that community subscribe.

Political Coalitions vs. the Mass Electorate

As I have defined the term, a political coalition is composed exclusively of elites and activists. It does not include voters. Voters are passive participants in the electoral process. They simply choose how to allocate their votes among the various alternatives that are presented to them. Unlike elites and activists, they do not try to actively influence the agendas of parties or candidates, nor do they work to actively support campaign efforts.⁴ That said, expectations about the behavior of voters are foremost in

⁴ John Aldrich, *Why Parties? The Origin and Transformation of Political Parties in America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 21. Citing Popkin, Aldrich makes a related argument that 'voters...are neither office seekers nor benefit seekers and thus are not a part of the political party...they are critical as the targets of party activities. Parties 'produce' candidates, platforms, and policies. Voters 'consume' by exchanging their votes for the party's product...'; Jeffrey Green, *The Eyes of the People: Democracy in an Age of Spectatorship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010)

the minds of all members of political coalitions. Voter decision-making and turnout are, after all, the variables that ultimately shape the outcome of election contests.

Political Coalitions vs Party Coalitions

In America, a majority of the electorate is organized into groups by the two main political party labels—Democratic and Republican. Most voters relate to politics through their perceptions of those party labels and the platforms that they represent. If a discrete political coalition wants to achieve influence and representation in government, it therefore cannot easily invent a separate name for itself and appeal directly to voters as a separate organization. Instead, it must decide to work within and through one or more of the established political parties in order to achieve ballot access.⁵

When a political coalition chooses to work within and through an established political party in order to field candidates in primary and general election contests, it may be said to be part of that party's coalition. In America, party coalitions are broad in scope and include diverse political coalitions and interests with diverse ideas and policy agendas.

Under what circumstances is a political coalition distinguishable from a broader party coalition of which it is also a part? A political coalition can be said to be distinguishable from a party coalition when it retains its own organizational structures and mechanisms to facilitate cooperation and coordination among its members. When a segment of a party's elites and activists retain membership in distinct organizations and associations in which they alone participate and meet to coordinate their actions, this is an indication that they are functioning as a distinct political coalition. Organizational structures and mechanisms can serve as invisible barriers between coalitions and facilitate their continued existence, even as they also collaborate with other party members for ballot access.⁶ Of course, in a similar vein, a political coalition remains distinctive as long as it functions as a separate discursive community.

⁵ There are exceptions. The Republicans, for instance, emerged as a new party in the 1850s to replace the Whigs. However, such instances are rare. In a system with winner-take-all elections, where strategic voting strongly discourages the formation of third parties, working through the existing parties is typically the only way that a political coalition can achieve access to the general election ballot. Also see: Gary Cox, *Making Votes Count: Strategic Coordination in the World's Electoral Systems* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997). Cox explains why winner-take-all electoral laws encourage strategic voting and discourage third-party formation.

⁶Marty Cohen, David Karol, Hans Noel, and John Zaller *The Party Decides: Presidential Nominations Before and After Reform* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2008). Like the authors, I recognize that activist groups form organizational networks that control resources, mobilize behind candidates, and seek to shape the direction of party politics. I differ from these scholars, however, in that I do not classify group networks as being components of "the party" and instead argue in favor of drawing sharp distinctions between elite-activist coalitions and party institutions. In this vein, I argue that political coalitions have the potential to develop their own distinct discourses, their own distinct platforms, and their own distinct strategies that are unlike those of the party that they seek to influence and that are also unlike those of other coalitions working to influence the same party. Thus, more than one distinct

Coalition partners may be engaged in both coalition and party discourses that occur through different channels and in different venues at different times. Just as is the case within a political coalition relative to its constituent groups, the relative engagement of actors in coalition vs. party discourses determines to a very significant extent which identity formation is the most salient for those involved and the most likely to structure behavior. Depending upon which identity formation is strongest – coalition or party– this can affect levels of party cohesion and factionalism.

As forums that facilitate discursive interactions, party institutions can potentially have strong, homogenizing effects. As coalitions, movements, and factions coordinate with each other collectively as part of a single party, party can grow in salience as an identity formation and cause political coalitions that have been absorbed to fade as their ideas and concerns are incorporated into the agenda and platform of the party. A shift in the locus of discursive interactions from coalition-specific channels and venues to shared party-wide channels and venues is the strongest indicator of this effect. It is also the primary mechanism that produces change.

That said, while parties have the potential to dissolve the boundaries that exist between factions and political coalitions by offering groups broad settings in which to collaborate (such as national party conventions), the infusion and incorporation of a distinct faction or political coalition into a party can have a powerful and transformative effect. When the scope of discursive interactions broadens beyond the lines of a faction or coalition, the ideas of the faction or coalition spill out. They have the potential to become diffused and absorbed into the party's platform and discourses and to *transform* the party and the ideas and principles for which it stands.

Of course, the extent of the transformation is determined by the size and strength of the faction or coalition that is absorbed and the extent to which that faction or coalition becomes involved in party-wide collaborative efforts, settings, and channels of communication. This includes the number, skill, and success of candidates who represent the ideas and platform of the coalition or faction in party settings. If many representatives of a coalition run in party contests and are elected, then the ideas and platform of the coalition will become more strongly infused into party discourses and into the party's platform.

network of groups may compete for control of a party at a given moment in time. These coalitions may be at odds with each other and may compete for the right to shape the party's agenda. These complex dynamics are most easily seen when coalitions and parties are viewed as separate entities. In addition, I argue that the authors go too far by arguing that groups, rather than politicians, are fundamentally in control of party institutions. As I argued in the introduction, my research indicates that politicians may harness, capture, and manipulate political coalitions and their resources in order restructure political parties and make them more to their liking. Often, influential groups are influential precisely because somewhere along the line, politicians have been involved (at the very least in a collaborative capacity with other elites) in seeding and guiding the development of those groups. I am therefore uncomfortable with characterizing politicians only as "managers" of groups. In my view, they just as often work as engineers who build, harness, manipulate, bond with, and steer coalitions in ways that are intended to serve their own strategic purposes.

Movements, pressure groups, and interest groups can of course form and exist outside of the party system and outside of the realm of any organized political coalition. There is an incentive, however, for organized elite-activist coalitions to capture movements, pressure groups, and interest groups that have no coalitional affiliations and to incorporate them into their electoral and policy efforts as well as the party coalition to which they are tied. The need to achieve ballot access and the need field competitive candidates in national election contests also tends to draw outside groups, movements, and factions into party coalitions.

Homogeneity and Heterogeneity within Party Coalitions

The distinctions expressed above are consistent with various works of political science that distinguish between the various wings and factions of party coalitions. I am simply confirming that distinctive political coalitions may exist within a single party, and I am seeking to characterize the terms and boundaries of their existence.

To reiterate the point, distinct political coalitions exist when they display distinct organizational characteristics, when they have distinct internal mechanisms to facilitate the coordination of their members, and when they are the sites of distinct discursive interactions that take place in unique venues and through unique channels of communication.

For the purposes of this analysis, I wish to avoid distinguishing among party factions based strictly upon sectional, cultural, and socioeconomic divisions. I view the presence of distinctive discursive interactions (not affiliations as defined by cultural or economic distinctions, *per se*) as the relevant factors for parsing party coalitions and distinguishing among their distinct groups. It is also possible that movements and factions may be simply absorbed directly by a party and become directly loyal to it without also being absorbed into a coalition.

Depending upon context, those coalitions and factions that retain their organizational, coordinative, and discursive distinctiveness once incorporated into parties may cooperate and interact with other party factions in an entirely cordial way, or they may alternatively compete in a more adversarial way with other coalitions and factions for control of a party's institutional apparatus.

From the standpoint of elites – especially from the vantage point of presidential contenders – breaking down invisible organizational, coordinative, and discursive walls that isolate coalitions and factions within a party from each other is typically an important part of fostering greater party unity. When boundaries break down and the lines between a single political coalition and party coalition are blurred – when party identity predominates over distinct coalitional identities – this can suppress factionalism and infighting and facilitate higher levels of cooperation and unity at a party-wide level. This unity is inextricably linked to the diffusion of ideas and enhanced cooperation that accompany an upward shift in the locus of discursive interactions.

Coalitions and Parties in an Era of Candidate-Centered Elections

The ideas of a political coalition may be transmitted and infused into the discourses of a political party when a coalition fields candidates under a party's label in primary and/or general election contests. In the modern era of candidate-centered elections, any candidate who meets basic qualifications may participate in a major party's primary and, depending on election results, ultimately go on to represent that party in a general election contest. The barriers to entry are low, and a candidate can succeed in capturing a party's nomination without the support of party elites. In the era of candidate-centered elections, a candidate may take his case directly to voters.⁷

In this vein, it is important to note that a political coalition may actually build its own campaign fundraising, recruiting, training, and staffing infrastructure to support its candidates in party election contests—essentially supplanting the role of the party organization as a provider of resources. This infrastructure may be effectively used to support candidates who inject alternative ideas into party communicative and elite discourses. Party nomination battles may become contests between candidates representing rival political coalitions or between a candidate representing a political coalition and a candidate who is more strongly sanctioned by entrenched establishment party elites. The important point here is simply to note that the rules of the game lessen the control of the party itself and make it possible for discrete political coalitions to field and support outsider candidates in party nomination contests.⁸

Even when a coalition's candidate does not win, his candidacy can still facilitate the transmission of ideas from coalition to party. A primary election campaign is an important party setting, and events held to support a party's candidate in a general election campaign can also be classified as party settings. The campaign process serves as an opportunity for the candidate of a political coalition to express and articulate the ideas of his coalition. By simply participating in the process, a coalition candidate has the opportunity to inject the ideas of his coalition into party discourses, prompting other candidates who are also engaged in the campaign to react and respond to those ideas. Over the course of an election campaign, party discourses emerge, expand, and develop in response to the ideas expressed by the candidates who are involved in the electoral process. Of course, if the candidate of a political coalition wins a nomination contest and goes on to run in the general election, this represents an even stronger opportunity to connect the ideas of the coalition into party discourses.

Another important party setting is the party in government. If a candidate who strongly represents the ideas of a political coalition succeeds in being elected to office,

⁷ Aldrich, *Why Parties*, 241-274; John Aldrich, "Presidential campaigns in party and candidate-centered eras," in Matthew McCubbins, ed. *Under the Watchful Eye: Managing Presidential Campaigns in the Television Era* (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 1992), 59-82; Byron Shafer *Bifurcated Politics* (New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation, 1988)

⁸ Cohen, *Why Parties*. The funding for this type of infrastructure is often provided by wealthy businesspeople. Russ Bellant *The Coors Connection* (Cambridge, MA: Political Research Associates, 1991); Theda Skocpol *The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013)

then he/she enters more prominent elite party settings in which he/she can also express the ideas of the coalition and advocate for policies that reflect the ideas of the coalition with which he/she is associated. An elected representative gains the rare opportunity to express the ideas of a coalition in high level party meetings and caucuses and to command media attention. He/she may have the opportunity to introduce legislation and to articulate the views of the coalition before a national audience while also connecting those ideas in the public mind to the party label with which he/she has chosen to become affiliated. Of course, at the same time, he/she may also experience cross-pressures to adhere to dominant ideas within the party that conflict with those of the coalition that he/she represents.

If a political coalition fields many candidates under a single party label, and if those candidates win, then the potential for the ideas of the political coalition to become permanent fixtures within party discourses grows incrementally over time. Many successive (and successful) attempts by a coalition to field candidates under a single party's label can promote the gradual infusion of the ideas of the coalition into party discourses. When the ideas of a coalition become strong features of a party's discourses, then the coalition is likely to lose some of its distinctiveness as members come to identify more strongly with the party label and as they increasingly cooperate, coordinate, and communicate as members of a party and in party settings rather than as members of a discrete, independent coalition. To refine a point made earlier, then, the flow of ideas from an institutionally bounded discursive community into a political party via the fielding of candidates can facilitate the process by which coalition members come to identify more strongly with that party and are ultimately absorbed by it. It may also alter public perceptions of the commitments of the party and prompt a reshuffling of partisan attachments at the mass level.

That said, strong institutions may serve as a brake on the absorption of a political coalition by a political party. If a coalition has formed a network of institutions to facilitate its own cooperation, coordination, and communication, then those institutions may prevent members of that coalition from being fully absorbed by a political party, even as they move into party settings and exercise greater control over public perceptions of the party and its ideological and policy commitments. As long as the institutions set up by a coalition continue to serve as distinctive centers of cooperation, coordination, and communication, they can help a political coalition to retain a degree of distinctiveness even as it becomes more strongly attached to and associated with a political party.

Over time, a political coalition's distinct organizational infrastructure may come to support and work directly with the party organization to support party efforts and party candidates. Party and coalition institutions may pursue many of the same goals. No matter how much support a coalition's institutions may provide to a single party, however, they will also tend to limit the incorporation of the groups who manage them by the party as long as they also serve as distinctive centers for cooperation, coordination, and communication. Because of these effects, the absorption of a political coalition by a political party can be partial but incomplete and the two can coexist in a symbiotic state for an extended period of time.

Political Coalitions Deconstructed

A political coalition is, by its very nature, an organized but heterogeneous group of elites and activists. The actors who work within a coalition tend to play different but complementary roles that are shaped and determined in important ways by: 1) the motivations that lead them to engage in the political process in the first place, 2) the resources that they possess; and 3) the resources that they lack and therefore need to obtain from fellow coalition partners. These factors form the basis for the formation of collaborative alliances and for collective action at the elite-activist level. It is useful to consider each of the major kinds of actors in an elite-activist coalition separately, paying careful attention to these factors.

Politicians

Politicians are driven, in part, by a desire to be elected, and they seek to build political coalitions that will enable them to achieve that goal. Most also go to office because they want to achieve some public good and because they have their own beliefs about the ways that government should be managed and the services that it should provide to the public. Generally speaking, then, politicians have policy preferences that are shaped by a combination of two factors: 1) what they believe is right; and 2) what they believe will help them to secure re-election.

Unlike other actors, politicians can effectively promise to have a direct and measurable impact upon the course of public law, and they can use this institutional leverage to build a coalition of elite and activist supporters who wish to have their policy demands met. They have the potential to translate the views of intellectuals into public policy, to serve the interests of the business leaders who support their campaigns, and to deliver policies to activist leaders and their supporters who help them to win office. They also have the potential to market their ideas to a mass audience and build a base of loyal supporters— that is, to make promises and use their institutional leverage in Congress to actually deliver tangible benefits.

Although politicians command vast institutional resources, it is nevertheless possible to identify very clear reasons why politicians need and have reason to cooperate with the other constituent parts of elite-activist coalitions and lean on other actors for support. They draw upon the ideas and policy proposals that are formulated by intellectuals. They pick up and recycle those ideas in their appeals to activists and voters. They also rely upon intellectuals to recommend policy ideas and proposals and to indicate the implications that various proposals are likely to have. In this vein, presidents recruit intellectuals to serve as advisers and to recommend courses of action along with the rationales for pursuing those courses of action.

Politicians rely upon the resources of businesspeople to fund their campaigns, and they rely upon the leaders of activist movements and interest groups to help mobilize and channel financial and human resources into their campaign organizations. They also rely upon cadres of rank and file activists to staff their campaign organizations and assist with on the ground efforts. Activists also help to build support for politicians and the political coalitions with which they are affiliated among a mass audience that is poorly informed

and only passively engaged in the political process. Politicians need all of these things in order to win and maintain power.⁹

Since politicians have a strong need for all of these resources, they tend to take a very hands-on approach in connecting together other groups of elites and helping to shape and guide the development of the elite-activist coalitions with which they are affiliated. Politicians may be found reaching out to groups of intellectuals whose ideas they admire and recruiting them to serve as advisers. They may be found regularly meeting with and building support among members of the business community. They may also work extensively to build relationships with activist leaders who speak to and influence large groups of activists and voters, and they may help to cultivate and strengthen ties between groups of elites and activists whose support they need and whose cooperation and coordination within the context of the coalition benefits and serves the interests of politicians. Politicians facilitate cooperation among these various actors primarily by linking together ideas and positions in combinations that bring the actors together who they need to be together for their own strategic purposes.

Thus far, I have framed the process by which political coalitions achieve representation and advance their views as a bottom up process. In this vein, I argued that political coalitions can and do field representatives in election contests. But this is certainly not the only way that the arrows may be drawn. The reverse can also be true. Political coalitions can be captured, harnessed, and manipulated by strategic politicians for their own constructive purposes.

In fact, politicians who are already in office often tend to survey the electoral landscape and identify coalitions that are growing which—when properly harnessed—offer a body of potential resources in the form of votes, labor, vocal support, funding, and power over election outcomes.¹⁰ In order to effectively capture a political coalition, the strategic politician must convince a community that he/she stands for its interests and that he/she is willing to serve as a representative of its ideas in government and in party settings.

Depending upon the motivations of a politician, his relationship with a political coalition may take different forms and produce different effects. There are many possibilities, and so I will only consider a few. For instance, a politician may: 1) seek to use the resources of a political coalition for personal gain in order to advance to higher office; 2) seek to harness and influence the deployment of the resources of the political coalition in order to promote the election of like-minded representatives to government; 3) help to expand, strengthen, tighten, and maintain the coalition; or 4) harness the coalition and usher it into party settings, thus breaking down the barriers that enable it to exist as a separate entity.

The second and third points demand further elaboration because they both hold the potential to significantly alter the expression and representation of the ideas of a coalition within the party system and within government generally. By harnessing and

⁹ Aldrich, *Why Parties*, 20-21

¹⁰ *Ibid.* Aldrich stresses that activists provide critical resources for politicians. I am simply extending the argument and suggesting that political coalitions, which include large numbers of activists, offer a bloc of resources as well as a broader staffing and fundraising infrastructure.

influencing the deployment of the resources of a political coalition, the strategic politician can effectively promote the election of others to office who are like himself and who are also aligned with and representative of the coalition to which he has become attached. If a politician wishes, he can bolster a coalition and work to strategically boost its size, influence, and impact in electoral contests. He can help it to find additional resources and recruit and speak on behalf of other candidates who are also associated with it. He can also bond with and influence the coalition by joining with it and working to steer its discourse in ways that serve his own purposes.

This can be desirable for a variety of reasons. Depending upon his motives, a politician may harness a political coalition and encourage it to support his political party. The politician who is perceived by the party leadership as mobilizing and leading on behalf of the party can receive special benefits and assignments. Politicians also have a general incentive to engage in coalition-building for the party because increases in party representation mean new opportunities to control policy-making and exercise power.

Alternatively, a politician may choose to bond with and harness the resources of a coalition in order to tip the overall distribution of preferences represented within governing institutions. Such a move holds the potential to shift equilibrium policy outcomes in the direction of the politician's own policy preferences. The politician who achieves policy outcomes closer to his own preferences is one who accumulates more victories for which he/she can claim credit in the home district in order to secure re-election.¹¹

Politicians can also harness political coalitions and use them to engage in attempts to restructure their parties from within. Parties are broadly based coalitions, and it is not uncommon for groups of politicians within the same party to be at odds with each other. Politicians who are at odds may bond with different political coalitions and harness their resources to compete with each other for the control of party institutions. Politicians can and often do harness coalitions and the resources they offer to promote the election of government representatives who have preference distributions that are closer to their own. In the modern era, political parties in government are strong. In the domain of candidate-centered politics, however, party organizations tend to be weak, and political coalitions are the organized entities (with their well-developed infrastructures) that wage battles for the control of party institutions in government.

Turning to point three, another important role that is sometimes played by the strategic politician is to help expand, tighten, and maintain a political coalition. In this process, politicians tend to work as partners with public intellectuals. Together, the politicians and intellectuals who choose to bond with a political coalition and who have an interest in keeping a coalition together will work to actively steer coalition discourses down constructive pathways.

There is a constant need for work by politicians and intellectuals at the discursive level. As new policy issues emerge and rise in salience on the public agenda, it is the role of politicians and intellectuals who seek to hold a coalition together to frame positions on those issues which speak to the constituencies involved in a coalition and which reinforce

¹¹ Keith Krehbiel *Pivotal Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); David Mayhew *Congress: The Electoral Connection* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974)

the basic, foundational logic that unites a coalition. New issues must be rationalized in terms of core principles upon which the members of a coalition generally agree.

Politicians and intellectuals also often play an agenda-setting role by selectively speaking about and raising awareness of a select group of policy issues that will unite a coalition's various members and reinforce the ideological bonds that brought them together. Elites help to actively stake out positions that resonate with the core principles shared by a coalition's members. In cases where there is ideological diversity (or at least differences of emphasis and concern) among the activists in a single coalition, it may also be the task of politicians and intellectuals to formulate and place multiple frames around a single issue position so to as to bring all of the coalition's members around to the same basic conclusion or position. Differently worded ideational frames may resonate in different ways with the value systems of different coalition partners. They may also be necessary to create unity and suppress tendencies toward factionalism. As long as the collection of frames placed around a single issue are not fundamentally incompatible with each other and as long as those frames have the potential to lead various coalition partners to all reach the same end conclusion, then the formulation and dissemination of multiple issue frames can help to tie a diverse coalition together and help its members to coordinate and fight together in support of the same goals. When deployed effectively, multiple frames can prevent sub-surface differences in the patterns of logic represented within a single coalition from resulting in factionalism.

Intellectuals

Public intellectuals are also elites, but they bring different motivations and resources into the political process than do politicians. Intellectuals have the unique mental faculties and levels of awareness necessary to formulate, manipulate, and articulate complex combinations of ideas and to reassemble ideas in new ways that are justified through reason and logic. As men and women who think broadly and deeply about politics, intellectuals have the ability to link ideas together in sophisticated and complex ways that have the potential to serve as a basis for complete and coherent governing philosophies.¹²

Some public intellectuals seek to maintain distance from politics and instead proffer critiques that will influence the course of public debate from afar. The detachment of some intellectuals from practical politics is evidenced by their use of theoretical and abstruse language in the books and articles that they write. They do not write for a mass audience but rather to each other and to a relatively narrow demographic of people who think and read deeply about political and philosophical issues.

This is not universal. Some intellectuals are also activists. Activist intellectuals often choose to enter politics as advisers. They interface directly with politicians and advocate support of their ideas and proposals in a very direct manner. Many intellectuals

¹² Philip Converse, "The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics," in David Apter *Ideology and Discontent* (New York, NY: Free Press, 1964); Hans Noel *Political Ideologies and Political Parties in America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013)

also seek opportunities to express their views through print and broadcast news media and through speaking engagements. In doing so, they tend to rephrase and condense ideas for popular consumption that are more easily received and digested than those who write from a more removed perspective.

At any moment in time, there are many different normative versions of the direction American politics ought to take being articulated by many different public intellectuals in books, magazines, and the news media. While these versions may be similar, they are also typically distinctive and reflect the various idea combinations and views of their individual proponents with regard to the factors and considerations that ought to drive public policy, to what the ends of government ought to be, and to the most appropriate means of achieving the normative outcomes that they prescribe.

Public intellectuals whose views and ideas are relatively consistent and compatible with each other tend to carry on extensive dialogues with each other through various media. They also tend to collectively build critiques of the ideas and actors who are perceived as common adversaries. Their philosophical views, along with the practical applications and critiques that they derive from them and promulgate, are then digested by politicians, businesspeople, activist leaders, and rank and file activists.

The ideas of the various intellectuals associated with a political coalition are picked up, digested, processed, and integrated to varying degrees into the parlance of the non-intellectual members of an elite-activist coalition. The extent to which certain ideas and critiques achieve primacy and become integrated into the thinking of coalition partners has much to do with: 1) the level of coverage that various intellectuals receive—that is, the extent to which certain idea elements and packages are amplified and successfully passed through various filters (such as magazine editorial boards, news producers, and the selective attention of other intellectuals associated with a particular discursive community); 2) the ability of the various other members of the coalition to comprehend and integrate the idea configurations and critiques to which they are exposed; and 3) the complicated, psychological processing of ideas by all of the non-intellectual elites and activists within a political coalition.

These points bear further elaboration. While intellectuals shape and define idea combinations that ultimately flow throughout and influence the various members of a coalition, there are many different streams of ideas and idea combinations constantly flowing through various media at once. There is no arbiter, nor is there any definitive source for *the* official ideas of a political coalition. Those that are picked up and repeated—either because they are published in widely circulated magazines, repeated in political television and radio programs, or infused into the rhetoric of prominent politicians—are ultimately selected and amplified over others. The combinations that survive the various alembics through which they pass are ultimately, therefore, those that also tend to be the most socially and politically acceptable, those that are expedient for staking out popular positions on the issues of the day, and those that have resonated in meaningful ways with the belief systems and ideas of elite coalition members (especially politicians). They are useful and salient. The idea configurations and critiques that are expressed and ignored die because they were poorly constructed or because environmental conditions were inhospitable.

The idea combinations that are articulated by various public intellectuals within a coalition's discursive community therefore get re-combined, processed, and refined as they are debated and used over and over again for rhetorical and constructive purposes by elites and activists. They become infused within a coalition's discourse, and in the process they are refined, elaborated, and reshaped. The combinations that ultimately survive, and the formulations that become widely shared and popularized, are amalgamations that are produced through organic discursive exchanges.

The defining and widely accepted principles that ultimately guide and pervade the thought of a coalition— that come to define the essence of liberalism, conservatism, libertarianism, and so on— are unlikely to be a carbon copy of any single intellectual's views or of any single document or book. Rather, the ideas that emerge and achieve prominence in a coalition's discourse are likely to be an amalgamation of the organically filtered and processed idea blueprints crafted by public intellectuals. They are ideas that have been amplified and that have survived and become central organizing principles and concepts within a political coalition's discourse.

In this vein, political ideologies are organic, evolving systems of ideas that are derived but ultimately distinguishable from the work of intellectuals. In a political coalition's discourse, the ideas that come to be regarded as immutable and defining principles are really just ideas and idea combinations that have been organically packaged, emphasized, and cited over and over again.

Once dispersed and ingrained through this organic process, and once used to rationalize the various policy planks that hold an electoral coalition together, such principles are likely to be regarded as eternal truths that are refined but ultimately perpetuated relatively intact and rarely discarded. Still, the process is organic, and, in this light, political coalitions tend to be held together by ideologies that may shift over time as the discursive communities from which they arise also evolve.

Businesspeople

Due to the unequal distribution of wealth in society, a comparatively small percentage of wealthy businesspeople and corporations control vast portions of the nation's wealth. These actors' financial resources provide them with a unique kind of potential to significantly shape and influence the political process through the sheer volume of their financial contributions. Typically, when they choose to do so, wealthy businesspeople seek policy benefits in the form of favorable tax and regulatory policies that will help the enterprises that they oversee to grow and that will help them to maintain and expand their own wealth.

The donations of businesspeople and corporations are of great value to politicians, who need them to support campaign organization efforts, political advertising, and other campaign activities. In this vein, it is common to see politicians reaching out to businesspeople and corporations, building ties with them, and ultimately accepting their contributions. Many businesspeople and corporations provide money to a variety of political actors and campaigns and sometimes even opt to support both sides in a political race. Generally, however, businesspeople tend to contribute the most resources to those contenders who are expected to support policies that will benefit them the most.

These are just a few of the obvious avenues through which businesspeople can seek to influence the political process. Businesspeople can *also* seek to influence the political process by funding the growth and development of specific political coalitions. Indeed, some align themselves closely with a single political coalition's network and devote all of their resources to strengthening its development.

When businesspeople integrate with a particular political coalition, they may help to fund the efforts of its activist leaders, activist organizations, and affiliated interest groups. They may also fund the efforts of intellectuals who are aligned with the same coalition and who help to influence and shape its discourses.¹³

To the extent that businesspeople fund these various non-political actors and groups, they are most likely do so because they judge the efforts of these actors as providing assistance to candidates that they prefer and as helpful for promulgating ideas and policy proposals that will serve their strategic interests. Businesspeople may therefore use their resources to not only fund campaigns (in the obvious way) but to also strengthen political coalitions by supporting all of the non-political elites and activists who collaborate within them. In doing so, they can amplify the impact of these actors' efforts and exert a multi-dimensional but highly targeted ideological impact on the development on the political process. Because these contributions fund the private efforts of unelected actors who merely help to elect affiliated politicians, the contributions move through channels that are entirely unregulated and unaffected by campaign finance laws.

This point bears further elaboration. Businesspeople may function as critical backers of political coalitions. By integrating with political coalitions and funding the efforts of their various members, they can support the development of the coalition's organizational, coordinative, and ideological infrastructure. By doing so, they can amplify the impact of their contributions and funnel them toward efforts that are guaranteed to support affiliated politicians who are aligned with the coalition and who advocate for the policy proposals that are also supported by group members. The implication is also that the intellectual elites, activist leaders, and even activists within a political coalition can become beholden to their financial backers are politicians. Businesspeople can therefore exert indirect influence over the backing of certain candidates, ideas, and policies by the network of actors within a coalition because they fund and support the maintenance of important coalition infrastructure.

For example, businesspeople can and often do choose to fund think tanks so as to amplify the ideas of certain intellectuals and the creation of policy alternatives that favor them.¹⁴ They also channel resources to support efforts for interest groups, movements, and other activist organizers who march in support of and promise to help elect the candidates that are likely to advocate for policies that will be favorable to them. From the standpoint of business elites, the ideas, efforts, and causes advocated by the groups and organizational efforts that they support financially are likely to matter only insofar as they direct support to candidates who are, in the end, likely to support the right

¹³ Kim Phillips-Fein *Invisible Hands: The Businessmen's Crusade Against the New Deal* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2009); Skocpol, Tea Party

¹⁴ Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands*

candidates. In practice, for financial interests, the ends are likely to matter far more than the means. They may care little about cultural or social issues but can go along with ideas and issues that are useful for holding the coalitions they support together.

Political Discourse, Institutions, and the Dynamics of Coalition Formation

In this section, I attempt to define and characterize the causal mechanisms that lead political coalitions to become tied together at the discursive level. The first step in this direction is to recognize that institutions filter and structure the flow of ideas. In the world outside of any institutional constraints— let us call this the arena of "public political discourse"— there is a vast, unconstrained, heterogeneous mixture of ideas floating around about public policy.

Ideas in the Arena of Public Discourse One framework that is useful for analyzing discourse in the public arena is to actually think of it as consisting of many distinct and subsidiary policy discourses. For the sake of analysis, I argue that around every policy issue that is debated in the arena of public political discourse, there is a distinct policy-specific discourse. For example, there is a public discourse on education policy. There is a public discourse on energy policy. There is a public discourse on national security policy, and so on. Collectively, public political discourse therefore consists of an amalgamation of many separate policy-specific discourses.

As I am using the term, a policy-specific discourse forms naturally around a policy issue as political elites, intellectuals, activists, the media, and others who are engaged in public political debate talk about that issue, take positions on it, and defend those positions. At the public level of discourse, a policy-specific discourse begins to take shape at the moment that a policy issue first emerges. As that issue is picked up and debated in public forums, that policy discourse expands and evolves to contain an extremely heterogeneous mixture of conflicting ideas about that policy issue. For instance, the public discourse on national security policy includes all of ideas about national security policy that are in circulation within the polity at a fixed moment in time. It includes the ideas expressed by defense hawks, isolationists, liberals, and conservatives alike.

Institutional Constraints Next, it is important to consider what happens inside of an institutionally bounded discursive community. As I have argued, a discursive community is characterized by a set of mechanisms which are set up by members to facilitate cooperation, coordination, and communication.¹⁵ By its very nature, then, a discursive community does not include all of the actors who are contributors to the broad arena of public political discourse. It contains only a subset of those actors.

Consequently, inside of an institutionally bounded environment, the flow and substance of ideas represented is structured and limited.¹⁶ Only certain ideas are

¹⁵ The Conservative Political Action Conference is one such mechanism.

¹⁶ Vivien A. Schmidt, "Speaking of change: why discourse is key to the dynamics of policy transformation," *Critical Policy Studies* 5, No. 2 (2011): 119-121 Schmidt notes that: "institutions for discursive institutionalists constitute the setting within which 'sentient' agents are the thinking agents who develop their ideas for action that they convey through discourse."

represented and supported. A great many of the ideas that have advocates in the vast arena of public discourse will have no advocates at all within an institutionally bounded environment. Certain ideas simply may not be discussed or debated at all, while others may only have strong opponents but no advocates.

Thus, within the confines of an institutionally bounded discursive community, only a subset of the policy discourses that are discussed and debated within the arena of public discourse will be featured at all. Every institutionally bounded discursive community will also be characterized by its own distinctive policy discourses that are distinguishable from public discourses on the same set of issues. To continue the earlier example, in a community where members discuss and debate the issues of energy, education, and national security policy, three distinct community policy discourses will emerge. Distinctive community discourses will emerge around energy policy, education policy, and national security policy.

Each of these community discourses will be characterized by a mixture and stream of ideas that is specific to the community itself. The ideational content of these discourses will include only the mixture of ideas represented by those elites and activists who have joined the community by cooperating, coordinating, and communicating with other members.

These points have several implications. First, as a result of all of these factors, the various policy discourses that emerge within a distinct discursive community will be subject to distinct evolutionary forces that are produced by the conditions within the community itself. Certain ideas that are strongly represented within a community may be emphasized, reemphasized, and linked together in distinctive ways through community channels as the members of the community cooperate, coordinate, and communicate with each other.

Second, ideational developments that occur within the confines of an isolated discursive community may not be fully transmitted into the broader political arena. Institutions may indeed not only keep certain ideas out of coalition channels— they may also serve as barriers that *isolate* and hold ideas in. If community members talk extensively through private channels and in private settings that are isolated from the rest of the political world, new ideas and discursive developments that arise, find expression, and evolve in those settings can essentially be cut off from the political world, even as they flourish in a small but hospitable environment.

Of course, this is rarely by choice. By definition, the representatives of a political coalition are highly engaged political elites and activists who have a strong motive and desire to push their ideas aggressively in the public marketplace. Often, it is the case that the members of a coalition will broadcast their ideas as loudly as they can to anyone who will listen. However, if conditions are not hospitable— if the media, the current political parties, and other channels of communication shut out certain actors and do not provide a medium for them to disseminate their ideas effectively and translate them into the

The institutional setting, moreover, constitutes both that which structures agents' ideas, discourse, and actions and that which is constructed by agents' ideas, discourse and actions..." In short, according to Schmidt, political actors structure institutions, and their discursive interactions are also structured by those same institutions.

political process— then the actors will be more likely to exchange ideas and cooperate, coordinate, and communicate within small, bounded institutional environments and channels of communication that are more isolated.

Political Coalition vs. Party Discourses These points are somewhat abstract, and so it is useful to consider a concrete example. Suppose that a political coalition is nested within a political party. The members of the coalition participate as members of the party, but they are also sectioned off from the rest of the party because they have set up separate mechanisms to facilitate cooperation, coordination, and communication among themselves as a group. Members of the political coalition have private meetings to which other members of the party are not invited. Also, the coalition's leaders schedule private strategy planning sessions among themselves to which other party leaders are not privy. In these separate settings, the coalition's leaders discuss their views on certain policy issues among themselves.

As coalition members discuss the policy issues that are of the greatest concern to them, distinct coalition policy discourses will almost inevitably emerge and evolve that are distinct from broader party discourses. To again continue the earlier example, suppose that the chief policy concerns of a coalition are education, energy, and national security. Three coalition policy discourses may emerge around these issues as they are discussed and debated in coalition settings. These distinct discourses will be shaped by the ideas supported by the members of the coalition who participate in the isolated discussions. The mixture of ideas flowing through these coalition discourses will be distinguishable from the mixture of ideas represented in party discourse and from the vast sea of ideas circulating in public discourse. Of course, a political party is also a community of discourse. Party discourse is therefore also structured, though it is typically much more visible, and changes in party discourse will typically spill out into the arena of public discourse more quickly and easily than the ideas of a coalition.

In this hypothetical world, then, multiple discourses form and evolve along distinct evolutionary paths. In the field of education policy alone, there will be a coalition discourse on education policy, a party discourse on education policy, and a public discourse on education policy. These multiple layers of discourse may overlap in certain respects exist as subsets of each other.

The Impact of Coalition Expansion I have also argued that in order to join a political coalition, actors must begin participating in the discourse of that coalition. Putting this into context of the points that I have just made, it follows that the addition of new members to a coalition can produce changes in that coalition's discourse.

New actors who join a coalition because of its stand on one particular issue may care about a number of other issues that were not previously emphasized in that coalition's discourse at all. Once new coalition members raise their own concerns in coalition forums, new coalition discourses will begin to immediately form and evolve around those distinct policy issues.

In addition, new actors who join a political coalition may carry new ideas into coalition settings that were not represented beforehand. In joining the coalition, new members may actually cause several developments. First, they may promote the development of new coalition policy discourses in the way I just described. Second, they may bring new ideas into coalition settings, thereby changing the substance of coalition

discourses that had taken shape prior to their entry. Finally, they may represent certain ideas more strongly than others, thereby strengthening the degree to which certain ideas are represented and expressed relative to the degree to which those same ideas were represented and expressed prior to their arrival. This can result in a process that I term "rebalancing." By rebalancing, I simply mean that the degree to which certain ideas are expressed relative to others has changed in intensity.

In short, the point I am arguing is that the distinctive policy discourses that exist in institutionally bounded environments necessarily change in subtle but important ways when new groups of actors enter those environments. When new factions join a political party, party discourses necessarily expand and evolve. When new factions join a political coalition, that coalition's policy discourses necessarily expand and evolve. Typically, the entry of new actors into a discursive community will result in the infusion of new ideas and an inevitable increase in ideational heterogeneity within that community.

As I have previously argued, it is possible for political coalitions to collapse and/or for the invisible walls that hold ideas within them to weaken and break down. This happens when there is a change in the locus of cooperation, coordination, and communication of actors who participate in a coalition. If the members of a coalition join and increasingly participate in party settings and through party channels rather than coalition channels— if they repeatedly field candidates in elections and establish a foothold within party institutions— then the ideas of their coalition will tend to spill out. This happens as distinct coalition discourses (with their distinct balance and mixture of ideas) become infused into the party's discourses, thereby changing the substance and balance of ideas in the arena of party discourse. Even when this happens, however, a coalition may continue to maintain its own infrastructure. In the era of candidate centered elections, political coalitions tend to be permanent fixtures, with the lines between party and coalition looking blurred or sharp at different times depending upon political context.

Linking Discourses With all of these points in mind, it is possible to bring the coalition-building role played by elites into sharper focus. It is also possible to state that changes in a coalition's discourse will follow ineluctably from changes in that coalition's membership base.

As I have argued, within the context of a political coalition, the mixture of ideas represented within each policy discourse is necessarily only a subset of the ideas represented in the broad field of public discourse. Nevertheless, coalitions are by their nature still heterogeneous, and not all actors who choose to cooperate with each other agree on all issues. At least some of the ideas that are represented within a coalition may conflict or potentially conflict with each other. From the standpoint of elites who associate themselves with a coalition, it is therefore important to deemphasize ideas that are contradictory to each other and to emphasize ideas that are consistent with each other or which (when framed in the appropriate ways) can be made to sound consistent with each other.

The more that the ideas represented by various actors are brought into harmony and linked together rhetorically, the more comfortable those actors will be with each other and the more likely they will be to cooperate and coordinate with each other effectively and efficiently as a tight, cohesive coalition. The task of elites who want to

create unity, then, is to select from the variety of ideas streaming through each of a coalition's policy discourses and to construct and articulate thematic frames that link those various ideas together and make them seem logically consistent with and complimentary to each other. In a similar vein, elites must simultaneously deemphasize and find ways of minimizing the expression of ideas that conflict with others.

In this vein, the maintenance of unity within a coalition is a never-ending task. If elites wish to expand the size of the coalition, they must find ways of linking a select group of ideas represented by the actors inside of the coalition to issues that are of concern to actors who are not yet active participants in the coalition. They must make some kind of appeal to outside groups to entice them to join the community.

At the same time, when new actors enter a coalition, they bring new ideas and new concerns into coalition settings. This process can weaken the effectiveness of frames that have already been constructed and emphasized or introduce latent fault lines that, while they not create any instabilities in an immediate sense, may make the coalition more likely to destabilize in the future if and when cross-cutting issues emerge that expose those fault lines. Linking discourses that were formerly effective for tying groups together may need to be adjusted and expanded in order to accommodate the infusion of new ideas into the coalition and correct for changes in the balance with which various ideas are represented.

In time, then, over the course of a coalition's lifespan, an increasing web of linking discourses and corrective, discursive bridges may tend to be elaborated in order to tie in new groups and to resolve and minimize complications that have been created by the incorporation of new groups, new ideas, and new issues. Also, while linking discourses are effective for building unity, it is important to note that they do so by selectively emphasizing certain ideas over others and delicately connecting the policy discourses of a coalition together at certain ideational nodes. Beneath the surface, conflicting ideas may build up within a coalition, and, as new groups are mobilized and assimilated and as policy issues change over time, these changes can bring settled tensions back to the surface and require additional work on the part of intellectuals who seek to hold the coalition together.

Surface Discourse vs. Sub-surface Tensions Before moving on, it is necessary to differentiate between “surface” level discourse and “sub-surface” ideational tensions.

Within a political coalition, I argue that there are two different ideational levels — the surface and the sub-surface. The surface level has to do with the substance and balance of ideas that are exchanged within the public discourses of the coalition. It includes not only the ideas that are exchanged among coalition partners but also the degree to which various ideas are voiced and the ways that those ideas are applied to issues that are currently under debate in coalition settings.

The sub-surface level has to do with the substance and balance of ideas within the belief systems of coalition members. Belief systems are complex and vary from individual to individual.¹⁷ An individual's belief system is the product of his environment, life experiences, and level of exposure to political debates and news coverage. Members of a coalition may hold many complimentary ideas that help them to

¹⁷ Converse, Nature of Belief Systems

work together and coordinate their efforts, but they may also hold many other ideas that conflict with each other. In a similar vein, members of a coalition may attach different degrees of centrality to certain ideas, have different underlying motivations for subscribing to certain ideas, and have different degrees of philosophical constraint and sophistication if their underlying belief systems could be compared to each other objectively. Since belief systems are complicated and part of individuals' psychological makeup, these comparisons can never be made. It is simply important to note that at the sub-surface level, there may be many differences in ideational emphases, motivations, and levels of philosophical constraint among the members of a coalition that are not evident within public, surface-level discourse.

Indeed, at the sub-surface level, there may be great ideational cleavages and differences between coalition partners that carry the potential to rip a coalition apart if they were ever exposed. These sub-surface differences are inevitable within all coalitions since coalitions are by definition heterogeneous and since, by definition, belief systems vary from individual to individual. The stability of a coalition therefore rests upon the maintenance of a surface discourse that maintains harmony and that suppresses the sub-surface differences that are inherent within the belief systems of the coalition's members.

There are several theoretical implications. First, it is important to note that when coalition expands in size, politicians and public intellectuals may do a great job of controlling and steering surface discourse so as to maintain harmony among new and established coalition partners. However, since belief systems do vary from individual to individual, the mobilization and incorporation of additional groups of actors into a coalition will invariably contribute to a buildup of greater ideological diversity among coalition members at the sub-surface level. When politicians work to mobilize new groups and expand the size of a coalition, they therefore sow seeds that make the coalition more susceptible to derailment in the future when policy issues change.

Second, on that note, it is important to recognize that when new policy issues do emerge on the public agenda, they have the potential to alter the surface discourse of the coalition and bring unsettled and perhaps hitherto unnoticed tensions to the fore. This can create additional work for the politicians and public intellectuals who endeavor to hold a coalition together. It creates a need for them to either suppress the discussion of issues that risk causing conflict or, failing that, to frame and advance arguments that help to rationalize positions on newly raised issues in terms that will reinforce the ideational common ground shared by coalition members and the logic that holds a coalition together.

Third, an important question concerns the extent to which not only elites but also activists who participate in the discourses of a coalition may be aware of unseen ideational differences and potential cleavages at the sub-surface level. To the extent that they are aware of these differences, the members of a coalition may work to preserve stability by simply avoiding issues that they know are "too hot to handle" and/or by refusing to express ideas openly that they know would upset fellow coalition partners.

To the extent that coalition partners do engage in this type of self-monitoring, it is possible that the surface ideational configuration of discourse may be artificial and that rhetoric in coalition settings may be instrumental. That is, surface discourse may be the product of a kind of unspoken consensus to use certain frames and talk about issues in

ways that are safe and capable of building a broad consensus while avoiding those that could incite conflict. At times, outside political developments may challenge such an unspoken consensus by forcing the deliberation of controversial issues and/or by prompting actors to voice unspoken frames and rationales. Also, the mobilization and incorporation of new interests may have a similar effect by altering the substance, balance, and flow of ideas in surface level discourse.

Discourse and the Process of Identity Formation

In this section, I build upon these arguments and begin to outline my theory of the role of discourse in coalition identity formation. The first step is to take a step back and develop a more precise definition of the term discourse. I define discourse as the interactive medium through which ideas are exchanged and communicated among a community of politicians, intellectuals, activist leaders, and activists. Discourse is ongoing, institutionally bounded dialogue. The content of this dialogue evolves as new actors join a community, begin to participate in its discussions, and begin to express their ideas and opinions.¹⁸

What is the relationship between a coalition's discourse and the formation of a sense of shared identity among a coalition's members? The first step toward understanding the connection is to recognize that within the ongoing dialogue within a community of actors, certain actors in the community tend to naturally pick up on the things that they have heard other members of the community say. In turn, these actors tend to selectively react, respond to, and repeat the ideas that have struck a chord with them (or a nerve), while also contributing their own caveats, criticisms, and additions as they express their own particular viewpoints. Thus, within the dialogue of a bounded community of actors, an idea or series of ideas may be introduced into the community's dialogue by one actor or series of actors for one reason, and then those same ideas may be picked up, recombined, repeated, and/or refuted by other actors as those individuals express their own opinions.

Discourse is therefore a medium of exchange through which ideas, narratives, characterizations, and frames are transmitted, received, processed, repeated, and recombined.¹⁹ Within a community of actors, ideas and combinations of ideas move, or

¹⁸Schmidt, *Discursive Institutionalism*, 306. My definition of discourse is influenced by Schmidt's work. She stresses that "scholars who speak of discourse address explicitly the representation of ideas (how agents say what they are thinking of doing) and the discursive interactions through which actors generate and communicate ideas (to whom they say it) within given institutional contexts (where and when they say it)." Also see Schmidt, *Discursive Institutionalism*, 309. Schmidt argues: "Discourse is a more versatile and overarching concept than ideas. By using the term discourse, we can simultaneously indicate the ideas represented in the discourse (which may come in a variety of forms as well as content) and the interactive processes by which ideas are conveyed (which may be carried by different agents in different spheres)."

¹⁹Ibid. Similarly, Schmidt notes that: "In the representation of ideas, any given discourse may serve to articulate not only different levels of ideas...but also different forms of ideas—narratives, myths, frames, collective memories, stories, scripts, scenarios, images, and more."

circulate. In the process, they are naturally extended, applied, recombined, and transformed in unpredictable ways as they are recited by different actors to express different perspectives. To reiterate a point that I made earlier, discourse is an organic medium of exchange where ideational permutations happen through natural processes and are outside of the control of any single actor or group of actors. Because ideas constantly circulate within a community of actors and because they are continuously being picked up, recited, and recombined, discourse may be described as a medium where certain ideas live and are perpetuated for extended periods of time as they are bounced around and processed by many different policy actors.²⁰

The next step is to understand that constituencies who are part of a community of discourse can be tied together through the organic ideational developments that happen through the medium of discourse. As I noted above, ideas are deposited into an ongoing, institutionally bounded dialogue by the participants in community, and they are assembled and changed organically as they are picked out of the stream, reassembled, and expressed by various actors as they react and respond to each other publicly. Over time, certain ideas, narratives, and interpretations can survive and be perpetuated (while others that are not repeated can simply die out). Through discourse, ideas may become linked together, rise in salience, and become functionally central organizing concepts with which many actors in a coalition are versed and conversant.

As scholars in the field of discourse analysis have long noted, ideas play a critical role in the definition of public policy problems as well as in the development of proposed solutions to policy problems. The nature of the solutions that are proposed and widely accepted depends almost entirely on how the problems have been defined. Within a bounded community of discourse, actors who interact and exchange ideas through discourse can come to settle on a commonly accepted bundle of problem definitions and solutions.

As certain ideas, interpretations, narratives, and principles achieve widespread circulation and common acceptance within the discourses of a community of actors, they can come to serve as the foundation for structured, shared perceptions of the political world and, by extension, as the foundation for a sense of collective identity among the members of a coalition.

The Field of Discursive Institutionalism

By arguing that discourse is a medium through which political identities are forged, I am situating myself within the growing field of “ideas in politics” or, to use a term for the field coined by Vivien Schmidt, “Discursive Institutionalism.”²¹ Like other scholars in this field, I argue that in order to understand ideational change— in order to understand why we have the policy coalitions (and by extension, the policies) that we

²¹ Ibid.; Vivien A. Schmidt, “Analyzing Ideas and Tracing Discursive Interactions in Institutional Change: From Historical Institutionalism to Discursive Institutionalism,” (CES Papers- Open Forum #3, 2010); Schmidt, *Speaking of Change*

have today— it is necessary to look not just at the role of ideas but to also look upon institutionally bounded and interactive *discourse* as a key variable.

Elites who wish to shape identity and build cohesion within a coalition cannot do so directly—that is, they cannot magically influence a coalition’s identity or degree of cohesion by simply shouting what they think at everyone they see who will listen. Instead, they must seek to exert influence indirectly by influencing discourse. They can do so making contributions to a broader stream of ideas and exchanges within a community, by seeking to recruit new actors to engage in discourse who share their views (therefore bolstering those views), and/or by creating new institutions in order to encourage more discourse and boost the circulation of ideas that they care about most.²²

In her writing, political scientist Vivien Schmidt has identified two broad categories of discourse: “coordinative discourse” and “communicative discourse.” The former involves discursive interactions among political elites, intellectuals, activists, and other policy actors. In the realm of coordinative discourse, policy actors collaborate in order to work out a consensus regarding what they stand for, as well as the details of public policy proposals that they wish to enact. This is the type of discourse that is common within party coalitions and political coalitions as I have defined them.

Meanwhile, communicative discourse involves the dialogue that is used by policy actors and other informed publics (including elites, activists, intellectuals, the media, and informed voters) to explain policy proposals to the general public and, by extension, to build public support and/or opposition to those policies. In essence, the function of communicative discourse is to translate a subset of the ideas and considerations tossed around in coordinative discourse into a language that is digestible by the less informed and philosophically less sophisticated public.²³ This is the type of discourse through which ideas are packaged by coalition members and presented to voters.

Rhetorical Instruments: Characterizations, Narratives, and Interpretations

As I have just defined it, a political coalition is a distinct community of discourse with its own organizational infrastructure and its own distinct body of discourses. As a distinct community, a political coalition can also come to have its own distinct friends and foes, as well as its own body of narratives and political strategies. In the context of a coalition, characterizations of friends and foes as well as narratives and political strategies are typically defined as the ideas and platform of the coalition are juxtaposed to the ideas and platforms of other actors, parties, and bounded communities of discourse

²² Schmidt, *Discursive Institutionalism*, 312. Schmidt notes: “The interactive processes of discourse may also exert a causal influence beyond what discourse does in representing ideas. Most generally, discourse serves not just to express one set of actors’ strategic interests or normative values but also to persuade others of the necessity and/or appropriateness of a given course of action.” Like Schmidt, I argue that actors seek to persuade through discourse; however, I argue that leaders may do so not only by engaging in discourse themselves but also by setting up institutions to encourage discourse and by recruiting other actors to engage in discourse so as to boost the circulation of the particular ideas that they represent.

²³ *Ibid.*, 310

operating within the polity. Politicians and intellectuals who are associated with a political coalition exert a strong influence over a coalition's discourse, and elite interpretations and explanations of context are therefore especially critical components in the construction and refinement of a coalition's narratives and strategies.

Within a community of discourse, shared understandings and perceptions of the political world and of other actors working within it— particularly understandings that breed hostility and a sense of identity and "otherness"— can build cohesion, cultivate strong impulses to engage in collective action, and erect invisible walls around a coalition. This is precisely why patterns of discourse are so useful for parsing the political world. Bounded communities of discourse tend to develop not only a unique blend of policy-specific discourses but also other linguistic formations that channel those ideas and shape perceptions and the behavior of coalition participants in distinctive ways.²⁴

Before proceeding, it is useful to elaborate upon these arguments by defining with greater precision three rhetorical instruments that politicians employ to shape perceptions of the political world: the characterization, the narrative, and the interpretation.

Characterization As I define the term, a political *characterization* is a stylized description of an idea, an actor, or an institution that has embedded within it one or more ideational frames.²⁵ A characterization imposes some kind of value judgment on the object that is being described. The following is a characterization of liberals taken by a speech by Robert Bauman at CPAC 1977.

...the liberals in Congress want their minorities that they champion grateful and dependent on them. That's their theory and that's the way they get elected to office. They don't want them self-sufficient and proud as free enterprise would allow them to be.²⁶

In this quote, Bauman characterizes liberals as savvy politicians out to take advantage of the little guy and determined to intentionally build dependence upon big government. He also clearly defines them as opponents of the important conservative concepts of self-sufficiency and free enterprise and, by extension, pegs them as the enemies of conservative principles.

The following is an example of a characterization of conservatives taken from a speech delivered by Elizabeth Warren at the Netroots Nation conference held in 2014:

²⁴ Ibid., 309

²⁵ William E. Connolly *The Terms of Political Discourse* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), 22-23 and 73-76. On p. 23, Connolly argues: "A description does not refer to data or elements that are bound together merely on the basis of similarities adhering in them, *but to describe is to characterize a situation from the vantage point of certain interests, purposes, or standards*. To describe is to characterize from one or more possible points of view, and the concepts with which we so characterize have the contours they do in part because of the point of view from which they are formed."

²⁶ MSS 176, LTPSC, Series XVI, Box 114, Tape 44

When conservatives talk about opportunity, they mean opportunity for the rich to get richer and the powerful to get more powerful. They don't mean opportunity for a young person with \$100,000 in student loan debt to try to build a future. They don't mean opportunities for someone out of work to get back on their feet. They don't mean opportunities for someone who worked hard all their life to retire with dignity.²⁷

In the next part of her speech, Warren added:

This is a fight over economics, a fight over privilege, a fight over power. But deep down it is a fight over values. Conservatives and their powerful friends will continue to be guided by their internal motto, "I've got mine. The rest of you are on your own." Well, we're guided by principle, and it's a pretty simple idea. We all do better when we work together and invest in building a future.²⁸

Here, Warren juxtaposes the attitude of conservatives (who she characterizes as indifferent and uncaring) to the principle espoused by progressives who, in her view, believe in working together.

Characterizations are thus important carriers of ideas. When articulated in coalition settings, characterizations can help to shape perceptions of actors and objects in the world outside of the coalition, and they can help to define the relationship between those outside actors and objects and the internal ideas and logic of the coalition being addressed. In a similar vein, characterizations can be employed to impose friend/foe designations and to cultivate positive or negative feelings toward other actors and entities within the polity.

A more positive example and use of a characterization (provided below), is taken from John Ashbrook's address at CPAC 1977. Here, Ashbrook characterizes conservatives as "productive people." He also applies a friend designation to certain key identity groups who he also defines as "productive" and therefore as conservative constituencies.

Somehow, some time, we have to return the control of government to productive people, and we all know it'll only be done through conservatives, because we are the productive people: The businesspeople, the self-employed, the factory workers, the farmers, the retired people who've worked— we are the productive people.²⁹

²⁷ Steven Rosenfeld, "Progressive Values are America's Values, Sen. Elizabeth Warren Tells Netroots Nation in Keynote Speech," (July 18, 2014), accessed March 14, 2015, <http://www.alternet.org/activism/progressive-values-are-americas-values-sen-elizabeth-warren-tells-netroots-nation-keynote>

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ MSS 176, LTPSC, Series XVI, Box 114, Tape 44

Narrative Another important discursive tool and carrier of ideas is the political *narrative*. As I define it, a political narrative is a stylized explanation of a sequence of political developments. A narrative delineates a complex, interactive relationship between ideas, interests, and/or institutions. It also incorporates and builds upon commonly recited characterizations (including the ideational frames inherent within those characterizations).³⁰

For example, the following is a narrative explanation of the rise of liberalism delivered by James Buckley at CPAC 1977. It weaves together characterizations of the New Deal, liberalism, interest groups, economic context, and liberal politicians, and it also delineates a complex, interactive relationship between multiple variables in order to define, frame, and explain a series of political developments. Of course, all of the characterizations encapsulated within Buckley's narrative explanation are also heavily laden with ideational frames that also juxtapose the philosophies of liberalism and conservatism. The last line of this narrative also perfectly incorporates a variant of the characterization of liberals as intent upon building permanent constituencies and is similar to the one by Bauman (quoted above). Buckley stressed:

In political terms, the most dramatic [revolution in attitudes] in modern American life has been the subtle shift that has occurred in the relationship between government and the individual. The federal government had been viewed by the Founders as a necessary evil, but during the New Deal years, it increasingly took on the role of benevolent provider— intent on freeing us from every care, from every risk. As a result, a doctrine has evolved that imposes on the federal government the obligation to provide for its citizens in areas where they could better provide for themselves. And during the past few decades, the number of special interest groups asserting special claims on the public treasury has grown far beyond the government's ability to respond. In the process, we have seen a gradual shift from the position in which the state was viewed as deriving its just powers from the people to one in which the people are increasingly deemed to be entitled to live their lives and return their earnings only at the tolerance of the state. The results have been catastrophic. People have been damaged by promises easily made but seldom kept, the economic structure of our nation teeters on the edge of fiscal chaos. But most serious of all is the damage that has been done to the human spirit. Politicians *out to build permanent constituencies* have encouraged people

³⁰ Marteen Hajer and Hendrik Wagenaar *Deliberative Policy Analysis: Understanding Governance in a Network Society* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 104-105. The authors argue: "The first layer [of policy discourse] consists of the story lines, metaphors and particular myths that help sustain the societal support for particular policy programs ... [the] story line allows for shared orientations and is an important factor in the formation of a supporting coalition. Story lines often carry metaphors: linguistic devices that convey understanding through comparison."

to retreat from self-reliance by singing the old siren song of total security.³¹ (emphasis mine)

The following is another example of a narrative. This one is an excerpt from a speech delivered by Hillary Clinton at the 2008 meeting of the Democratic Leadership Council. In this portion of her speech, Clinton describes the prosperity that existed at the end of the twentieth century as a product of the Democratic Party's leadership during the 1990s, and she blames the decline in economic prosperity of the Republican Party's policies. She also incorporates characterizations of the Republican agenda, including the notion that it is "focused on helping the strong get stronger and the rich get richer."³² Clinton noted:

We ended the last century with America's economic might at its peak, with Americans at their most optimistic, and with opportunities for almost everyone who wanted to work hard to make the most of their God-given abilities. We got there in large part because of the Democratic Party's philosophy of governing. We asked individuals to take responsibility for themselves and also chip in and help in their communities, and, in return, we expected, and we asked people to expect, that their government would take responsibility for spending those hard-earned tax dollars and ensuring the underpinnings of fairness and opportunity for all. Now, I don't need to tell you that over the past five years, we've gone in a very different direction. A policy of fiscal discipline and budget surpluses was abandoned for one that racked up debt and proclaimed that deficits don't matter, and a policy that focused on helping the middle class get bigger and stronger was replaced by one that helped the strong get stronger and the rich get richer, in the mistaken belief that the rest of the country would eventually get their share. For the first time ever, we've had four straight years of rising productivity and falling incomes. Americans are earning less, while the costs of a middle class life have soared. College costs, up 50 percent in five years. Health care, 73 percent. Gasoline, more than 100 percent. Rising home costs have pushed people farther and farther from their work. A lot of Americans can't work any harder, borrow any more, or save any less, and those same costs of health care, retirement, transportation, energy-- are impacting our businesses, as well. It's time for a new direction.³³

³¹ MSS 176, LTPSC, Series XVI, Box 114, Tape 47

³² Hillary Clinton, Remarks at the Democratic Leadership Council Annual Meeting, (July 24, 2006), accessed March 15, 2015, <http://www.c-span.org/video/?193643-1/democratic-leadership-council>

³³ Ibid.

Interpretation I define an interpretation as a stylized explanation of a political development. An interpretation includes an ideational component, but it differs from a narrative in that it does not necessarily link multiple political developments together or delineate a complex relationship between them. An interpretation often takes the form: “x happened, and here’s why.”³⁴

That said, an interpretation may draw heavily upon commonly understood relationships between variables that are established within existing narratives, and it may draw upon and incorporate frequently recited characterizations of other actors and groups of actors operating within the polity. It is rare for an elite to offer an interpretation of context that does not have at least some roots in existing political discourses and rhetoric. Interpretations thus simultaneously arise from existing narratives and characterizations and also serve as the building blocks of narratives and characterizations.

These points bear further elaboration. Within a community of discourse, there is a tendency for interpretations of current events to build upon and ultimately become permanently incorporated into established narratives.

For example, following the remarks cited above, Buckley proceeded to define a strategy for assembling an electoral coalition of citizens who had been damaged by and who he characterized as being fundamentally opposed to the philosophy of modern liberalism. Buckley’s subsequent discussion of strategy included important characterizations of the desires of the electorate— who he depicted as having “had enough” of liberalism— and of the national media. He also offered an interpretation of Carter’s election that reinforced the belief that conservative ideas were critical for mobilizing and speaking to voters.

³⁴ James H. Kuklinski and Norman L. Hurley, “It’s a Matter of Interpretation,” in Diana Mutz, Paul. M. Sniderman, and Richard A. Brody, eds. *Political Persuasion and Attitude Change* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 125-144; Kuklinski and Hurley stress that elite interpretations are almost always instrumental. They are framed so as to elicit desired responses. In this vein, the authors note: “Members of Congress, interest groups, and other concerned actors convey not facts but their interpretations of them; and these interpretations vary as strategic goals vary. In other words, political elites’ words characterize the world as the communicators want others to see it; they are not a logically derived and veridical expression of the facts.” They go on to quote Edelman, who noted that “Officials, interest groups, and critics anticipate the interpretations of particular audiences, shaping their acts and language so as to elicit a desired response.” Although the authors are referring specifically to the communicative discourse between policy actors and the general public, it is important to note that in coalition settings, interpretations of events are still likely to be instrumental.; Also see: Hajer and Wagenaar, *Deliberative Policy Analysis*, 105. The authors would use the term “myth” to describe what I call an “interpretation.” They note: “Myth...brings coherence by explaining why things cohere: a ‘constitutive myth’ explains cohesion by narrating a foundational event, a ‘dystopian myth’ makes people cohere to avoid a catastrophe.” I differ from them in that I see interpretations of everyday events in the political sphere as also being collectively important to the maintenance of group cohesion. Thought leaders must constantly use flexible logic and provide interpretations of events in order to preserve the basic assumptions that are built into coalition narratives and strategies and in order to maintain discourse as history unfolds creates new issues and new realities.

In the context of Buckley's remarks, characterizations, narratives, and interpretations were thus woven together so as to frame context and chart a path forward for the conservative community. These rhetorical elements were also subtly infused with ideology and established ideational relationships between the electorate, the conservative elite-activist coalition, and a series of opposing interests. Buckley noted:

The American people have had enough of the debasement of their hard earned dollars, of confiscatory taxation, of increasing federal interference in their lives and in the lives of their families. It is therefore ironic in the extreme that they elected to the presidency and to the majorities in the Senate and House last year, men and women who represent the very philosophy that is falling into disrepute among free people everywhere in the world...Part of the answer lies in the political traumas of the last decade. Part of it is simply a problem of political image. Part of the problem lies in the national media which is not given to putting conservatives in the best possible light. But part of the blame, I fear, rests with us...Last year, we saw a Democratic presidential primary campaign succeed because the candidate stirred his audiences by speaking over and over again such words as decency, honesty, compassion, faith, morality, values, and love. Now for those of us who were brought up to prize reticence in ourselves and others as a virtue, it is not easy to utter those words from a political platform. But we live in a period in which those words are what millions of Americans are yearning to hear. For what those words connote is something larger than mere politics and economics. They connote nothing less than that total system of beliefs and values that we call the Judeo-Christian tradition—the system which structures our society and orders our lives and gave us political freedom. We, too, should be using those words, for the beliefs and values they represent are central to every conservative thought and principle. We must not allow our political opponents to preempt that high ground which by very definition belongs to conservatives. But it is we who must demonstrate that it is we who belong on that ground.³⁵

The Organic Nature of Characterizations, Narratives, and Interpretations

At any time, elites may craft fundamentally new characterizations, narratives, and/or interpretations of context that are of their own design and that have no precursors in discourses of the past. This is rare. More often than not, the task of elites is not to construct radically new characterizations, narratives, and interpretations but rather to amend, build upon, and/or simply repeat those already in circulation and to use those at their disposal in fresh ways in order to explain recent events and to capitalize upon the possibilities of the moment in which they are situated.

³⁵ MSS 176, LTPSC, Series XVI, Box 114, Tape 47

Over time, characterizations, narratives, and interpretations can develop and evolve as they are recited and applied by multiple actors within a community of discourse and as a body of generally accepted strategies that are derived from the relationships defined in reference to these features are delineated and repeated.

As multiple actors within a community recite and build upon the characterizations, narratives, and interpretations expressed by others and as these features become bound up within the discourses of a political coalition, original authorship tends to become lost in the shuffle. Core characterizations, narratives, and interpretations that are used over and over again can *live* within the discourses of a coalition for an extended period of time, and they can even become rhetorical fixtures around which other narratives, characterizations, and interpretations form and evolve. Narratives may be extended over time or may be recombined as they are retold and reused.

Narratives, characterizations, and interpretations that live within the discourses of a coalition can evolve in an organic fashion as they are repeated, embellished upon, extended, and applied by multiple actors. From a normative standpoint, the staying power of discursive elements within the discourses of a coalition can be constructive for the purposes of coalition-building and maintenance. Over time, political actors can tend to become increasingly familiar with and saturated within the discourses of a coalition. Frequent exposure to the characterizations, narratives, and interpretations of a coalition as well as the ideational components encapsulated within them can enhance the salience of core ideas and boost feelings of identity and cohesion. Put differently, a coalition can develop its own language, and members of a coalition can become saturated and fluent in that language over time. These discursive instruments are carriers of ideology that help actors to make sense of the political world. They become lenses that help to facilitate the growth of ideological unity and cohesion.

In this vein and before putting this theoretical discussion aside, it is interesting to compare a recent characterization of the Democratic Party made by Rush Limbaugh with the characterizations of liberals made by Bauman and Buckley some thirty-five years prior. The policies are different (Limbaugh's words are taken from a broader discussion of the Affordable Care Act), but the underlying characterization of liberals that he employs is essentially the same. It is not difficult to imagine similar characterizations being scattered throughout the intervening thirty-five years of conservative political discourse, and, in that time, to also imagine these characterizations as being applied to a diverse mixture of liberal politicians, activists, and policy initiatives. It is, in that sense, a characterization that has lived within the discourses of the coalition and that has survived many changes in context:

This is the party that celebrates free riders. This is the party that devotes itself to creating even more free riders. This is a party that could not survive without free riders and freeloaders. *This is a party that does everything it can to make people as dependent as possible on the government.* Free riders, freeloaders. Isn't their goal to get more and more people dependent on the government? Didn't they spend millions advertising for more people to take free handouts from the government? Isn't there a big advertising campaign on right now to

expand the scope of food stamps to the food free riders? Hell's bells, folks, the Democrat Party is the free rider party.³⁶ (emphasis mine)

Bringing it all together: 6 Postulates About the Role of Ideas in Coalition Formation

1. Ideas have the potential to *rationalize* coalitions.

In their most basic form, coalitions are groups of organized interests with heterogeneous policy goals and positions. When deployed in certain ways, ideas have the potential to connect the disparate platform of policy goals and positions together in ways that seem logical, natural, and obvious to those involved— even when the assorted positions have no absolute or required connections to each other from a purely objective standpoint. Coalitions are rationalized by connecting assorted ideas and issue positions of the coalition to a tightly bound set of underlying ideas or principles. The underlying ideas or principles to which various positions are linked may, in turn, be tightly connected to each other via idea chains and developed into comprehensive public philosophies.³⁷

Core principles have a significant impact on the behavior of politicians and intellectuals, who are the actors that are most likely to understand them, relate to them, and think in terms of them. The degree to which a group of elites will work together in coordinated fashion to maintain a coalition is greatest when all of the politicians and intellectuals within the coalition subscribe to and think in terms of the same basic set of

³⁶ Rush Limbaugh, “Liberals Claim ‘ObamaTax’ Punishes ‘FreeRiders,’” July 2, 2012, accessed March 13, 2015.

http://www.rushlimbaugh.com/daily/2012/07/02/liberals_claim_obamatax_punishes_free_riders

³⁷ See James W. Caeser, “Foundational Concepts in American Political Development,” (Colloquium paper delivered at the Miller Center at the University of Virginia on January 28, 2005). http://web1.millercenter.org/apd/colloquia/pdf/col_2005_0128_ceaser.pdf As I define them, “core principles” are what Caeser refers to as “foundational concepts.” Caeser’s argument is particularly appealing, since he explains how sponsors of foundational concepts may become concentrated and bound up within specific institutional environments. In this vein, he notes that supporters of the concept of nature have become bound up within the modern Republican Party and that in that institutional environment, the concept has come to justify and rationalize a broad range of policy positions— from quota and Affirmative Action policies to the War on Terrorism. I suggest that the sponsors of foundational concepts or principles may become concentrated in even smaller, institutionally bounded communities such as political coalitions, as I have defined them. In small, concentrated ideological communities, foundational concepts or principles may come to actually define the very essence of group membership. As they are used to rationalize a series of policy positions that are important to various members of the group, their importance and centrality is further reinforced. In the conservative coalition, the most central foundational concept was certainly freedom. That one concept tied together the positions of economic, social, religious, and anti-communist conservatives.

core principles. Sources of tension and conflict emerge when elites within a single coalition subscribe to distinct combinations of ideas with distinct and disconnected sets of underlying principles.

2. Ideas have the potential to *tighten* coalitions by smoothing out differences and minimizing points of conflict among diverse coalition partners.

Ideas can be used to stake out some common ground (either real or falsely constructed) among a diverse group of coalition partners and to heighten the salience of that common ground in the minds of those who are involved. Common ground may be found by linking the grievances of disparate groups to common enemies, thereby generating and inducing feelings of solidarity among coalition partners, uniting their focus, and pushing potential sources of conflict into the background.³⁸ Common ground may also be found by identifying common policy goals that are perceived as good and just and that are cast as common remedies to the grievances of various coalition partners.

Ideas may also be used to frame or package diverse issue positions in ways that make them resonate with the belief systems of various coalition partners and therefore seem more salient. Diverse positions may be woven together into thematic narratives that are heavily laden with overlapping idea frames which make an assortment of policy stances seem broadly salient to diverse and large groups of actors. One way that this can happen is through the addition of multiple idea frames to a single issue that rationalize a single position in multiple and overlapping ways.³⁹

Ideas can also be differentially deployed to create distorted and idiosyncratic perceptions of reality among different interests within a coalition and therefore obscure or erase potential sources of tension. Coalition partners may be led to develop different perceptions of the core ideas for which the coalition ultimately stands and to hold different understandings of the logical chains that tie various ideas together (1). Different combinations of ideas may be salient and operational in the minds of different coalition partners at any given time, depending upon their belief systems and levels of political sophistication and awareness.

The diffusion and acceptance of ideas in different combinations by different actors within a coalition is practical and beneficial. Differential rationalization enables different actors to perceive the logic of the coalition in ways that resonate on a very personal, psychological level. This can enhance loyalty to the coalition and its purpose, prevent cognitive dissonance, and hide or minimize awareness of interests and goals that would be sources of conflict if the logic holding the coalition together were viewed from

³⁸ Blyth, *Great Transformations*, 38. Blyth persuasively argues that ideas are tools for coalition-building. They can be used to define and interpret the interests of multiple groups of actors such that those actors' interests appear to be aligned.

³⁹ D. Sunshine Hillygus and Todd G. Shields, *The Persuadable Voter: Wedge Issues in Presidential Campaigns* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008) Although the authors focus on partisan voters, the evidence they provide to show that different issue frames may be used to target and mobilize different constituencies in different ways is consistent with the argument I make here.

the standpoint of elites or viewed from the vantage point of other coalition partners. Differential rationalization can therefore produce beneficial tightening effects.

It follows that the political philosophies and logical chains that are used to tie positions and principles together (1) are critical for politically sophisticated elites, but may only be partly or minimally active in the minds of other coalition partners who have different ways of thinking, limited political awareness, and fragmented belief systems. Outside of the realm of political elites and intellectuals, distortions of the formulations and philosophies with which they identify are common, and are, from the standpoint of elites, most ideal.

The key to successful framing is the constructive usage of idea frames that speak to the idiosyncratic perceptions of various coalition partners and that resonate with their unique understandings of the logic that holds the coalitions to which they belong together, as well as with the ways that they perceive and interpret their own roles and reasons for participating.

Finally, ideas have the potential to produce what political scientists call polarization, or conflict extension. When ideas are used to tie positions together logically and when they are deployed to frame positions such that combinations of positions become salient to many different groups of actors all at once, the implication is a kind of tightness whereby groups of interests all find themselves united on the same side of many issues and with more intense preferences than they would otherwise have.⁴⁰

3. Ideas have the potential to *enhance the durability of coalitions.*

Ideas may be used to frame coalition agendas in ways that produce strong emotional reactions and feelings of attachment by coalition partners. Some of the most powerful frames are those that cause agendas to resonate with highly entrenched, static belief systems that derive from class, race, political culture, and other relatively static identity formations (2). As long as frames that activate these identities remain operative parts of a coalition's discourse, the feelings of attachment by coalition partners that they generate may persist over very long periods of time and add stability to a coalition.

Over time, coalition membership may ultimately become bound up as a part of coalition partners' class-based, racial, and/or cultural identities. In the case that coalition partners come to tie coalition membership to relatively static, apolitical identities, this can promote the continuation of certain ideas and frames within a coalition's discourse over an extended period of time. Paradoxically, this can also allow for greater flexibility and change at the discursive level, since coalition partners with strong attachments are less likely to react to small to moderate discursive shifts and adjustments by changing their coalition loyalties.

It is also important to note that the alignment and configuration of ideas in the polity can actually prompt the formation of new discursive communities and the formation of institutions to bind those new communities together. If ideas are configured in such a way that actors do not have strong representatives in existing institutions, then

⁴⁰ Geoffrey C. Layman and Thomas M. Carsey, "Party Polarization and 'Conflict Extension' in the American Electorate," *American Journal of Political Science* 46, No. 4 (October 2002): 786

those actors will have an incentive to erect new institutions in order to facilitate their own cooperation, coordination, and communication. In other words, they will have an incentive to not only create but to also institutionalize a new discursive community to serve their needs.

The alignment, configuration, and flow of ideas within institutions may thus produce conditions which favor the creation of new institutions, and these new institutions may, in turn, enhance the durability of newly minted coalitions. Once a political coalition has formed its own institutional infrastructure, there will be a tendency for that infrastructure to persist over time and to thus institutionalize within it a certain configuration and alignment of ideas. This tendency is reinforced by the rise of candidate-centered elections, which tends to weaken parties and create incentives for groups to engage in the creation of additional layers of extra-governmental institutions that work independently from party organizations. This is only a tendency. As I have argued, coalitions and their infrastructures can break down if the ideas of the coalition become strong features in a party's discourses and if this diffusion of ideas encourages actors to more strongly identify with the party and abandon more isolated channels of cooperation, coordination, and communication.

In short, while I am suggesting that ideas can lead to the creation of institutions, I am also recognizing that ideas always emerge within and are structured by preexisting institutional arrangements.

4. Ideas have the potential to *expand* coalitions.

Ideas are effective tools for mobilizing new groups of interests. They can be used to target latent or new cleavages at the mass level, heighten the salience of those cleavages, and attach political relevance to them, thereby mobilizing people and bringing them into the political process. Ideas deployed in this way may then be rationalized and incorporated via logical chains that connect them to the set of core ideas to which a coalition's platform of other political positions are also tied (1).

Mobilization efforts may be followed by tightening and by the distortion of ideas in ways that are necessary to minimize sources of potential conflict among new and old coalition partners. This may be achieved through the creation and infusion of additional frames (ideological packaging) around ideational constellations that have been recently reconstituted or tweaked and through adjustments to coalition narratives and discourse (2). New frames may be necessary if new coalition members have different belief systems and different perceptions of the coalition and its commitments.

5. Ideas have the potential to *restructure* coalitions.

When ideas are deployed to mobilize new actors (4), this can result in a process of ideational reshuffling and rebalancing. In cases where coalitions are not ideologically homogenous at the elite level (1), ideas can become the instruments of *intra*-coalition elite warfare and can be deployed to reshape and reconfigure the ideational balance of coalitions via the mobilization of new interests (4). If two politicians are members of the same coalition but differ in important respects, one can enhance his power in the coalition

relative to the other by seeking to mobilize additional activists and political candidates to join the coalition who share his own perspective.

The linking of ideas and principles with discursive chains (via the mechanisms I outlined earlier) may also lead to the ideational restructuring of coalitions through less antagonistic means. The rationalization of a coalition via the incorporation of new principles and idea chains can create pathways through which interests who espouse those ideas can express their ideas more vocally or with suddenly greater impact relative to other coalition partners.

Once ideas have been connected to deeply embedded and shared systems of ideas (1), this can serve as a powerful resource for those who espouse those ideas to then express, spread, and popularize them. Newly infused or vocalized ideas are also more likely to be adopted and incorporated into the belief systems of other coalition partners (2). The increased vocalization of certain ideas relative to others and their popularization among actors within a coalition can, in turn, enable those ideas and the core principles that underpin them to rise in salience and centrality within the broader flow of ideas within a coalition's discourse.

The restructuring of the salience of certain ideas relative to others within a coalition's discourse (whether by strategic design or systemic causes) can enhance the position of the actors who espouse those ideas and can increase the centrality their policy objectives relative to others. This can, in turn, damage the effectiveness of certain frames and narratives, expose distortions in the perceived logic of the coalition, and incite fresh tensions among actors who may no longer feel that they stand on equal or common ground with other coalition partners. Problems may also arise when interests who are suddenly empowered begin to vocalize their own idiosyncratic versions of coalition principles and commitments, since these may differ profoundly from the sophisticated rationales held by elites and intellectuals and from the various other versions espoused by fellow coalition partners. This can also create a strong need for efforts to facilitate tightening through the incorporation of new frames and narratives (2).

If rationalization and tightening are effectively achieved, so that balance and harmony are restored, then a consequence of ideological rebalancing and restructuring may be further polarization and conflict extension (2). It is possible that ideological restructuring can therefore lead to conflict, to the detachment of certain interests from a coalition, *and* ultimately to conflict extension— all at the same time. The incorporation of new groups can have multiple and reverberating effects as configurations of ideas shift and as a variety of actors react and respond.

Due to the series of chain reactions that result from the mobilization of new interests and the rebalancing of ideas within a coalition's discourse, it is impossible to predict exactly how a coalition will look after new groups are mobilized. It is best to simply recognize that whatever the outcome, it is likely to be the product of multiple, interactive effects and adjustments by multiple actors.

It is also important to note that changes in the balance and flow of ideas within existing institutional arrangements can actually push actors out of some discursive communities and into others. For example, the restructuring of a party's discourse may alienate some of the actors cooperating within it and push them out of the party. If alienated and suddenly detached from a coalition or party, those actors may join an

existing political coalition— thereby expanding that coalition's size and influence and contributing to the organic development of its policy discourses— or they may break off and form their own community.

6. Ideas have the negative potential to *break apart, or destabilize* coalitions.

Ideas may destabilize coalitions when policy issues emerge that are important to certain partners but which cannot be rationalized ideationally (1) or when the frames that are placed around new ideas come into conflict with the logical chains that connect other ideas together.

Although the differential deployment of ideas can tighten coalitions by easing tensions among diverse interests and by staking out common ground (2), this process also sows potential seeds for a coalition's demise. As I argued in the earlier discussion of surface discourse vs. sub-surface tensions, changes in historical and environmental context can exacerbate latent or suppressed tensions and expose hidden distortions when groups of interests who think and perceive the world differently are confronted with new issues. New ideas may strike at coalitions in ways that are cross-cutting and expose latent fault lines.

It follows that the fewer unique distortions that are necessary to produce the illusion of homogeneity and tie a coalition together in the first place, the more impervious the coalition will ultimately be to changes in environmental context. Unfortunately, the expansion (4) and restructuring (5) of coalitions usually promotes the development of an inevitable buildup of ideational distortions in order to create and propagate the illusion of common ground and to suppress mounting sub-surface inconsistencies as a coalition expands. The differential deployment of ideas (2) can produce coalitions that give off the illusion of cohesion but which are, in reality, filled with delicately resolved contradictions and which are therefore quite volatile and susceptible to the instigative effects of historical change.

Ideas may also be intentionally adopted or reconstituted for the purposes of coalition construction and expansion (4) only to destabilize pre-existing idea configurations and alienate existing coalition partners. They may also be deliberately harnessed by opponents to incite division and steal away certain groups of interests. Indeed, in a two party system, there is a natural tendency for each party to pick strategically at the ideological bonds of the opposing party's coalition by reconstituting and deploying ideas in new ways. Doing so, however, can lead to a reverberating series of adjustments in the ideational configurations within their own coalition as well as among the opposition (5).

On a related note, the mobilization of new interests (4) may also possibly lead to structural imbalances in the awareness and identification of coalition partners with the narratives that are used to tie together ideas and give them salience (2). In a coalition's discourse, narratives may often be used to justify ideas and positions via allusions to shared experiences. Recently mobilized or absorbed groups of coalition participants are unlikely to be as aware of or responsive to the discursive cueing of experiences that were forged among coalition partners prior to their arrival. This can lead to a buildup of varying levels of collective consciousness over time and varying degrees of receptiveness

to and identification with the narratives and idea frames that are used to carry and express ideas within a coalition's discourse (2). Groups that are not sufficiently socialized or as receptive to the narratives that bind a coalition together – typically a coalition's newest members– are therefore likely to be the most susceptible to capture by opposing coalitions.

Efforts to try to adjust ideology and reframe coalition narratives to prevent capture therefore always carry risk. Changes can have unintended and disruptive effects which can expose inconsistencies and weaken the discursive bonds that hold coalition partners together. Ideas may also lead to the breakdown of institutions and, in the process, weaken barriers that hold certain configurations of ideas in place. Changes in the configuration of ideas (such as the infusion of ideas of a coalition into a party's discourses via the mechanisms outlined earlier) may actually weaken and destabilize the institutions created to hold the political coalition together, thus leading to the breakdown of the coalition and its incorporation into a political party or more broadly based coalition.

The Importance of Context

In closing, it is important to consider the role of context in the life of a political coalition. Context structures the developmental path followed by a coalition from the moment of its inception. It determines the interests and ideas that are likely to become bound up within a coalition. It structures the ways that ideas are assembled and connected together within a coalition's discourse. Also, precisely because context structures the environment in which ideas are picked up and assembled by a coalition, this means that significant changes in context can have potentially harsh and destabilizing effects upon the bonds that hold a coalition together over time.

Elites who are affiliated with an established political coalition and who wish to hold it together must therefore be constantly vigilant. As history unfolds and as new issues inevitably emerge in the public space, the elites who attach themselves to a coalition and who seek to harness and maintain it must formulate and advance arguments which rationalize positions in terms that speak to and resonate with the established concerns and emphases of a coalition's diverse members. Elites also typically work as the agenda-setters of a political coalition– steering discourse so as to focus emphasis upon a platform of issues that have the potential to expand and reinforce the logic of the coalition while minimizing cross-cutting issues that have the potential to expose its internal cleavages.

As I have argued, the irony of all of this is that the forces which drive a coalition to form and expand in the first place also inevitably contribute to a buildup of fault lines which make a coalition more susceptible to the winds of historical change. Political coalitions exist in a constant state of evolution, but their underlying ideational bonds and fault lines tend to be established in their early history and become partially frozen at that moment in time. The historical context in which a political coalition is initially forged tends to leave an indelible mark or imprint that forever shapes that coalition's developmental trajectory and makes it perpetually susceptible to derailment by the same types of policy issues and ideas over and over again.

At the same time, forces can also arise within a coalition which push in the opposite direction and promote a fading of these differences. The formation of discursive linkages between the ideas of a coalition and the pursuit of repeated efforts to cooperate, coordinate, and communicate can prompt coalition partners to adopt some of the ideas of their coalition partners. Institutions can also have homogenizing effects. The residual impact of the historical context in which a coalition is forged thus tends to be lasting but have only partial, tempered effects. Sub-surface tensions that are frozen in place when a coalition forms will tend to surface or fade in unpredictable ways as history unfolds and as the elites who seek to hold a coalition together perform their work with varying degrees of proficiency and success.

It is also possible to take a different perspective and examine the political landscape from the perspective of the elites who are opposed to a particular political coalition and wish to destroy it. An effective opponent will tend to raise and force the deliberation of wedge issues that expose and inflame the sub-surface tensions inherent in a coalition. Because sub-surface tensions do tend to persist in at least subtle ways over time, it may be possible for discerning opponents (either from rival parties or political coalitions) to pick relentlessly at the bonds that hold a discursive community together and to weaken it via successive political attacks at the pressure points where it has been stitched together. Precisely defined, wedge issues are those which drive various members of a coalition toward different conclusions and which produce irresolvable paradoxes when viewed from different angles by different coalition members.

For example, modern progressives have supported same sex marriage for their own reasons, but this issue has had the added advantage for them of driving a wedge between the traditionalist and libertarian factions of the opposing segments of the conservative coalition. The issue has destabilizing qualities for conservatives precisely because it drives two segments of their coalition which emphasize different conservative principles to arrive an array of different and sometimes conflicting policy positions. As a social issue, the fight for traditional marriage is therefore not "constructive" for conservatives in the same way as abortion. Abortion is an issue for which strong individualistic and moralistic arguments can be made in defense of the same policy position.

When viewed through this lens, the conservative coalition is currently being pulled apart by changes in historical context. Issues have emerged on the public agenda which (at the urging of liberals) are picking at the latent fault lines cemented into place within the conservative coalition decades ago during its early stages of development. As I will show in the chapters that follow, the social issues that were on the agenda at the moment of this coalition's formation were more easily rationalized with a series of readily available, overlapping idea frames. In the modern context, elites have simply been unable to isolate and reinforce a collection of frames to stave off and suppress the destabilizing effects of cross-cutting issues such as marriage, immigration reform, and, to a lesser extent, counter-terrorism. In the face of historical events beyond their control and in the face of insurgent factions emphasizing contradictory systems of logic, elites have been unable to fully shift the dialogue away from contentious issues toward a platform of issues that promotes unity and reinforces the internal logic of their coalition.

CHAPTER 3

The Conservative Movement and the Roots of CPAC

In this chapter, I provide a brief history of the conservative movement from the late 1950s until the early 1970s. I argue that by the mid-1970s, there were actually two developing conservative political coalitions in America— the Old Right and the New Right. In this context, during the 1970s, CPAC was poised to become a mechanism that would facilitate cooperation, coordination, and communication between the two coalitions. By extension, it was also poised to become a site of coalition discourse where the ideas and policy concerns of multiple communities could be expressed and linked together.

The National Review

Like many histories of the rise of modern American conservatism, my account actually begins with the founding of the *National Review* by William F. Buckley. The first step toward understanding the significance of the *National Review* and Buckley in the development of modern American conservatism is to recognize that three distinct strands of conservatism existed in the post-war era. These were libertarianism (which was rooted in the principles of classical liberalism), traditionalism (which was rooted in the principles of Burkean conservatism), and anti-communism.

Prior to the 1950s, these different strands of conservatism were not tightly connected together. Enter Buckley. During the 1950s, Buckley worked to forge those connections. He brought thinkers from the different intellectual traditions together on the editorial board for his journal of opinion and encouraged them to engage in open and spirited public debate with each other.¹

Although a consensus was never reached, during the late 1950s and early 1960s, a small group of conservative intellectuals based at the *National Review*— led by Frank Meyer and M. Stanton Evans— played an especially important role in trying to minimize the differences between the various strands of conservatism and in trying to explain how they were consistent with and complimentary to each other. Together, Meyer and Evans sought to bring free market conservatism, traditionalism, and anti-communism into a single philosophical synthesis which they called “fusionism.”²

¹ For background on the *National Review* and the role of conservative intellectuals in the construction of the modern conservative coalition see: Jeffrey Hart, *The Making of the American Conservative Mind* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2005); George Nash *The Conservative Movement in America Since 1945* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 1996); Hans Noel, *Political Ideologies and Political Parties in America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013); William Rusher, *Rise of the Right*; Kevin Smant *Principles and Heresies: Frank S. Meyer and the Shaping of the American Conservative Movement* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2002).

² Frank S. Meyer, *In Defense of Freedom: A Conservative Credo* (Chicago, IL: Henry Regnery, 1962); Frank S. Meyer “The Twisted Tree of Liberty” *National Review* (January 16, 1962): 25;

Fusionism

In the fusion conservatism elaborated by Meyer and Evans, freedom was a central organizing concept that was used to tie together disparate strands of libertarian, anti-communist, and traditionalist thought.³ According to fusion political philosophy, the state was considered to be essential, but its proper role was limited to the enforcement of law and order and the protection of the freedom of individuals. Since crime and Communism both posed serious threats to the ability of individuals to exercise their natural freedoms, combating them was treated as being a necessary and proper function of the state. Strong national and domestic security states were classified as being essential in order to secure an environment in which individuals could enjoy their freedoms without fear that others would infringe upon them.

Beyond the protection of individual freedoms through maintenance of a safe and free society, however, the state was not viewed as properly having many additional regulatory functions, nor was it viewed as properly having any redistributive functions whatsoever. Governing authority exercised outside of the protection of individual freedoms was depicted as only infringing upon and curtailing the exercise of freedoms.

In addition to limited government and strong defense, the third element of fusion thought was traditionalism. This included a belief in the supremacy of God, a belief in the existence of economic, racial, intellectual, and hereditary hierarchies within society, and a belief that the purpose of man was to pursue Christian morality and virtue. In keeping with traditionalist thinking, Meyer, Evans, and other fusionists believed in the inevitability of a hierarchical social order. In the fusionist line of thinking, it was not the responsibility of the state to attempt to correct the differences that inevitably emerged within a free society, nor was it the responsibility of the state to level the playing field by correcting for economic imbalances. Economic, racial, intellectual, and other disparities were regarded as inevitable.

Traditionalism was linked to the libertarian and anti-communist strands of conservatism via the theme of freedom. In the thought of Meyer and other fusionists, the state's role in promoting and facilitating the pursuit of morality by individuals was to maintain an environment in which individuals were free to pursue morality and their transcendent destiny on their own terms. Toward that end, the only functions of the state were to prevent men from infringing upon others' rights and to prevent foreign powers from invading and thus infringing upon the rights of citizens. The latter point, of course, justified the maintenance of a strong national security state.⁴ But that was all. In fusionist thought, the state did not have the kind of authority to legislate morality or to force individuals to act in virtuous ways, as the traditionalists really believed that it

Frank S. Meyer "Why Freedom" *National Review* (September 25, 1962): 223; M. Stanton Evans "Techniques and Circumstances" *National Review* (January 30, 1962): 58

³ Meyer, Why Freedom. The state's function was simply to "preserve the freedom of men from infringement by other men through domestic or foreign force or fraud; and to settle the disputes that occur when rights clash with rights."

should. In fact, state regulations intended to encourage moral behavior were believed by Meyer and Evans to only prevent the pursuit of true morality and virtue. This was so because the pursuit of morality was considered to be most meaningful when practiced in an environment in which there was an element of “volition.”⁵ In Meyer’s words, if citizens only act in moral and virtuous ways because they are coerced into doing so by the policies of a benevolent state, then this is merely the “simulacrum” of virtue.⁶ The pursuit of virtue in an environment in which the individual ultimately chooses that path himself was considered by to be the one of far greater significance. Salvation, Meyer claimed, simply cannot be forced.

To summarize the main points, then, freedom was the core theme that was used to tie together the three strands of conservatism in fusionist political philosophy. It connected support for a small, limited regulatory state with support for a large national and domestic security state and support for traditional views of morality, hierarchy, and a belief in God. A national security state and a domestic security state were necessary to protect freedom, as were severe restrictions on other functions of government that might prevent the exercise of economic and moral freedoms. Freedom was also an essential component for the pursuit of Christian virtue, since virtue could only be achieved in its most meaningful sense in a society in which the state did not impose virtue and in which individuals could make the free choice to pursue morality on their own terms. In fusionist thought, freedom was important, but it was only a means toward the end of creating an environment in which individuals could make the free choice to behave responsibly and pursue a path toward morality and virtue.

Meyer, Evans, and other fusionists based at the *National Review* made important contributions by helping to show how conservatives with different philosophical concerns and emphases could work together and find common ground. That said, they never perfectly resolved the tensions between traditionalism and libertarianism. At heart, Meyer, Evans, Buckley, and many of the other thinkers based at the *National Review* were libertarians, and the philosophical synthesis that they tried to work out tilted in favor of libertarian principles. This was obvious—particularly in the fact that they refused to embrace the traditionalists’ willingness to use state authority to legislate morality—and the writings of fusionists drew pointed criticisms from traditionalist scholars. The most notable criticisms came from two traditionalists also based at the *National Review*—Russell Kirk and Buckley’s brother-in-law, L. Brent Bozell. Both disagreed with the libertarian-leaning fusions with respect to their understanding of the proper role of the state. Unlike the libertarians, they were perfectly willing to use the instrumentalities of the state in order to preserve and cultivate a Godly, virtuous society through laws regulating immoral behavior.⁷

Another problem was that the generalizations made by fusionists skirted the complicated political realities and dilemmas that surfaced when their principles were actually applied to real world policy questions. In fusionist philosophy, the role of

⁵ Evans, *Techniques and Circumstances*, 58

⁶ Meyer, *Twisted Tree*, 26

⁷ L. Brent Bozell “Freedom or Virtue?” *National Review* (September 11, 1962): 181-206; Russell Kirk “Mill’s ‘On Liberty’ Reconsidered” *National Review* (January 25, 1956): 23-24

government was to create an environment in which individuals were free to practice their freedoms without having their rights infringed upon by others. But conservative thinkers did not work out fully the lengths to which government should go to preserve that environment. Was it the responsibility of government to protect individuals from powerful corporations and employers with the resources to take advantage of them? Was it the responsibility of government to protect members of minority racial groups from infringements upon their rights by the majority? Traditionalism involved an acceptance of hierarchy within society and an acceptance of the fact that different classes naturally emerge along economic, racial, intellectual, and hereditary lines. In the real world, however, such disparities can tend to lead down a path toward infringement upon the individual rights of minorities by members of the majority.⁸ Were those infringements natural byproducts of hierarchy and of a free society, or were they deleterious to individual freedoms and therefore sufficient reason to warrant governmental intervention? In the real world, the protection of rights leads down the path toward an increasingly expansive regulatory state, which is, of course, something to which conservatives are opposed in principle.

Beneath the broad, meta-level analysis that was used to tie core principles together, then, there were deep, unresolved dilemmas and difficult tasks ahead. There was a need for conservatives to rationalize a political coalition. This meant extending and applying the system of core principles that had been assembled at the *National Review* in ways that would rationalize a series of positions on current policy issues, that would satisfy the coalition-building needs of the day, and that would suppress rather than exacerbate the unresolved tensions between the ideas of libertarians and traditionalists. In the years ahead, the key to these critical tasks, I will argue, involved the framing of the social and moral policy positions that were of concern to traditionalists in individualist terms.

Ideas, Discourse, and the Conservative Movement

Ideas that are developed in journals of opinion must ultimately make the leap from the printed page into active politics. During the late 1950s and early 1960s, the ideas developed by intellectuals in books, editorials, and journals of opinion were read, absorbed, and debated by conservative politicians and activists, and, in the process, they fueled and shaped the discourses of a growing conservative political movement.⁹

⁸ Deborah Stone, *Policy Paradox: The Art of Political Decision-Making*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company, 2002), 125. On p. 125, Stone notes: “The exclusion of whole categories of people from rights and liberties to which other citizens are entitled is the great loophole in liberal political thought. There is always a danger that powerful citizens can simply declare the less popular and less powerful groups to be ‘of non-age,’ as Mill so delicately put it. The United States has a long tradition of declaring entire peoples as immoral, backward, incompetent, or otherwise incapable of exercising the responsibilities and freedoms of citizenship.”

⁹ Mickey Edwards, correspondence with the author, May 14, 2014. in correspondence, Rep. Edwards suggested that conservatives absorbed what they read in books and journals in an

During the early 1960s, conservative activists who were avid readers of the *National Review* and *Human Events* exchanged ideas at meetings, conferences, and “Draft Goldwater” rallies, and, as they became organized, they increasingly learned to cooperate, coordinate, and communicate with each other. The key conservative movement organizations during this era included the *National Review*, *Human Events*, and Young Americans for Freedom (YAF). Conservatives were also active in the Young Republicans (YR) and in the Young Republican National Federation (YRNF), though conservatives often clashed with moderates and liberals who were also active in party organizations that were not organized along strictly ideological lines.

The conservative news publication *Human Events* played a particularly important role in building the conservative movement during the early 1960s. Between 1960 and 1963, the periodical organized a series of meetings called the “Human Events Conferences” in Washington D.C. The meetings, which would later serve as a model for CPAC, were intended to bring conservative intellectuals, politicians, and activists together and to unite them in support of the shared goals. At the conferences, conservative leaders addressed large crowds and spoke out about the perils of communism, about the burdens imposed on society by the New Deal state, and about the importance of electing Goldwater as the Republican nominee for President in 1964. The speakers at the conferences included not only prominent conservative politicians but also intellectuals from *National Review* and *Human Events* who engaged in the discussions and, in doing so, served as missionaries and representatives of their own ideas.¹⁰

The development of the conservative political movement during the early 1960s was critical because it was this political coalition that mobilized around Barry Goldwater’s candidacy and that succeeded in pushing for Goldwater’s nomination on the Republican Party’s ticket in 1964. The Goldwater campaign effort gave conservative activists a common cause around which to rally, cooperate, and coordinate. During the election, the expanding coalition captured control of the Republican Party’s institutions. In the process, many new political activists discovered conservatism and became involved in politics. Alliances among different kinds of conservatives were strengthened, a sense of identity was forged through shared experiences, and conservatives developed methods of communicating with each other. In 1968, M. Stanton Evans noted:

The Goldwater enterprise helped create...intercommunication...by fostering among conservatives their own circuits of communication. The upshot is that conservatives, once rather isolated, not knowing each other very well or even being aware of one another’s existence, now form something like a coherent movement. The interior lines of communication, which did not exist to speak of in 1960, are now

organic way and that those ideas were ingrained into their “intellectual DNA” when they occasionally gathered at meetings and interacted with each other. I have adopted the term “organic” and used it much more broadly to also describe the nature of the ideational changes that happen through discourse as multiple actors interact and share ideas.

¹⁰ Morton Blackwell, interview with the author, March 2014; Thomas Winter, interview with the author, March 2014

established; the common discussion of ideas is an accepted and welcome practice...¹¹

As the conservative movement came together during the Goldwater campaign, the process was aided by the philosophical groundwork laid by intellectuals at the *National Review*. In speaking to conservatives, Goldwater took stands in support of strong national defense and strong internal security, limited national government, and free market capitalism. He also appealed strongly to social conservatives in the South on the issue of race by strongly opposing forced integration policies administered by the federal government. Overall, his platform was broadly reflective of the blending of conservative strands that had been achieved at the *National Review*. It was fitting that one of his speech writers and the ghostwriter of his famous tract, *The Conscience of a Conservative*, was *National Review* columnist L. Brent Bozell.¹²

Of course, Goldwater failed miserably, and conservatives were devastated. However, during the Goldwater campaign, a movement took shape, expanded, and was institutionalized. The intellectual, political, activist forces that mobilized by Goldwater would continue to be actively involved in Republican Party politics in subsequent years and would come to serve as the center of a larger conservative political coalition that would develop and mobilize behind Ronald Reagan's candidacies in 1976, 1980, and 1984.

The Conservative Movement After 1964

In the wake of the Goldwater campaign, conservatives lost their grip on party institutions, and they retreated to continue their work through an expanding network of conservative movement organizations. In his book, *The Future of Conservatism*, M. Stanton Evans noted:

Symptomatic of the post-Goldwater sense of conservative community was the founding of several new conservative organizations—among them the American Conservative Union, the Free Society Association, the Conservative Book Club, Arlington House Publishers, the Philadelphia Society, Constructive Action, Inc., the Constitutional Alliance, *Triumph* and *Rally* magazines and other groups. All these came into being and/or reached major organizational status after 1964 supposedly obliterated the conservative movement of which they are a part.¹³

¹¹ M. Stanton Evans, *The Future of Conservatism: From Taft to Reagan and Beyond* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1968), 136

¹² Joseph Lowndes, *From the New Deal to the New Right: Race and the Southern Origins of Modern Conservatism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008). The book includes an excellent analysis of Goldwater's rhetoric and appeals to race conservatives..

¹³ Evans, *Future of Conservatism*, 137

Of course, it is important to note that many of the organizations cited by Evans in the above passage were publishing houses and journals of opinion that were devoted to the discussion of ideas rather than to political action on a grand scale comparable to what had been achieved during the Draft Goldwater crusade. The Philadelphia Society, too, was intended to encourage scholarly discussion and debate among conservative intellectuals rather than to cultivate organized political action.

In fact, during the latter half of the 1960s, conservatives devoted comparatively less time and attention to the task of political organizing. The American Conservative Union (ACU) was the organization designed for this purpose. It was formed in 1964 to encourage conservative political action within the Republican Party; however, its activities and accomplishments were modest during the 1960s. Between 1964 and 1974, there were no political action conferences on a scale comparable to those that had been held by *Human Events* in earlier years of the conservative movement. There were no mass rallies like those that attracted thousands of activists seeking to draft Goldwater.

It is possible that this was due— at least in part—to Nixon’s victory in 1968 and to conflicting responses by conservatives to his administration and his policies. During his presidency, Nixon went from having the tepid support of the conservative movement to inciting hostility from some prominent conservative leaders by 1971. Nixon was not a leader who inspired the same kind of enthusiasm and turnout from conservative activists as Goldwater had or as Reagan would in the coming years. After 1968, Reagan was serving as the Governor of California and, since Nixon was in office, he was not yet a presidential candidate around whom the conservative movement could yet rally and generate enthusiasm. As a result, while the conservative movement persisted during the Nixon years, it also lost some of the momentum that it was able to generate when it mobilized behind Goldwater and Reagan.

The first rumblings of an idea to resurrect the grand conservative political action conferences of the Goldwater years came in 1969. In that year, David Jones of YAF, who had been involved in the Human Events conferences of earlier years, collaborated with Buckley, Rusher, and a small group of leaders to plan an action conference for conservatives. The conference was to be sponsored by four organizations— the *National Review*, *Human Events*, Young Americans for Freedom, and the American Conservative Union. It was to be chaired by William F. Buckley, and it was to include eight panel discussions— four devoted to discussions of the issues and four to discussions of political action. Speakers for the conference were to include Barry Goldwater, Ronald Reagan, Strom Thurmond, and William F. Buckley. Buckley, who was a part of the organizing effort, committed to speak at the conference. When Goldwater and Reagan both declined to attend, however, the entire conference idea was shelved because it was believed that both of those leaders were also needed in order to attract a sufficiently large crowd.¹⁴

In place of the action conference, the same four organizations decided to hold a conservative awards dinner in October 1969 to honor conservative lawmakers in Congress, journalism, and other fields. According to an internal memo from Jones, the dinner was intended to serve as “morale booster” for conservatives. Approximately 400

¹⁴ William A. Rusher Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. Box 46, Folder 4

invitations to the dinner were extended to conservative leaders selected by the four sponsoring organizations. At the dinner, William F. Buckley served as the Master of Ceremonies, James Jackson Kilpatrick delivered the keynote address, and John Ashbrook made a series of award presentations.¹⁵

A second Conservative Awards Dinner with a similar format was held on February 4, 1971. That event was twice as large as the first. According to its planning documents, approximately 800 conservative leaders were invited to attend.¹⁶

Although the conservative awards dinners were borne out of the failed attempt to hold a political action conference, the idea of holding the action conference was never entirely discarded. In 1971, ACU Executive Director John Jones— the brother of David Jones, who had collaborated on the plans for the failed 1969 event—was asked to develop a proposal for Buckley and Rusher concerning a “Conservative Political Action Conference.” The event would be sponsored by the same four organizations that had collaborated on the 1969 event and that had sponsored the two conservative awards dinners. In an internal memo to Rusher written in 1971, Jones described his vision of CPAC. It would be:

...a high-level conference of perhaps 200 leaders. Purpose of the conference would be to develop a basic strategy for 1972 covering areas such as, issues, Senate and Congressional campaigns and the Presidential campaign.¹⁷ [sic]

In the memo, Jones added, “I would also hope that the political action conference could develop a conservative platform for 1972.” It was all for naught. For unknown reasons, the action conference idea was again shelved.¹⁸

The original motivation for CPAC was thus to create a mechanism for conservative leaders to discuss strategy, to coordinate their political efforts, and to develop a platform for the conservative movement. The fact that early attempts to organize CPAC failed and that no similar conferences were held by any other conservative organizations during the same period are indications of the broader trends toward decline in the realm of political action that I have noted. The conservative movement was still active, but it was also stifled by Nixon’s presence as a first term Republican President.

As further evidence of this, I will show in the next chapter that by the time that the first CPAC was finally organized in 1974, M. Stanton Evans would write that many believed the conservative movement had become badly fragmented. In that year, CPAC was actually framed as an effort to correct what had become a serious shortcoming of conservatives in the realm of organized political action. Indeed, in an article written about CPAC 1974, *National Review* columnist Daniel Oliver would ask pointedly,

¹⁵ William A. Rusher Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. Box 131, Folder: 1964-1971

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

“where have the conservative leaders been? Not regrouping regularly for battle, though certainly not without their successes. Not meeting often enough to organize their pressure on and support of conservatives in Congress.” He would go on to describe CPAC as an effort to “remedy the failure in leadership” that had existed during the years after the Goldwater campaign.¹⁹

The Old Right vs. the New Right

I refer to the political coalition that was borne out of the remnants of the conservative movement of the early 1960s and the Goldwater campaign as the Old Right. It was a political coalition that was forged through shared experiences of those years, and it was held together by the network of leaders and institutions that I have mentioned so far, the most important which were the *National Review*, *Human Events*, YAF, the ACU.

Beginning in late 1973, a distinct conservative political coalition began to emerge which I—in keeping the label assigned to it by its leaders and by many other scholars of conservatism—will refer to as the New Right. Among the leaders who worked to build this new political coalition were such well-known conservatives as Paul Weyrich, Richard Viguerie, Morton Blackwell, Terry Dolan, Howard Phillips, and Reed Larson.

Many of leaders of the New Right were traditionalists who had been active in conservative politics during the 1960s. Indeed, many of them had been supporters of Goldwater and had participated alongside leaders of the coalition that I have termed the Old Right (who were at that time just conservatives). Regardless of their political backgrounds, what the leaders who formed the New Right shared was a belief that it was important to encourage political action by social conservatives. As conservatives who believed in basic traditionalist principles, leaders of the New Right were concerned about the social issues, and they saw the social issues as keys that would be useful for mobilizing a mass voting coalition that would help conservatives to achieve political power.

As a result, the group of leaders that I have mentioned began working to build institutions, mobilize and assemble groups of conservative activists, encourage cooperation, coordination, and communication through a separate set of institutions and channels of communication, and orient a new political coalition around the blend of ideas and strategies that they preferred. In an essay published in the Robert Whittaker’s 1982 volume, *The New Right Papers*, William Rusher reflected on the emergence of the New Right. Rusher noted:

During the 1970s a certain difference, first in philosophical emphasis and then in operational style, began to appear between more orthodox conservatives and the group centered around Richard Viguerie, who by this time established himself as perhaps the leading exponent of direct-mail political warfare. The latter group (which included such activist organizations as Howard Phillips’s Conservative Caucus, Terry Dolan’s

¹⁹ Daniel Oliver, “What are Conservatives Telling Each Other?” *National Review* (March 1, 1974)

National Citizens' Political Action committee, Paul Weyrich's Committee for the Survival of a Free Congress, Woody Jenkins's American Legislative Exchange Council, and Viguerie's own *Conservative Digest*) was in favor of appealing far more explicitly to social conservative voters on the basis of social issues (right-to-life, anti-gun-control, anti-pornography, etc.) than some of their colleagues, who preferred to continue to stress such economic issues as balancing the budget. This philosophical preference rapidly produced operational differences as well: Viguerie and his allies, who now began to be called the New Right, were broadly sympathetic to my own 1975 call for a new party to institutionalize the majority coalition of economic and social conservatives....²⁰

In the same volume, Paul Weyrich wrote at length about the philosophical differences between the New Right and the Old Right. He especially distinguished the New Right from the Old by noting that its members placed greater emphasis upon social issues than upon economic issues and by noting that its members also saw a positive role for government in encouraging morality and protecting the traditions of society.

These distinctions are reflective of the distinctions between libertarian fusionists and traditionalists that I delineated earlier. His remarks also note that the coalition was more strongly organized around principles originating from the doctrines of Christianity. According to Weyrich:

...the blue-collar, middle class origins of the New Right help explain its philosophical motivations. The New Right differs from the Old in its value-orientation, which translates to the "social issues" in the current political jargon. The Old Right gives a primacy to laissez-faire economics. To be sure, we of the New Right believe strongly in free enterprise and individual initiative, and we oppose the expansion of government interference with individual lives. However, the New Right also believes that the individual as an individual does have personal responsibility to society and that each individual has intrinsic moral worth. The Old Right's "live and let live" idea is not reflective of Christian social teachings. A common assumption of New Right activists is that government should support certain moral truths. Having experienced life in working class America, the New Right leadership realizes that people have come to expect certain things of their government, and that it is possible to give those things to people without destroying the free enterprise system. Christian social doctrine teaches that, just as individuals have a certain responsibility to individuals, so does government. We reject the total indifference advocated by libertarians, just as we reject the extremes advocated by liberals. I would, for instance,

²⁰ William Rusher, "The New Right: Past and Prospects" in Robert W. Whitaker, ed., *The New Right Papers* (New York: St. Martins Press, 1982), 18

want to see government—through churches and private institutions—ensure care for the helpless. I want to see government by law protect the helpless, be they unborn or senile, against the self-interest of others. Culturally destructive government policies—racial hiring quotas and busing come to mind as examples—are to the New Right more immediately important in the realm of action, since the damage they can do is enormous and practically irremediable. Given a choice between focusing attention and effort on the defeat of a pork barrel public works bill, and focusing effort on the defeat of an abortion funding bill, the New Right would work to defeat the abortion bill.²¹

It is especially important to note the emphasis placed upon Christian principles and traditional morality by the New Right. During the late 1970s, New Right leaders, who placed great emphasis upon upholding Christian principles and upon limiting funding for abortion, were the individuals who would actively reach out to Jerry Falwell and other religious leaders and who would encourage the formation of the Moral Majority and mobilization of the Religious Right into politics.

The New Right and The Christian Right

There were modest attempts by evangelical Christians to build a distinct political movement during the early 1970s; however, major efforts were not undertaken until later in the decade. In 1976, Rev. Jerry Falwell organized a series of “I love America” rallies on the steps of state capitols, at which he assembled groups of evangelical Christians and sympathetic politicians and called for a “moral America.” In 1977, Falwell participated in the campaign led by Phyllis Schlafly against the Equal Rights Amendment, and in 1978 he helped to fight a gay rights ordinance in Florida as well as a proposal that would have legalized betting in Virginia.²²

In 1978, the Rev. Robert Billings formed the National Christian Action Coalition (NCAC) to oppose interference by the federal government in private school education. In 1978, the organization Christian Voice was formed to organize evangelical Christians and encourage them to engage in political action. Its organizing efforts were advertised and conducted partly through Rev. Pat Robertson’s television program, the 700 Club. The program was featured on Robertson’s own Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN).²³ In 1979, Falwell formed the Moral Majority, and Billings joined the organization as its

²¹ Paul Weyrich, “Blue Collar or Blue Blood? The New Right Compared with the Old Right” in Whitaker, *New Right Papers*, 53

²² Robert C. Liebman, “Mobilizing the Moral Majority,” (Paper presented at the American Sociological Association in san Francisco, CA April, 1982). The most notable early effort was led by Campus Crusade for Christ founder Bill Bright in 1974. Bright sought to recruit evangelical candidates and encourage evangelical Christians to become engaged in the political process.

²³ *Ibid.*, 2

Executive Director. In 1980, Billings would go on to serve as an adviser to the Reagan campaign and assist with Reagan's outreach to religious groups.

The Religious Roundtable was formed in 1979 by Ed McAteer of the Conservative Caucus (the latter of which was a New Right action organization that had been formed in 1974). During 1979 and 1980, the Roundtable came to serve as a central organization for coordinating the efforts of the growing Christian Right movement. As Robert Liebman has noted, the Roundtable served as a "trade association."²⁴ It brought leaders of the Christian Voice, the Moral Majority, and the Campus Crusade together with "individuals such as Richard Viguerie, Phyllis Schlafly, Paul Weyrich, and Adrian Rogers, former president of the Southern Baptist Convention."²⁵ The Conservative Caucus and the closely affiliated Religious Roundtable therefore served as critical organizational infrastructure and played an important role in the life of the New Right coalition that was somewhat analogous to the one played by the American Conservative Union in the life of the Old Right coalition. Religious Roundtable meetings were one forum through which New Right and Christian Right leaders worked to coordinate their efforts. The Religious Roundtable also organized its own conferences and seminars. Writing in 1982, Robert Liebman noted:

Roundtable organized a series of national seminars for political discussion and education which included workshops to teach participants how to mobilize their congregations on behalf of conservative causes. The most successful of these events was August, 1980 Dallas National Affairs Briefing where thousands of clergy and laymen heard from leading New Right figures, many of the nation's prominent televangelists, Southern Baptist President Bailey Smith, and presidential candidate Ronald Reagan. After the election, Roundtable shifted its efforts to the formation of local affiliates.²⁶

These events were primarily gatherings for Christian Right leaders and clergy. The Moral Majority was the primary organization that was responsible for grassroots political organizing and for conducting voter registration drives through the churches.

It is important to note the timing of these developments. It was during 1978, 1979, and 1980 that the New Right expanded to include the Christian Right. The New Right coalition had its own leaders—Viguerie, Schlafly, Weyrich, Falwell, Billings, and others—who provided leadership and guidance for the coalition in a capacity that was comparable to the leadership that Rusher, Evans, Ashbrook, and other leaders provided for the Old Right. It also set up its own mechanisms to facilitate cooperation, coordination, and communication among its members, such as the Roundtable, and there were large gatherings like the National Affairs Briefing that were at least roughly analogous to CPAC and that were attended by associated activists.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

A brief excerpt from the 1980 Dallas National Affairs Briefing hints that the ideas expressed and exchanged in the discourses of the New Right/Christian Right were also quite different in substance and balance from those at the Old Right meetings led by Rusher, Ashbrook, and Evans. At the Dallas National Affairs Briefing, televangelist James Robison, shouted:

If the righteous, the pro-family, the moral, the biblical, the Godly, the hard working, and the decent individuals in this country stay out of politics, who on this earth does that leave to make the policies under which you and I live and struggle to survive? I'm sick and tired of hearing about all of the radicals, and the perverts, and the liberals, and the leftists, and the communists coming out of the closet. It's time for God's people to come out of the closet, out of the churches, and change America. We must do it.²⁷

The reference to coming of the closet was, of course, also a reference to Robison's opposition to homosexuality. As a minister and televangelist, Robison spoke very openly about the fact that he considered homosexuality to be a sin. It is implausible to imagine a scenario in which Buckley or Evans would have expressed similar sentiments.

The intellectual leadership of the Christian Right was also quite different from the Old in that it was provided by pastors rather than by Princeton and Yale-educated conservative public intellectuals. But certainly, many ministers—especially those with large followings—were and are highly educated and espouse deeply sophisticated philosophical worldviews. Falwell founded his own university in 1971!²⁸ There were

²⁷ “National Affairs Briefing” YouTube Video, 25:58 Posted by “Life Today,” August 1980. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IH1e0xxRRbk>

²⁸ Belief systems rooted in theology are not necessarily sophisticated or constrained *in the political sense* measured by political scientists such as Converse. They may well leave their adherents in the position of issue publics--- with only partially developed views on public policy matters. However, they are certainly sophisticated belief systems nonetheless that serve as blueprints for viewing the world. Surely, pastors are ideologues, just not political ones, and the congregants they address are exposed to and can potentially develop sophisticated, theologically-rooted belief systems as well (depending, of course, upon the extent to which they pay attention in church and read scripture). The belief systems of ministers and devout congregants are simply rooted in scripture and do not recommend a comprehensive list of political positions. It seems probable that as they became involved in politics, leaders and congregants with sophisticated theological belief systems begin to also develop increasingly sophisticated political belief systems. Future research might investigate the relationship between the two for religious individuals and consider the ways in which the former shape the latter, as well as the extent to which the process by which sophisticated theological leaders were helped along in the process of developing sophisticated political belief systems by working with coalition members the New Right (and later in the GOP), engaging in coalition and party discourses, as well as by reading publications such as the *National Review*. Surely, there were intellectual leaders who helped politically active evangelicals to make ideational connections between their theologically based worldviews and the variant of modern American conservatism. Future research might also

also other affiliated intellectuals who provided guidance to the growing Christian Right movement. As I will show, several of the constitutional law scholars who worked closely with the Christian school movement were invited to attend CPAC conferences during the late 1970s. These were individuals who thought deeply about constitutional law from a conservative perspective and who helped to articulate sophisticated constitutional arguments that supported the ideas and grievances of the Christian school movement and of the New Right generally.

In short, it is important to note that the New Right was cultivated and steered by a different group of political and activist elites than the Old Right. It consisted of different networks and different channels of communication. The discourses of the New Right were also home to a different balance (but not necessarily incompatible blend) of ideas and policy concerns. In both form and function, then, the New Right thus developed into a second and distinct conservative political coalition during the 1970s. Some conservative leaders, such as Phyllis Schlafly, kept one foot in institutions of both the Old Right and the New Right and sought to merge the two together. Some institutions, such as the American Conservative Union, made efforts to bring Old Right and New Right activists together (as I argue in the next section). But throughout the late 1970s, the Old Right and the New Right developed separate infrastructures and mostly coordinated their political efforts through separate institutions. The fact that they did meant that they retained a degree of distinctiveness (particularly in the areas of emphasis, strategy, and the ways that they framed problems), and they therefore did not operate as a single, tightly knit community.

Two Political Coalitions and the Role of the American Conservative Union

In this context, it is possible to define with greater precision the role and importance of CPAC as an institution. CPAC was founded by YAF, ACU, *Human Events*, and *National Review* in 1974 in order to unite the conservative movement behind a common agenda and behind common strategies for political action. It was thus founded by the core organizations of the Old Right, and, indeed, at the time of its founding, although New Right leaders were active in conservative politics, the New Right had not fully come to fruition as a separate political coalition.

It was also in 1974, however, when the New Right did begin to separate and evolve along its own path, and once it did, it rapidly started to grow. As the New Right developed, CPAC was quickly transformed into a site where the two coalitions—the YAF, ACU, *Human Events*, and *National Review* community (Old Right) and the New Right—were brought together under the aegis and stewardship of the former. Every year, CPAC organizers extended invitations to all of the emerging New Right political action groups, and they sought to include many of the socially conservative leaders and activists who became involved in New Right politics as speakers on the CPAC program of events. At CPAC, then, representatives of diverse activist constituencies with diverse concerns

evaluate how the theologically based worldviews of religious leaders shaped New Right discourses when those groups became active in New Right coalition politics and compare the impact on New Right discourses to the impact on discourses in coalition settings such as CPAC.

and diverse discourses were thus brought together to talk about their ideas and policy concerns.

CPAC therefore became an important instrument—an important mechanism—for facilitating and encouraging coalition-building efforts. This was deliberate. The Old Right, coalition-minded fusion intellectuals who guided the formation CPAC (led by William Rusher and M. Stanton Evans) looked fondly upon the new conservative forces emerging within the GOP. They recognized (as did Reagan) that the foundational principles of fusion conservatism needed to be extended and applied more forcefully to the social issues and that the groups associated with those issues would be critical to victory in 1980. By inviting members of the emerging New Right into the fold, they were able to foster discursive connections and to partially tear down the boundaries between two sprawling communities of discourse, each with its own distinct communities and discourses.

As the two coalitions expanded, the discourses at CPAC each year reflected changes in the size and diversity of the two coalitions. At CPAC 1974, religion was not discussed in any significant way. At that time, CPAC was primarily the domain of economic, libertarian conservatives of the Old Right. Just four years later, at CPAC 1978, social conservatives at CPAC would speak about the dangers of social engineering in educational curricula. Just five years later, at CPAC 1979, the Rev. Robert Billings, who was soon installed as the Executive Director of the Moral Majority, would stand before the crowd at CPAC and state his belief that evolution was wrong. Over time, then, CPAC came to serve as a coalition setting where different ideational streams were merged and blended and where ideas were shared and transmitted among various branches of the conservative movement.

That said, throughout the decade, CPAC remained under the control of the Old Right-dominated ACU and its board. At CPAC, the crucial narratives, strategies, and interpretations of context provided during major addresses were shaped much more strongly by the coalition-minded fusion intellectuals from the *National Review* and by political elites who were affiliated with the Old Right. The key addresses at CPAC were delivered by Ashbrook, Crane, Buckley, Rusher, Evans, Reagan, and their contemporaries—not by Bryant, Falwell, Weyrich, Viguerie, or Phillips. Schlafly was an annual speaker at CPAC along with pro-life activist Mildred Jefferson, but she and Jefferson were always confined to a single "social issues" panel. The Old Right leaders thus sought to tie constituencies together by encouraging the merging of different discourses and streams of ideas while also continuing to keep discussions of context and strategy more strongly oriented around those that they preferred.

In sum, during the transitional era of the late 1970s, ideational and institutional connections were forged even as the two conservative communities of discourse were also rapidly expanding in different directions. Rather than defining the Old Right and the New Right as two sharply defined political coalitions, I therefore define them as two partially overlapping but distinct coalitions that elites were actively working to merge together. As one site where this merging process happened, CPAC proceedings help to demonstrate and reflect the nature of the efforts that were being taken by the Old Right to steer discourses and build unity at a critical and formative time in the lifespan of the conservative movement. It is also useful for capturing the broader spectrum of ideas

flowing through the discourses of both political coalitions and for identifying the common themes and ideas that helped to bring diverse conservative constituencies together.

CHAPTER 4

CPAC 1974

I do not have the Nixon monkey on my back. That tired, tergiversating tramp never impressed me for a moment as a conceivable instrument for any useful end, even in an order inherently inadequate for a serious purpose. Voting for him was... horsemeat... Goldwater, whose enthusiasm for his own candidacy [in 1964] had been, if anything, smaller than Bill's... proclaimed for Nixon early in 1965, and promptly set about delivering the conservative movement to him. Among his early converts were Jerry Milbank and Bill [Buckley] (with whom his personal friendship was now intensifying). Reagan, of course, was not yet Governor of California; even his entry into the primary was a year away. When Reagan did win the governorship, and thus became a really hot conservative presidential prospect in his own right, the discomfiture in the Goldwater (i.e. pro-Nixon) camp could have been cut into chunks and served as a high-protein dish at state prisons. The rest is history—though it is only fair to note that Bill's own preferences as between Reagan and Nixon fluctuated during 1967 and 1968, and finally settled down to little short of neutrality at Miami Beach. It was, I think, not nearly so much Bill as Barry Goldwater who scotched the conservative drive for Reagan and thus nominated (and elected) Nixon... Where all this leaves Bill today is, to be sure, a proper question. He probably has higher hopes for Nixon than I do, if only for the mordant reason that I have none worth mentioning.¹

- William Rusher in private a letter to L. Brent Bozell
March 6, 1969

Even before he became president, Richard Nixon was a polarizing figure within the conservative movement. In 1968, Nixon ran on a relatively conservative platform, and he won the GOP nomination with tepid support from many conservatives, including Goldwater, Buckley, and the *National Review*.

As Nixon's presidency unfolded, however, levels of support for his administration dropped among the leaders who headed the four main conservative movement organizations. In 1971, a group of conservatives calling themselves the "Manhattan Twelve" published an article in the *National Review* announcing that they were officially withdrawing their support of the Nixon administration. The group included Buckley and Rusher as well as James Burnham and Frank Meyer (all from the *National Review*). It also included Alan Ryskind and Thomas Winter (the editors of *Human Events*), Randal Teague (the Executive Director of YAF), and John Jones (the Executive Director of the American Conservative Union (ACU)). M. Stanton Evans of the *National Review* and of the ACU drafted the Manhattan Twelve's declaration, although he ultimately refused to

¹ William A. Rusher, Letter to L. Brent Bozell, March 6, 1969. William A. Rusher Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. Box 11, Folder 13

sign the document when Buckley softened the language by removing some of Evans' objections to Nixon's domestic policies.²

How deep did the opposition to Nixon go? In a manuscript entitled "A Manifesto for Conservatives" penned in 1971 but ultimately never published, William Rusher went so far as to suggest that conservatives should work to ensure that a Democrat would be elected in 1972 instead of Nixon. Rusher reasoned that Nixon's domestic and foreign policies— which embraced deficit spending, wage and price controls, the family assistance program, a reduction in American military capabilities, and détente with Red China— were every bit as liberal as those that could be expected from a Democratic President. Because Nixon was a Republican, however, Rusher lamented that he was able to advocate for liberal policies far more effectively than any hypothetical Democratic president ever could. This was so because Nixon was able to squelch opposition from conservatives within the GOP who were reluctant to criticize a sitting Republican president.³

Rusher theorized that the problem would be resolved if only Kennedy or Humphrey were elected in 1972 instead of Nixon. With a Democrat in office, conservatives in the GOP would be free to go on the attack—to express strong opposition to the same policies they were pressured to accept under Nixon and to mobilize behind a true conservative candidate like Barry Goldwater or Ronald Reagan in the presidential election of 1976.⁴

The Conservative Challenge to Nixon in '72

In 1972, the same group of conservative leaders took things one step further. In that year, William F. Buckley offered his support to an effort organized by Rusher and Evans to recruit a candidate— ultimately Congressman John Ashbrook of Ohio— to challenge Nixon during the 1972 GOP primaries. Ashbrook's candidacy was endorsed by the *National Review*, and the unstated goal of the effort was to voice strong opposition to Nixon's policies.

Of course, there was never any real chance that Ashbrook would be able to unseat Nixon. He received only a little more than 5% of the overall vote in 1972. As a result, the Ashbrook candidacy drew opposition from many within the GOP, including Ronald Reagan, who felt that conservatives should stand behind Nixon as their president and that the intra-party squabbles could only aid the Democrats.

In any case, by 1972, the lines were clearly drawn between the conservative movement and Nixon. The core network of conservative organizations— the ACU, YAF, the *National Review*, and *Human Events*, as well as their leaders— had established

² Lee Edwards, *The Conservative Revolution: The Movement that Remade America* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1999), 170-172.

³ William A. Rusher, "A Manifesto for Conservatives," Unpublished Manuscript, nd. William A. Rusher Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. Box 167, Folder: Nixon, Richard: conservative suspension of support, correspondence and related material, 1971-1972

⁴ Ibid.

themselves as being staunchly and publicly opposed to Nixon and his policies, even though many other conservative Republican leaders still opted to support him.

The Manhattan Twelve, Ashbrook, and CPAC

This history is critical to an analysis of CPAC because, as it turns out, the conference was created and organized by the *National Review*, *Human Events*, Young Americans for Freedom, and the American Conservative Union. That is, it was founded and planned by the exact same tightly knit network of leaders and organizations who had publicly withdrawn their support of the Nixon administration in 1971 and who, in keeping with that pledge, had also refused to back him in 1972.

Because they were the four sponsoring organizations, the same group of conservative leaders also helped to determine the speakers who would appear on the CPAC program. The President of the American Conservative Union (ACU) at the time—the person who exercised a great deal of influence over the selection of speakers at CPAC 1974—was M. Stanton Evans. As I noted in the last chapter, along with Frank Meyer, Evans had been one of the primary architects in the early 1960's of the strain of fusion conservatism developed at the *National Review*. Of course, he had also written the first draft of the declaration against Nixon issued by the Manhattan Twelve.

Under Evans' leadership, a broad array of conservative intellectuals, politicians, and policy experts were invited to appear at CPAC. According to one ACU leader who helped to plan the event, a great deal of care and thought went into the selection of the policy issues that should be discussed and into the selection of individuals who were best suited to address the audience on those issues.⁵ Among the politicians invited to appear at CPAC 1974 were: Rep. John Ashbrook, Rep. Robert Bauman, Rep. Ben Blackburn, Sen. James Buckley, Rep. John Conlan, Rep. Phil Crane, Sen. Carl Curtis, Rep. Marjorie Holt, Rep. Jack Kemp, Rep. Trent Lott, Gov. Ronald Reagan, Rep. Floyd Spence, Rep. Steve Symms, Gov. Meldrim Thomson, Rep. David Treen. Many conservative activist leaders were also featured, including: Morton Blackwell, David Keene (who would later serve as President of the NRA), Howard Phillips, Phyllis Schlafly, Richard Viguerie, and Paul Weyrich. Among the invited conservative scholars and strategists were Pat Buchanan, Lee Edwards, Phil Gramm (who at the time was not yet an elected representative), John Lofton, Lyn Nofziger, Kevin Phillips, William Rusher, F. Clifton White, and Dick Wirthlin. Planning documents indicate that a number of other prominent conservatives such as John McCain and Daniel Oliver (of the *National Review*) were also in attendance. Sen. James Buckley and Gov. Ronald Reagan were featured as keynote speakers. The selection of Reagan for the featured slot was designed to build his image and reputation as a spokesman for the conservative movement.⁶

The conference was therefore ecumenical. A broad array of conservative leaders were in attendance, including social conservatives such as Phillips, Schlafly, Viguerie, and Weyrich, who had been active in movement politics since the 1960s and who were just beginning to coalesce as part of the distinct New Right coalition. That said, the latter

⁵ Frank Donatelli, in discussion with the author, July 2014

⁶ Anonymous, Handwritten Notes, n.d. MSS 176, LTPSC, Series III, Box 2, Folder 28

were placed on panels focused upon campaign technology and specific issues rather than on the panels devoted to discussions of the Nixon Presidency or overarching movement strategy. Those important panels were reserved for Ashbrook, Evans, Phillips, and Rusher. This placement ensured that the particular interpretations and strategies advocated by the Old Right leaders were featured and reinforced.

For all of these reasons, the process of creating CPAC, structuring the program of events, and recruiting the speakers to headline the event involved actions that not only encouraged the expression of ideas and deliberation of issues but also determined in advance what the substance and flow of the ideas at CPAC would be. For example, it is crucial to note that among those selected to speak about the Nixon Presidency were: 1) Rusher– the man who in 1969 privately called the president a “tergiversating tramp” and who wished for him to lose the 1972 election and 2) Ashbrook, the man who had been backed by CPAC sponsors in his challenge against Nixon during the 1972 GOP primaries. With Rusher, Ashbrook, and their friends standing in front of the microphones, the conference was bound to take on a harsh and decidedly anti-Nixon tone.

In analyzing the discourses at CPAC during this era, it is therefore important to treat the discussions of strategy not as an indicators of the overall balance of ideas and opinions streaming through conservative discourses of the era but rather as part of a structured environment that privileged the representation and expression of certain ideas and strategies over others and that structured the flow of ideas. It can also be seen as an effort to unify the conservative movement behind the goals and strategies supported by the *National Review*, *Human Events*, YAF, the ACU, and their partners in the conservative movement. These points are not unique to CPAC. All conferences are biased to some extent because they do inevitably require that hard choices be made about who will speak, who will be invited to attend, and what topics will be discussed. But this only reinforces the point that the conference format itself can be an effective mechanism for selectively reinforcing certain ideas and positions over others.

The Original Purpose and Structure of CPAC

The goals that conference organizers hoped to achieve by creating CPAC are further documented in the letters that were sent to invited speakers and to potential conference attendees. These letters have been preserved in the ACU archive in Provo, Utah. For instance, the version of the letter that was addressed to conservative members of Congress stressed the importance of uniting the conservative movement behind a set of common goals. In the letter, ACU Executive Director Ronald Dear wrote:

Many conservatives believe that our forces across the country have become fragmented, having no unified goal. It is our hope that this conference will serve to bring us into common alignment. Your participation will be invaluable in helping us to achieve this goal...⁷

⁷ Ronald B. Dear, Untitled Letter, January 18, 1976 MSS 176, LTPSC, Series III, Box 2, Folder 19

Meanwhile, the invitation letter that was to be sent to conservative activists was drafted by M. Stanton Evans. It was mailed to 21,000 people on Richard Viguerie's conservative mailing list. In that letter, Evans noted:

The 1974 PAC affords us a unique opportunity to assess our political situation, define positions on important issues and plan our strategy for this year's elections...the PAC will provide training in all the vital techniques of modern political campaigning. Participants will also be given campaign ammunition on hot topics such as the "Energy Crisis," "Taxation," "Détente," and "the Nixon Presidency," etc... We cannot permit the Conservative Movement to be badly fragmented now. This conference will be the first of its kind since the early 1960s. It will give us the much needed chance to re-unite, renew our commitment and re-focus our energies on common goals.⁸

The conference was organized with a two-track structure. Meetings in the first track were designed to address current policy issues and political topics. Meetings in the second track were designed to address campaign management and political organizing techniques.

The Purpose of CPAC

Overall, then, the goal of CPAC was to mobilize conservatives behind a particular set of goals, to clarify thinking on important issues of the day, and to steer the movement in the direction that Evans, Rusher, and their closest political allies felt would lead to success in the years ahead.

In early 1974, clarity was a commodity that was in high demand. At the time, the Watergate scandal was a national spectacle. It dominated the news cycle, and there was an intense, ongoing public debate about whether Congress would impeach Nixon or whether he would be able to continue in office. Many important questions were swirling around in conservative activist circles. How had Watergate affected public perceptions of the Republican Party and of conservatives? How had it affected the ability of conservatives to mobilize the coalition of voters that had supported Nixon? How would impeachment affect the prospects for Republican candidates in the 1974 midterm elections? If Nixon were forced out of office and Ford were to become President, then how would this affect conservatives? What opportunities and constraints did the conservative movement face in the years ahead due to Nixon's presidency, and what strategies would be necessary in order to achieve the goal of electing more conservative candidates to office?

At the time, there was no uniform consensus about the answers to these questions, and, as I have noted, in the broad spectrum of conservative discourse, opinions of Nixon varied widely. At CPAC, the conservative politicians, intellectuals, and strategists who

⁸ M. Stanton Evans, Untitled Letter, MSS 176, LTPSC, Series III, Box 2, Folder 19

were assembled by conference organizers talked about these questions openly and at length. They provided answers to all of them, and, in doing so, they voiced their own strategic recommendations regarding what conservatives ought to do in order to survive the Watergate scandal and achieve their goals as a movement. They also helped to chart a path forward for the years ahead.

Through their definitions of the political situation facing conservatives, the leaders at CPAC thus did more than simply talk about conservative ideas and policy issues. They used ideas to frame and articulate elaborate, ideationally laden narratives and interpretations of political context, to define the friends, enemies, and target constituencies of the growing conservative movement, and to recommend political strategies that were based upon those interpretations of context. Through their answers to the major questions of the day, they helped to draw sharp boundaries between the ideas of the conservative movement and the ideas of the moderate-liberal factions of the Republican Party that were aligned with Nixon, and they managed to stoke the ideological tensions that formed those boundaries. In doing so, they also contributed to the development of a sense of collective identity for the conservative movement rooted in shared perceptions of the causes and implications of current political events.

Discourse Analysis

With this background firmly in hand, it is now possible to analyze the content of the discourses at CPAC 1974 and to evaluate the substance of the discussions there in context. To reiterate the point, I argue that the provision of the rich, ideologically tinted descriptions of political context that I document here were part of an ongoing process (that extended beyond the CPAC conference itself) through which elites sought to unite conservatives around shared understandings of political context.

My purpose in analyzing the speeches at CPAC is therefore not so much to document the words of various speakers as it is to identify the common themes and ideas that were expressed and developed through exchanges of multiple speakers and to capture the nature of the broader flow of ideas at the conference. What seems like a great deal of thick description is actually a part of the extended process of identity construction that I am seeking to document. The dissemination and absorption of long-winded characterizations, narratives, and interpretations of the current political situation *were the mechanism* through which elites sought to create unity and steer everyone in the room toward similar conclusions and modes of thinking.

In this vein, in the case of discussions of the Nixon Presidency (provided below), I am less focused upon capturing the opinions of Ashbrook and Rusher than I am upon capturing the aggregate impression of Nixon and of moderate Republicans created for the audience by Ashbrook, Rusher, and the other speakers and upon capturing the fact that these impressions were encouraged by the selection of speakers and the organization of the conference itself. Again, my contention is that discourse is a medium of exchange structured by institutions and that the ideas that survive and are articulated over and over again by multiple speakers are those that have the greatest potential to be received, processed, and re-circulated and to thus strengthen levels of cohesion.

The Nixon Presidency

Under the stewardship of the members of the Manhattan Twelve and their political allies, the discussions of the Nixon Administration at CPAC 1974 assumed an extremely hostile tone. In his opening address at the 1974 CPAC conference, William Rusher addressed the audience in the midst of the Watergate crisis. He advised conservatives not to take any "mea culpa" in Watergate or in Nixon's downfall, stressing that Congressional Republicans and conservatives had been pushed out of his administration and the White House decision-making process and therefore had no hand whatsoever in any of its wrongdoings. He cast the Nixon administration as one run not by Republicans *or* conservatives but rather by a new managerial class of "thin lipped, able, and essentially apolitical men" interested primarily in achieving "power for its own sake" and committed to "loyalty to the leader" (Nixon) above all else.⁹

According to Rusher, this mentality led Nixon and his staff down the road toward instances of illegality and an emphasis on "screwing" their opponents. In this vein, he also drew a sharp contrast between the conservative hero, Barry Goldwater, and the managerial Nixon administration. Rusher added that while he had no affection for Nixon, he felt that Nixon had done nothing inherently deserving of impeachment. Referencing Mark Twain, he said that he "really didn't care whether he [Nixon] went to Heaven or Hell because he had friends in both places."¹⁰

In a similar vein, John Ashbrook criticized Richard Nixon not for the Watergate crisis but for turning his back on conservatism and conservative principles. He argued that Nixon and "supposedly conservative" Congressmen had rejected and *damaged* the reputation of conservatism by rhetorically identifying themselves with the conservative label while ultimately rejecting conservative principles and governing as liberals once in office. He stressed that because of the rhetorical posture of Nixon and other Congressional Republicans, however, the public tied conservatism to the policies and positions of Nixon. Consequently, his failings fostered serious doubt among the public about conservatism and about the ability of conservatives to govern effectively.¹¹

It was within the context of a lengthy diatribe leveled against Nixon that Ashbrook paused to define and elaborate upon his own definition of conservatism. Ashbrook stressed that the "bedrock of conservatism" involved support for the following principles: 1) a sound currency; 2) a balanced budget; 3) free enterprise; 4) limited government; 5) advocacy of the private sector over the public sector; 6) strong defense; and 7) anti-communism. Ashbrook then elaborated upon the meaning of these principles through a lengthy critique of the Nixon Administration and Republicans in Congress.¹²

He ridiculed Nixon's statement that he was "a Keynesian in economics" as unbecoming of a conservative and stressed that America's sound currency was being assaulted by deficit spending and the "ruse" of a "full employment budget." He labeled the full employment budget as nothing more than a mask for Keynesian deficit spending

⁹ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 113, Tape 8

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

and called for conservatives to fight "Keynesian concepts" which brought about the debauching of America's currency. He also criticized Nixon's support of wage and price controls and a guaranteed annual income program. In this vein, he warned of potential increases in government power in the fields of energy and trade. He also discussed foreign affairs, stressing the dangers of expanded foreign aid, providing trade and aid to the Soviet Union, détente, an insufficient buildup of the military, and Nixon's support for the SALT treaty.¹³

Ashbrook then criticized the Nixon administration for supporting poverty and legal services programs and the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO), ending his speech on the note that conservatives must "oppose rather than support the liberal policies the president is advocating." He also referenced and reinforced Rusher's analysis of the Nixon administration, stressing that "big government, centralization, and crisis policies" strengthened the Nixon administration's "managerial liberal approach." On multiple occasions during his speech, Ashbrook criticized Republicans in Congress, who identified themselves as conservative but who ultimately supported Nixon's policies, for turning their backs on the conservative principles in which the "grassroots conservatives" of "America's heartland." His prescription was for conservatives to oppose Nixon and to speak out against and oppose liberal policies. The implication of his recommendations was also that conservatives could win and be effective if and when they sent a strong, undiluted signal to the electorate that they stood for the true conservative principles he had outlined.¹⁴

It is important to note that Ashbrook defined and elaborated upon the meaning of conservatism through a diatribe targeted at unprincipled Republicans in Congress and at the Nixon administration. As a result, the panel, as well as Ashbrook and Rusher's speeches, heightened the salience of ideological tensions simmering within the Republican Party and of the ideological battle for control of the party that would reach a boiling point in 1975. Rusher, Ashbrook, and other leaders of the CPAC conference strongly doubted the viability of the Republican Party as a vehicle for conservatism, and, in the following year, they would use CPAC as a mechanism to try to steer conservatives in the direction of abandoning the GOP altogether. As a site of conservative discourse, CPAC was a space where Rusher, Ashbrook, and fellow ideologues could express their opinions and subtly drive discourse in directions that stoked tensions within the party and amplified a pure, dogmatic version of conservatism.

As a counterfactual, it is interesting to imagine what the flow of ideas would have been had a similar panel been led by Pat Buchanan, a Nixon aide who was also present at the conference. Had Buchanan led the discussion, it would have unquestionably followed an entirely different course and set an entirely different tone for subsequent debate. Indeed, when Buchanan spoke at a later panel on the media, he added an unplanned coda to his speech, warning conservatives that "the worst mistake conservatives could make is to be stampeded by the liberal press into joining the lynch party... forming on Capitol Hill." He noted that "conservatives should not let themselves be stampeded into doing the liberals' dirty work for them," and that political opponents were interested in

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

"discrediting the political verdict of December 1972." He added that his remarks were more "serious than he had hoped to make" but that when he looked in the back of the room and saw Jeffrey Bell and Alan Ryskind (members of the Manhattan Twelve), he wanted everyone to know that it was "good to know that not all of the members of the Manhattan Twelve were missing and unaccounted for." The subtle implication, of course, was that the surprisingly strong anti-Nixon thrust of the conference prompted Buchanan to try to push back against it. He was a lone wolf in a sea of voices against Nixon. Ryskind followed by light-heartedly commenting, "I don't know if I should thank you Pat, or not."¹⁵

Following Ashbook and Rusher's speeches, the climate in the room was so filled with hostility toward Nixon and Republicans in Congress that the discussion prompted an objection from an audience member. The exchange is worth quoting at length because it was an impromptu exchange that was truly generated by the panelists' speeches and by the environment in the room. It is a perfect example of how the climate at a particular site of discourse frames and structures the flow of ideas. It is also significant because, in his response, William Rusher openly affirmed that the terms of the discourse were influenced by the purpose and conditions at CPAC itself.

Female Audience Member: Don't you think we have enough things to criticize the liberals for, though, that we don't need to continuously allow ourselves to be in the position of having to criticize people who may not be as conservative as we want them to be, but are certainly not as liberal as George McGovern. But we seem to get ourselves in the position that we're always defending those people and *never* complaining about the ills of the *more* liberals. (sic)

William Rusher: I'm not sure I agree. I think, that's alright, if this were a meeting of either party, Republican or Democratic, there would be a lot of soundness to your point. But this is a conservative gathering, and our concern, therefore, without in any sense being I hope fanatical or let alone kook, is with principle. And if we are to make ourselves felt, we are going to have to stick to principle and certainly complain, perhaps complain the more loudly, when wage and price controls are brought in by, for heaven sakes, an allegedly, relatively conservative administration. When détente with Russia and the opening of relations with Red China upon bases that have been opposed by both Republican and Democratic administrations for nearly a quarter of a century, is brought in by a relatively conservative Republican administration and then hailed as the principal achievement of the administration. For us to sit around in silence while that is going on, on the grounds that McGovern is, after all, still out there, is, I think, a wrong approach.

¹⁵ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 113, Tape 10

John Ashbrook: I would agree 100% with that Bill, and I think again you get to the matter of basic principles. You touched on several. I've been very close to the whole matter of national security for the last decade, and the fact that George McGovern was going to destroy internal security doesn't really warm me up very much when I see what this administration has done. President Nixon moved to take the Internal Security division of the Justice Department, he let the SACB die by the actions of his subordinates, he's completely, in the public mind, undermined the FBI, the Justice Department, the CIA, as far as National Security instrumentalities are concerned. If you think of National Security and Internal Security throughout the country now, and try to promote it, most people think of raiding the Democratic Headquarters and going into the Ellsberg Office. So it doesn't make me feel too good to feel that if McGovern had been elected, that would have been one of the things he would have accomplished directly, when our people, supposedly conservative, did it indirectly and sometimes hail it as an accomplishment. In talking on principles, it doesn't do us any good to just attack the other side and say we're better than they are, if we're not doing what we should do."¹⁶

These general characterizations of the Nixon administration continued throughout the rest of the conference, as well. During a different panel, Political Strategy for 1974, conservative strategist Kevin Phillips was asked what issues conservatives he could use during the upcoming election. He noted:

I don't think there are very many issues that will make any difference. The President, when he is under pressure, tends to move left. He did this in 1971 when everything seemed to be falling apart. That's when he wanted busing in Austin, Texas. That's when the Family Assistance Plan was still the flagship of the rattered, tattered fleet. This stuff is all warming on the back burner right now to serve as a mass offering to the liberal media. We've got the welfare program taking shape, health insurance, more liberal services approaches, all sorts and forms of détente, all sorts of deals for the Russians on natural gas, you name it they're thinking it up right now...they tend to neutralize their own potential issues to appease the liberals programmatically.¹⁷

After the event, press coverage of the CPAC conference reflected the strong anti-Nixon sentiments that had been on display. Various headlines included: "Major conservative groups cold-shoulder support of Nixon policies," "Nixon Support Dwindles Within GOP Right Wing," "Ford Calm; Conservatives Upset," "Many Conservatives at

¹⁶ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 113, Tape 8

¹⁷ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 113, Tape 11

Parley Appear Ready to Abandon Nixon,” and “Don’t Join Lynch Mob, Buchanan Urges Right Wing.”¹⁸

The Conservative Majority

Of course, the conservative leaders who spoke at CPAC did more than simply express their opposition to the policies of the Nixon administration. They also sought to chart a path forward for the conservative movement—to unite conservatives behind common goals and to define the strategies that would enable conservatives to retake control of the Republican Party. Significantly, despite the specter of Nixon, Watergate, and the looming 1974 mid-term elections in which conservatives were expected to be crushed, leaders argued that there was considerable hope for conservatives in the future. They emphasized that hope could be found in the fact that the American people were basically conservative and that Americans were becoming even more so. The path forward for conservative activists was therefore to move past Watergate, to identify ways of speaking strongly to the concerns of the American people, and to, in turn, harness various forms of popular opposition to the liberal policies of big government that were embraced by Nixon, unprincipled Republicans in Congress, and the Democrats.

Certainly, the most powerful idea that structured conservative discourses during the 1970s was a characterization of the electorate as containing within it a latent conservative majority. The idea had been developed significantly by conservative columnist and strategist Kevin Phillips. In his 1969 book, *The Emerging Republican Majority*, Phillips argued that the Republican Party was poised to eclipse the Democratic Party and become the new majority party in the United States. According to Phillips, the GOP could reach majority status by strongly embracing conservatism and by cultivating a base of support among blue collar workers and social conservatives rooted in the South and West.¹⁹

Phillips’ thesis wasn’t entirely original. Republican candidates had been making inroads in the South since the 1950s. In 1964, Barry Goldwater had made strong appeals to southern voters on the basis of his conservative stance on Civil Rights. Nixon appealed to southern conservatives in 1968 and then again 1972, and he won in both years with strong support from elements of the coalition described by Phillips. Still, Phillips validated old claims with fresh statistics, and he made the case for the ascendance of conservative Republicanism in a more powerful and convincing format than had ever been made before.

During the 1970s, the idea that there was a latent conservative majority at the mass level thus grew to be an extraordinarily powerful rallying point for the expanding conservative coalition. It was a powerful idea because what it carried was enormous potential. It offered hope that conservatives could achieve real political power. It also suggested a path toward that end. To win, it would be necessary for conservatives to

¹⁸ MSS 176, LTPSC, Series 3, Box 2, Folder 29

¹⁹ Kevin P. Phillips *The Emerging Republican Majority* (New Rochelle, NY: Arlington House, 1969)

appeal to voters on a series of emerging policy issues. In addition, it vindicated the efforts of conservatives— they were nobly fighting against the liberal elite factions that created and propagated big government on behalf of an unorganized majority of the American people.

It is not at all surprising, then, that the task of characterizing and evaluating the contours of the latent conservative majority became a focal point of the politicians at CPAC who sought to chart a path forward for conservatives. One after one, politicians, intellectuals, and analysts reinforced the familiar characterization of the electorate as consisting of a growing conservative majority. In speaking to the activists, campaign managers, politicians, and candidates who were present, politicians and intellectuals explained the need to apply conservative principles in strategic issue areas, and they offered hope for mobilizing a vast conservative constituency that could help conservatives to overcome the problems imposed by the Nixon Administration and Watergate and to achieve political power in 1976.

Conference organizers actively recruited a team of speakers who reinforced this characterization and who helped to update and apply it to the circumstances of the day. In fact, Kevin Phillips himself was invited to speak and was introduced to attendees as “the author of the most important book ever written by a Republican.”²⁰ In a panel on election strategy, Phillips repeated his basic thesis and stressed that, despite Watergate, the appeal of conservative ideas was “substantially undiminished” by Watergate. He noted:

I think the potential is enormous. Here you have this basic drift to the right...I’ve seen in the Wall Street Journal quite recently their chief political writer was quoting Walter Dean Burnham of MIT on the possibility of a big right wing shift that could even lead to a man on horseback. Even Roscoe Drummond, who is not known for electrifying analysis of a potential movement to the right, said that every politician he spoke to recently said the trend was to the right. William S. White, the same thing. It would be possible to cite a number of additional analyses in this sense, so I don’t think the underlying potential of 1972 has been destroyed [by Watergate]. What I think has been destroyed is Richard Nixon’s ability to mobilize it. I think the old new majority is dead, but there’s a possibility of a *new* new majority that could make the liberals wish they had the old one back.²¹

Other speakers echoed this view. During his remarks on the Nixon Presidency, John Ashbrook noted: “part of my concern is the apparent inability of conservatives to capitalize on what quite clearly is a conservative trend in the country.”²² During the same session, William Rusher noted, “I think the Democrats would be making, in addition to a terrible mishmash for the country, a great mistake for themselves to suppose that

²⁰ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 113, Tape 11

²¹ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 113, Tape 11

²² MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 113, Tape 8

somehow they had at last derived a national mandate to be more liberal or leftist...the New York Times... survey of New York City... showed that one third of all the people—more than think of themselves as moderates, more than think of themselves liberals—think of themselves as conservatives... There's no question that the mayor, the candidates in the Democratic primary there, were not running on a notoriously leftist platform.”²³

During his keynote, James Buckley further echoed these sentiments, emphasizing that “a clear majority of the American people have rejected Liberalism and opted for Conservatism.” Buckley quoted statistics which indicated that in a recent poll, 61% of the public had favored strengthening local government while only 32% favored strengthening the federal government.²⁴

These same sentiments were also echoed by the conservative intellectual, M. Stanton Evans, who stressed that reaching out to the conservative majority and mobilizing it was the key to overcoming the difficulties of Watergate and leading the Republican Party back in a more conservative direction. Evans stressed:

We have been without articulate conservative leadership at the national level for quite a while, at a point where the constituency is waiting there to hear from such leadership. Our job, it seems to me, and the answer to how to get out of this bind in which we find ourselves—that is, the whole Watergate conundrum in which you are hurt whatever you do, it's a totally no-win situation, as long as we remain in that box, we are going to be hurt very badly indeed— but because of the authentic and spontaneous concern of the American people about all of these other issues, the very clear answer is that we have got to start speaking to the American people about those issues... to get some kind of articulate presentation of our view on the energy crisis, busing, welfare, taxes, abortion, the whole litany of issues which have people out there steaming and about which we aren't saying anything so far as they can tell... the White House isn't the whole of government... we have excellent leaders... Governor Reagan, Senator Goldwater, Senator Thurmond, Senator Tower...if these people will come forward decisively on these issues and hit them hard, I think that majority can be reached even now.²⁵

During his opening remarks, Rep. Robert Bauman made a similar point. He noted:

... the American people are learning out of the experience of the last few months, and out of the more specific experience of gas pumps that are empty and fuel bills that are going up. If they are learning anything, they are learning something that Stan Evans has for years said in his columns in such an articulate manner— that the government of the United States is not

²³ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 113, Tape 8

²⁴ James Buckley, Address to CPAC 1974, William A. Rusher Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. Box 13, Folder: Buckley, James L. 1972-1975

²⁵ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 113, Tape 11

the panacea, cannot solve the problems, is indeed the problem causer in this country.²⁶

Reaching the Conservative Majority

The idea that there was an expanding conservative majority at the mass level and the idea that this majority offered great potential for conservatives to remake the GOP prompted extensive discussions of the ways to reach and mobilize that majority. Despite Evans' suggestion that Republican senators and governors could play an important role in reaching the majority by articulating conservative positions, it was equally clear that having a conservative Republican as the leader of the party and hopefully as president instead of Nixon was a critical step, as well.

After all, part of the vehement opposition to Nixon was rooted in the fact that he was in the seat of power, that he was identified in the public mind with the GOP, and that he was identified as a conservative. As a result, the president confused the electorate about the nature of conservatism and damaged public perceptions of the ability of conservatives to govern.

In order to solve the problem, an important key for conservatives would therefore be to build up a leader (and hopefully a president) like Reagan who would be able to change those perceptions. That was part of the impetus for making Reagan the featured speaker at CPAC. It was an effort to position him to assume that role. In fact, the goal of getting a conservative back into the White House was so important that it led Evans (who loathed Nixon and his policies) to recoil at the idea of Nixon leaving before the end of his term. This was because Nixon's exit would allow Ford to ascend to the Presidency. Evans noted:

If we base our analysis on what it takes to get through the 1974 election, if we improvise something to get past that crisis, but then find ourselves with a permanent situation that is itself deleterious in the long run, it seems to me we've made a very bad bargain, and this, in essence, is what is being suggested when we talk about deposing Nixon and replacing him with Ford so we can get by 1974, but then we have another vista of years to contemplate in which we have another centrist in office for many, many years to come, and I think that is a radical vice of political analysis and a radical vice of much conservative participation in the political process in recent years to surrender the long perspective to the short one. I think this is indeed what led to the '68 calculation. We found many people in the conservative community who said well, we had our ideological orgy in 1964, and we were trounced, and now we've learned our lesson. We've got to get smart and pragmatic, and not try to push our principles so hard in the political marketplace, and I think that, in retrospect, it is very easy to see that the Republican Party and the conservative interest were healthier after the defeat of 1964 than they are after the victories of 1968

²⁶ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 113, Tape 5

and 1972. I think it is time that we re-infused these considerations of principle.²⁷

In addition to winning the presidency, the leaders at CPAC also worked to define with greater precision the issues that would be effective for mobilizing the conservative majority, and they discussed the institutional roadblocks that conservatives would need to overcome in order to achieve power. They did not, however, discuss the ideological or ideational roadblocks associated with assembling diverse blocs of voters. A significant feature of the conservative majority idea was that it characterized an enormous chunk of the electorate as being broadly conservative in its outlook and as being opposed in a nearly monolithic way to big, activist government in a wide range of issue areas. It therefore steered discussions away from the complex realities of public opinion. It did not encourage discussions of the multi-pronged rhetorical strategies that would be necessary for reaching and assembling diverse blocs of voters with diverse policy concerns. Instead, it suggested that sentiments could be harnessed through general statements that spoke to the public's opposition to the policies of big government.²⁸ Following his comments on the Nixon Presidency, Ashbrook noted:

The issues are still there for a conservative to identify with a majority of voters in his district... Inflation, less government. Myself, as I go throughout the country, the one big issue I see that isn't used enough: the average person feels the government's *invading his home*. Invading him in many ways— in education, in what he can do, getting into his moral decisions, wants to control his gun, wants to bus his children, this whole concept that the government is trying to push itself into my door as to how much gas I can have, what kind of car I can have, seatbelts have to be on. The average person is sick and tired of this type of government. I think he's sick and tired of this kind of action, and I think for somebody to say you ought to be able to own gold, you ought to be able to do these things, you ought to have a degree of your own freedom and freedom of choice in education and across the board, I think can get elected because that is the temper of the American people, and I don't think there's any doubt about it myself.²⁹

Of course, in order to link various forms of anti-statism together so fluidly and to make them seem so tightly connected to each other, it was necessary to apply frames that made the issues seem to line up rhetorically and have a singular problem and a singular solution.

²⁷ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 113, Tape 11

²⁸ This would change after the 1976 election when conservatives sought to distinguish their brand of conservatism from Carter's conservatism. In the wake of that election, they began to think more deliberately about how to make rhetorical appeals to the conservative constituencies who had been susceptible to his message and rhetoric.

²⁹ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 113, Tape 8

In the context of these remarks, the frame that Ashbrook applied in order to achieve this was one that emphasized government intrusion. This was an effective frame because it harnessed opposition to the social issues—such as busing and abortion—and it connected that opposition neatly to various forms of opposition to government action in the economic realm.

For example, in this particular instance, Ashbrook’s reference to interference in moral decisions was likely a nod to the social issue of abortion. A frame used frequently at the first few CPAC conferences was one that connected the issue of abortion to family planning programs and depicted abortion as a tool used by big government to interfere in the choices of individuals and to engage in social engineering by encouraging population control. The idea that abortion was a tool used by big government to interfere in the choices of individuals was effective precisely because it skirted potential contradictions that would have been created had a moralistic frame been applied. If abortion had been framed as a purely moral issue, this would have potentially conflicted with the libertarian principle that government should not legislate morality. It also would not have connected the issue as strongly into a chain that emphasized the problems created by government interference in the economic realm. The “interference” frame was effective because it flipped the issue position around and depicted liberal supporters of abortion— not conservatives— as the actors attempting to use the instrumentalities of the state to control people and to take away freedoms. It allowed Ashbrook to make a nod toward the issue and to connect it into a diatribe against big government that connected a range of grievances together as a single package. As I noted in the introduction, the way that problems were framed and understood within coalition and, in this case, conference discourses was key to connecting various issue positions together and building a master discourse that united diverse communities of issue activists with diverse policy concerns.

It is also revealing to analyze Ashbrook’s characterization of the so-called conservative majority. Upon close inspection of his words, it is clear that at its core, the majority— as characterized by Ashbrook— included a large conglomeration of people who were opposed the regulatory policies of big government. In order to characterize the people as broadly conservative, this required the bundling many different strands of public opposition to big government and the classification of a majority of voters as supporters of the entire bundle. A major problem with the picture painted by Ashbrook, however, is that voters are not ideologues. Voters tend to be moderate, and those who are opposed to certain aspects of big government often tend to simultaneously embrace other aspects of big government.³⁰ Most voters are uninformed and have many conflicting views about public policy. Characterizations of the electorate as conservative therefore conflate various forms of opposition to government, gloss over differences and complex opinion dynamics, and create an entirely false construct.³¹

That said, even though the conservative majority idea conflated and distorted the complex realities of public opinion, I argue that the construct was nevertheless powerful and important. It was powerful (and used often) because it linked the many different

³⁰ John R. Zaller *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

³¹ Jeane Kirkpatrick, *Why the New Right Lost*

types of anti-statism expressed by conservative activist constituencies together, it painted the American people as broadly supportive of the entire package, and it therefore characterized the coalition as fighting for the preferences of a majority of the American people. As a result, it vindicated the political efforts of conservatives and made their cause a righteous one.³²

It is therefore not at all surprising that the conservative majority idea worked its way into many conservative speeches and strategic formulations. There are many examples of this that can be taken from the discourses at CPAC. Buckley made this leap in logic on several occasions. He spoke broadly and characterized “the public” and “the American people” as a whole as being strongly opposed to a range of big government policies advocated by liberals.³³ At one point, Buckley noted:

We are told that *the public's* undeniable disillusionment is solely due to the fall-out from Watergate. But the fact is that if the Watergate idiocies had never occurred, *the American people* would still be exasperated to the point of outrage with the ever-growing intrusion of government into their lives: with the Legal Services horrors and the wage-price fiasco and the Affirmative Action quotas and all of the big brother programs ranging from ignition-interlock auto seat-belts— and I cite a proposed rule devised by H.E.W.— a proposal to ban bicycles as a hazardous substance! The Liberal intellectuals and bureaucrats have caused more fundamental damage to this nation in a lazy afternoon of policy making than the entire Watergate crew did in a year of bungling and burgling.³⁴ (emphasis mine)

In these remarks, the term “conservative majority” is not used, but the idea is present. What is perhaps most striking about these remarks is that the policy issues listed by Buckley are very diverse in scope and in the various types of state authority that they represent. In the context of these remarks, redistributive, regulatory, and affirmative action policies are connected together, described as instances of government intrusion, and characterized as a conglomeration of policies with which the American people as a whole are exasperated.³⁵ This is consistent with the frame emphasized by Ashbrook (cited above).

In other portions of his keynote, Buckley continued to argue the same basic points again and again. He characterized the American people as broadly opposed to a wide range of big government policy initiatives, and he characterized the people as being

³² Ibid.

³³ James Buckley, Address to CPAC 1974, William A. Rusher Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. Box 13, Folder: Buckley, James L. 1972-1975

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ The “legal services horrors” are a reference to the movement of legal assistance services to the poor from the Office of Economic Opportunity to the newly formed Legal Services Corporation (formed in 1974).

broadly open to the rollback of government authority in a wide range of policy areas. In Buckley's view, the conservative message was thus the one that "the public" wanted to hear. The people—in the broadest sense—were opposed to liberalism across the board and were ready for government to be completely remade in accordance with an entirely new conservative public philosophy. Buckley noted:

I am convinced that the missionary field has never been so ready to hear the Conservative gospel...If we will translate our principles into specific approaches to concrete problems, we will find ourselves on most issues in harmony with the concerns and aspirations of a *solid majority of Americans of every background*, who at base want nothing more than to be allowed to work out their own lives, set their own priorities, and achieve for themselves such happiness and contentment as is given man to enjoy in this life...I believe, too, that *the public* is ready to understand that it is the Conservative who truly believes in and trusts the common man. We reject the elitism that is at the heart of so much of Liberal policy...we are a scandal to the liberals because we really believe that Americans are intelligent enough to lead their own lives, and that they are competent of responsible self-government at levels less olympian than the federal. We do not speak of the 'masses' or 'minorities' or of any other quantitative misrepresentations so popular in liberal rhetoric. Instead, we focus our attention on the individual. We dare to hold the heretical idea that Americans irrespective of station or origin should be treated as citizens and not as ciphers. *Our people* have had their fill of condescension on the part of big brother government. *They* have seen the failure of all those shiny promises that each one of our problems could be solved if only the federal government adopted the necessary programs and spent the necessary billions. *Americans* are ready now for a new approach that will offer common sense solutions to very real problems, that will seek to return real responsibilities to state and local governments, that will prefer freedom to regulation, that will once again treat the ordinary American as a person capable of making his own decisions without the guidance or dictation of a benevolent state... at a time when America seems to have lost its moral moorings, *Americans* are hungry for a sense of commitment to an ideal higher than the satisfaction of their appetites. We are there to fill the void with our passionate concern for individual freedom... any political party that forthrightly builds its platform on the bedrock of Conservative principle and insight will be the majority party of the 1980s.³⁶ (emphasis mine)

³⁶ James Buckley, Address to CPAC 1974

The State vs. the Individual

It is important to note that in these remarks, Buckley does more than characterize the people as being opposed to the liberal policies of big government. He also characterizes them as having a character, a mindset, and a work ethic that is conservative and that is much more strongly compatible with the conservative vision for American government and society than with the liberal vision. In other words, as Buckley puts it, the American people aren't just conservative because they are opposed to big government; they are conservative because they want the opportunity to be free, to make achievements, and to be responsible. They are, at heart, conservatives in a positive sense because they yearn to take care of themselves without the aid of government.

In this vein, Buckley indicates that the purpose of government is not just to create freedom for freedom's sake. It is to create a free environment that will provide citizens with the opportunity to act responsibly. He expresses confidence in the individual to take care of himself, and he notes that citizens want the opportunity to govern themselves and to find 'a sense of commitment to an ideal higher than the satisfaction of their appetites.'

In these comments, Buckley also makes an implicit reference to the policy of colorblindness when he mentions that conservatives oppose the use of terms such as "minorities" and "masses." The passing reference is tied to an emphasis upon a self-described "idealistic" confidence in the potential of the individual, who presumably should be fine on his own without special assistance. Again, the theme of responsibility and self-reliance is implicit. The implication is that conservatives have confidence that individuals are capable of taking responsibility and providing for themselves. This vision of the nature of man as capable and self-reliant is juxtaposed to the liberal viewpoint, which is framed as lacking confidence and trust in the abilities of the individual to care for himself without the support of the state.

Also, this faith in the superiority of the colorblind approach is cast as an extension of a much broader worldview which emphasizes not just faith in the individual but also protection of the individual from the damage caused to him by liberal policies. Here, the implication is that race sensitive policies are opposed not because they are unfair but because they are damaging to the individuals that they ultimately seek to help. In the language here, these policies are condescending, and they ultimately mistreat the individual by undervaluing his potential.

These remarks also hint at a broad, recurring theme prevalent in conservative discourses and in many of Buckley's speeches—that is, an emphasis upon the importance of the dignity that an individual derives from taking care of himself and from acting responsibly and a concern for the damage to that dignity that is caused by well-intentioned policies of the liberal state. In this vein, racial distinctions hurt the individual in a very profound and personal way. They take away his dignity by taking away the opportunity to step up, take care of himself, and act virtuously and responsibly.

The theme of the dignity of the individual is one that ran throughout other portions of the speech, as well. At another point, Buckley noted:

It was the late, beloved and unforgettable Frank Meyer who best summed up why we have to present a common front against the great heresies that

still dominate our times. I want to quote Frank Meyer at some length because he so clearly understood the absolute necessity for Conservative unity. He wrote: “In opposition to this image of man as neither free nor inspired by a transcendent dignity, the differences between libertarian and traditionalist are thrown into their true perspective: differences of emphasis, not of underlying opposition... The desecration of the image of man, the attack alike upon his freedom and his transcendent dignity, provide common cause in the immediate struggle. As with our ancestors who laid the foundations of the Republic, the challenge to our common faith inspires us, without surrendering differences of stress, to create a fundamental unity of doctrine with which libertarian and traditionalist, respecting each other, can mutually vindicate the true nature of man, free and responsible, against the arid, mechanistic, collectivist denial of man’s nature which transitorily prevails...”³⁷

When these remarks are coupled with those opposing racial categories and redistributive policies generally, Buckley’s views come into even sharper focus. He suggests that conservatives oppose these policies because they are damaging to the dignity of the individual. They take away from the individual the opportunity to ultimately be responsible and to pursue his “transcendent dignity” on his own terms.

This is highly consistent with the blending of traditionalism and libertarianism that is prevalent in the earlier description of fusion political philosophy. In this vein, the benevolent state may try to solve the problems of society, but ultimately, for Buckley and for fellow ideologues, this kind of government intervention was ill-advised because it destroyed the ability of individuals to take responsibility and find their own path toward morality and virtue. This is not a coincidence. CPAC was organized by M. Stanton Evans— one of the founders of fusionism— and under his leadership, other fusion intellectuals like Buckley were recruited to lead the dialogue. Through their leadership and participation in the discourses at CPAC, Evans, Buckley, Rusher, and others helped to connect their ideas into the discussions and debates of the coalition.

At the end of his speech, Buckley returned to this theme of the assault upon the individual by the liberal state. In his final comments, Buckley delicately wove the themes of libertarianism and traditionalism together and reinforced the fact that the individual’s conscience and dignity were under assault by the liberal state. He also brought in the theme of anti-Communism by connecting the assault against individual freedoms in the United States to the assault on individual freedoms posed by Communist states in other parts of the world:

Conscience. That strange, atavistic word, the word that sends shivers up the spines of materialists and those who can think only in collectivist terms. It has the ancient, honorable connotations of spiritual virtue and intellectual integrity about it. And from time to time in history a single event reminds us all precisely what conscience means and what it can

³⁷ Ibid.

achieve. Fourteen years ago, the publication of Barry Goldwater's book was such an event for America. On a wider scale, embracing not only America, but the world, the recent publication of Alexander Solzhenitsyn's Gulag Archipelago is such an event for today. Here, in the last quarter of this cruel and bloody century, from the heartland of despotism...we have heard the ringing, defiant, unconquerable voice of the human conscience. That voice is now heard, incredibly, above the grinding, hideous sound of the machinery of the totalitarian state. It has pierced the soothing reassurances of a policy of détente. It is heard when all that we have ever known about power has taught us the impossibility for such a voice ever to be heard. But Solzhenitsyn in a transcendent act of courage has sounded the voice of conscience and that sound will grow in volume until even the most spiritually deafened leaders of the West must hear its message. That voice is really what this conference is all about: for it speaks of man's unquenchable thirst for freedom. That voice is threatened at every instant by the brute totalitarian force which Solzhenitsyn has described in such horrifying detail. The language in this case is Russian but the message is universal. Listen to what Solzhenitsyn had to say in the Nobel Prize address he was never allowed to deliver: "In order to mount this platform...I have climbed not three or four makeshift steps, but hundreds and even thousands of them, unyielding, precipitous, frozen steps, leading out of the darkness and cold where it was my fate to survive, while others... have perished..." My friends, let us resolve that the climb made by Alexander Solzhenitsyn and others up those unyielding, precipitous, frozen steps shall not have been in vain. Let us resolve that we will never take our freedoms so lightly that we will make less than a total commitment to their preservation."³⁸

³⁸ Ibid.

CHAPTER 5

CPAC 1975

I personally believe that we are in an axial period in American politics. I think that the enormous discrepancy between the level of conservative affirmation in the country, which is a high and rising level, and the level of Republican affirmation, which is a low and declining level, suggests that there is an enormous opportunity here for some new political entity to reach out without all of this inherited difficulty from Watergate, without all of the policy confusions that have been imposed upon the Republican Party by these last two administrations— to reach out to that latent constituency, to transform that latent majority into an actual majority, and lead us as conservatives and as Americans on to victory in 1976.¹

- M. Stanton Evans
Remarks at CPAC 1975

In this chapter, I analyze the discourse at CPAC 1975. In doing so, I seek to document what conservative elites and activists were saying to each other in that year and to establish what forces were effectively uniting them as a coalition. I argue that there were two primary forces at work that structured coordinative discourse and brought conservative elites and activists together. The first was a shared desire to achieve power and to enact the policy platform of the conservative movement. The second was a shared ideology that rationalized that platform by connecting the grievances of diverse elements of the movement together into a single, tightly woven package. I argue further that intellectual and political elites influenced the coordinative discourse at CPAC through two corresponding mechanisms. First, just as they had in 1974, they organized and moderated discussions of the strategies that would lead conservatives to power. During these discussions, they promoted unity by providing their own highly stylized descriptions and interpretations of political, institutional, and ideological context. In doing so, they helped to build and reinforce common understandings of the situation faced by conservatives and of what ought to be done in order to win. Second, elites initiated a process of clarification and refinement at the ideological-discursive level. They did so by selectively reinforcing themes and ideas that expanded, rationalized, and sharpened the platform of the growing conservative movement.

This remainder of this chapter is organized into two parts. The first examines the way that discussions of strategy were shaped by elite explanations of political, institutional, and ideological context and the way that these discussions of strategy promoted unity in the field of political action. In this section, I also explore the notion that discussions of strategy and context both structured and were structured by discussions of ideology.

¹ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 113, Tape 19

Part two examines the process of ideological refinement that took place at CPAC in greater detail. Through a discourse analysis of the CPAC issue panels, I attempt to isolate the common ideas and themes that were effectively used to tie the planks of the movement's platform together and build ideological unity.

In this chapter, I take a much more in-depth look at the ideas expressed by various intellectual, political, and activist constituencies than I did in 1974. This is not to say that the ideas and the problem and solution frames I document here were not also expressed at the CPAC issue panels held in 1974 or that they were first expressed at CPAC 1975. Rather, it is because a majority of the issue panels at CPAC 1975 were recorded and available for analysis. Because the historical record of the 1975 conference is more complete than any other, it is an optimal year to conduct an in-depth analysis of CPAC issue panels and to consider their significance in theoretical context.

At the same time, it is unnecessary to preface an analysis the discourses at CPAC 1975 with as much background and historical information as was necessary for an analysis of the 1974 conference. It is sufficient to note that the general purpose was the same and that conference organizers continued to exert the same kind of influence over the flow of ideas through their influence over the conference's structure, agenda, and list of invited guests. In fact, in this chapter, I will argue that M. Stanton Evans, William Rusher, and other leaders who were most actively involved in the planning of the 1975 conference had a very specific agenda. Specifically, they sought to encourage the conservative movement to break away from the Republican Party and to form a New Party. They set the conference up as a forum that would present and build momentum for the New Party idea and that would lead to a "decision" on the part of conservatives to explore the possibility of forming a New Party. Although speakers with diverse viewpoints were included on the CPAC program, a disproportionate number of speakers were recruited and featured who favored the New Party idea and who helped to guide the conference toward its pre-ordained conclusion. Just as in 1974, then, I argue that CPAC was more than just a forum where conservative discussed their ideas and debated the path that they should follow. It was an *instrument* that was used to steer the coalition in the direction its organizers thought best.

I. Framing Context and Defining Strategic Goals

The first feature to note about the 1975 conference— particularly in relation to the 1974 conference— is that leaders took much more obvious and overt steps to position Ronald Reagan as the leader of the coalition and as the candidate that would lead conservatives to political power. From the vantage point of conservative leaders in the mid-1970s, a Reagan presidential candidacy was a critical step toward winning their extended struggle to gain control of the Republican Party and remake it as the party of conservatism in the United States. They therefore reinforced the point repeatedly for attendees at CPAC in a variety of ways.

A Reagan candidacy was important for two primary reasons. First, Reagan was perceived by many as having the personality, the character, and the rhetorical skills

necessary to make him an effective presidential candidate. By 1975, Reagan was the candidate preferred by a majority of the conservative movement— including a majority of its leadership and its activist base. During his opening remarks at CPAC 1975, YAF Chairman Ron Docksai told the audience:

We must say out loud early and often what we all privately know to be true, and that is that in our present predicament, operating in an atmosphere similar to 1968, we are faced with the potential of one and only one candidate of extraordinary stature with the ability, the character, and the willingness to be president, and that man is Ronald Reagan (cheers and extended applause). Though we may each individually defer on the tactics to be deployed, all of us here, I think, share a common vision as American conservatives.²

In fact, the audience at CPAC did overwhelmingly share that vision. At the conclusion of Reagan's featured speech that weekend, the entire auditorium would break into a chant, shouting "We Want Reagan, We Want Reagan." The cheers and applause for Reagan at CPAC were so overwhelming that it prompted *National Review* publisher William Rusher to return to the stage and comment, "I think I speak for everyone here when I say that we got your message, and I suspect you have gotten ours."³

A second reason that a Reagan candidacy was so important was that Reagan was a principled conservative with a track record of effective governance. He had successfully implemented conservative policy solutions as Governor of California, and, as a result, it was believed that he could make a credible and convincing case to voters that conservative principles worked in practice.

At CPAC 1975, Reagan's record as a successful conservative governor was put on full display. Daniel Oliver of the *National Review* organized a panel on welfare reform and invited the director of Reagan's welfare reform effort in California, Robert Carlson, to speak. Carlson spoke at length about the Reagan administration's battle with the federal bureaucracy, the California state legislature, the court system, and supporters of the welfare system generally. He explained how Reagan had invited in a team of citizen experts into his administration as governor to analyze the welfare system, root out inefficiencies, and invent creative ways of finding and eliminating fraud. He also depicted at length the success of Reagan's reform effort. Carlson noted:

In every month for eight straight months the welfare rolls dropped. They leveled off in December 1971, they dropped again in January '72, they went up in February and March of '72 because we lost a case which we won at the US Supreme Court level or they wouldn't have gone up even during those months, and then they continued on downward through the rest of '72, and with the exception of just a few months, they've been going down virtually ever since. Today there are well over 300,000 fewer

² MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 113, Tape 17

³ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 113, Tape 28

people in the Aid to Families with Dependent Children Program in California than there were when we started our effort. Even according to the most conservative estimates, during the first two years of the welfare reform, we spent 1 billion dollars less than would have been spent without the welfare reforms, and half of that billion dollars was federal money... After the first year, 42 of California's 58 counties reduced their property taxes all at the same time. That had never happened before because of savings and welfare. The state, instead of having to have a gigantic tax increase which was being pressed so hard in the last legislature during the welfare reform battles, found itself with an 800 million dollar surplus in the treasury. And Governor Reagan battled to see that the legislature and he returned that to the taxpayer in the form of a tax rebate instead of spending it on something else. In addition to that, there was a cost of living increase for the Aid to the Blind and the Disabled ... and in addition to that... the ones who ... are really in need, received an immediate 20 percent increase in their benefits to bring them up to the standard of need that existed in California at that time. All of that was financed out of the savings because of the reductions in the welfare rolls.⁴

Reagan had been popular among movement conservatives since he had delivered his famous speech at the 1964 nominating convention for Barry Goldwater, but it was this track record for cutting welfare and rolling back government that made him the hero of the conservative movement and fueled the perception that he was the perfect candidate to run for president. James Buckley, who was tasked with the job of introducing Reagan on the day after Robert Carlson's presentation, noted:

...we are acquiring a track record, and much of that record is directly attributable to the man who I am privileged to introduce to you... I could spend a few minutes talking about him as an articulate spokesman for conservative principles, or as a personal friend many of us have grown to admire and respect, but within the context of this weekend's conference, I think it more appropriate to introduce him as a symbol of the successful fusion of conservative principle and political action. Ronald Reagan has just completed a major undertaking in his eight years as governor of our largest state (applause). During that period, he has proved himself an adroit politician, an efficient administrator, and an imaginative reformer. Those eight years stand as a monument to the ability of conservatives to do more than talk. Ronald Reagan is living proof that we conservatives can govern and govern effectively. Earlier, I compared him to a great artist, and I think the analogy is a good one. In California, he inherited a shapeless mass of liberal chaos. He quite literally reformed what he had been given through the application of political creativity, intelligence, and imagination. Just look at the record. Ronald Reagan left Sacramento

⁴ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 113, Tape 20

more popular than ever. More important, he left the state with a budget surplus, a decreasing welfare population in which those in need receive more help, and a bureaucracy that hasn't grown in eight years' time in spite of the introduction of new programs. He left, in short, as a successful conservative governor who dealt with the issues confronting him. He has proven that we conservatives offer the alternative that the American people seek. He is the man who has proven conservatism works...the Conservative Movement's Rembrandt, Ronald Reagan.⁵

During the speech that followed, Reagan would further describe in detail his record in California, and he would reinforce the fact that it discredited liberal arguments made in defense of the welfare state. Reagan noted:

The legislature let us present the case to them, but they insisted the reforms wouldn't work, the needy would starve in the street, the load would be dumped on the counties, the property taxes would go up, and we're run a deficit of at least 750 million dollars that year. That was four years ago. Today, the needy have had a 43 percent increase in their welfare grants, the taxpayers have saved 2 billion dollars, the case load is 400,000 less than it was four years ago, more than 40 of our 58 counties have reduced their property taxes two years in a row, and most of them three years in a row, and the 750 million dollar deficit became an 850 million dollar surplus. (cheers and applause).⁶

The Importance of Mobilizing a Latent Conservative Majority

Of course, from the perspective of movement leaders, a Reagan candidacy was only part of the strategy for achieving victory. As I argued in the last chapter, a second and equally crucial component of movement strategy involved assembling and mobilizing a vast conservative constituency at the mass level— by some accounts the exact same constituency mobilized by Richard Nixon in 1972. In his comments at CPAC 1975, M. Stanton Evans clearly articulated the coalition-building task that lay ahead:

The problem before us, although it is technically difficult, conceptually is not difficult at all. The problem is very simply stated. There is a latent conservative constituency in the country shown in every opinion survey available to us, it doesn't matter what it is: Harris, Gallup, Sindlinger, you name it. All of these polls shows that the American people are increasingly conservative and that that conservatism consists, although it consists of many things, but it consists in major part of discontent with the mounting social costs of the liberal welfare state, the taxes, the inflation, the intrusion into personal life, the mounting difficulties that everyone is

⁵ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 113, Tape 28

⁶ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 113, Tape 28

encountering because of the big government system that is simply not working, not solving their problems. Our job is to reach that constituency. To reach out to it in comprehensible terms and to energize it on behalf of conservative officeholders and conservative programs in the federal government.⁷

At a later point during the conference, conservative strategist F. Clifton White would characterize the project in much the same way. White noted:

One of the real ironies for those of us who have been fighting this particular battle for the last 25 or 30 years is we finally are getting to the point where the majority of the American people are identifying themselves as conservatives, and we don't seem to be able to get a conservative public policy... I think what we have to worry and concern ourselves with is how we do get to these people who identify themselves as conservatives in this country, and communicate with them and take their desires and their interests and aspirations and translate them into the electoral process and therefore into public law.⁸

This mass conservative constituency was critical because it would provide the base of support necessary to facilitate Reagan's election. It would also serve as a foundation for the election of conservatives to Congress and the other institutions of government.

In movement discourse, the importance of the coalition-building project, the importance of a Reagan candidacy, and the importance of remaking the GOP as the party of conservatism were all inextricably linked. As a principled conservative candidate, Reagan would be able to attack liberal policies forcefully and directly. He would be able to communicate and represent conservative ideas in a way that would effectively speak to and energize the all-important latent, mass conservative constituency. As a Republican, he would send a signal to that constituency that the GOP represented its interests and its policy preferences and therefore help to transform it into the base for an ideologized Republican Party. At the same time, once energized, that conservative majority would be available to elect Reagan and to advance the conservative effort to wrest control of the party apparatus away from the GOP's moderate and liberal elite factions. Once conservatives pulled control of the party away from moderates and liberals, the party would be positioned to attack liberalism with greater force and clarity.

In this vein, just prior to his introduction of Reagan, James Buckley made the following remarks:

For the Republican Party ... it cannot plausibly attack the Democratic record unless it is prepared to attack the liberal Democratic policies that have created that record. This means that unless the Republican Party

⁷ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 113, Tape 19

⁸ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 113, Tape 27

brings itself to stand for a coherent philosophy of political alternatives, it will continue along its current decline. Republicanism of the kind that accepts in the name of moderation half the liberal democratic loaf holds no appeal to those conservative minded Independents and Democrats who were essential to the sweeping Republican victory in the presidential election of 1972. (applause) Liberal Republicans cannot hope to resurrect Republican fortunes. The one chance for the Republican Party to become the majority party is for it to do what ought to come naturally, and that is to identify itself fully and forthrightly with the conservative alternative to the liberalism that now dictates Democratic policy. Otherwise, the Republican Party may have no future. This, then, is the problem that conservatives and Republicans face. It is also their opportunity. But the opportunity is one which is by nature different than opportunity knocking. It is the opportunity to go to work, to be missionaries, if you will. For, in the last analysis, ideas uncommunicated are ideas that will not be of use to the practical affairs of man.⁹

It was in this context that Buckley turned to introduce Reagan— the great communicator, or, as Buckley so eloquently put it, the Rembrandt of the conservative movement. It was Reagan who had proven conservatism could work in practice. It was he who would be able to effectively communicate and represent conservative principles in a way that would energize conservative-minded Independents and Democrats. It was he who was positioned to help the Republican Party identify itself "fully and forthrightly with the conservative alternative" and lead it away from a path of decline toward a brighter future as the party of conservatism.

The Aftermath of Watergate

When Richard Nixon was besieged by the Watergate crisis and when he ultimately resigned in August 1974, this caused a chain reaction of events that complicated the plans of movement conservatives on several different levels. First, Gerald Ford, who was not a movement conservative, advanced to the presidency. He quickly proved to be a willing advocate of deficit spending and of the Nixon policies of détente that were firmly rejected by movement conservatives. In his opening remarks at CPAC 1975, Congressman Robert Bauman helped to frame the political context that conservatives faced in the wake of Watergate and argue that conservatives should not support Ford's moderate policies. He noted:

Today we are confronted with an administration which in a short six months has frittered away potential national support by adopting policies of amnesty for draft dodgers and deserters, the biggest budget deficit in peacetime history, relentless pushing of détente, a succession of presidential appointments culminating in the elevation to the high office of

⁹ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 113, Tape 28

vice president of the single most unacceptable nominee one might contemplate— Nelson Aldrich Rockefeller (cheers, shouts, applause). I ask you, is this what we are to stand and fight and die for in elections to come? Not me brother! The day of compromise and appeasement within our own ranks is over. We have compromised once too often and the result has been rampant national liberalism.¹⁰

Jeffrey Bell, an aide to Reagan and a fellow at the Hoover Institute, would echo concerns about Ford's acceptance of deficit spending, noting that "President Ford gave away the game at the outset by saying... yes; I agree with you we need a huge deficit. It becomes very hard for Republicans to rhetorically and substantively support him, because they're only talking about details by that time."¹¹

In a characteristically fiery speech, movement icon Buz Lukens, who had famously led the charge for Goldwater forces when they faced off against Rockefeller supporters at the 1963 meeting of the Young Republican National Federation (YRNF), delivered a blistering critique of the Ford Administration. In his speech, he linked the record of the Ford administration to the Nixon administration and linked both, ultimately, to liberalism:

We've had histrionics coming out of the White House now for the last ten years. I've had a piece of nothing ever since I became a Republican, and I'm tired of it (extended applause)! It's true, it's really true (speaking over applause)! ... He [Ford] has not named one conservative to one position of policy in the time he's been in there, and I'm disappointed in him. I'm really disappointed in him (extended applause).¹²

Remarks such as these echoed throughout the conference and contributed to a tone that was hostile to the Ford-Rockefeller Administration. There were a few exceptions— notably, words of support from the Chairman of the Mississippi Republican Party, Clarke Reed— but for the most part the tone was negative.

At the same time, as a newly sworn in president, Ford was gifted with an opportunity that Nixon in his second term did not have— that is, the option to run for the Republican nomination in 1976 as a sitting President. The seat that would have been "open" for Reagan was suddenly occupied. Given the perception that Ford was not a committed conservative and was leading the Republican Party further down the road toward liberalism, this generated serious concern. M. Stanton Evans would explain the difficulties posed by Ford's accession during his remarks:

...while I would agree with my good friend Clarke Reed that there are some specific things that Mr. Ford has done. ... the thrust of this administration is not a conservative thrust. It is a continued drift in the

¹⁰ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 113, Tape 17

¹¹ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 113, Tape 19

¹² MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 113, Tape 26

same confused direction that the Nixon Administration was following, which was, in turn, an extension of what the Kennedy and Johnson administrations were doing, and I can't support that. You are going to have one or the other of those gentlemen [Ford or Rockefeller] as your candidate in 1976 for the Republican Party.¹³

Indeed, to complicate matters further, when Ford became President, he had appointed Nelson Rockefeller as Vice President. Although Rockefeller had famously moved to the right in his later years as the Governor of New York, he was still regarded by movement conservatives as a symbol of the Republican Party's liberal, northeastern wing. Robert Bauman's comment that Nelson Rockefeller was "the single most unacceptable nominee one might contemplate" drew extended cheers from the CPAC crowd.

The Ford-Rockefeller team was therefore more than just a roadblock to a Reagan candidacy in 1976. They also posed a threat to the second component of conservative movement strategy—the coalition-building project. As a team of moderates, Ford and Rockefeller were incapable of articulating the all-important platform that conservatives believed needed to be articulated in order to associate the Republican Party with conservatism, credibly speak to the concerns of conservative Democrats and Independents, and facilitate desired and anticipated shifts in mass partisanship. In fact, they complicated the task by further associating the Republican Party with a moderate-liberal policy agenda. This was the same objection that movement conservatives had expressed with regard to the policies of the Nixon administration at CPAC 1974.

In this vein, Buckley's remarks are worth repeating. Again, he stressed to the audience, "Liberal Republicans cannot hope to resurrect Republican fortunes."¹⁴ During his remarks at CPAC, Senator Jesse Helms also explained in detail how the policies of Nixon, Ford, and Rockefeller damaged the Republican Party and seriously complicated the conservative coalition-building project:

The people all too often correctly understand what the leadership of the Republican Party is doing. No amount of communication specialists can hide the soaring federal deficit, or the failure of the Republican Administration to respond to the social issues upon which we were elected. We cannot preach honest economics, and then bring forth a budget proposal calling for a 52 billion deficit that optimistically assumes spending cuts of 17 billion that a Democrat-controlled Congress will never approve— a budget that fails to mention another 10.6 billion in agencies that are separately funded for a total deficit of 75.5 billion... Is there any reason why, under a Republican administration, foreign aid is projected to rise from 3.6 billion in Fiscal Year 1974 to 6.3 billion in Fiscal Year 1976?... Is there any reason why, under a Republican administration, food stamps are presently costing 4 billion a year and are projected to go up to

¹³ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 113, Tape 19

¹⁴ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 113, Tape 28

8 billion a year? Is there any reason why, under a Republican administration, we should be negotiating to give away strategic US territory in the Canal Zone to a country that has less population than metropolitan Washington? Is there any reason why we should be proposing billions to develop energy resources in Siberia when we cannot even agree on unleashing private enterprise to develop our own resources? I know that we have a Congress that is opposed to the President's program. But too often the President's program is so bad that even Republicans have difficulty supporting it. Under the Republican Party's present course, the Party is out of tune with its own rank and file membership and out of tune with the growing conservative majority. It is out of tune with the majority that is fed up with both parties and is looking for politicians who will stand on issues and deliver what they promise.¹⁵

In this context, the notion that Gerald Ford was nevertheless well-positioned to be the Republican nominee in 1976 instead of Reagan was extremely difficult for many conservatives to accept. As long as Ford remained in the White House, the Republican Party would not be able to associate itself with the platform necessary to speak to and energize the conservative majority.

To make matters even worse, in the 1974 election following Nixon's departure, the Republican Party lost forty-eight seats in the House of Representatives, and it lost three seats in the Senate. This was framed by both the media and by conservatives as a catastrophic defeat. Interestingly, in movement discourse, the defeat of Republicans was not tied exclusively to the wrongdoings of the Nixon White House or to Watergate. Instead, a prominent interpretation provided by movement leaders at CPAC was that the Nixon majority had refused to support Republicans because it had been alienated by Nixon and the party's collective failure to implement the conservative platform of 1972. Criticism for the disastrous election result therefore extended past Nixon and Watergate to moderate and liberal Republicans in Congress for their support of deficit spending, détente, the Family Assistance Program, and other big government policies of the Nixon years.

In this context, the accession of Ford and Rockefeller to the White House in August 1974 was not cast as a development that would greatly improve Republican fortunes or correct the problems that had led to defeat in 1974. In fact, due to its perceived affiliation with the moderate-liberal wing of the party, the Ford-Rockefeller administration promised only to extend and exacerbate the very trends that had led to defeat by further alienating the conservative majority. Discussions of the party's defeat at the polls therefore became connected to criticism of the policies of the new Ford administration.

This interpretation of the 1974 election result also served another functional purpose. It focused responsibility for the defeat at the polls upon the Republican Party as an institution and upon the liberal policy agenda supported moderate and liberal Republicans while absolving conservative ideology and the Nixon platform of 1972 from

¹⁵ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 113, Tape 22

any of the blame for the drubbing at the polls. In movement discourse, the perceived mandate for conservatism that had been delivered by voters in 1972 had not been rescinded or diminished at all by the election results of 1974. Support for conservative policies at the mass level remained as strong as it had ever been, and the conservative constituency remained intact. Only the Republican Party as an institution had been refuted and discredited, and this had occurred precisely because it had failed to boldly stand for policies consistent with principled conservatism and therefore energize and mobilize the coalition of voters that had supported Nixon.

During his comments at CPAC, M. Stanton Evans would touch on these points directly. In response to a comment regarding the root causes of the Republican defeat in the 1974 Congressional election, he noted:

The country is indeed fed up, as I think we've all remarked in one way or another, and people are looking for some kind of redress to all of these social costs, however you want to define them... the recession, inflation, taxes, and the rest of it. One difficulty is that the Republican Party for the last six years, having been elected to the White House on the supposed basis of doing something about those concerns, has failed to deliver— not only in terms of legislative action where ... they didn't control the Congress, but even in the proposals. A president who said I am now a Keynesian in economics, a president who ran up billions and billions in deficits. Another president proposing 50 billion in deficits. How can you communicate to the American people that you have a concern for what bothers them if you're talking more of the same thing that bothers them? So I think that that is one essential cause of the Republican shortfall. This is why conservatism goes up, Republicanism goes down.¹⁶

James Buckley would echo these same themes during his comments, noting that "as we survey the shambles of last November's elections, certain facts become increasingly clear. The electorate did not reject political conservatism in 1974. Rather, by their votes or by staying home, they delivered a stinging political defeat to the Republican Party."¹⁷ Jesse Helms' comments are also instructive and reinforce the same key points. In Helms view, conservative voters rejected the Republican Party because it had not lived up to expectations and because it had not taken principled stands on the issues of concern to voters:

In 1974, the voters stayed home! They stayed home in droves— Republicans, Democrats, and Independents. Only 38% came out to vote, and they were angry. The hopes of 1972 had not been vindicated. The image of rectitude had been shattered and the issues which had influenced the voters to vote for Nixon in 1972 never found fulfillment. They felt twice-cheated— and they either became disillusioned and stayed home, or

¹⁶ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 113, Tape 19

¹⁷ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 113, Tape 28

they took revenge by voting with those who never wanted Nixon anyway. Does this not indicate the final collapse of the two party system? With no issues-candidate in a national forum, the voters stayed away in droves, disappointed with both parties, with broken promises, and with broken illusions. Only the left wing Democrats came out in substantial numbers, confirming that the Democratic Party, by and large, was operating largely as a cohesive liberal faction— a liberal party as it were— while the regular Democrats— the Democrats by geography— joined the Republicans and Independents in apathy.¹⁸

Gallup polls at the time indicated that levels of voter identification with the Republican Party dropped to an all-time low— below that of both Democrats and Independents.

A New Majority Party?

In this context, the debates at CPAC 1975 revolved around extensive discussions of how to break through the institutional roadblocks created by intra-party ideological heterogeneity, facilitate a Reagan candidacy in 1976 despite Ford and Rockefeller's presence in the White House, and energize the mass coalition perceived as being such a critical component of a Reagan victory.

As I noted in the introduction to this chapter, the organizers of CPAC represented a growing faction of the conservative movement that— in the wake of the 1974 election— came to increasingly see the Reagan candidacy and coalition-building project as goals that simply could not be achieved by working within the institutional framework of the Republican Party. Instead, they believed that a new party was required to replace the Republican Party, and they structured CPAC 1975 as a forum for the discussion of the new party issue. The ACU Board of Directors meeting held on December 15, 1974 was devoted to planning for CPAC. The minutes from the meeting provide insight into their thoughts and intentions regarding the new party alternative and the upcoming conference:

A general discussion of CPAC followed, focusing on what outcome was expected or desired. Mrs. Schlafly suggested offering attendees two choices— New Party or working within traditional parties— at some point during the conference. Mr. Keene suggested, sentiment willing, that the conference resolve to appoint a New Party exploratory committee. It was felt that the conference must end on the note of 'having taken a step; putting the conservative movement into a course of action.' Various suggestions for panels were noted by the conference planning staff. Mr. Evans' suggestion that a 'Committee for a New Majority' result from the conference was approved in principle, as was the general use of this vehicle as a fund-raising, organizing, and communications vehicle prior to the actual establishment of a New Party. Mr. Winter urged the heavy involvement of State ACU organizations in this effort. The CPAC

¹⁸ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 113, Tape 22

program will be as specific as possible. Mr. Evans agreed to meet Governor Wallace at his earliest convenience to discuss political cooperation with his constituency and organization, particularly in the vexing area of legal roadblocks to New Party efforts.¹⁹

In keeping with these goals, the CPAC planners featured several strategists and activists who supported the new party option, and they scheduled panels to debate various aspects of the process of party formation. During a panel entitled, "The Republican Party: Does it Have a Future," David Keene, an Assistant to James Buckley who would later go on to serve as a political strategist for the Reagan, George H.W. Bush, Dole, and Romney presidential campaigns, posed the question before conservatives in the following way:

Do we stick with the Republican Party, or do we break out on our own to form some sort of a new party or coalition? As I indicated, the answer to this question is basic to the answers to the other questions we've been discussing here this weekend... The problem is obvious. Most Americans describe themselves as conservative, as conservative on a wide variety of public issues. But we conservatives have not been able to transfer that broad, albeit big consensus into either government or policy or electoral success. We as conservatives dominate the Republican party numerically, but certainly don't control it in any substantive sense.²⁰

Kevin Phillips strongly favored the new party option, stating emphatically: "I think the total opportunity in American Politics today lies in the hand of a new party that will arise to combine the thrust of conservatism on one hand and elements of populism—Wallace— on the other hand and make it into a viable new majority party in the United States."²¹ He went on to say that the notion that the Nixon Majority of 1972 was "harnessable in the Republican harness is just out of the question." He argued that the Watergate debacle combined with inflation and economic decline under Republican leadership had damaged the party's reputation beyond repair.

Phillips also argued that the party's decision to "straddle all the issues" was a source of its decline.²² This reinforced the common theme (also emphasized by Buckley and Evans) that the party's failure to identify itself strongly with the conservative alternative prevented it from credibly attacking the liberal policies of the Democratic Party and was a primary cause of declining levels of voter identification and support for the GOP. In Phillips' own words:

...it's just not going to go anywhere. It's pathetic, and it's just nothing that you can advertise to people anymore as having any real soul, to use that

¹⁹ American Conservative Union "Minutes of the Board of Directors Meeting," (December 15, 1974), MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 21, Folder 11

²⁰ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 113, Tape 27

²¹ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 113, Tape 27

²² MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 113, Tape 27

word. I just don't think there's anything there. I think it's the twentieth century Whigs at this point, trying to straddle all the issues. They had a conference of state chairmen in January where they brought in some pollster that said you want to get away from national issues, you want to stress things like prevention of local burglaries and checking out supermarkets for price fixing or something. Well, this is the sort of breadth of imagination that makes you think of Millard Fillmore. In fact, if you look at the White House, there's a hell of a lot that makes you think of Millard Fillmore.²³

Ron Docksai, National Chairman of Young Americans for Freedom, also spoke on the panel and reinforced many of the same points:

...should another party appear with the image of one which can potentially govern, and potentially represent the attitudes and the interests of the larger, popular middle class, the popular middle class described by Kevin Phillips, it will once again become the century's successor to the experiment of 1856, as the Republican Party of today follows the way of the Whigs. So the real question to be answered as I pose it is not where is the Republican Party going, but how long is it going to take until we get there? William A. Rusher has contributed more toward answering this question perhaps than many, and in his upcoming book, *The Making of the New Majority Party*, he says as follows: "In state after state, as I've found it, the Republican Party hardly exists at all. In part, this is due to the long-term shift of the national support from the party to the individual candidates, but this, in turn, is the result of the essential meaninglessness of the party. No one can effectively lead or even look to the Republican Party today, because no one can possibly say what the Republican Party stands for. It simply defies categorization. It defies it, moreover, not like the Democratic Party in the interest of opportunism in which nothing human is alien, but in the Republican Party's sterile and futile effort to avoid hostility of blocs that have no intention of voting Republican anyway." Mr. Rusher concludes by calling for the formation of an Independent Party...²⁴

For Kevin Phillips, Ron Docksai, William Rusher, M. Stanton Evans, and other advocates, the appeal of the third party option was that it solved key problems that stood in the way of effective execution of the conservative coalition-building project. First, it solved the problem posed by ideological heterogeneity within the GOP. Without moderate and liberal factions supporting a diverse range of liberal policy planks, conservatives would be able to stake out a bold ideological platform consistent with core conservative principles. Consequently, conservatives would be able to send a strong

²³ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 113, Tape 27

²⁴ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 113, Tape 27

signal to the latent conservative majority that would speak directly to its alleged opposition to big government policy initiatives and therefore more effectively mobilize it. In a similar vein, the party's candidate for president would be able to take strong, principled stands on issues rather than weakened, middle of the road stands that were perceived as so often necessary in order to win the Republican Party's nomination and support. Indeed, complaints by individuals such as Ron Docksai, William Rusher, and Kevin Phillips that the Republican Party stood for very little were tied to the fact that Republican candidates were often forced to take safe and moderate stands on issues and straddle ideological lines in order to satisfy all of the party's diverse factions.

Second, a new party solved the problem of reputation. To reiterate, this band of conservative leaders believed that a considerable amount of blame had been heaped upon the Republican Party by voters (as evidenced by the 1974 election result) for its failure to live up to the mandate for conservatism delivered by voters in 1972, for its tacit and, at times, willing support of liberal big government policy initiatives, for its support of détente, and for its culpability in the decline of the American economy and rise in inflation. In their view, a great deal of this blame was deserved. Nixon and moderate and liberal Republicans were, in fact, responsible for the economic decline and for a severe weakening of American superiority on the world stage under their watch. In this context, Watergate only added to the party's already terrible reputation for policy failure, and it was this reputation that had contributed greatly to the GOP's defeat in 1974. A new party would be free to throw off this yoke, repudiate all of these policy failures, and to speak with greater clarity, credibility, and force to the conservative constituency.

M. Stanton Evans' comments are worth quoting at length because they reinforce all of these points. Evans noted:

I personally believe that in 1976, we need a new political party at the presidential level. (Applause and cheers) How one goes about doing that, what the options are in terms of candidates, these are things that need to be discussed. I realize, talking to my Republican friends, that this presents many terrible difficulties... This is something not to be lightly considered. The whole project is one of immense significance, not only in an immediate political sense, but historically. I personally believe that we are in an axial period in American politics. I think that the enormous discrepancy between the level of conservative affirmation in the country, which is a high and rising level, and the level of Republican affirmation, which is a low and declining level, suggests that there is an enormous opportunity here for some new political entity to reach out without all of this inherited difficulty from Watergate, without all of the policy confusions that have been imposed upon the Republican Party by these last two administrations— to reach out to that latent constituency, to transform that latent majority into an actual majority, and lead us as conservatives and as Americans on to victory in 1976.²⁵

²⁵ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 113, Tape 19

Senator Jesse Helms shared this vision and strongly identified with the fundamental goal of creating a conservative party, but he differed in that he did not absolutely preclude the possibility of transforming the Republican Party into a party of conservatism. He stated that he favored the "realignment of political action into philosophically consistent parties," emphasizing that it was "not of primary importance... what these parties would be called."²⁶ In Helms' words:

... we must be prepared long before the filing dates have passed, long before it is too late for us to get on the ballot in each state, to have acceptable candidates ready and able to run for office, not excluding the Presidency itself, in the event that major parties continue in the direction they are now going. Thus, there will be no new party unless one is necessary. And if we see that a new party is necessary, we will be ready.²⁷

Certainly, the American Conservative Union Board and the group of activist leaders who spoke in favor of the new party alternative at CPAC represented only a segment of the American conservative movement. Even among speakers at CPAC, there were clear differences of opinion about the prudence of the new party alternative. Buckley remained cautiously optimistic and urged conservatives to work within the Republican Party in order to transform it, as did Clarke Reed, Representative Phil Crane, and, most importantly, Ronald Reagan. Strom Thurmond, who spoke at the conference, did not address the issue and did not criticize Ford. Republican strategist F. Clifton White and Representative John Ashbrook refused to take a position either for or against the new party alternative, stressing that it remained unclear which would serve as the best institutional vehicle for conservatism.

A young Karl Rove, then president of the College Republicans, was perhaps the most strongly outspoken opponent of the idea due, in part, to what he considered the impossible logistical tasks of creating a viable new party structure, getting onto the ballot in all fifty states, and raising the money to execute a campaign for the presidency under restrictive campaign finance laws that were extremely unfriendly to third parties. Rove also stressed that a split within the conservative movement's ranks would only reinforce the likelihood of a Democratic victory in 1976.

Rove's case was strong. However, while his views may have been consistent with the views of many conservatives still committed to working within and transforming the GOP, they went against the grain at CPAC 1975. In a moment that gave particular insight into the emotions of the crowd, a member of the audience criticized Rove, bringing up the fact that he had selected a liberal national vice chairman in his capacity as President of the College Republicans and asking pointedly, "why are you here?" The meeting descended into disorder as some members of the audience cheered loudly and shouted in approval. When Rove began to defend himself, the audience member again interrupted, asking whether the College Republicans would also support Rockefeller were

²⁶ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 113, Tape 22

²⁷ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 113, Tape 22

he nominated for the presidency. When Rove answered in the affirmative and stressed that the College Republicans would support the Republican nominee no matter who was ultimately selected, murmurs of disapproval from the crowd grew even louder, and the discussion became even more disorderly.²⁸

Eventually, an unidentified audience member shouted that he could testify that Rove acted as a solid conservative in the Rule 29 fight (also prompting applause from a segment of the audience). Keene brought the meeting to order, closing the panel by noting, "we came in here with an unresolved debate, we heard some various viewpoints, and I'm sure that not all of us have been convinced of the correctness of either of those viewpoints."²⁹

Speaking near the end of the conference to the crowd that had gathered to hear Reagan, *National Review* publisher William Rusher attempted to frame the verdict of the conference as being largely in favor of the new party alternative. He remarked:

One cannot help sensing that we are approaching here in this year 1975—approaching some kind of crossroads in political action— some decisions of perhaps a major and historic type. I know how eager many of you are for quick and spectacular action in such a direction. I know not merely because I have observed how you feel. I know because I feel that way myself, and have testified to it myself by writing that book, the order forms for which are right out there in the hall! It would be nice if we could have, without paying the price and political consequences of prematurity and bad timing, the great thrill of saying here, now, tonight, this very moment— let us make history ... Let me assure you that none of the conservative leaders I have met and spoken to here, and I have met and spoken to most of them, are in a mood to waste any time... but as Senator Helms said in that wonderful talk of his last night, there are many, many things to do, many constituencies to talk to, many negotiations to be entered into, many preparations to be made, and I count on you, and I know I do it without any hesitation or without any doubt, to continue to act in this conference firmly and responsibly and not merely recklessly or precipitately.³⁰

Since Rusher was the most ardent supporter of the new party alternative, his assessment of the conference verdict was certainly biased. Also, the conference itself was undoubtedly biased in favor of new party formation relative to the climate of opinion in the conservative movement as a whole. After all, the ACU Board supported the new party approach and recruited friendly speakers to express favorable viewpoints during the panel sessions. The new party option's most vocal critic— Rove— had, in fact, been a last minute replacement for another panelist who had cancelled.

²⁸ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 113, Tape 27

²⁹ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 113, Tape 27

³⁰ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 113, Tape 28

In fact, the size of the elite faction of the conservative movement pushing for a true break from the Republican Party was modest. However, it was powerful, and, in the context of the coordinative discourse at CPAC, it was disproportionately represented and disproportionately vocal.

CPAC 1975 Speakers and the New Party Option³¹

In Favor

Ron Docksai
M. Stanton Evans
Thomas Ireland
Buz Lukens
Serphin Maltese
Kevin Phillips
William Rusher

On the Fence

John Ashbrook
Robert Bauman
Jesse Helms
Phyllis Schlafly
Meldrim Thompson
F. Clifton White

Opposed

James Buckley
Philip Crane
Phyllis McGraff
Ronald Reagan
Clarke Reed
Karl Rove

As I argued in chapter 2, the conditions at a site of discourse need not mirror conditions in the outside world. The planning committee favored the new party option and gave speaking time to Helms, Evans, Rusher, Docksai, Phillips, and Bauman, who were amenable to the idea. As such, they amplified and strengthened the expression of that viewpoint within the context of the conference itself and therefore strengthened its salience and circulation in movement discourse. By simply expressing their idea, they forced other prominent speakers such as White, Ashbrook, Crane, Buckley, Rove, and Reagan to react and respond to it. It guided and structured the comments of these elite actors, even though they took neutral or opposing positions.

These debates were not specific to CPAC. Discussions of the new party alternative both predated and postdated the conference and were therefore amplified by it.

³¹ CPAC speakers whose positions are unknown are not included in the list.

Rusher had contemplated the idea for years and had already written a book on the subject.³² The ACU and movement leaders associated with the idea would seek to build additional momentum behind the new party effort at CPAC to add credibility to the efforts they planned to undertake in the following months. As pre-ordained by the ACU planning sessions during December 1974, the conference was presented with and approved the appointment of a Committee on Conservative Alternatives (COCA) to further investigate the new party option. The individuals selected for the Committee included:

Representative John Ashbrook
 Representative Robert Bauman
 Ron Docksai, Chairman, Young Americans for Freedom
 M. Stanton Evans, Chairman, American Conservative Union
 Senator Jesse Helms
 Eli Howell, Former Assistant to George Wallace
 Cyril Joly, Maine Republican National Committee
 James Lyon, Harris County (Texas) Republican Finance Committee
 J. Daniel Mahoney, Chairman, New York Conservative Party
 William Rusher, Publisher, *National Review*
 Phyllis Schlafly, Chairman, Stop E.R.A.
 Representative Steve Symms
 Governor Meldrim Thomson of New Hampshire
 Robert Walker, former political aide to Ronald Reagan
 Thomas Winter, Editor, *Human Events*³³

Not long after CPAC, a meeting was also convened by James Buckley in February 1975 at St. Michaels, Maryland. According to author Timothy Sullivan, Buckley, who did not favor the new party option himself, sought to harness the unrest within the conservative movement and use it to exert greater pressure on the Ford White House to pay attention to the policy demands of the conservative movement. It is unclear exactly what transpired at the St. Michaels meeting, and it is equally unclear what viewpoints were represented there, since a diverse guest list was intentionally prepared. According to Sullivan, the majority opinion at the meeting was to continue to work to transform the Republican Party.³⁴

Still, the list of those who attended the meeting speaks to the significant level of attention attached to the debate by prominent conservative leaders of the day. Also, it is important to note that the new party idea, however contentious it may have been, prompted collaborative strategy meetings among high ranking leaders of the conservative movement that were focused upon solving the problems of intra-party ideological

³² Rusher, *New Majority Party*

³³ "Resolutions Passed by 75 CPAC Participants," February 16, 1975. MSS 176, LTPSC, Series III, Box 3, Folder 26

³⁴ Timothy J. Sullivan, *New York State and the Rise of Modern Conservatism* (New York: SUNY Press, 2008)

heterogeneity and of party image. Prominent participants at the St. Michaels meeting included: James Buckley, Clarke Reed, Jesse Helms, Karl Rove, John Ashbrook, Patrick Buchanan, Phil Crane, Joseph Coors, Marjorie Holt, M. Stanton Evans, Jack Kemp, Jeremiah Milbank, Trent Lott, Roger Milliken, Meldrim Thomson, Jr., William Rusher, F. Clifton White, Thomas Winter, and David Keene.³⁵

The Importance of the New Party Debate

In hindsight, nothing ultimately came of the new party debate. Knowing that, the question that immediately presents itself is: did the debate have an impact? Since it failed, is it worthy of such extended consideration? I argue that the answer is yes, for reasons that have never been fully explored.

First, the new party alternative framed and structured coordinative discourse at a critical moment in the conservative movement's history. It was tightly connected to and helped to frame movement opposition targeted at the Republican Party and its moderate and liberal factions. It was an integral part of discussions regarding the problem posed by ideological heterogeneity with the ranks of the Republican Party in Congress, and it helped to reinforce the idea that ideological heterogeneity had to be overcome in order to effectively execute the coalition-building tasks that lay ahead. Arguments in favor of a new party brought awareness to the importance of having a principled conservative candidate like Reagan rather than Ford on the ballot in order to communicate the conservative message in an undiluted format and reach key constituencies. In conservative discourse, it was a carrier of the idea that Nixon, Ford, and other unprincipled Republicans were destroying the reputation of the party as an institution and alienating voters through their support of deficit spending and policies of détente. It also shaped elite explanations for low voter identification with the Republican Party and for its defeat at the polls on the heels of the great Nixon victory of 1972. In short, it was an idea that structured elite discussions of context and strategy and infused those discussions with considerations tied to the importance of ideology.

The new party alternative was also an integral part of dialogue that emphasized and stressed the absolute necessity of building a strong, principled conservative platform that would speak to the concerns of the latent conservative constituency and energize it. Concerns about party system structure, the institutional roadblocks to a Reagan candidacy, and talk of a third party alternative accelerated and reinforced the need for a process of refinement and expansion of conservatism itself at the ideological-discursive level. Regardless of the institutional vehicle conservatives chose, it would be necessary either way to mobilize and tie together the same target activist and mass constituencies. In this vein, amid his comments at CPAC 1975, Helms noted:

... we need to organize conservatives into a more coherent structure, and I mean not only our trusty band of ideological conservatives, but

³⁵ Jim Buckley, Memorandum to Meeting Participants, February 28, 1975, William A. Rusher Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. Box 141, Folder: Correspondence, 1975-1977

nonpolitical people who are grappling in their own communities with issues such as pornography, the right to life, school textbooks, community control of schools, as well as those who are affected by economy issues such as inflation, soaring social security taxes, and loss of jobs. We must stop talking to ourselves in our own code words, and talk to people in language they understand... we must begin working now and we must work in different ways, with different groups, with different constituencies....We can ill afford the luxury of turning away any individual, any group of individuals whether a state party organization or national party organization or any other body sharing the same basic principles that we believe in. We must not forget that the most fertile ground for political action lies with the millions who are completely disgusted with both major parties. We must give them a solid alternative....We must develop a program of principle, so that the American people will know what we stand for...we must have a platform convention not only to lay out the program that we intend to present to the American people, but also to demonstrate the soundness of our political organization. Is this platform convention the convention of a new political party? It may be. Frankly, it is what we make of it...³⁶

If conservatives broke out on their own, they would be building a party truly from scratch. It would be critical that they have in place a platform and a message that would have strong appeal and attract a broad constituency to serve as a base of support. In fact, discussions of the third party alternative led repeatedly into discussions of the policy issues that would later be used to mobilize voters within the institutional framework of the Republican Party.

For example, in the context of his speech arguing for the formation of a new party, Kevin Phillips also made the following point:

Now in terms of what this means and how the whole idea of a third party should be approached, let me retreat from that a little bit and say I would not approach it very quickly or very vehemently at this point for the simple reason that if it is precipitated too quickly and everybody's in a great rush to set up an alternative structure, I think you run the risk of being taken over by people who would over ideologize it in a way that would not be sufficiently appealing to a large group of the American people. I think that is especially clear in the economic area, where you cannot sell what amounts to the old Kaiser-Fraser era brand of free market conservatism in a situation when we have 9, 10, 11 percent unemployment. I think anybody who tries is going to be in desperate straits, and I think... to the extent of something set up as a third party movement that builds quickly upon the conservative movement, it would set itself in a fatal position in terms of economics, and it would foreclose

³⁶ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 113, Tape 22

flexibility and ability to present itself as responsive to the needs of what is really middle America, which is not an affluent constituency. It's a constituency that's having a lot of problems right now.³⁷

Speaking on the same panel, Karl Rove made the same point, but he took the opposing position and used it as yet another reason to oppose the formation of an alliance with social conservatives:

[There is] a danger to the traditional conservative principles of the free market by fusion with neoconservatives. Ron made mention of the Bob Teeter survey conducted for the Republican National Committee. That survey tried to find out what that majority of Americans who say they are conservative really mean when they say they are conservative, and on all the social questions they came out right: on the questions of pornography, of drugs, of crime, they agreed with what conservatives would agree with, but on the questions of the economy, they traditionally took, and in every one of the poll samples that we took, they took the position of the New Deal economics. They were in favor of government intervention, they were against business, they were against the profit motive, some of them of course were perhaps running opposite of that tide, but the neoconservative is by and large a social conservative first and an economic New Dealer second. As conservatives, we believe in the prime point of economic freedom, that economic freedom is necessary to political freedom, and by making a coalition, by making a compromise with those who say that economic freedom is a baggage to be tossed aside in times of economic difficulty, we're putting our conservative principles up for a rather cheap sale.³⁸

These issues were not resolved in any sense at CPAC 1975, but they were part of an ongoing coordinative dialogue among conservative activists about how to communicate their positions in ways that would resonate with and mobilize voters. They also show that as concerned as conservative leaders were about developing a program of principle, they were cognizant of the fact that their message needed to be refined in order to speak to and effectively mobilize voters.

Discussions regarding the formation of a conservative platform also gave rise to extended discussions of which target constituencies would be most critical and of what message would effectively resonate with those constituencies. In his comments supporting the creation of a new party, M. Stanton Evans noted:

...the issues are there: the issues are suggested by these polls, they're suggested by the protests of the people. They are taxes, busing, welfare, abortion, the energy problems, inflation, and so on. These are issues that

³⁷ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 113, Tape 27

³⁸ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 113, Tape 27

have spontaneously arisen in the various communities around the nation, and if candidates come forward and speak credibly on these issues, they can reach this constituency....³⁹

Jesse Helms also speculated about the target constituencies that were necessary for the success of the conservative coalition-building project:

I think we will find our majority by presenting our views in terms that are easily understood by persons who are worried about what is happening to them, but are outside of active political participation. We will find them in families where parents are worried about state interference in their right to educate their children according to their own values, whether it be the values of their own community, their own neighborhood, their own religious beliefs. We will find them among the people who can no longer make ends meet because government interference with the economy and ideological vendettas in the name of the environment have robbed their localities of economic growth. We will find them among people who are disturbed because they no longer have the freedom to arrange their own lives according to their own means, who are alarmed over governmental interference with their own privacy, and privacy of their families. Yes, even the right to life itself has been called into question by an uncontrolled judiciary that has constantly asserted more and more control over people's lives.⁴⁰

II. Discourse Analysis of CPAC Panel Discussions

CPAC 1975 was more than just a forum where elites discussed context and strategy. It was also a site where the conservative message itself was refined and sharpened. Conservative leaders were very forward-thinking. They were focused on the coalition-building tasks that lay ahead, and they anticipated the package of policy planks that would likely be critical for not only mobilizing traditional conservative constituencies but also for speaking to the latent conservative majority. The planners therefore organized panel discussions centered around policy issues that were of importance to the conservative movement, as well as around issues that they anticipated would be important for appealing to target constituencies.

CPAC issue panels were and are important, and an investigation of their significance sheds fresh light on the very active role that intellectuals play in the process of coalition-building. Political scientists have long noted the role of intellectuals in the construction of political ideology. An area remains less explored theoretically, however, is their role in the spread and dissemination of ideas beyond scholarly books, journals of opinion, and the provision of advice to policy makers. The role that intellectuals played during the early years of CPAC was unique and important, and it does not fit into any of

³⁹ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 113, Tape 19

⁴⁰ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 113, Tape 22

these categories. During this time, CPAC was a forum in which intellectuals effectively shaped the balance and flow of ideas within coordinative political discourse. It was a site where they promulgated ideas that effectively blended, rationalized, and sharpened the platform of the expanding conservative movement. An analysis of the proceedings of CPAC 1975 helps to clarify and illustrate these points. The *National Review* and *Human Events* publications were co-sponsors of CPAC, and prominent columnists, such as Daniel Oliver, Alan Reynolds, William Rusher, and M. Stanton Evans, helped to shape the selection of issues to be discussed and to create the list of speakers who would be invited. Daniel Oliver of the *National Review* organized a panel on welfare reform, and Alan Reynolds, also of the *National Review*, organized a panel on the economy, inflation, and recession. These panel discussions were staffed by supply-side economists, principled conservative politicians, and other scholars whose work was broadly consistent with the brand of conservative ideology being developed and honed at the *National Review*.

The experts who were selected to speak on these panels played an important role. They helped to stake out and emphasize positions on contemporary and strategic issues that resonated with and reinforced core conservative themes and principles. This process of clarifying and reinforcing thinking on emerging and strategic policy issues aided in the development and maintenance of an ideologically rationalized policy platform for the conservative movement that had contemporary relevance. It helped to reinforce ideas, themes, and patterns of thought among members of the conservative movement's elite-activist coalition that were consistent with the ideology of the conservative intellectuals at the helm. As the movement expanded and soaked up new groups during this critical time, this process of refinement also meant that the arguments which rationalized new policy planks in terms of core conservative principles were the very arguments that were represented and reinforced at the CPAC conference. Conservative intellectuals and scholars thus spread ideology not just by writing about it but also by expressing it aloud and infusing it into an ongoing, interactive dialogue between elites and activists.

Surely, leaders such as Rusher and Evans envisioned the policy forums at CPAC as refining the platform of a new conservative party, but their efforts ultimately contributed to the expansion and refinement of a unifying discourse that facilitated the assimilation of groups by the Republican Party. To reiterate the point, new party coalition-building efforts potentiated relevant discussions of policy issues and had a significant impact even though elite attitudes toward the Republican Party changed over time.

The Socially Constructed Image of Modern Liberalism at CPAC 1975

As CPAC panel discussions unfolded and as the experts who had been assembled spoke about their assigned topics, an image of modern liberalism was socially constructed through conference discourse. When all was said and done, the image that emerged through discourse was of an ideology that supported big, activist domestic government across the board and that placed great faith in government. It was of an ideology that sought to also use the instrumentalities of the state to *transform* the economy, society, and the relationship between the state and society. Because of its

transformative aspects and their negative consequences, modern liberalism was also depicted as an ideology that caused great damage to the rights and dignities of individual citizens, the traditions of society, and the health of the economy.

In the realm of foreign policy, the image that emerged was of an ideology that was naïve, that contributed to national weakness on the world stage, and that caused damage to national security interests. Expressions of opposition to big, activist government were still part of foreign policy discussions, but they were applied to the Communist menace and, in keeping with fusion conservative philosophy, were used to rationalize an expansion of the national security state. They were also used to underscore similarities between the domestic solutions of modern liberalism and Communism and, by lumping the two together, to highlight the common nature of the dangers to freedom posed by both.

Functionally, these themes were very effective for uniting conservative constituencies with a diverse platform of grievances against a common enemy---modern liberalism. Whatever the grievance-- from worries about inflation to opposition to busing to anger over the assault on family values to fears about national security and the growth of the welfare state-- the ideology of modern liberalism was the recipient of all of the blame. Panel discussions also addressed the ways that these objections should be conveyed to the American people. Strategy dictated that in order to win at the polls, remote, general, economic objections about the dangers posed by modern liberalism to the economy needed to be reframed and connected to the impact on the individual.

Positive discussions of conservative policy solutions were also discussed. The accompanying discussions of solutions revolved around the parallel objectives of: 1) reducing the size of government; 2) reducing and decentralizing the authority of government; and 3) strengthening the military and assuming an offensive posture on the world stage. Solutions were focused upon promoting the status of: 1) the individual; 2) the economy; and 3) national security. The core theme that tied the package of solutions together-- the idea that were at the heart of the conservative movement's message of change-- was the concept of freedom.

Ultimately, however, it was the negative formulation-- the one that emphasized the harm inflicted by liberal policies-- that linked groups and their ideas together most strongly at CPAC. Conservatives united through expressions of hostility toward their common adversary.⁴¹ An examination of the discourse at CPAC shows how the dangers posed by modern liberalism were articulated and reinforced across a series of policy domains. I identify five that were critical: 1) welfare; 2) spending and deficits; 3) regulation; 4) social issues; and 5) anti-communism. In each of these policy areas, grievances were expressed and the effects of liberal policies were identified as problems that demanded conservative solutions. In the pages that follow, I consider each of these in greater depth.

⁴¹ M. Stanton Evans, *Getting Together*, MSS 176, LTPSC, Series XV, Box 109, Folder 9

1. Welfare

Conservative objections to liberal welfare and social programs were tied, in part, to the fact that these programs were costly and contributed to the growth of government expenditures, deficits, and debt. Secondly, objections were tied to the fact that these programs were inefficient and riddled with waste and fraud that raised levels of government spending to amounts beyond those that would exist if government statutes were efficiently administered. In this vein, a common argument was that people who did not deserve welfare were nevertheless able to apply for it and receive it. Thirdly, objections were tied to the fact that social programs destroyed the incentive to work and made recipients dependent upon government aid. Discussions of welfare policy therefore linked together three distinct kinds of conservative objections to big, activist government, including: 1) the idea that excessive government spending caused damage to the free market economy; 2) the idea that big government programs were susceptible to waste, fraud, and inefficiency; and 3) the idea that big government programs intended to help those in need often caused damage to the dignity of those same individuals and destroyed their will to act responsibly.

Sen. Strom Thurmond, who spoke extensively about welfare at CPAC, touched upon each of these themes. First, he emphasized concerns related to dependence created by the welfare system:

The amount of unemployment and welfare has concerned me very much. I've always taken the position that if there were people who were disabled mentally or physically, they had to have some help some source. I think primarily the communities in the states where it occurs ought to take care of this problem. But so many people have gotten to depend upon the federal government for everything. Well, even if the federal government has to help that category of people who are disabled, I still say that they don't have to help people who are able to work and won't work and sit down on their fanny. They ought to be put to work!⁴²

Thurmond also made derogatory comments about fraud and waste in the food stamp program and implied that government expenditures on social programs contributed to increasing levels of spending, deficits, and debt. These comments are also interesting because Thurmond isolates and identifies categories of people, including union workers and students, as characteristic and undeserving abusers of the welfare system:

...several years ago, I introduced a bill, and Senator Helms introduced it last year, and I joined him on that too, to provide that people who have jobs and voluntarily go on strikes would not get food stamps. I've introduced it again this year, and I think that Congress ought to pass this bill. A lot of people don't have jobs at all, and people who have jobs and walk away from them— why should Congress have to support that category

⁴² MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 113, Tape 23

of people? I say let the unions support 'em and not the tax payers of America! And the number of college students now from moderate to wealthy families drawing food stamps? This should be stopped! I'm about ready to terminate this food stamp program altogether and just provide the money rather than the food stamps. I think it's abused too much, for the families that have to have help. Some people hide behind food stamps. They'd be ashamed to take the money, but they're not ashamed to take food stamps. It's abused. And let it come out in the open, and let people see where the money is going and who's getting it, and public opinion almost will rise up and take care of the situation if we do that. Now, I've been in the Congress for 21 years. This is the 21st year. In the 20 years, the budget has been balanced only four times. It's been balanced only 6 times in 25 years. Now, ladies and gentlemen, we can't keep on going like that either. Our present debt is 485 billion dollars. The president now asking that be increased over 500 billion dollars. I have never voted to increase the debt limit, and don't expect to. I realize it may produce a crisis in this country, but maybe we need a real crisis to bring people to their senses. We can't keep on spending, spending, spending.⁴³

Thurmond then suggested that a continued path down the road to increasingly bigger government would pave the road toward a bankrupt nation that would be susceptible to socialism or communism:

I realize with some of the news media, it's very hard to get them to carry the message of conservatives, for some unknown reason, they feel that the trend is toward liberalism— more and more and more— but I warn you now that we can't continue like we're going. We can't continue to spend more than we take in, and if we do we're going to be a bankrupt nation, and you know what'll happen. We'll end up with a socialist or communist type of government, and the very people who are helping now to take us that way will be the people who will suffer the most. It's difficult to understand the thinking of some of the prominent people in this country and why they don't have the courage to stand up. America's a free nation, and we want to remain free, but to remain free we've got to act with common sense and wisdom and judgment and courage, and I hope we can stoke public opinion along this line to do so.⁴⁴

Other speakers echoed Thurmond's criticisms of the welfare system. For example, Ronald Reagan alluded to the inefficiencies of the California welfare system during his keynote address, noting that prior to his substantial reforms, the system had been riddled with waste and fraud. He noted:

⁴³ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 113, Tape 23

⁴⁴ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 113, Tape 23

We went up and down the state telling the people what we had discovered of what was going on in the area of welfare. One newspaper in San Francisco tested our charges of welfare excesses, and when their reporter came back and reported that he had gotten on welfare four times under four different names in the same office on the same day, the paper joined the crusade.⁴⁵

Welfare Reform

There were also extensive discussions at CPAC about the steps that should be taken to reform the welfare system. Yale Brozen, a conservative economist from the University of Chicago, was invited to speak on the topic. During his comments, Brozen made the argument that the statutory requirements for welfare were too lax and that many people who did not actually need welfare benefits nevertheless qualified to receive them. His recommendation was that requirements be scaled back and made more restrictive so as to reduce the welfare rolls and limit the provision of assistance to only those truly in need. Brozen noted:

There's enough money being handed out in the welfare programs, so that the lower twenty percent of the population could have an income which is double the poverty level, just from the welfare payments, including all of the in-kind payments as well as the cash payments here. The problem is not that not enough money is being provided. We only need half as much money as is being provided to move everybody above the poverty line in that twenty percent, even if they had no income from any source whatsoever. Now of course they do have income from a good many other sources, and with that income from a good many other sources, the lower twenty percent of the population is not in poverty as measured by the Bureau of the Census... It's only the lower seven percent. So, if we concentrated welfare payments on the lower seven percent in need, in that case we have the most richly funded program that anyone could possibly conceive. We could put every one of those families in the lower seven percent above the median income level in the United States— that is \$12,162 per family of four— is the median income level. Every one of the nominally poverty stricken families which are actually there in terms of income from non-governmental, non-welfare sources, could have an income above the median level using present welfare payments. Well, this suggests to me that the kind of reform we need in our welfare program in addition to what's already been discussed here is simply slicing the program in half and concentrating the money where it is really needed and not sprinkling it everywhere to those not in need as well as to those in need.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 113, Tape 28

⁴⁶ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 113, Tape 20

Strom Thurmond suggested a different kind of policy solution. He argued that government jobs programs could be a substitute for the big government welfare system. Interestingly, these ideas conflicted with the ideas expressed by the conservative economists who also spoke at CPAC (see section 2, below, on spending and deficits). Alan Reynolds of the *National Review* was highly critical of what he called "New Deal nostalgia"—the philosophy which suggested that public jobs programs could somehow bring the economy out of recession.⁴⁷ Reynolds' concerns about public jobs programs were, of course, economic. They emphasized the fact that government spending was ultimately still necessary in order to pay extra government employees. In his view, the financing of government jobs programs entailed additional amounts of spending that necessarily drained private capital markets, thereby reducing the number of jobs created in the private sector. Government jobs were thus created at a huge cost to the private sector and, in fact, reduced the number of private sector jobs created.

But these concerns were expressed at a different point during the conference. Thurmond's contrasting views, which emphasized support for jobs programs, were of an entirely different nature. They were not economic but were rather highly moralistic. Thurmond did not address the fact that public jobs programs would require an expansion of the government's payrolls. Thurmond noted,

I want to say that with the unemployment today, instead of just paying out unemployment from which nothing comes back, and people sit down and do nothing, providing jobs doles and handouts, if we've got to do something for this unemployment, why not build more ships, why not build more power dams? We need the power! Why not build more highways? We've got to have more roads eventually. Why not build flood control projects, and why not build other projects of a worthwhile nature, of a permanent nature instead of just taking this money practically putting it down the rat hole and never get anything back again? In 1968, did you know that only 243 ships have been added to the Navy while 710 have been retired, a loss of 467 ships? Did you know that we now have the fewest number of ships in this country since the year 1940? Did you know that we have 69 fewer fighting ships than the Soviet Union? Why waste money when we can give people jobs and provide employment in matters that really count and will help to provide for the safety and security of this nation, instead of just giving handouts and doles, which in turn destroys the very heart and soul of a man.⁴⁸

Welfare and Federalism

In addition to the statutory reduction of welfare benefits, the other primary solution emphasized at CPAC involved targeting and eliminating the waste and fraud in

⁴⁷ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 113, Tape 21

⁴⁸ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 113, Tape 23

the system. Here, as with most of the policy planks in the conservative movement's platform, discussions of reform stressed the utility of decentralizing administrative authority and shifting additional responsibility from the federal level to the state and local level. Reagan's welfare reform effort in California (mentioned earlier) was touted as a prime example of what could be achieved when the states took the lead in welfare reform efforts. Reagan had proven that fraud and waste could effectively be eliminated by the states. Reagan's California welfare director, Robert Carlson, stressed this point at length:

You can see that those states where there has been a positive effort to tighten up and reform their efforts, those are the states where the rolls are going down. In the states where nothing is being done or has been done such as Ohio or Massachusetts, the rolls are still going up... I think that the important thing... is to let your people at the state and local level know that you know that they now have more tools than they ever have before to run a good welfare system and that the old excuse that the federal law or the federal court decisions won't let them clear up the system is no longer valid. You want to effect the kind of change in your state that's been done in other states in the Union... One of the reasons that I'm for keeping government at the local level is because the bigger the organization you have, the more waste you have. We found that the smaller counties in California were doing a much better job of running welfare than the big counties. And I've found nationally that the small and medium sized states are doing a much better job of running their welfare system than the big states... They haven't let themselves get into the mess that the large states let themselves get into... We do have an answer to those people who say that the system is hopeless and you're going to have to federalize it or otherwise it won't succeed.⁴⁹

Woody Jenkins, a state senator from Louisiana who would go on to become a leader in the conservative movement and the Executive Director of the Council for a National Policy in 1981, also emphasized the importance of reform at the state level:

Now the federal government's taken over a lot of welfare, but I'll tell you what. We're never going to have welfare reform anywhere but at the state level, because it's the local district attorneys who have to prosecute people for non-support of children. If the local district attorney does not prosecute people for non-support, then the people who have children will not support their children, and the welfare rolls are going to continue to grow. Unless the state has an effective system that encourages—almost requires—district attorneys to prosecute those absent fathers in particular, then the welfare rolls are never going to get smaller. They're always going

⁴⁹ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 113, Tape 20

to grow larger, because some people would rather live on a handout than work for a living.⁵⁰

Negative vs. Positive Formulations

Although these discussions of welfare reform efforts were prominent features of the coordinative discourse at CPAC, there were still a lingering question as to what would be most effective for mobilizing voters at the mass level. As I have argued, discussions of strategy revolved around the ways that issues important to movement conservatives ought to be condensed and packaged so as to mobilize the latent conservative constituency. On the one hand, as Buckley argued, Reagan's success as a successful reformer meant that he would be able to represent the success and value of conservative policy solutions in a way that would energize voters. On the other hand, there was a question as to whether negative rhetoric emphasizing waste, inefficiencies, and damage associated with the welfare system would be more effective than positive rhetoric emphasizing the necessary reforms.

M. Stanton Evans' touched on this question directly during his remarks. His comments are instructive and are applicable beyond the policy domain of welfare. While they were a source of debate and not everyone agreed with them, they nevertheless represent the ways in which electoral strategy and concerns about communicative discourse were distinguishable from the coordinative discourse at CPAC. Evans noted:

We don't need to invent our answers to the liberally defined problem of poverty or pollution or whatever, we need to break through the tissue of superficialities that liberals have opposed on our policies and talk about the things that matter to us and that matter to the American people. This means, above all, going on the attack. It means constantly criticizing, holding up to objurgation all the things the liberals are doing. Most elections are decided on that basis. They're decided on the basis of somebody's discontent and the ability of a candidate or a party to reach that discontent and to convince the people who share it that your opponent is responsible for it...I think that we do, indeed, need practical linkages by which we can put our program into operation. I'm talking about legislative formulae, policy proposals in the executive branch if we ever have a conservative president, ways in which to move from the condition we are in to the condition we would like to be in... The welfare reform that Bob Carlson who is going to be here speaking has enacted at the national level, things like a youth wage or tax credits: things that can indeed move us from where we are to where we want to be. But I think that those things, although they have some utility in the electoral context, are less important in getting yourself elected than they are in functioning after you are elected. Elections are decided not on technical questions but on visceral

⁵⁰ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 113, Tape 26

questions. They're decided on these root issues of public discontent on the cost of government as it is being conducted today.⁵¹

Evans' call for conservatives to refuse to respond to problems as defined by liberals is particularly important. In these remarks, Evans instructs conservatives to reject liberal problem frames and to instead redefine and reframe problems in their own terms. Specifically, he calls on conservatives to define the "problems" faced by the American people as *consequences* of liberal efforts to transform the economy and the relationship between state and society. This is the same point that was also famously made by Ronald Reagan--- that government is not the solution (as defined in liberal discourses). It is, in fact, "the problem" itself. In Evans view, conservatives had to work to facilitate that shift in public discourse. They didn't need to have well-formulated policy proposals in order to win. They simply needed to encourage a shift in the ways that problems were framed so that liberal "answers" received the blame for matters that were at the center of public discontent.

2. Spending and Deficits

In the discourses at CPAC 1975, liberal social programs, expanded foreign aid, wasteful and inefficient spending, Keynesian economic policies, and efforts by politicians to over-stimulate the economy in order to win elections were blamed for contributing to a dramatic growth of government expenditures and for producing increasingly large amounts of deficit spending and debt.

Increases in expenditures, deficit spending, and debt were, in turn, framed as policy consequences that: 1) necessitated higher taxes, 2) contributed to inflation, 3) required government borrowing that resulted in the depletion of private sector credit markets, and 4) led to declining levels of private sector investment and capital formation.

These policy consequences were, in turn, all framed as outcomes that imposed heavy costs upon the productive sector of the economy and ultimately dampened rates of economic growth. In short, a diverse array of spending policies and inefficiencies associated with big government were blamed for inflicting harm upon the private sector and for leading to a series of outcomes that caused damage to the overall health of the economy.

These arguments laid the foundation for a package of "supply side" policy solutions aimed at freeing business from the burdens thrust upon it by the spending initiatives of big government and at incentivizing private sector investment and capital formation through tax credits. In order to clarify the web of linkages between welfare, Keynesianism, spending, deficits, inflation, recession, taxes, and supply-side policy solutions, it is useful to break down these concepts and to consider the discussions that surrounded each of these issues separately.

The Root Causes of Rising Government Expenditures, Deficits, and Economic Instability

⁵¹ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 113, Tape 19

Social Programs First, it is important to recognize that liberal social and welfare policies (described at length in the section on welfare) received most of the blame the growth of government expenditures, deficits, and debt. Increases in spending were traced back to social programs that originated during the New Deal and Great Society, and criticism of the Nixon and Ford Administration budgets emphasized the acquiescence and failure of these presidents to stem the escalation of trends that had begun years earlier.

Foreign Aid and Wasteful Spending Other policies that received blame for contributing to the escalation of government spending were expanded foreign aid and other wasteful and unnecessary government research. Governor Mel Thomson and Sen. Jesse Helms criticized the provision expanded foreign aid to Red China and to mid-eastern countries that were not strong allies of the United States. Ronald Reagan joked about wasteful government research studies that held no value and produced absurd and obvious conclusions.

Keynesian Philosophy Keynesian economic theories were also blamed for contributing to the mentality that deficit spending during recessions was acceptable and that it could somehow be used to effectively spur economic recovery. As the argument of conservative economists went, excessive spending policies pursued in order to stimulate the economy are ultimately just inflationary, and they do not have lasting benefits. Any modest benefits that increases in spending do have on employment are short term and perfunctory. In the long term, they argued, increases in government spending during a recession or period of unemployment do not encourage true recovery, since all sectors of the economy eventually adjust their behavior to reflect increases in prices. According to Alan Reynolds.

A new burst of inflation will reduce unemployment for a little while and it does so in several ways... by tricking workers and small savers into accepting less real compensation than they think they're getting. They think 5 an hour isn't really going to be 4.25 after inflation, so they take it. The second way is that it reduces the real value of welfare and employment benefits, and that makes you anxious to just take any old job rather than hold out for the best one. This little rip-off of the little guy is called the Phillips Curve, or liberal economics for short.⁵²

What Reynolds termed "New Deal nostalgia" was also a scapegoat for several speakers. As the argument went, the increased spending needed to support an increase in public sector jobs requires corresponding increases in either deficit spending or taxes in order to pay additional employees. The creation of public sector jobs can happen only at the cost of inhibiting private sector capital formation and investment. If public sector jobs are created, there's a good chance that private sector jobs that might have been created will not be. Alan Reynolds noted:

Suppose we tried expanding the government payrolls. What are we going to pay these people with? If the added payroll is financed by increased

⁵² MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 113, Tape 21

borrowing or by increased taxes, that will clearly decrease the employment that would otherwise have been associated with the private uses of those funds. There would be for example less funds available for auto loans and mortgages if you borrowed it, or less after tax income with which to make the payments on a new car or house, if you taxed it away.⁵³

Another argument that was prevalent blamed Keynesian philosophy for the misguided notion that government should try to "fine tune" or stabilize the economy through policies designed to curb subsequent bouts of inflation and recession. The liberal mindset, as conservative economists saw it, was that the economy is inherently unstable in its natural state and that government should intervene in order to stabilize it. Conservative economists saw governmental efforts to intervene and fine tune the economy as an important cause of economic instability rather than a solution. Dr. Norman Turé emphasized these points during his remarks:

Among the things that policymakers ought to unlearn is...[the notion] that the private sector is inherently unstable, if left to its own devices will oscillate extremely between booms and inflation and recession and deflation, and that, therefore, government must lend a stabilizing hand and only government indeed can keep the economy on a steady course. If there is anything that the postwar record of the US economy demonstrates, it is exactly, precisely the opposite. Every period of economic instability since the war ended can be traced directly or just a tad indirectly to the enormous disturbances imposed on the market system by one or another set of governmental actions, primarily the federal sector.⁵⁴

Here, as in Evans' remarks, government was framed as being the source of the problem rather than the solution.

The Political Cycle The re-election incentive of politicians was also blamed for leading to increases in spending and deficits and for destabilizing the economy. The idea here was that politicians have an incentive to stimulate the economy by passing risky, poorly timed spending increases and tax cuts during the period just prior to an election, even when those actions are not appropriate.

The Damage Caused by Spending and Deficits to the Economy

Tax Increases One reason for conservative opposition to high levels of spending was that excess spending necessitates tax increases. Conservative intellectuals argued that increases in taxes—particularly on business—carry negative consequences. As they put it, this is because higher taxes reduce profits and translate into lower rates of private sector saving, investment, and capital formation. This, in turn, results in lower levels of economic growth and recovery than would be possible in a lower tax environment.

⁵³ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 113, Tape 21

⁵⁴ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 113, Tape 21

Deficit Spending Of course, government spending not covered by tax or other revenues is deficit spending. According to the conservative economists who spoke at CPAC 1975, in order to finance deficit spending, government is forced to either: 1) monetize its deficits through the expansion of the money supply; 2) borrow money from the private sector; or 3) pursue a combination of debt monetization plus private sector borrowing. Each of these alternatives carries extremely negative consequences for the productive sector of the economy.

Debt Monetization and Inflation The economists at CPAC strongly criticized the monetization of government debt as a means of deficit financing, arguing that monetization invariably leads to inflation. As they explained to the audience, when the government sells bonds in order to raise funds needed to finance deficit spending, this tends to drive up interest rates. When interest rates rise, the Federal Reserve is invariably pulled into the political cycle. It tends to print money and increase the rate at which buys bonds in order to hold interest rates down. This activity, in turn, increases the money supply and drives up prices, fueling inflation and creating an environment that discourages investment and long-term economic growth.

Government Borrowing and the Depletion of Capital Markets The second course of action for financing deficits— borrowing money from the private sector without monetization— was depicted as no less problematic than the first. As conservative economists explained it, government borrowing dries up credit that would otherwise be available for use in private sector transactions. By soaking up sources of lendable funds, the liberal policies of big government necessarily contribute to a decline in the rate of private sector capital formation and investment. This "crowding out" ultimately inhibits economic growth and recovery. In this vein, Alan Reynolds noted:

Suppose just for a hypothetical case all of the federal spending were financed by borrowing from the private sector. That's the ultimate tax cut. No taxes at all, right? Does anybody think that would stimulate anything? It would drain private capital markets completely. And what is ridiculous in the extreme does not become brilliant by being adopted in part.⁵⁵

Discursive Connections

Putting all of these points together, the inflation and recession that were prominent in the 1970s were therefore depicted as negative implications of liberal, big government policies and the resulting deficits associated with those policies, as well as of misguided, interventionist attempts made by government to stabilize and control the economy. Liberal welfare programs, deficits, inflation, and economic decline were all tightly connected together and were all policy consequences of liberal ideology.

⁵⁵ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 113, Tape 21

Supply Side Policy Solutions

All of these arguments created a basis for the package of supply side economic solutions advocated by conservative economists. Conservative economists rejected and criticized the idea that there was a tradeoff between fighting inflation and fighting unemployment or between fighting inflation and fighting recession. They argued that both could be pursued simultaneously.

The package of conservative policy solutions advanced to solve the problems of inflation and recession were focused primarily upon solutions that would increase investment and promote capital formation. These were framed as the keys to economic growth. Important components of reform included: 1) The implementation of contractionary monetary policies and a return to a monetary rule to limit the discretion of the Federal Reserve to adjust the money supply (monetary restraint); 2) A dramatic reduction in government spending (fiscal restraint); 3) The cutting of corporate and small business taxes, including an increase in the investment tax credit (tax credits for capital investment were framed as being particularly important, since they would have the important effect of directly stimulating the supply side of the economy); 4) The indexing of personal income taxes so as to prevent inflation from pushing individuals into higher tax brackets and forcing them to pay higher rates without increases in real income; and 5) The decontrol of domestic energy resources so as to reduce dependence upon high and destabilizing prices set by foreign suppliers.

During his remarks, Jack Kemp emphasized many of these solutions:

Last year, the federal government borrowed or preempted more than 65 percent of the total available private credit in the USA. To finance that debt, it'll either take a 15-16 percent increase in the money supply or 80 percent preemption of the private credit in this country, and that leads to disaster. It is disaster if it is not immediately reduced. If we do not grab control of that runaway growth of federal deficits, if we don't boost production by finding those capital formation techniques, and I don't know, Alan, after hearing you speak if you came out for a tax cut or not, but I believe one of the most important places where we need to cut taxes is in that area of our economy that will boost productivity. I believe that we need an immediate corporate income tax cut. We need tax reductions for small businesspeople and farmers and small businesswomen too (applause). I think the indexation of personal income tax rates is extremely important, and I'm very much in favor of it, and we're going to be talking about capital formation techniques with Dr. Ture, and thirdly I personally believe that we need to if we can't abolish the ICC and the CAB, we ought to. I think the presidents commission and the Congressional desire to bring reform to the regulatory agencies that at one time were set up to protect competition in fact today are inhibiting competition is one of the most important aspects of this whole fight against inflation. We talk about inflation being too many dollars facing

too few goods, and we tend to come down hard on the side of monetary restraint, which can only come of course after fiscal restraint. Not enough of us including the president are talking about the other side of the equation, which is boosting goods and services and production, and it seems to me that this goes back to my second point— that the only way to boost production, the only way to put people back to work in meaningful jobs— not tax consuming jobs but tax producing jobs— are through the private sector, and that means a permanent investment tax credit, not just a one year rise in the investment tax credit, that's really not going to mean much as far as I can tell, and I'll let you amplify more on that Dr. [Ture], but we need to decontrol of natural gas, we need, I'd like to see the president immediately decontrol domestic crude oil. He doesn't need to wait until April 1 if he wants to make this country independent or move toward independence from Arab oil. We ought to decontrol our domestic energy resources...⁵⁶

Tax Policy, the Individual, and Income Inequality

Finally, conservative economists tended to emphasize the implications of spending for the productive sector of the economy, and their policy solutions were aimed primarily at reducing the tax burden on business. That said, it is important to note that high individual tax rates were also criticized at various moments during the conference. A common argument was that higher tax rates reduce the incentive to work, and tax transfer policies designed to reduce economic inequality are simply inefficient, their primary impact actually being to hurt business and contribute further to the decline in rates of capital formation and investment. According to Norman Turé,

[Another thing] that public policymakers must unlearn is that tax and expenditures, particularly transfer payment policies, are essential to offset an inherent inclination in the economy for the distribution of income to become more and more skewed— that tax transfer policies are needed in order to reduce inequality in the distribution of income. If there's anything that the historical record shows, not merely in the US but in every country in the world, it is that tax transfer policies do not affect the distribution of income or of wealth, a tittle or a jot. What they do do, however, if they are implemented along the lines of most of the western democracies, is to inhibit private capital formation and to keep everybody poorer than he otherwise would have to be.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 113, Tape 21

⁵⁷ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 113, Tape 21

3. Regulation

Opposition to government regulation was also a prominent feature of the discourses at CPAC 1975. Unfortunately, the panel entitled "The Regulated American," which included remarks by Congressman John Rousselot, Congressman Sam Steiger, Yale Brozen, and James Davidson (Executive Director of the National Taxpayers Union), was not recorded, and there are no records of the arguments that were made during that session.

Nevertheless, it is possible to glean from other speeches delivered at the conference some of the main themes that were used to express opposition to regulatory policy. First and foremost, it is clear that regulations on business were opposed because they interfered with free market competition. For example, Don Totten, a state Representative from Illinois, argued that government regulations had interfered with free market competition in Chicago— forcing bus and taxi companies out of business who could not comply with government regulations and preventing competitive pricing by business. Totten noted:

...it was very seldom pointed out that the failures of the free market in transportation in Illinois were not the free market but were the regulations that were put on by the various commissions, the ICC and so on... For example, in Chicago, we have the Chicago Transportation Authority, which is a monopoly. Suburban bus companies were failing continually because they were not allowed to transport or pick up people once they crossed the Chicago city border and take them into the loop. There was a restrictive ordinance that prevented suburban bus companies from surviving, there's restrictions on taxi cab licenses, there's restrictions at the airport since the FAC and CAB have been regulating the airlines, we have not seen a single new airline in this country, and the only thing they can compete on is the movie they show and the number of drinks they serve, and that's not a free market in transportation. The only surviving free market transportation systems in the Chicago areas have been the Jitney cab service on the south side... and that system which surrounds the city which is a toll way which is relatively free and the users pay the charge... and yet we say the free market fails, and it has been the restrictions of government.⁵⁸

Strom Thurmond echoed these same concerns during his comments, noting that government regulations reduced business activity and therefore led to increased levels of unemployment. Like others, he stressed that government was the *problem* and not the *solution*:

If you will remove a lot of shackles away from a lot of organizations in this country, a lot of business, there would be more employment. This

⁵⁸ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 113, Tape 26

OSHA bill which has created a lot of trouble, and some of the railroads only allowed to operate a few hours a day. The way business has been shackled by our government is one of the chief causes of unemployment today. If you turn America free and return the true freedom again, you'll see America like it was several years ago, and you wouldn't have this unemployment.⁵⁹

4. Social Issues

In the realm of social issues, conservative grievances were targeted not at the size but the excessive authority of the federal government. One core theme was that the state used its authority to intervene in the lives of individuals and that it disrupted the traditional moral fabric of society.

Dr. Charles Rice, a Professor of Law at the University of Notre Dame and Catholic scholar, was invited to speak at CPAC. Emphasizing a theme that would become increasingly common in conservative discourse in the years leading up to the 1980 election, Rice referred specifically to the state's "attack on the family." He warned that government efforts to help by promoting "child development" only caused damage. According to Rice:

The family is under attack today. You know that. That's a cliché. Sometimes we overlook the family aspect however of legislation which we oppose on other grounds. The Community Services Act of 1974 included certain promotions of so-called child development. There have been very massive proposals which have not yet been enacted to get the federal government into this business on a large scale. When you analyze this, you must conclude that this is a drastic assault on the prerogative of parents because the family is the primary unit. Parents and children do not exist for the state. Rather the family is the primary society. Child development is one example. The serious proposals for psychological testing, the actual practices of psychological testing of schoolchildren without parental consent provide another example. If you've had anything at all to do with the ludicrous masquerade that goes under the heading of sex education, you know that this involves an interference with the parental prerogative. It involves the intrusion between the parent and the child of the state on the transmission of moral values concerning the most important thing that we can do in terms of family life, and that is to transmit new life. And, it's not the question just of lurid pictures or crazy descriptions. We're not opposed to sex education, but it belongs in the home. It belongs with the parents. It is something that the state ought to keep its hands off. You have to look at this as a family oriented thing.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 113, Tape 23

⁶⁰ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 113, Tape 24

Rice then applied the same frame to the issue of busing. He framed the decision of which school a child would attend as a "family oriented issue." In this context, the state's use of its authority to promote balancing by forcing students to attend certain schools was depicted as direct interference. At the same time, Rice linked this frame of intrusion by government to a secondary frame emphasizing discrimination. Here, Rice emphasized the idea of colorblindness, arguing that even though racial balancing was not rooted in racism, it was nevertheless a kind of discrimination based on racial categories. Rice's emphasis on the theme of colorblindness was reflective of a broader trends in conservative discourse toward an emphasis on race neutrality:

Another of which is very definitely a family oriented issue, but the content of which is so greatly obscured, is racial balancing in the schools. Now, we have a concept in our Constitution which is given lip service by the Supreme Court—colorblindness. But it is ignored, it is disregarded in so many ways, and I could go into this in great detail. But if you look at what is happening in this situation, you see the government arrogating to itself as, for example, in Judge Garrety's orders in Boston, arrogating to itself the capacity to classify pupils on the basis of race and shove them around. Phase two will apply to the entire city of Boston. Shove them around from one school to the other, in such a way that its designed to promote the education of the children as conceived by the state. Now, no state has any right, I submit, to discriminate on the grounds of race in the allocation of any public facility. That ought to be quite clear— that discrimination is wrong whether its discrimination which passes under the heading of benign or whether it is some other kind. And it seems to me that we tend to overlook these aspects of this particular problem. We tend to regard it as solely a question of racist people on one side, and the government on the other side. I think we have to realize that the primary right to educate belongs to the parents. What's the remedy to that? Well, a conservative party— or any party which proposes to offer an alternative— shouldn't tinker around with this thing. I suggest that the solution is to return education to those who have the primary right for it, and the primary responsibility for it, and that is to the parents. Through the medium of a voucher program, or whatever, with appropriate measures made to ensure a practical freedom of choice at the lower economic levels, why can we not restore education where it belongs?⁶¹

Abortion as a Mechanism of Government Control

Opposition to abortion was another important theme in the arena of social issues. As I noted in chapter four, conservative arguments made in opposition to abortion during the mid-1970s tended to highlight and criticize the use by the state of abortion as a means of controlling the population and of encouraging family planning. The frame of abortion

⁶¹ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 113, Tape 24

as a mechanism of control cast abortion as the tool of an activist, interventionist, liberal state. This aligned it neatly with other grievances related to the interference of the state in the affairs of the family. This frame was prevalent in Dr. Charles Rice's comments on abortion. In this vein, he noted:

What we are seeing under the leadership of such as Vice-President Rockefeller, we're seeing the Government moving in- in what to me is a genocidal enterprise to reduce by persuasion or by compulsion if necessary the birth rate of the non-white people, particularly those in the lower economic stratum. Now those who say that this is because they are inferior. We want to maintain our gene pool, but I recall on one occasion A. Rickenbacker, I remember discussing this with him... he said birth control is race suicide, and that's true. And there are others who have taken that position, and we as a nation have been rushing toward the brink of self-destruction, and now we are enlisting the government to coerce, persuade if possible, but coerce if necessary those segments of our society, principally black, that we regard as somehow inferior, to keep them from reproducing. To make them adopt the same contraceptive mentality, and you can't have that without having abortion. And you can't have it really without the attack on the family, and conservatives have to confront this issue because there are economic conservatives that say birth control is the greatest thing since paperclips because it keeps the welfare rolls down, and I think we have to get away from that mentality.⁶²

Significantly, in these comments, Rice notes the existence of contradictions within conservative discourses on the issue of abortion. In fact, as he notes, some economic conservatives supported abortion as a means of reducing the number of poor individuals dependent upon the state. At CPAC, however, these ideas were not represented among those who were called to speak. The conservatives who were invited to speak emphasized moralistic rather than economic arguments. Surely, this is an instance where the "selection factor" I described earlier was at work. In movement settings, social conservatives were given center stage and pro-abortion arguments were not only not represented but were in fact vociferously opposed and repudiated.

It is also important to note Rice's emphasis on birth control. In fact, in other portions of his remarks, Rice also tied the promotion of abortion by the state to the promotion of birth control methods, such as sterilization and contraception. In Rice's view, these were additional areas where the state encouraged immoral actions in order to control the population. At the same time, state support of birth control, immorality, and abortion were all things that encouraged immorality and promiscuity. In essence, because the state subsidized these things and made them readily available, it actually lowered the cost of immoral behavior and encouraged a breakdown of the "family values of virtue and self-control." In other words, through its efforts to make these things

⁶² MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 113, Tape 24

available, the state lowered the costs of immoral behavior by society and therefore indirectly encouraged and facilitated immorality:

You have the phenomena today of government, particularly with welfare recipients, and here's where conservatives have to be very careful, particularly with welfare recipients you have the phenomenon of government actively promoting sterilization and contraception. The concept here is that the government is not concerned about promoting the family values of virtue and self-control. Rather, the government is concerned about preventing the undesirable consequences, and that is children. This is an area where there is a very definite genocidal aspect. We've had problems in New York, let's lay it right on the line: When I was with the Conservative Party, the Conservative Party took a stand unambiguously in favor of a constitutional amendment to prevent abortion. It's the only political party that has ever done so... There was great opposition. The opposition included the so called economic conservative. I don't just mean the libertarian types who call themselves that, but the economic conservative. This is a way to solve the welfare problem. Massive, governmental sponsored, governmentally sponsored birth control, including not only sterilization and contraception, but abortion. And we've got to face that problem if we're going to do anything for this country, e've got to come out unambiguously in favor of life, we've got to recognize that we don't have the right to subsidize immorality. We don't have the right to encourage promiscuity.⁶³

Abortion and the Right to Life

Another theme that was used to rationalize conservative opposition to abortion issue was the "right to life." In short, the very straightforward idea was that the unborn child was a person deserving of constitutional protections. Dr. Mildred Jefferson, a Harvard-trained surgeon and President of the National Right to Life Committee, was invited to speak at CPAC in 1975 and in several other years, as well. During her remarks, she emphasized the "right to life" frame repeatedly. At the same time, she framed Court decisions as creating different classes of citizenship. She argued:

.. in these Supreme Court decisions on abortion, the highest court of our land joins that very strong team of the woman and the doctor against this most defenseless member of our human family, and indeed creates that third class of citizens I referred to, and referred to by Professor Rice, in order to destroy the child, to end its life, necessary to declare a biological being in existence as non-person, only to allow its life to be taken. Following the path of the totalitarian countries, I wouldn't want to count how many people in Siberia ... were declared non-person just to strip

⁶³ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 113, Tape 24

them of their political rights or their lives. And now, the highest court of the United States has again taken us on this route.⁶⁴

According to Jefferson, the Supreme Court had protected only the rights of the woman and her doctor and had stripped the father and the unborn child of any rights whatsoever.

When the highest court of our land handed down decisions on abortion on January 22, 1973, that highest court which should uphold the Constitution of the United States, indeed struck at the very foundations of our Democracy. That high court created a special stratification of citizens, it created three different categories of citizenship for these United States: by granting a woman and a doctor that right of the private death contract, that right of the private death decision, the highest court elevated two members of our society to the rank of super citizens with the private right to kill. And gave to the hand of the physician the almost unlimited right to end a life. For those who have customarily worn trousers, those who are called men or husbands or lovers or other strange names, they were reduced not just to second class citizens, but a class lower than that— sub-citizens with no rights at all, no defined rights in that decision to protect the lives of their children before they are born, and lower courts since then have underlined this loss of rights.⁶⁵

Secularism and the State

In closing, it is interesting to consider Charles Rice's comments regarding a broad series of other social issues, including pornography, homosexuality, and school prayer. It is important to note that the glue that essentially connects this platform together is the belief system of Christianity (perhaps more specifically, Catholicism). The theme that tied these ideas (as strikingly different as they were) into coordinative political discourse was the opposition expressed throughout to the various intrusions and dangers posed by big, activist government. In this case, the damage inflicted by government was on the moral fabric of society. These ideas grew out of a different strand of conservatism—traditionalism. Rice argued:

What do you think pornography is? Pornography is just a manifestation of the separation of sexuality from procreation. Gay lib, the homosexual rights movement, is another manifestation, perhaps the most striking, of the separation of sexuality from procreation. It's an inversion, a perversion, it's contrary to nature, I don't mean just that manifestation, but the entire separation of those two intertwined aspects of sexual activity—that is union and procreation—and our government now especially that

⁶⁴ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 113, Tape 24

⁶⁵ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 113, Tape 24

who else but Nelson is the de facto leader of it? Our government is promoting this concept with a vengeance. If we're going to do anything about it, we've got to confront this issue.... I think this has a consequence with respect to promiscuity among the young. If sex doesn't inherently have anything to do with babies, if you can willfully separate those two as a matter of governmental policy, you don't have to be a Rhodes scholar to conclude that sex doesn't inherently have something to do with marriage, and you don't have to be a Rhodes scholar conclude that it's just as well to indulge outside of marriage. The whole thing hangs together, and it hangs together because frankly it's a Christian view of the family, and if we try to reduce it to an economic thing, or if we try to reduce it to some kind of mechanistic thing, we're going to get messed up. The error is compounded because the Supreme Court in its school prayer decisions has adopted for this country a posture of official governmental agnosticism. As Justice Brennan said in the 1963 school prayer decision, government has to be neutral, as between those, as among those, who believe in God, among those who deny God, and those who don't know whether he exists. Government has to be neutral, but he says this doesn't necessarily mean that the words "Under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance are unconstitutional, and these are his words-- "they may merely mean that this nation was *believed* to have been founded under God." You have to put these things together. We have a government which has cut itself off from the higher law, cut itself off from the acknowledgement that there is a standard of right and wrong higher than the state. We have a generation of school children who are brought up in the public schools never once seeing the official agent of the state acknowledge that there is a standard of right and wrong higher than the state...⁶⁶

5. Anti-Communism and National Defense

On one level, conservative discourse in the arena of anti-communism and national defense took a familiar and consistent form. The conservatives at CPAC expressed strong opposition to the defense policies advocated by *liberals*. In this case, the conservative grievance, so to speak, was that by allowing a scaling down of America's military force and armaments and by acquiescing to the negotiated policies of *détente*, liberal thinking put America at a disadvantage. In short, liberal policies were leading to the decline of America's standing on the world stage and creating a dangerous situation that tipped the balance of power in favor of the Soviet Union. In this vein, Reagan noted:

We seem to be increasingly alone in a world that's grown more hostile. But we've let our defenses shrink to pre-Pearl Harbor Level. And yet we're conscious that in Moscow the crash buildup of armaments continues. The SALT II agreement that we negotiated in Vladivostok, if not

⁶⁶ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 113, Tape 24

renegotiated, guarantees the Soviets a clear missile superiority in the near future sufficient to make a first strike possible with little fear of a reprisal. But too many of our Congressmen today are demanding further cuts in our own defenses including delay if not cancellation of such weapons as the B1 bomber.⁶⁷

Admiral Elmo Zumwalt, the former Chief of Naval Operations, expressed similar concerns:

They [the Soviets]... have developed a fantastic capability. They have four times the number of ships that we have if you count their dangerous small ones with cruise missiles. They have three times the number that we have if you eliminate the smaller ones. As John Fisher suggested, Admiral Moore and I, between us, have destroyed more US Naval vessels than any enemy admiral in history. In the last five years, we have reduced your Navy by 47 percent of its ships, by 24 percent of its aircraft, and 30 percent of its personnel. Why? Notwithstanding the conventional wisdom ... if one looks at the constant dollars eliminating inflation and the grossly accelerated costs of personnel with the elimination of the draft, in purchasing power and constant dollars, your defense budget each year has dropped to a lower level. We're 15 percent below the level of expenditures the year before the war in Southeast Asia. We're 33 percent below the level of expenditures at the height of the war. We're at the smallest fraction of the GNP for defense since 1950. We're at the smallest fraction of the federal budget for defense since 1950. The defense fraction of the federal budget has dropped from 53 to 27 percent. The human resources fraction of the budget has grown from 30 percent to 45 percent.... While the Soviets have increased their manpower from 2.1 to 4 million, your manpower has dropped from 3.6 to 2.1. We've gone exactly the reverse, and your Navy has the smallest number of ships since 1939.⁶⁸

Of course, the conservative answer to these problems involved increasing the size of the defense budget and increasing the size of the national security state. Sen. Strom Thurmond was invited not just to sit on a panel but to provide a keynote address on the subject of US foreign policy. During his extended remarks, Thurmond argued:

We've got to go forward with the trident, B1, more missiles, more rockets... the best way to keep out of war and keep free is to stay strong militarily, and if we do this we can survive as a nation. We can help the free nations of the world to survive, and we can pass on the freedom, and

⁶⁷ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 113, Tape 28

⁶⁸ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 113, Tape 18

if we don't do this we can hide our heads in shame and feel that we never should have lived.⁶⁹

These arguments about the need for a strong defense posture were used to criticize the liberal approach to foreign policy and emphasize the need to pursue peace through strength. Thurmond's comments emphasized this theme, as well:

Now, we hear a lot about detente. It means, I believe to live in peace. That's the effect, so they say. But I think if we're going to have a détente, it ought to apply both ways. Any détente we have with the Soviets or the Chinese is a threat today. Red China has invented the nuclear bomb, but they don't have the means to deliver it. And they're not as aggressive as the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union is the immediate threat to the freedom of the world. Detente is no stronger than the military force to back it up. It means nothing so matter as the Soviet Union is concerned unless we've got the power to back it up. Our foreign affairs will depend on the military strength to back it up. If we've got the military establishment, then we can conduct foreign affairs from a standpoint of strength and not weakness and that's the only language that the dictators know. That's the only language the Kremlin knows, or the rulers in Red China know...⁷⁰

While these views certainly contrasted with the views of liberals, they nevertheless also constituted a potential contradiction to other conservative discourses. In every other policy arena, conservatives stressed the importance of less government spending. In the area of anti-communism and defense, however, they advocated an increase in spending and a corresponding increase in the size of the state itself.

As I noted in the last chapter, this contradiction was resolved in two ways. In fusion conservatism, it was resolved through an emphasis on the theme of freedom. According to fusions, a strong security state was compatible with a small regulatory and welfare state because security was essential in order to secure an environment in which citizens could exercise their freedoms. Secondly, this contradiction was resolved by framing the fight against Communism as a fight against an ideology that advocated for a strong, totalitarian state. In this vein, the fight against communism abroad and around the world was cast as an extension of the fight against big, activist government on the domestic front. Thurmond's comments regarding the need to provide aid to South Vietnam in order to prevent the spread of Communism reinforced all of these ideas:

...the question now is whether we're going to let 17 million people go down the drain, as well as whether we're going to let the whole of southeast Asia go down the drain. It isn't as much a matter of helping the South Vietnamese— which would be a noble cause to help them maintain

⁶⁹ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 113, Tape 23

⁷⁰ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 113, Tape 23

freedom— but is it in our national interest? I think it is. I become more concerned each year about the Communists. I'm just against Communists, out and out wherever they are. It's being said now that we ought to recognize Cuba, that we ought to recognize Red China. I'm against recognizing either one of them, and furthermore if the Soviet Union had not already been recognized, which I think was a mistake, I would oppose recognizing the Soviet Union. One only has to travel in some of the countries where I have travelled— East Berlin, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and other places— to see how people live behind the Iron Curtain, and I tell you that if they could go and see what happens there, how people are depressed, how their freedoms are destroyed, the dignity of the individual is not acknowledged, and where the government makes all choices for people, I think they'd take a different attitude toward helping, to work together with the free world. The people of South Vietnam have chosen to remain in freedom... we told those people we'd give them a gun for a gun, a bullet for a bullet, a tank for a tank, we made a commitment to them. Now are we going to live up to that commitment? I think they can survive... [extended lapse] I believe that it's our duty and responsibility at this period of time in history that we have an obligation to preserve the freedom of this nation and help preserve the free nations of the world. And if not they'll be gobbled up one by one, and then we'll be isolated, and what chance to survive will you have if all the rest of the world has gone communist?⁷¹

Full Circle: The Importance of Ronald Reagan

The tensions in the air at CPAC 1975 posed a very real threat to the stability of the conservative movement. *National Review*, *Human Events*, Young Americans for Freedom, and the American Conservative Union were four of the most important movement organizations of the day. Leaders of all four organizations sat on the COCA, and three of the four formally endorsed the new party option at CPAC. Jesse Helms was a rising star among movement activists, and his openness to the idea added tremendous credibility. Its supporters were dead serious, and, had they proceeded, their efforts would certainly have caused the conservative movement to split into separate factions working within separate parties.

Of course, the conservative movement did not split apart. Reagan himself stepped in and achieved what he alone could. He played the critical role of preventing a split within the conservative movement and of holding activist forces within the Republican Party. In what has since become a famous speech, he made the case that the Republican Party could still be refashioned into an effective vehicle for principled conservatism and that under his leadership, the party could articulate the ideas and planks necessary to effectively mobilize a broadly based mass conservative coalition. It was an effective

⁷¹ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 113, Tape 23

posture precisely because where Reagan went, the conservative movement would also certainly go, and a third party effort not led by Reagan would never leave the ground.

Reagan's remarks to the audience at CPAC are worth quoting at length because they struck a perfect balance. Coming as they did at the end of the CPAC conference, the ideas included in his remarks were no doubt already familiar to conference participants. In fact, what Reagan eloquently articulated was nothing less than the platform of the conservative movement that had been elaborated in a very organic form through the panel discussions at CPAC. He spoke to the hopes, fears, and concerns of those present, reinforcing all of the ideas they had heard repeated over and over again, while also stating his resolve to help conservatives do what they had wanted to do for years— to remake the Republican Party as the party of conservatism in the United States. Reagan exclaimed:

I don't know about you, but I am impatient with those members of the Republican Party who, after the last election, couldn't wait to rush into print saying now that's proof that we must broaden the base for our party, when what they really meant was fuzz it up and blur even more the difference (cheers begin) between (over shouts) the two parties ... (extended cheers, shouts, applause)... Our people look for a cause to believe in. Is a third party the need, or is a new and revitalized second party— raising a banner of no pale pastels, but bold colors which make it unmistakably clear where we stand on all the issues that trouble our people. Let me show you. Let's show them where we stand with that banner on fiscal integrity and sound money. And above all, for the end of deficit spending with ultimately the retirement of the national debt. Let's also on that banner include permanent limit on the percentage of earnings that government can take without the people's consent. Let our banner proclaim a genuine tax reform that will begin by simplifying the income tax so that workers can complete their obligation without having to employ legal help. (applause)... And let that banner provide also a tax reform that would give us indexing, adjusting the brackets to the cost of living so that an increase in salary merely to keep pace with inflation doesn't move the taxpayer into tax bracket increasing the government's share and making him worse off than he was before he got the raise. Let our banner proclaim our belief in a free marketplace as the greatest provider for our people. Let it call for an end to the nitpicking, the harassment, and the overregulation of business and industry that restricts expansion and our ability to compete in the world market. (applause) Let it reply to those political demagogues who appeal to the worst in human nature, telling us that we can have a bigger slice of the pie only if we can help them reduce someone else's slice. Let our banner proclaim we can all have a bigger slice of the pie if the government will get the hell out of the way (shouts begin)... and let the private sector (Reagan's words muffled by screams and applause)... Under our banner there will be compassion for those who need help, but we will not sentence them to a lifetime of hopelessness on the dole. We'll seek to make them self-

sustaining with home in a future in which they can control their own destiny. Let us explore ways to ward off socialism not by creating or increasing government's coercive power but by increasing participation by our people in the ownership of our industrial machine to a greater number than we have so far. Our banner must recognize the responsibility of government to protect the law abiding and to hold those who commit misdeeds personally accountable (applause). And we must make it plain to international adventurers that our love of peace stops short of peace at any price. That we will maintain with whatever level of strength is necessary to preserve our free way of life (applause). A political party cannot be all things to all people. It represents certain fundamental beliefs which must not be compromised for political expediency or to swell its numbers. I do not believe that I have proposed anything here for our banner that is contrary to what has been considered Republican philosophy and principle. It is at the same time the very basis, the heart and soul of conservatism. It is time to reassert those principles, that banner, and to raise it to full view, and if there are those who cannot subscribe to that banner or follow it, then let them go their way. (cheers, applause, shouts of 'We Want Reagan, We Want Reagan').⁷²

⁷² MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 113, Tape 28

CHAPTER 6

1976

If the opinion surveys are to be believed, most Republicans find themselves on the same side of the issues as tens of millions of Democrats and Independents who find little in common with the dominant thinking to be found within the Democratic Party. The fact is that while the Republican Party represents a diminishing political base, it also represents a latent popular majority— one that it has been able to mobilize into victories in two of the three last three presidential elections...¹

James Buckley, CPAC 1977

Expressions of opposition to Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, and Nelson Rockefeller were commonplace within the coordinative discourses at CPAC 1974 and CPAC 1975. At those early conferences, strategic considerations about what conservatives ought to do in order to achieve victory as a coalition revolved to a very great degree around these Republican presidents and vice-presidents and around the significant problems created by their presence in the White House and as leaders of the Republican Party.

In fact, during the era prior to the 1976 election, liberalism as expressed and supported by Republican leaders was a much more significant focal point in conference discourses than was liberalism as expressed and supported by Democrats. In general, the view expressed at CPAC was that by accepting large amounts of deficit spending, by accepting liberal social programs, and by pushing for détente and trade relations with the Communist world, Nixon, Ford, and Rockefeller failed to send the signal that movement conservatives believed was so essential in order to associate the GOP strongly with principled conservatism and attract the votes of detached Democrats and Independents. In fact, these leaders were charged with tarnishing public perceptions of conservatism and of giving the Republican Party a bad reputation by misleadingly associating themselves with the conservative label while failing to deliver true conservative policy solutions. Republican presidents— and especially Nixon— were further blamed for driving the Republican Party in Congress to the left by continually asking Republicans to back their unprincipled policy agendas.

Ford and Rockefeller were also regarded as roadblocks to a successful Reagan candidacy. A principled Republican like Reagan was seen as being essential in order to send the strong signal that was believed to be necessary in order to effectively mobilize the latent conservative majority and usher in the rise of a strong, conservative Republican Party capable of controlling both the executive and legislative branches of government.

The general perception was that while a moderate like Nixon could win the Presidency occasionally, elections would always be “hit or miss” as long as moderate candidates were fielded, and winning would always depend on the selection of far left

¹ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 114, Tape 47

candidates by the Democrats. Also, a moderate candidate was not capable of strongly changing the sour reputation of the Republican Party or of transforming it into an organization that could attract a permanent majority. Nominating a principled candidate was therefore not only important to conservatives from an ideological perspective; it was also instrumentally advantageous. Only a principled candidate could draw large numbers of detached, disaffected voters, win the permanent loyalties of those voters, alter negative public perceptions of the Republican Party, and assemble a lasting electoral coalition capable of carrying Republicans to power in both the White House and Congress.

Another focal point within coalition discourses involved the significant problems posed by unprincipled leaders within the Republican Party's organization and within Congress. The concern expressed at CPAC was that because the party was diverse and because liberals held positions of influence within it, the GOP as a whole often came out in support of moderate/neutral or liberal positions on many issues. Because the party did not identify itself with bold, conservative policy solutions, it was not perceived by the public as representing a clear alternative to the Democratic Party. Voters could not see that the GOP stood for much, and so they saw few reasons to identify with it or support it.

In the discourses at CPAC, fine distinctions were not drawn between Republican Party moderates and liberals. Speakers at CPAC used the label "liberal" broadly and frequently to characterize those in the party who were outside of their coalition. Certain individuals— especially Jacob Javits and Nelson Rockefeller— were singled out frequently as examples of a much larger group that also came to include Nixon and Ford. In conference discourses, there were just two general groups— principled, coalition conservatives on the one hand and then liberals and their unprincipled allies on the other.

During 1974 and 1975, coalition political strategies (as developed and articulated by affiliated elites) were therefore primarily structured by considerations related to countering the roadblocks posed by moderate and liberal Republican leaders and by settling upon effective methods for circumventing the problems posed by intra-party ideological heterogeneity. In this vein, the succession of Ford and Rockefeller in the wake of Nixon's resignation was cited as one justification by new party advocates for breaking away from the Republican Party altogether to form a new political party. As I argued in the last chapter, even though these arguments were a minority view, they reinforced the severity of the problems posed by ideological heterogeneity within the Republican Party's ranks, and they structured discussions of strategy by calling attention to barriers to the expression of conservative ideas.

Changes in Context & the Refocusing of Coalition Discourses

With these trends firmly in mind, it is useful to move forward and take a brief survey of the discourses two years later at CPAC 1977. During his keynote address at that conference, James Buckley would note:

It seems to me that the next few years will offer the Republican Party, its leadership in the Congress and in the Republican National Committee a unique opportunity to reach out to [its target] constituencies with a principled exposition of a distinctly Republican, inherently conservative

point of view...there will be ample opportunity for Republicans cast in the role of the loyal opposition to define how their party would go about addressing the major issues that will be coming before the American people. If they define the Republican position with... target constituencies in mind, there is no reason why they shouldn't be able to break through the semantic barriers that have caused their party to be perceived by too many as the party of privilege and big business.²

As I will show in the subsequent analysis, this quote is reflective of a CPAC conference that had a very different tone than the conference held in 1975. The level of enthusiasm was greater. The new party rhetoric faded to a whisper.

So, what happened? Simply put, the events of the 1976 election season altered context and prompted very significant changes in conservative discourses. During the intervening two years, some of the intra-party barriers to the expression of coalition ideas were removed. In addition, the relationship between the conservative political coalition and the Republican Party changed, as did the representation of conservative ideas with party discourses and party settings. In the wake of the election, conservatives occupied higher ground— from which they sought to control and shape Republican Party positions and to ensure that those positions were conservative. Jimmy Carter's election also produced a new balance of power within the polity in which expressions of conservative *Republican* opposition were likely to become more strongly targeted at liberals within the Democratic Party than they had been in the past.

In order to interpret the discourses at CPAC 1977, it is first essential to summarize the changes in political context that occurred during the election cycle and to consider the impact of these changes on the relationship that existed between the growing modern conservative coalition and the Republican Party. The first significant event came on November 4, 1975. On that date, at Ford's request, Nelson Rockefeller— perhaps the greatest symbol of liberalism within the Republican Party's hierarchy— announced that he would not seek the Republican Party's vice-presidential nomination in 1976. The growing strength of conservatives within the party was an important reason for Ford's decision to ask for Rockefeller's withdrawal, but the decision itself was also a critical step forward because it *removed* a key enemy and focal point of conservative discourses from a position of great influence within government and within the party.

The next key event happened during the Republican Party's nomination contest and party convention. In a primary challenge strongly backed by coalition conservatives, Reagan challenged Ford for the Republican Party's presidential nomination. The race was close, and in the end, Ford triumphed over Reagan at a hotly contested Republican National Convention by a margin of just over 5% of the convention votes.

Reagan may have lost the nomination to Ford, but his campaign had a transformative impact upon the balance and flow of ideas within the Republican Party and upon the relationship between the conservative political coalition and the Republican Party. Thanks in part to Reagan's presence, enthusiasm among coalition conservatives was at a high. Coalition conservatives flooded into the Republican National Convention

² MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 114, Tape 47

(a party setting) in large numbers, exerted a significant degree of control of the platform committee, and helped to draft a much more conservative party platform than had been passed in 1972. During his remarks at CPAC 1977, Patrick Buchanan would note:

The Republican Convention for those of you attended it was quite frankly a conflict between modern conservatives and movement conservatives, with the movement conservatives dominating the platform.³

Reagan's campaign also facilitated a groundswell of involvement by Reagan supporters within state and local Republican Party organizations in states such as Texas and North Carolina.⁴ As a result of the Reagan candidacy, coalition conservatives strengthened their grasp of the party's machinery and found fresh opportunities to cooperate, coordinate, and communicate with each other in meaningful ways *as conservatives* within *party settings*.

Increased participation by coalition conservatives led to changes in the balance and flow of ideas within the party. The new platform was one example. In the wake of the 1976 election, the new platform would galvanize conservatives, and it would become a symbol of the inroads that conservatives had made during the election. Reagan's challenge (as well as participation by a greater influx of conservative Congressional candidates and political activists) also facilitated a fresh infusion of conservative ideas into party discourses. This, in turn, set up a context in which coalition conservatives could more strongly embrace their identity as *Republicans*.

I use the phrase "more strongly embrace" deliberately. I do not mean to suggest that during the years prior to 1976, many coalition leaders and Reagan activists did not identify as Republicans. Many— but not all— of the committed coalition conservatives who were active in the Reagan Campaign in 1976 had been Republicans for years, and some had been active as far back as the Goldwater campaign of 1964. Rather, I mean to suggest that higher levels of participation brought about by the Reagan campaign and the corresponding infusion of conservative ideas into party discourses created a context in which coalition conservatives could make stronger ownership claims of the party and begin working to rebrand and transform it in more aggressive ways. In the wake of the election, there was a new environment in which coalition conservatives could point to the new platform and to the ascendance of conservatives who supported Reagan's campaign. They could assert that principled conservatism was becoming synonymous with *Republicanism* and that outsiders in the party who were not conservatives were worse than misguided— they were out of place. Congressman Robert Bauman's comments at CPAC 1977 are indicative of a broader trend:

This is the party that set the black man free, although you didn't hear it mentioned during Roots... this is the party of the Constitution and of the American Revolution, what have we always stood for us, those who claim to be Republicans. We said that we believe in ordered liberty, limited

³ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 114, Tape 44

⁴ John Buckley, in discussion with the author, November 2014

government, and the rights of man regardless of race, creed, or color... in other words, the ideals of our Founding Fathers. That's what our party was founded upon. Now obviously that doesn't apply to all Republicans today. Some of them don't believe in any of those things. They're quite opposite in their views. Others seem to believe in nothing at all. If it were within my power, I think I'd say to them what William Lloyd Garrison said to the states of the Confederacy as they left the Union— "let our erring sisters go in peace." If they want to go— I'd like to have them stay— but that *have* to cease to be the tail that wags the elephant.⁵

I will return to this narrative and the distortions encapsulated within it later. For the moment, it is useful because it shows that in the transformed context brought about by the election, claims of conservative ownership of the GOP grew from a whisper to an enthusiastic, fevered pitch. Conservatives also actively used the 1976 platform to claim ownership of the party label and express the idea that Republicanism was synonymous with conservatism. During his remarks at CPAC 1977, Congressman Phil Crane would note:

...it's important to recognize that that so called Reagan platform that was drafted at that convention was drafted in spite of the fact that the Ford supporters controlled the platform committee. I think what this indicates is that that was not a Reagan platform that was drafted at the Republican Convention, rather it was a Republican platform, embraced by Ford supporters and Reagan supporters, and to confuse that as the media has endeavored to do is to confuse the electorate again on where we stand, as they attempt to try and suggest that Ronald Reagan somehow is representing some minority fleet within the Republican Party seeking to impose its will on the majority.⁶

Of course, the platform had really been a source of profound tension, but the changes that had been pushed by Reagan forces were a critical piece of ideational capital in the drive to redefine Republicanism as being synonymous with movement conservatism. Ronald Reagan would similarly use the 1976 platform as a reference point for defining the platform of what he envisioned as the "New Republican Party" during his address at CPAC 1977. He was able to define the conservative ideas that had been represented at the convention and injected into the platform as core *Republican* principles:

What will be the basis of this New Republican Party? To what set of values and principles can our candidates appeal? Where can Americans who want to know where we stand look for guidance? Fortunately, we have an answer to that question. That answer was provided last summer by the men and women of the Republican Party – not just the leadership, but

⁵ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 114, Tape 44

⁶ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 114, Tape 44

the ones who have built the party on local levels all across the country. The answer was provided in the 1976 platform of the Republican Party. This was not a document handed down from on high. It was hammered out in free and open debate among all those who care about our party and the principles it stands for. The Republican platform is unique. Unlike any other party platform I have ever seen, it answers not only programmatic questions for the immediate future of the party but also provides a clear outline of the underlying principles upon which those programs are based. The New Republican Party can and should use the Republican platform of 1976 as the major source from which a Declaration of Principles can be created and offered to the American people.⁷

A third critical event happened when Ford ultimately lost to Carter in the general election. As a result of Carter's victory, a second adversary of the emerging coalition was removed. Ford was swept away from his position of party leadership by the tide of history. Reagan may have lost in the primary, but with Ford gone, the top spot would be open in 1980. Some conservative leaders even framed Ford's loss as a *positive* development for the GOP. During his remarks at CPAC 1977, Phil Crane noted:

I remember having a meeting with some of my friends who were urging third party route, and I suggested to them that if their goal, as they had indicated, was to destroy the Republican party as quickly as possible... that probably their efforts should be directed toward guaranteeing that Gerald Ford would be elected rather than defeated.... The fact of the matter is that... with this overwhelming Democrat control and more specifically union control of the Congress of the US, we would have a man who had no deep roots, philosophical roots, occupying the White House— a man who tended in his political career to get along and be amiable— trying to make certain compromises with the Devil, and, in the process, he would be compromising the Phil Cranes out of their House seats just as I think during the Eisenhower years, we saw a 1952 election send a majority of Republicans to Congress dominated by hard charging conservatives who over the span of the Eisenhower years were compromised out of their seats. They were compromised out of their seats... because in the perspective of the average voter, what he saw portrayed out of the White House was something totally different from the positions taken by some good activists in the Senate and the House, good solid conservative Republicans, and so I think having a Republican president and this kind of control of Congress would create a situation where the unperceptive, and that's probably millions of voters in America, identify with the Republican Party with that individual who has the

⁷ Ronald Reagan, "The New Republican Party," (Speech at the 4th Annual CPAC Conference on February 6, 1977), accessed March 13, 2015.
http://reagan2020.us/speeches/The_New_Republican_Party.asp

highest profile in the party, and to the extent that that is a Gerald Ford ... getting a great deal of his input and policy making from the wrong element of the party, or even a Richard Nixon... I think we have been compromised...⁸

Putting these developments together with my discussion of pre-1976 discourses, it is easy to see that the departures of Rockefeller and Ford were important because their exit removed what had been perceived by some to be insurmountable intra-party barriers to the ascendance of conservatives. Their departure left an important leadership vacuum in the GOP as well as a party structure that would prove to be more malleable by conservatives in the years to come. Where intra-party barriers to the expression of conservative ideas had existed at the top of the GOP before the election, there was an opening for conservatives, and there was an opportunity to focus coalition/party discourses upon new enemies and new coalition-building tasks.

Of course, at the Congressional level, the party remained diverse. Coalition conservatives still had to contend with party moderates and liberals in Congress. But once the barriers at the top were removed, the signal sent by members of Congress was—by itself— not as problematic for the coalition-building project or for the re-branding of the GOP as when it had been combined with the strong and confusing signal that had been sent by Nixon, Ford, and Rockefeller.

In the wake of these changes, during the 1976-80 period, the re-branding of the GOP would become a new, key focus in coalition settings. With Rockefeller and Ford gone, conservatives could devote more of their time to discussions of how to constructively re-brand and reorient the party, and they could do so more boldly and enthusiastically without having to devote as much concern to confusing elite signals as they had in the past. During his comments at CPAC 1977, Robert Bauman would note that with Republicans out of power, there was less pressure on members of Congress to support liberal policy initiatives:

We don't know yet if the Republican in the Congress will talk straight, if they'll talk tough to the American people about things such as the Soviet arms buildup is making us a second class power in a world where only the first class survives, but I'm glad to report to you that more of my colleagues on the Republican side of the aisle are now willing to admit that... now that they don't have to worry about offending Henry Kissinger and his several presidential employers.⁹

At CPAC 1977, Patrick Buchanan would emphasize that Republicans should completely disavow the Nixon-Ford years and move forward to become what he called "political warriors of the New Right":

⁸ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 114, Tape 44

⁹ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 114, Tape 44

Let's look at the Ford-Nixon years, which have been talked of recently... It is true that we promised fiscal responsibility and added more to the federal debt than any other administration in peacetime history. It is true that we promised again and again that we'd do something about quotas on campuses and forced busing in public schools, and yet during the eight years of Republican rule, there were more quotas imposed, more busing decisions handed down than any previous years in our political history... So we did many things wrong. We are responsible for over-selling the benefits of détente with the Soviets to the American people. How do we as conservatives handle that? It's a difficult problem that calls to mind the situation some 30-40 years ago. I think back to 1932, when Franklin Roosevelt had gone to Pittsburgh, and he delivered a speech in a campaign against Hoover, when he called Herbert Hoover a profligate Wall Street spender, and he said when we take office, we're going to cut the budget by 25 percent— we're going to have balanced budgets in the Roosevelt years. Mr. Roosevelt got in the White House, and they began to throw that Pittsburgh speech at him, and he called Sam Rosenman, and he said how are we going to handle that Pittsburgh speech on balanced budgets, and Sam came back in after a day's work and said, Mr. President, I think there's only one way to handle that Pittsburgh speech, and that's to deny we were ever in Pittsburgh. So I suggest we deny we were ever in Pittsburgh quite frankly with regard to the previous eight years.¹⁰

Again, these comments were possible precisely because Ford lost. They are reflective of the transformed context brought about by the election and of the potential for conservatives to reshape and redefine the party free from the pressure that had been exerted by Nixon and Ford.

The shift in party control of the executive branch also facilitated a fourth change in context that would also prove beneficial to conservatives. Just as a series of new opportunities emerged to re-brand the GOP— in the form of the leadership vacuum, the upward shift in the locus of cooperation, coordination, and communication by coalition conservatives to the level of party, and the stronger infusion of conservative ideas into the party's platform and policy discourses— there was also a new Democratic president available to become a new focal point for conservative opposition.

At the end of the 1976 election season, there was therefore an entirely new political context in which conservatives had a better foothold in the party and could mount a stronger insurgency to re-brand the GOP while also focusing a greater amount of the opposition to liberalism upon Democrats, upon Carter, and upon the liberal progressive-liberal political coalitions working within and through the Democratic Party. It was a context in which conservatives could work to express and shape *Republican* critiques of the Democratic Party (which had won united control of government), and it was a context in which they could fight to make those critiques strongly reflect the ideas

¹⁰ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 114, Tape 44

and narratives of their political coalition free from interference by a Republican president.

In this vein, during his comments at CPAC 1977, James Buckley would note:

I am intrigued by the suggestion that the Republican National Committee form a shadow cabinet for the purpose of tracking and commenting upon the policies and programs that will be offered by the Carter administration. This would provide the members of such a cabinet with a continuing basis for articulating alternative approaches based upon the 1976 presidential platform, which is the most recent statement of specific Republican principles and positions... I [also] believe the Senate and House Republican Policy Committees should become just that: instruments for the definition of a Republican position on each of the major matters to come before the Congress. I am not suggesting that the positions hammered out in debate and adopted by a majority of the respective caucuses be binding on all their members. Rather I propose that Republicans on each side of Capitol Hill set about defining and adopting specific positions and programs, even if some of their members find they cannot go along with it. Only in this way can Republicans on Capitol Hill develop and present to the nation those constructive alternatives that everyone is urging upon the party. Only in this way can the party, as such, launch its own legislative initiatives and have them so identified in the public mind.¹¹

The outcome of the initiatives proposed by Buckley in these comments is not as important as the general thrust of his words and of what he felt conservatives were poised to achieve. In the new environment, conservatives were energized and were free to actively reshape the Republican Party without having to focus attention and contempt upon the overpowering and conflicting signals of the Ford-Rockefeller White House. Conference discourses were mostly cleansed of the “new party” rhetoric and were increasingly becoming oriented around strategies for transforming the Republican Party into a vehicle for principled conservatism.

The Conservative Majority: Mounting Doubts and Criticisms

Paradoxically, at the same time that these new opportunities emerged, the election also generated a good deal of skepticism about the viability of conservative ideas and strategies. If there was truly a vast, latent conservative majority as conservative leaders claimed, then why did Reagan lose to Ford, and why did Ford lose to Carter? Why had Democrats won united control of not only the presidency but of both Houses of Congress?

John Ashbrook’s introductory remarks at CPAC 1977 are a reminder that these questions were, in fact, swirling around in conservative political discourses of the day:

¹¹ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 114, Tape 47

... the basic question I am asked as I travel the country is, well, if conservatives really are the majority in our country, why is it we do so poorly at election time? Why is it every time we organize the Congress, or in every state legislature, or add up the governors, or add up the elected officials, and somehow or other the liberals have synergism. You know the sum of the parts always is more than what you put into it. For some reason or other they're synergistic, and we seem to not be able to even have simple addition, to add up our numbers that we have into spokesmen and representatives. Obviously we're failing somewhere. If we're a majority in the country, which I think every poll indicates ...¹²

There were skeptics in the broader political arena, as well. William Rusher began his remarks at CPAC 1977 by referring to an article published by Jeane Kirkpatrick in *Commentary* magazine. The article, entitled "Why the New Right Lost," was a six page, frontal assault on the entire conservative majority concept. In the article, Kirkpatrick had identified William Rusher, Ronald Reagan, Patrick Buchanan, and Kevin Phillips as leading proponents of a flawed theory. She described their characterizations of the majority and refuted them point by point, boldly arguing that "New Right" conservative intellectuals were distorting facts and that a series of electoral losses were proof that arguments about the existence of a vast conservative majority were fallacious:

This theory [of the existence of a conservative majority] is mistaken, first, because it is based on an oversimplified conception of ideology in contemporary American politics; second, because it overestimates the electorate's ideological inclinations; and third, because it misunderstands the nature of political organization. Each of these errors helps to explain why the expectations of the New Right intellectuals were disappointed in 1976 and also why their disappointment is probably a chronic condition.¹³

According to Kirkpatrick, the New Right intellectuals erred by tying together the economic, cultural, and foreign policy dimensions in American politics and by lumping voters who took conservative positions on any one of the three dimensions into a single, diverse group. In fact, she argued, "a great many voters support an active role for government in the economic sphere, oppose challenges to the authority of government, distrust the Soviet Union and support a strong defense posture, or adopt some other combination of 'liberal' and 'conservative' positions."¹⁴ In other words, she argued that the conservative majority theory distorted complex realities and created an illusory group by lumping a large number of moderate voters with a variety of complicated and mixed policy views into a single category.

¹² MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 114, Tape 44

¹³ Kirkpatrick, *Why the New Right Lost*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

Kirkpatrick went on to challenge the assertion made by conservatives that articulating bold alternatives (of the type advocated by Reagan at CPAC 1975) was an appropriate strategy for mobilizing and assembling the imagined conservative majority. As evidence, she pointed to the failure of the Goldwater and McGovern candidacies and emphasized that extreme, ideological candidates were historically rejected by American voters.

Those who believe in the conservative majority argue that it can be mobilized for the purposes of electoral victory by a leadership that articulates the ‘basic’ disagreements separating liberals and conservatives... It is an undeniable *fact* that each party has tried the strategy out in the recent past and that the two candidates— Goldwater and McGovern— who provided the desired kind of leadership were overwhelmingly defeated by opponents who advocated and practiced consensus politics... The “moral” of the Goldwater and McGovern debacles is not that the American electorate is neither as “conservative” as Barry Goldwater nor as “liberal” as George McGovern, but that the voters will repudiate candidates who offer a narrowly ideological rhetoric and a divisive appeal.¹⁵

Finally, Kirkpatrick went on to point out that “these theorists seem to believe that organizations can and should be only vehicles for the expression of political ideas.”¹⁶ Of course, this is exactly what conservatives believed and wanted. Indeed, in 1975, debates at CPAC were oriented around selecting an appropriate institutional “vehicle” for their version of principled conservatism. But in Kirkpatrick’s view, this strategy was bound to fail. She argued that:

The ideological perspective in politics...breeds intolerance of diversity, impatience with compromise, and the kind of intransigence characteristic of sectarian, rule-or-ruin politics. Ideological purists encounter persistent and probably insurmountable difficulties in building institutions through which to achieve their political goals, not only because their clearly defined programs cannot attract more than a minority, but also because their inclinations and habits are the opposite of those required to maintain large, inclusive democratic political organizations.¹⁷

Indeed, as an example of the flawed intractability of conservatives, Kirkpatrick cited the fact that movement conservatives refused to support “Republican loyalists like Gerald Ford who share *most* of their conservative views.”¹⁸ In her view, the road to political success was paved through consensus and moderation.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

At the beginning of 1977, then, it is important to note that within the arena of public political discourse, there were strong criticisms of the conservative majority thesis. Even within the evolving political coalition, there was some confusion about what the 1976 election results implied. Criticisms were swirling around that challenged the basic premises of affiliated conservative politicians and intellectuals. Also, there were elites and intellectuals outside of the conservative political coalition who were offering competing visions and alternative strategies for the future and who were advocating for a politics of consensus and moderation.

Of course, as Kirkpatrick rightly noted, this was the exact *opposite* of what the politicians and intellectuals who were associated with the evolving conservative movement believed to be necessary. It was precisely a “rule-or-ruin” perspective that conservative leaders stepped up to advocate in the post-election context as they excoriated Ford and other Republican Party moderates and sought to transform the GOP.

CHAPTER 7

CPAC 1977 & CPAC 1978

...there is...in the case both of the New Right and the New Politics, an imperviousness to empirical disproof. Defeat of their position never demonstrates that the putative hidden majority does not in fact exist; it only proves that the cause was sabotaged by the media and betrayed or at least failed by its leaders. The belief in a hidden majority, indeed, puts an especially heavy burden on leadership, while sustaining partisans in the face of repeated losses and providing a sense of solidarity with "the people."¹

Jeane Kirkpatrick, January 1977

At the close of the 1976 election, the politicians, activist leaders, and intellectuals affiliated with the Old Right-centered political coalition had their proverbial work cut out for them. There was a proliferation of groups who had been mobilized into politics and who were emerging around opposition to modern liberalism, but these forces had to be harnessed, cultivated, and channeled. The Republican Party structure was more malleable, and, as I have argued, this created a series of new opportunities for conservatives to re-define the party in more aggressive ways. However, methods for doing so still had to be worked out and executed. Coalition narratives still had to be refocused and updated with new interpretations to explain the tide of events, to quell mounting confusion and skepticism about the causes and implications of defeat, and to dispel alternative strategies supported by some Republicans that advocated for a politics of consensus and moderation. Moreover, the path forward for the coalition had to be not only worked out by leaders but also communicated to coalition activists.

In this chapter, I argue that in the wake of the shifts in the political landscape brought about by the events of the 1976 election, politicians and activist intellectuals stepped up to take advantage of changes in context and to provide just this type of critical guidance and leadership. Just as they had in years past, the leaders who organized and spoke at CPAC 1977 and 1978 helped to interpret, explain, and frame changes in ideological and political context in ways that reinforced a sense of coalition identity, and they helped to recommend political strategies based upon their interpretations of context that were designed to enable the coalition to advance its ideas and its policy agenda through the party system.

Updating the Conservative Majority Thesis

Following the 1976 election, conservative leaders went to great lengths to update and reinforce the validity of the conservative majority thesis. As I argued in the last chapter, the thesis that the electorate was conservative was called into question by some

¹ Kirkpatrick, *Why the New Right Lost*

after the 1976 election. There were obvious reasons for doubt. Reagan had lost. Carter had won. Democrats continued to control both Houses of Congress by extremely wide margins. To the casual observer, the public certainly seemed at the very least to be moderate to somewhat liberal in its outlook. In turn, this also seemed to suggest that there was a degree of prudence to be found in a politics of moderation by the Republicans. The argument that there was no conservative majority was reinforced by opponents of conservatives, who characterized both Ronald Reagan and the conservative movement as a small minority seeking to capture control of the Republican Party.

From the standpoint of Ashbrook, Rusher, Buchanan, Reagan, and others, however, the characterization of the electorate as consisting of a conservative majority was important. The conservative majority theory was really a characterization of the electorate— one that lived within and structured coordinative discourses of the conservative movement throughout the 1970s. The idea that the public was basically conservative served as an important foundation for interpretations of political developments, for the elaboration of coalition narratives about the course of events, and for the formulation of strategies by conservative politicians. It also helped to justify and rationalize the entire conservative coalition-building project. After all, conservatives were fighting a noble fight. According to the theory, they were not a small minority at all— they were aligned with and were speaking for an unorganized majority of the American people.

During his remarks at CPAC 1977, Ronald Reagan called on those present to reject the characterizations that cast conservatives as a minority and that denied the conservative nature of the electorate. He noted:

Let us lay to rest, once and for all, the myth of a small group of ideological purists trying to capture a majority. Replace it with the reality of a majority trying to assert its rights against the tyranny of powerful academics, fashionable left-revolutionaries, some economic illiterates who happen to hold elective office and the social engineers who dominate the dialogue and set the format in political and social affairs. If there is any ideological fanaticism in American political life, it is to be found among the enemies of freedom on the left or right – those who would sacrifice principle to theory, those who worship only the god of political, social and economic abstractions, ignoring the realities of everyday life. They are not conservatives. Our first job is to get this message across to those who share most of our principles. If we allow ourselves to be portrayed as ideological shock troops without correcting this error, we are doing ourselves and our cause a disservice. Wherever and whenever we can, we should gently but firmly correct our political and media friends who have been perpetuating the myth of conservatism as a narrow ideology.²

In these comments, it is possible to see exactly what Kirkpatrick meant when she noted that the belief in a hidden majority contributes to a sense of solidarity with "the

² Reagan, New Republican Party

people.” Reagan’s picture of a majority trying to assert its rights against a minority conflates the principles of conservative politicians and activists with the views of a vast majority of voters who, as Kirkpatrick noted, have diverse, conflicting, and, in many policy areas, no developed views whatsoever about the proper role of government relative to society.³ Kirkpatrick argued from a realist perspective—and correctly, in my view—that the notion of a conservative majority oversimplified the complex nature of public attitudes toward public policy and that it also overestimated voters’ levels of political and philosophical awareness and sophistication.

That said, I am not concerned with identifying all of the contradictions and distortions that were inherent within coalition discourses. Instead, I am primarily interested in identifying the interpretations, narratives, and characterizations that were repeated in coalition settings and in understanding how these elements of discourse brought conservative activists together, structured their thinking, and shaped their behavior and sense of identity as a coalition.

For the purposes of my analysis, it is of little consequence whether Reagan or Kirkpatrick was correct. What is important is that conservatives repeatedly stated that they represented and were speaking for a majority of the electorate and that they put this idea to work and used it as a basis for understanding their work as a coalition and for formulating coalition strategies.

Another important factor concerns the way that events actually unfolded relative to what the conservative majority theory suggested would happen. At any point in time, the beliefs of conservatives did, albeit vaguely, anticipate that politics would unfold in a particular way. For instance, they believed that a Reagan candidacy would be successful. When Republicans lost severely in the 1974 election, when Reagan lost to Ford in 1976, and when Ford lost to Carter, these events required leaders to amend narratives and strategies in order to explain how these events were consistent with past narratives and interpretations. Through flexible logic, they were able to effectively rationalize these adverse outcomes. However, it must be noted that this process of rationalization *changed* the discourse and thus disciplined it as leaders amended and extended existing narratives, even though it did not overturn basic assumptions. I would argue that this is a pattern that always holds true, not just in the conservative case but for all political coalitions. History a primary driver of discursive change. As history unfolds, it forces leaders to amend discourse and refine elements of it in order to accommodate new realities. When events happen that contradict existing predictions, this requires public intellectuals, politicians, and other thought leaders to go to work in order to explain events and preserve core ideas and assumptions.

For example, while speaking at CPAC, William Rusher aggressively defended the conservative thesis, and, in doing so, he addressed Jeane Kirkpatrick’s criticisms directly. Rusher noted:

Among many... mistakes that Dr. Kirkpatrick makes, is to announce that it is a myth, she describes it as a familiar myth, that there is a conservative majority in the United States. She cites various things that lead her to

³ Converse, *Nature of Belief Systems*

suppose there isn't one, and that comfort her in that reflection, and the first point I want to make to you is that I very definitely think that... providing we are not talking about a highly ideologized, narrowly construed conservative majority, but a broad, general agreement on large principles—provided that is what we understand by conservatism in this context—then I do think there is and has been probably for at least fifteen years a conservative majority in the United States. That is not the same thing by a longshot as saying that it has been effectively mobilized or that it has been politically successful, or that over that period of time it has run the United States. It hasn't. I merely said that there has been— inchoate, so to speak— embryonic, but there— a conservative majority. I think it was there, I said fifteen years, I think it was there in one of the years that Dr. Kirkpatrick cites as evidence of its nonexistence— 1964. Because I think that *only* a Lyndon Johnson, from Texas, representing as he did on the 1960 Democratic ticket the conservative wing of the party, *could* have confronted and defeated Barry Goldwater as Goldwater was defeated in that year. But the conservative majority, as so often in this country was divided, with part of it behind Goldwater and a very important part of it behind Johnson in that election. I think the majority was there in 1968, and again, I think it was split, with a very large part of it behind Nixon and very nearly ten million people behind it in the Wallace camp, although in certain cases in the Wallace Camp I would not argue that they were all conservatives, but I do think the majority of the Wallace Camp in 1968— a majority of those ten million votes were basically, in the sense in which I have used the word, broadly conservative. But the majority, again, was a split majority. I think the majority was still there in 1972, and this time it *did* register itself, ironically in the one election of the law in which the Republican Party had the least cause to expect conservative support. Richard Nixon after four years in office had imposed wage and price controls, had backed the Family Assistance Program that would put millions more Americans permanently on welfare, had invoked détente with Red China, had invoked détente with the Soviet Union, had started the SALT talks. But still, as against the candidate that the Democratic Party was kind enough to give us that year, he got the unified support of the American conservative majority and won with 49 of the 50 states. I think the majority is still there, and I think it was there again in 1976, although more familiarly split. Because now the politicians themselves had begun to feel the presence of the change of opinion in the country, and the Democratic Party moved accordingly in response and picked a man who, in the Democratic context, most definitely was not on its liberal side, and who *repatriated them* from the great Nixon majority of 1972— a large number of the so-called social conservatives, the southerners particularly, and specifically the Protestant and still more specifically Baptist vote in the southern United States— to the Democratic Party, so that again the majority was seriously split. And it may, as I will remark at the end,

remain split. But I don't think it needs to, and it certainly is none of our business to see to it that it does. Our business is to put it, if we can, together. I think we can, and I think we should...⁴

Explanations for Conservative Losses in 1976

One issue addressed at CPAC concerned the reason why conservatives had lost the election to Carter and the Democrats if the electorate was, as they asserted, basically conservative. The most commonly recited explanation for the paradox of Republican losses in 1976 can be found at the end of the narrative offered by Rusher. It was that liberals had won the election because they *recognized* the conservative trend in public opinion, and they pivoted to the right in response. The assertion was that Carter had been deliberately selected and backed by the liberal Democratic establishment because he demonstrated a potential to appeal to conservative constituencies in the South and to effectively pry them back away from the Republican Party. In the words of Jesse Helms:

The bottom line of 1976 was that it was a year of conservative campaigning. Even the Democratic nominee— a promising politician who promised everything— talked of balancing the federal budget, and deregulating our energy resources, and restraining big government, and the importance of the family as the basic unit of our society— not the federal government... he campaigned as a conservative, and he won because millions of Americans believed that he was.⁵

Indeed, the notion that Carter had run as a conservative and had captured the support of the conservative majority neatly vindicated and reinforced the conservative majority thesis and all of its corollaries. As the argument went, the country was becoming so conservative that even the Democratic Party was encouraged to abandon its liberal principles in order to ride the conservative wave in public opinion and harness it in order to win. Sen. James Buckley also linked Carter's victory and Democratic victories to the use of conservative, values-oriented rhetoric and to Carter's ability to appeal to conservative voters in language that they understood and appreciated. Buckley noted:

It is... ironic in the extreme that [the American people] elected to the presidency and to the majorities in the Senate and House last year, men and women who represent the very philosophy that is falling into disrepute among free people everywhere in the world... part of the blame, I fear, rests with us... Last year, we saw a Democratic presidential primary campaign succeed because the candidate stirred his audiences by speaking

⁴ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 114, Tape 44

⁵ Jesse Helms, "Address by Jesse Helms at the Conservative Political Action Conference," March 17, 1978. Courtesy the Jesse Helms Center Archives.

over and over again such words as decency, honesty, compassion, faith, morality, values, and love.⁶

During his remarks at CPAC, Rusher also commented on the significance of Carter's conservative rhetoric. In Rusher's view, Carter's rhetorical appeals were guided by the conservative environment in which he was operating. By positioning himself as a strong supporter of conservative initiatives, Carter was practicing "very sound politics." In Rusher's words:

I think that the concept of big government as a *bad thing* has come into its own in the last three or four years in this country, very much in the way we have been talking about it for forty years. I think the liberals have... retreated... So, now it is a very nearly common ground among the American people. President Carter knows this with all of his symbolic efforts to reduce White House staff, to project a more modest image. This is very sound politics because it is majority American belief, a very large majority, I think.⁷

Conservatism in the Democratic Party as a form of Deception

Inherent within both Buckley and Rusher's remarks is a general argument that Carter's appeals were manipulative, symbolic, and primarily rhetorical rather than substantive and deeply felt. In the discourses at CPAC, Carter's conservative rhetoric, as well as the moderate-conservative positions taken by the Democratic Party during the 1976 election, were pegged as forms of *deception* rather than as evidence of a true faith in conservative principles. When explaining the reasons for conservative losses in 1976, John Ashbrook noted:

I think you have to make the first postulate the absolute hypocrisy and the just outright deception of the liberal leaders in this country... in election after election, the liberals, rather than standing on principle, like putty apply their principles to what seems to be popular at the time... 1974 ... most liberals in our country ran against inflation. They had created inflation. 1976? They ran against big government— they who created big government. So there is a degree of deception on the other side which has been a significant part of our loss.⁸

While speaking at CPAC 1977, Orrin Hatch noted that Carter used conservative rhetoric and claimed to stand for many conservative ideas and values while also supporting liberal policy initiatives that defied that rhetoric. He noted:

⁶ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 114, Tape 47

⁷ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 114, Tape 44

⁸ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 114, Tape 44

It concerns me that the promises to the people in this country made by the Carter administration seem, to me, to be contradictory. On the one hand, President Carter promises that he will "fight" to keep excessive government spending under control, and thus relieve the taxes imposed by the Washington establishment. Yet Mr. Carter proposes to support and sign a national health care insurance bill ... He promises support for the Humphrey Hawkins bill which will cost us 20-40 billion dollars a year because it will make the government the employer of last resort, at a cost of great sacrifice to the free enterprise system. It will also provide for a centrally planned economy that will determine what type of raw materials we get in what section of the country at what time... things that hardly sound like conservative talk. I might mention that he's promised to federalize the welfare system. If he can balance the budget as he says by 1980, I don't think we have to look for the second coming of the savior anymore, he'll be here in the form of Jimmy Carter... He can't deliver on the promises that he has made.⁹

Blaming Ford and GOP Moderates for Carter's Victory

Nevertheless, even though his promises were characterized as inflated and contradictory, Carter succeeded in preempting the Republican Party and harnessing conservative trends by working through the Democratic Party. Why were Carter and the Democrats able to preempt the high ground that, according to Buckley, Reagan, Rusher, and others belonged to conservative Republicans? Why were Carter's symbolic efforts and weak rhetorical appeals to middle class values relatively effective?

In the discourses at CPAC, it was Gerald Ford and the moderate-liberal Republican Party factions aligned with him who were blamed for allowing Carter and the Democrats to succeed in their efforts to capture the support of the conservative majority. According to conservative leaders, Ford did not advocate for the conservative ideas and policy solutions that had been written into the 1976 platform. He did not follow the bold colors strategy advocated by Reagan and conservative leaders. Indeed, he could not do so because he was not a true conservative. Instead, he embraced a politics of moderation.

As a result of Ford's moderation, Carter was able to position himself as the more conservative of the two candidates on the ballot in 1976. Conservative voters selected the most conservative option available to them—the candidate who spoke in language that they understood and wished to hear. That was Carter, and so he won the election. In this vein, Helms noted:

Thanks to the dedication and hard work of hundreds of Republican delegates, the Republican Party produced a noble platform [in 1976] that was much more specific, much more forthright, than any other party

⁹ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 114, Tape 50

platform in recent memory ...If our party's nominee had stuck to the platform, he very well might be the President of the United States...¹⁰

Of course, even with Ford as the candidate, the presidential race had been close. The fact that it was a close race was not, however, cast a result of Ford's personal appeal. According to the leaders who spoke at CPAC, Ford's levels of support fluctuated based upon the extent to which Carter was perceived as a conservative and upon the extent to which voters came to identify the Republican Party with the ideas and positions articulated by Ronald Reagan during the party's primary campaign. Speaking at CPAC 1977, Pat Buchanan explained:

Jimmy Carter ran his strongest in the primaries with 52 percent of the voters saying he was as conservative as or more conservative than Mr. Ford. In the Fall election, Jimmy Carter's collapse, which was the worst collapse of any candidate in political history, with the loss of 30 points between August and November, came about because as the pollster Ankilovich and others have said, Jimmy Carter suddenly began to be perceived as a traditional big spending liberal... So I think it's that perception of Carter as a liberal that enabled the Republican party to do as well as we did.¹¹

Here, Carter and the Democratic Party are depicted as the primary force shaping the outcome of the election. Ford is depicted as being little more than a shallow, content-free alternative to Carter. His levels of support are depicted as fluctuating based not upon his own personal appeal or upon the appeal of his ideas and policies but rather as a byproduct of fluctuations in public perceptions of Jimmy Carter as a conservative.

It is important to note that this is also consistent with the characterization of Ford inherent within Rusher's remarks (quoted above). In Rusher's narrative, the GOP is treated as a passive and almost powerless participant in the electoral process throughout the 1960s and 1970s. In each successive election, the GOP's electoral fortunes are framed by Rusher as being highly dependent upon the behavior of the Democratic Party. In this vein, Rusher ties the success of the Republican Party in 1972 not to the appeal of Nixon's message or of Nixon's record but rather to the selection of an unviable, liberal candidate by the Democrats—George McGovern. In 1976, Rusher describes Jimmy Carter as winning the election because he ran as a conservative and because he was therefore able to mobilize the conservative majority. For Rusher, the weakness of the GOP was due to its poor reputation among conservative voters. This, in turn, was mostly tied to its reputation as the party of big business. Because of this reputation, the party as an institution was not a particularly effective vehicle for attracting votes from the middle class, and it tended to win the presidency under circumstances when Democrats nominated unviable far-left candidates

¹⁰ Jesse Helms, "Keynote Address of Senator Jesse Helms to the Conservative Political Action Conference," February 3, 1977. Courtesy the Jesse Helms Center Archives.

¹¹ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 114, Tape 44

Optimism in the Wake of Defeat

That said, by 1977, Rusher was a lone wolf, and many of the leaders who spoke at CPAC 1977 openly disagreed with him. Ronald Reagan, Phil Crane, James Buckley, and Pat Buchanan all openly noted during their remarks at CPAC that that the GOP was the vehicle that conservatives should work within and through. Not a single leader stepped up to support Rusher's contention that there should be a new party. Even Jesse Helms, who had entertained the idea in 1975 and who had led an exploratory effort aimed at founding a new party, displayed a fresh sense of optimism about the prospects for winning in 1980. At CPAC 1977, Reagan emphasized to the audience:

I have to say I cannot agree with some of my friends – perhaps including some of you here tonight – who have [said that] this nation needs a new political party...Rather than a third party, we can have a new first party made up of people who share our principles.¹²

James Buckley noted:

Whatever its past flaws and problems, the Republican Party represents the instrument by which the necessary political realignment of this country can be achieved, and a new sense of direction and purpose articulated.¹³

The resolve to work through the GOP grew, in part, out of a perception that if Reagan had been the GOP nominee instead of Ford in 1976, Carter's weak appeals would never have worked. Voters would have seen the Republican Party as offering a principled conservative alternative, and the party would have won the election. The perception was that conservative trend in public opinion was as strong, if not stronger, in 1977 than it had been before the 1976 election. The potential for Republicans to harness the trend toward conservatism had not been realized because, as I noted earlier, Carter came to be perceived as more conservative than Ford. By extension, the feeling was that conservative Republicans could still win in 1980 by fielding a true conservative like Reagan and by providing voters with a philosophically principled alternative to the politically motivated, contradictory, and unprincipled conservative rhetoric offered by the Democrats.

In this vein, Phil Crane's remarks at CPAC reinforced the passive characterization of Ford that I noted earlier, but they also indicated that Reagan's involvement in 1976 had a positive effect and suggested even more potential for the future. In Crane's view, it was Ronald Reagan– not Ford– who was primarily responsible for the fact that 1976 was a reasonably close race. His contention was that Reagan's bold articulation of conservative principles during the primary election campaign had significantly improved the image of the GOP and had helped to increase perceptions of the party as relatively

¹² Reagan, New Republican Party

¹³ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 114, Tape 47

conservative. Reagan's involvement had led some voters to support Ford and the Republicans who would not have done so otherwise. Crane explained:

I think another encouraging note is the fact that while the polls indicate only 18-20 percent of the electorate will define itself as Republican today, it is obvious that Republican candidates can draw heavily from Independents and Democrats alike, and even, perhaps in one of the most inept presidential campaigns waged in many a year and even with a candidate who I think, as Gerring Moose said, is the singularly most inarticulate man to run for the office, we still got 48 percent of the vote. So, with all of those handicaps, I think it is a tribute to the public's growing awareness that the Republican Party does have some basic fundamental principles and principles that the average voter can embrace, and I think that came about as a result of the Reagan campaign. The Reagan campaign was what finally began to dramatize some of these points to the American voter, and even though Reagan lost that nomination, they said, "well, if Reagan's there, and he's in that party, then there has to be a residue of support for those principles..."¹⁴

Jesse Helms carried this line of thinking one step further. During his address at CPAC, Helms stated outright that if Reagan had been the nominee in 1976, the Republicans would have won the election. Moreover, under Reagan's leadership, Republicans could certainly win in 1980. Helms stressed to the audience:

We all know how close Ronald Reagan came to winning the nomination. We all know how closely Ronald Reagan was identified with the platform. It is very interesting, therefore, to look at the results of the CBS-New York Times Poll taken on election day among voters who had just voted...in three sections of the country, more people who had just voted said they would rather have voted for Reagan than for Ford; and, in the fourth section, the number was equal...It is especially interesting to note that the CBS poll showed that among Independents, 51 percent said they had voted for Ford, while 53 percent said they would like to have voted for Reagan. Among southern Independents, 53 percent said they had voted for Ford, but 63 percent said they would like to have voted for Reagan. Among Democrats, 20 percent said they had voted for Ford, but 25 percent said they would have voted for Reagan against Carter. Now, where are all those professional party spokesmen who kept telling us that the principles of the Republican platform and of Ronald Reagan represented a narrow base among Americans? Every one of these poll results shows that Governor Reagan had a greater following...even without campaigning. Does this not tell us how to "broaden the base of the Republican Party?" Just supposing that Governor Reagan had been the candidate, and that he

¹⁴ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 114, Tape 44

had been on radio or TV day after day, night after night, with his great talent for communicating on the issues— what would have been the result? I think I know. I think you know. Certainly it is the clearest possible message that the Republican Party has the opportunity right now to reach out to the American people, to broaden its ranks, and to win over those Independents and Democrats who are already disposed to our principles by making Ronald Reagan its preeminent spokesman on the crucial issues facing this country today....for no one can any longer doubt that the mood of the American people is turning on key issues...¹⁵

Here, it is possible to see Helms' remarks as yet another response to skeptics— as a vindication of the conservative majority thesis and as a reaffirmation of coalition political strategies calling for the type of “rule-or-ruin” politics so strongly denounced by Kirkpatrick. In the discourses at CPAC, the middle of the road strategy that Kirkpatrick advocated and that Ford ostensibly embraced was cast as the very reason why Ford lost to Carter.

In this context, the race to win in 1980 would be a race to appear as the most conservative party on the ballot. Only by nominating a true, principled conservative like Reagan could the Republican Party fully position itself as a party of conservatism and put a stop to the Democratic Party's ability to harness conservative impulses arising within the polity.

This is precisely why Ford and Rockefeller's departure so strongly galvanized conservatives— even in the midst of significant defeat. With Ford and Rockefeller gone, there was suddenly an opening to mobilize behind Reagan or another conservative, to take possession of the Republican Party, to reaffirm the new platform that had been drafted with the support of Reagan delegates in 1976, and to reposition the GOP so as to offer a philosophically principled and more conservative alternative to the appeals offered to voters by Carter and the Democrats.

Transforming the GOP: Appealing to Social Conservatives

At CPAC 1977 and 1978, leaders also stepped up to define key conservative swing constituencies with greater precision, characterize the specific values and concerns of those constituencies, and delineate the steps that would be necessary in order to reach them and bring them into the GOP. This process involved more than stating the specific rhetoric, language, and policy positions that seemed likely to appeal to target conservative constituencies. It also involved identifying the ideas and elements within the Republican Party that repelled them and that needed to be altered in order to make the GOP seem more hospitable to them. In this vein, CPAC became a forum for discussions of the rhetorical strategies and language that would be necessary to appeal to and mobilize a winning coalition of voters.

¹⁵ Jesse Helms, “Keynote Address of Senator Jesse Helms to the Conservative Political Action Conference,” February 3, 1977. Courtesy the Jesse Helms Center Archives.

Analyses of the nature of Carter's successes and conservative rhetoric— especially the reasons for his sweeping victories in the South— were integral to this evaluative process. Carter's victories and the nature of his appeal helped to bring greater awareness to the importance of religious voters and the impact that religious rhetoric emphasizing traditional values could potentially have for Republicans.

During his remarks at CPAC 1977, Reagan called for the merging of social and economic conservatives under the auspices of what he called the New Republican Party. Reagan told the audience:

You know, as I do, that most commentators make a distinction between [what] they call "social" conservatism and "economic" conservatism. The so-called social issues – law and order, abortion, busing, quota systems – are usually associated with blue-collar, ethnic and religious groups themselves traditionally associated with the Democratic Party. The economic issues – inflation, deficit spending and big government – are usually associated with Republican Party members and independents who concentrate their attention on economic matters....In fact, the time has come to see if it is possible to present a program of action based on political principle that can attract those interested in the so-called "social" issues and those interested in "economic" issues. In short, isn't it possible to combine the two major segments of contemporary American conservatism into one politically effective whole? I believe the answer is: Yes, it is possible to create a political entity that will reflect the views of the great, hitherto [unacknowledged], conservative majority...¹⁶

Again, Carter's campaign had helped to raise awareness of the language that was effective for mobilizing social conservatives and for assembling such a coalition. During his comments at CPAC 1977, James Buckley made specific references to Carter's campaign rhetoric and recommended that conservatives learn from it. His comments may be seen as recommending a rhetorical approach for reaching out to middle class, socially conservative and predominantly religious *voters* and for assembling the kind of mass party coalition described by Reagan. Buckley explained:

Last year, we saw a Democratic presidential primary campaign succeed because the candidate stirred his audiences by speaking *over and over again* such words as decency, honesty, compassion, faith, morality, values, and love. Now for those of us who were brought up to prize reticence in ourselves and others as a virtue, it is not easy to utter those words from a political platform. But we live in a period in which those words are what millions of Americans are yearning to hear. For what those words connote is something larger than mere politics and economics. They connote nothing less than that total system of beliefs and values that we call the Judeo-Christian tradition— the system which

¹⁶ Reagan, New Republican Party

structures our society and orders our lives and gave us political freedom. We, too, should be using those words, for the beliefs and values they represent are central to every conservative thought and principle. We must not allow our political opponents to preempt that high ground which by very definition belongs to conservatives. But it is we who must demonstrate that it is we who belong on that ground. Morality, decency, honesty, values: define these terms and you have defined the philosophy which we call conservatism. Compassion, love, caring. Here again, we are discussing essentially conservative concepts. Each of our principles grows out of an absolute and unshakeable belief in the primacy of the individual and the primacy of the liberty in the social, political, and economic life of America... what could be more compassionate, or loving, or caring than to attempt to help every American become self-reliant and by so doing to ensure him of a dignified, respectable, and rewarding life?.. There are those who accuse us conservatives of making a god out of economics to the exclusion of concern for human beings. We must let them know once again therefore that our concern for economics is concern for individual human beings—precisely that!¹⁷

It is important to note that at the end of these remarks, Buckley alludes to a prominent liberal characterization of conservatives as uncaring. He responds to this characterization directly and stresses that conservatives do, in fact, care. These irresolvable differences rest on the fact that conservatives and liberals frame problems differently and therefore arrive at very different solutions. Liberals frame inequality and poverty as a problem that demands government-funded welfare solutions; conservatives frame the problem to be solved as dependency on government and a decline in the values of hard work and self-reliance brought about by years of social welfare programs. For Democrats, government assistance is the solution. For Buckley, it is the problem. The struggle between the two sides—and the struggle to which Buckley is addressing his remarks--- is a competition over which frame will be accepted by the voting public. In these remarks, Buckley calls on conservatives to combat the liberal definition of the problem and to reinforce the conservative definition of the problem. He stresses that they must do so by packaging *their position* with the same value-oriented words and rhetoric that was used effectively by Carter and the Democrats.

It is also important to note that the remarks by Reagan and Buckley cited above are primarily focused upon the strategies for assembling a winning coalition of voters—not political activists. As is evident in Buckley's remarks, strategies for mobilizing voters involved the incorporation of language that would resonate with basic value systems and that would explain how conservative policies would be more effective than liberal policies for producing an environment in which individuals' basic needs would be met.

As I have argued extensively, the important process of clarification at the ideological-discursive level that was necessary to fuse the Old and New Right *political*

¹⁷ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 114, Tape 47

coalitions together was something different. This process was happening at sites such as CPAC. Amid the ongoing dialogue among conservative leaders and activists, the salience of common opposition to modern liberalism shared by Old Right and New Right activists was being emphasized, and arguments that rationalized an unofficial platform for the coalition from a variety of different angles were being articulated and absorbed. Through interactions in shared settings such as CPAC, members of the two political coalitions— one of which included libertarian economic conservatives and the other of which contained mostly social and religious conservatives— were learning to work together, to appreciate the common ground centered around their mutual opposition to modern liberalism, and to rationalize in their own ways and in terms of their own worldviews the policy platform of the expanding and increasingly interconnected modern conservative coalition.

It is therefore important to distinguish between the self-conscious strategizing that politicians were engaged in at CPAC (exemplified by these remarks) and the organic, coalition-building process at the elite-activist level that was being pursued at CPAC in an unstated, less obvious, and more organic way. In hindsight, it is also important to note that these two processes were both essential in order to create the new party that Reagan envisioned. In order to connect voters together, politicians and activists also needed to be united. The process of platform construction that was happening at CPAC was essential in order to send the signal necessary to assemble the kind of mass voting coalition that conservative leaders envisioned. Without the merging of elites and activists, the communicative strategies discussed by conservatives would not have been possible.

Re-branding the GOP as the Party of Small Business

At CPAC, leaders also engaged in self-conscious strategizing aimed at improving the image of the Republican Party and at making it more appealing to target swing constituencies (again at the mass level) who would be critical for victory. According to leaders at CPAC, a lingering problem for the GOP was the common perception that it was the party of big business. This was an image that alienated the middle class. In this vein, William Rusher, who was the lone proponent advocating for a New Party in 1977, exclaimed: “We are the country club of America at the polls. [The GOP] is perceived by the vast majority of the American people as simply the spokesman of business and nothing but! You and I know it isn’t true, but it’s the image...”¹⁸

For Rusher, the image problem was so great and so entrenched in the public mindset that it could never be overcome. Rusher still advocated for forming a new party. Other leaders disagreed with him on the new party issue but expressed the same general concerns about big business. During his remarks at CPAC 1977, Pat Buchanan remarked:

There are certain things I think that need to be done. There's nothing wrong with the basic message of the Republican Party, or its basic point of view. There's a great deal wrong with its performance in Congress, there's

¹⁸ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 114, Tape 44

a great deal wrong with the image we present to the country... We know today that the Republican Party is identified as the party of big business, and a lot of big business [has been bad] recently.... So how do we react here?... I think the Republican Party needs to alter its point of view. We need to be the spokesmen for those particular businesses and businesspeople who do not have large lobbying divisions in the nation's capital. We need to represent *small* business.. (applause)... small businesspeople quite candidly... I believe that the working class should be the backbone of the new Republican Party.¹⁹

During a discussion panel, William Rusher reinforced Buchanan's remarks. His words, which brought a loud wave of applause from the audience, clearly reflected the sentiments of many who were assembled in the room:

I agree entirely with Pat Buchanan's point. That there are businesspeople out there with their money and their effort and their brains digging the grave of conservatism in this country and knowing what they are doing, and I say to hell with them! (strong applause)²⁰

According to James Buckley, the method for correcting the perception of the GOP as the party of big business in the public mind was rhetorical. In Buckley's view, the GOP needed to refocus its dialogue with target middle class and blue collar constituencies in mind and to explain "its economic policies in terms of jobs." During a press conference held at CPAC, Buckley noted:

[The Republican Party's] number one task [is] to identify the constituency that ... [it] must appeal to-- not in order to change its own beliefs, historic beliefs and principles--but to be able to focus its dialogue, focus what it talks about. I think if you look at the fringe, swing group that has given the Republican Party its strength-- people who-- groups who are normally associated as Democrats-- when you talk about the blue collar worker, talk about the Catholic ethnic groups--you can see that [if] the Republican Party, unlike what some people propose it broaden its ideological appeal by speaking out of both sides of its mouth... if it concentrates and explains its economic policies in terms of jobs, the kind of jobs that people want-- not government make-work jobs-- but on an assembly line, in the stores, and the factories, on the farm-- that... the Republican Party-- can begin to demonstrate that it is for the little people. That it is for small business, not big business. That it is opposed to a concentration of power. That it is opposed to government telling other people what to do...²¹ [sic]

¹⁹ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 114, Tape 44

²⁰ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 114, Tape 44

²¹ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 114, Tape 47

In other words, the method for reaching out to and mobilizing the conservative majority and for re-branding the Republican Party with a more modest and less elitist image was to focus on blue collar and middle class voters and to speak to them (as Carter had) using language that they would understand and in terms that would resonate with their values and concerns.

Ronald Reagan reached a similar conclusion. Like Buckley, he spoke of the importance of re-branding the Republican Party as the party of small business and of refocusing the party's discourse so as to speak directly to the common man. This would be necessary in order to make the party a palatable alternative for middle class and blue collar swing constituencies. Reagan noted:

The New Republican Party I envision will not be, and cannot, be one limited to the country club-big business image that, for reasons both fair and unfair, it is burdened with today. The New Republican Party I am speaking about is going to have room for the man and the woman in the factories, for the farmer, for the cop on the beat and the millions of Americans who may never have thought of joining our party before, but whose interests coincide with those represented by principled Republicanism. If we are to attract more working men and women of this country, we will do so not by simply "making room" for them, but by making certain they have a say in what goes on in the party. The Democratic Party turned its back on the majority of social conservatives during the 1960s. The New Republican Party of the late '70s and 1980s must welcome them, seek them out, enlist them, not only as rank-and-file members but as leaders and as candidates.²²

Re-branding the GOP as the Party of the Middle Class

In sum, the conservative majority that leaders imagined was important because it would serve as the basis for the new Republican Party envisioned by Ronald Reagan and other coalition conservatives. There was a concerted effort at CPAC to characterize and define the boundaries of the conservative majority more precisely, to think about the values and concerns of middle class voters, to establish what language would help these constituencies to feel at home in the GOP, and to talk deliberately about how to re-brand the party so as to make these voters feel comfortable with the Republican Party as an institution.

The strategies for repositioning the party suggested by politicians (and especially by Buckley) involved refocusing the party's communicative discourse with these constituencies in mind, and they involved orienting the party's dialogue around messages and themes to which middle class voters were expected to easily relate. By incorporating values-oriented rhetoric similar to what had worked for Carter, placing greater emphasis on the social issues, highlighting the importance of family, and explaining the conservative message in terms of its potential to create economic opportunities,

²² Ronald Reagan, New Republican Party

conservatives sought to re-brand the GOP as an organization that could attract middle class voters. In another section of his remarks at CPAC, Buckley stated candidly:

If the Republican Party is to recapture its old place in the sun, it must do so by preempting its logical constituency, and to do this, it must identify its principles and positions and priorities with the interests of its natural allies. This will require more than talking about principles and the fact that Republicans care about people. It will require defining those principles and explaining plausibly why Republicans can be trusted to apply them in building the kind of society that most Americans still want. And who are these natural allies? They have been defined by Kevin Phillips and Bill Rusher as social conservatives, or producers. And their key importance is confirmed by any analysis of the swing constituencies that brought Richard Nixon and almost returned Gerald Ford to the White House... The Republican Party's natural constituency is to be found... among the ranks of blue collar workers, the union members whose votes can no longer be arbitrarily commandeered by distant bosses, among those struggling to get by on low to middle incomes and know what it is to be caught between high taxes and high inflation. Among people who are neither so poor as to be totally dependent on government favors nor so rich as to be able to escape the reach of a federal judge. Among the increasing members of blacks and other minorities who are entering the middle class and find the same economic and social interests to protect and problems to resolve that confront other middle class Americans in their day to day lives. Among those who by tradition and circumstance feel strong roots in the family and in the communities and neighborhoods in which they live. Among the millions of small businesspeople and women struggling to translate dreams into success in the face of another increasing burden of taxation and regulation. It seems to me that the next few years will offer the Republican Party, its leadership in the Congress and in the Republican National Committee a unique opportunity to reach out to those constituencies with a principled exposition of a distinctly Republican, inherently conservative point of view... If they define the Republican position with these target constituencies in mind, there is no reason why they shouldn't be able to break through the semantic barriers that have caused their party to be perceived by too many as the party of privilege and big business.²³

It is also significant to note that in Buckley's speech, perhaps the clearest description made at CPAC of the groups that comprised the so-called conservative majority, he included union members who were "no longer... arbitrarily commandeered by distant bosses."²⁴ At CPAC, several speakers also sought to distinguish between

²³ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 114, Tape 47

²⁴ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 114, Tape 47

union workers (an important part of the conservative majority as envisioned by coalition leaders) and the political action committees of organized labor (bitter enemies of the coalition). During his remarks at CPAC, Rusher noted:

It isn't by a longshot clear to me that American conservatism has a lifelong enmity with the concept of unions or union workers as... we let businesspeople persuade us that we have... One reason why the unions back the Democratic Party is that it is the only party that has ever paid any attention to them. Now unions can be wrong, and unions can also be over-weaning, but they can also be very good...on the social issues: busing ,and abortion, and the rest , or even on economic issues, we don't have all that much disagreement with a great part of the Union movement.²⁵

Perception vs. Reality

In conclusion, it is important to recognize that Rusher and his fellow coalition leaders never quite escaped the fact that the conservative majority did, in fact, contain many moderate voters who— precisely because they were non-ideological— were susceptible to appeals from moderate politicians.

As Rusher even admitted in his reply to Kirkpatrick, many of the union and other blue collar voters who he and others lumped into the so-called conservative majority had been easily persuaded to vote for Lyndon Johnson (who implemented the Great Society) and for Jimmy Carter (who, as Hatch noted, openly supported national health care and the federalization of welfare). The fact was that many of the voters coalition conservatives were targeting were aligned with conservative positions on some issues, but on others (especially issues in the economic realm), they displayed a persistent willingness to accept the big government policies advocated by the Democratic Party. The conservative majority was indeed a heterogeneous group of philosophically unsophisticated voters who did see a positive role for government in some circumstances.

The Importance of the Conservative Majority Thesis, Revisited

The fact is that characterizations and other elements of discourse need not be valid or perfectly true in an objective sense in order to shape perceptions of the political universe and structure political action. By their very nature, characterizations, narratives, and interpretations, as well as the strategies that are based upon them, are carriers of ideas and encourage ideologically tinted and sometimes skewed perceptions of the political universe to develop. In my view, it is important to note that advocates of the conservative majority concept— Rusher, Reagan, and others— believed in its veracity, and they used the theory as a basis upon which to interpret events, formulate strategy, and build cohesion and momentum.

Over time, through its repeated use, the conservative majority thesis evolved to become much more than a simple belief that the American people were conservative.

²⁵ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 114, Tape 44

Elaborate narratives, embellishments, and strategies were developed around the basic construct as it was articulated, repeated, refined, and used by multiple leaders to respond to and interpret a series of political developments. Over time, it grew to become a conglomeration of multiple elements of discourse that served as a lens through which conservatives perceived the world outside of their coalition. It came to shape and structure coalition identity and collective consciousness. Coalition strategies for focusing discourse and re-branding the Republican Party also emerged around it. It comes as no surprise that in the wake of the 1976 election, politicians defended it, used it to analyze the way in which events unfolded, and relied upon it almost exclusively to define a path forward for the transformation of the Republican Party.

At the post-election CPAC conferences, piecemeal additions to the conservative majority theory were made and bundled organically with prior formulations as the concept was used by multiple politicians to interpret and explain recent political developments and to chart a course for the coalition. In my view, no single expression or use of the conservative majority concept—no single quote that I have mentioned in this chapter—was itself a critical or decisive statement of the concept. It is not possible to credit any particular speaker with single-handedly refuting critics like Kirkpatrick or with fully defining the concept or vindicating it from attacks by skeptics.

It is more accurate to say that in the post-election context, the fluid, organic iteration of the conservative majority concept that was already living within coalition discourses was extended, refined, and updated gradually through the interactive and compounded contributions of the multiple elites that I have cited. This process of discursive refinement was propelled by history and the need of leaders to refine discourse in order to account for new developments. It happened as the concept was used, referenced, and recited over and over again as it was used to interpret the election outcome and subsequent events and as multiple elites tried to steer the coalition in the directions that they thought best. In the process, the concept had a pervasive, multi-dimensional influence, and, when viewed from a broad perspective, it helped to tie the expanding elite-activist coalition together and define a sense of coalition identity. The ongoing dialogue among politicians and activist intellectuals (of which an analysis of the discourses at CPAC provides only a momentary glimpse) was essential for holding the coalition together and for steering it along the path that it ultimately followed.

CHAPTER 8

CPAC 1979 & CPAC 1980

If you haven't noticed it, liberals are stealing our issues!¹

Sen. James McClure (R-ID)

Jerry Brown in California has shown us right wing extremism is a big tent. Congresswoman Snowe of Maine has said there only two things she doesn't like about Jerry Brown. His face.²

M. Stanton Evans

There is a main tide in liberalism itself to rethink the very meaning of the liberal tradition and to regain the ancient tradition of being anti-state... Just as you're beginning to win, your enemy is changing.³

Michael Novak

During the conservative political action conferences held in 1977 and 1978, politicians and intellectuals sought to frame Carter's victory over Ford as positive proof of the strong conservative impulses arising within the polity and of the tremendous potential for transforming the Republican Party into a vehicle for their ideas. Two important interpretations that elites reinforced during these years were that: 1) the Democrats nominated Carter because they recognized the conservative trend in public opinion and sought to harness it; and 2) Carter won in 1976 because he used conservative rhetoric and positioned himself to the right of Ford.

These interpretations came to serve as important, supporting evidence for strategic formulations which stressed that Republicans could win the White House in 1980 if they rejected the moderate politics practiced by Nixon and Ford and nominated a true conservative like Ronald Reagan who could speak credibly and forcefully to the conservative majority. As the argument went, this approach would inevitably succeed because the Democrats had not actually become conservatives and because Carter himself was not a true conservative. If Carter were faced by a Republican challenger in 1980 who faithfully represented the Republican Party's new conservative platform, then the shallow, conservative rhetoric of the Democrats would be exposed, and Carter would certainly lose his bid for re-election. As noted in the last chapter, Jesse Helms made this exact argument at the CPAC in early 1978.

As Carter's presidency unfolded, however, a growing number of Democratic leaders and spokesmen also adopted conservative rhetoric and positioned themselves

¹ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 116, Tape 104

² MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 117, Tape 119

³ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 117, Tape 114

behind conservative policy initiatives, and a sense of discomfort began to creep into conservative circles. Even as conservatives celebrated the growing popularity of conservative domestic policy initiatives, such as tax limitation, a balanced budget amendment, and de-regulation, and even as they sought to collaborate with conservative-leaning Democrats to pass initiatives that they supported, they also watched with trepidation as their political opponents mobilized behind the issues and ideas that they had long-championed and as those opponents increasingly capitalized upon these stands in order to win and maintain political office.

For instance, two core components of Carter's plan for fighting inflation involved: 1) support for de-regulation and 2) support for significant reductions in federal spending.⁴ In October 1978, Carter appointed Alfred Kahn, a Cornell University economist who was a well-known champion of de-regulation, as his special adviser on inflation. In that role, Kahn advocated de-regulation as a solution for combating inflation. These efforts reinforced and strengthened Carter's ability to position himself as a conservative. Also, for instance, Governor Edmund (Jerry) Brown Jr. (D-CA) came out in support of a balanced budget amendment during his 1978 gubernatorial campaign and positioned himself as a vigorous supporter of cuts in government spending.⁵ In Massachusetts, Edward King ran for governor in 1978 as a conservative, pro-life Democrat and also favored fiscally conservative policies.

The label that was applied to describe liberals who had recently gravitated away from liberal positions and adopted conservative positions and rhetoric was the term born again conservative.⁶ While there were clear differences between the so-called born again Democrats and born again liberal Republicans (who had recently become conservatives), the conservative southern Democrats (who had always been conservatives), and the liberal Democrats, it is important to note that the common thread among all of these loosely defined categories of actors was that they supported a variety of conservative policy positions and made use of conservative rhetoric during the late 1970s. In 1978 and 1979, even liberal stalwart Edward Kennedy became a strong advocate for de-regulation in the airline and trucking industries. Another Democratic Party faction—the neoconservative Democrats associated with the Coalition for a Democratic Majority—were supporters of a strong anti-Communist foreign policy and had also been in existence since 1972.

⁴ I will argue that stronger differences persisted between liberals and conservatives on the foreign policy front. Also, it is important to note that reductions in spending in a period of high inflation are consistent with Keynesian fiscal policy. Conservatives advocated for reductions in spending as part of a program that also called for reductions in taxes. In conservative discourses, spending cuts were embraced as part of a broader "supply side" program intended to spur economic growth rather than to simply fight inflation. Nonetheless support for decreased spending was an important component of both, and Carter's support for spending reductions threatened a key distinction that conservatives drew between the ideas of their coalition and the ideas of the Democrats and liberal Republicans.

⁵ Adam Clymer, "Liberals Are Not the President's Only Worry," *The New York Times*, January 21, 1979.

⁶ The metaphor was not used in a religious sense.

The trend toward greater fiscal conservatism in the Democratic Party was so pronounced in 1979 that the New York Times dubbed the Congress elected in 1978 the “Less is More Congress.” The paper noted:

Not only conservative Republicans but liberal Democrats won re-election [in 1978] on promises to cut spending and Congressional leaders, such as Robert C. Byrd, Senate majority leader, and Thomas P. O’Neill Jr., Speaker of the House, forecast success for Administration budget-cutting.⁷

Thus, by early 1979, many of the various policy positions supported by movement conservatives were also being expressed by actors who were situated in and around the Democratic Party. Of course, the various positions were only selectively embraced and applied by actors who were not participants in the conservative movement’s discourses. They were not bundled together by outside actors and communities as they were in movement discourses or necessarily embraced for the same philosophical reasons. Instead, they were represented and bundled to varying degrees with other conflicting policy positions and ideas. Many Democrats (with the exception of conservative Democrats) did not all share the underlying conservative principle that big, activist government as represented by liberals was a bad and dangerous thing. As Democrats, many of the actors who adopted conservative rhetoric and positions during the late 1970s still embraced the government social programs of the New Deal and combined support for those programs with support for a select and dissimilar mixture of approaches and ideas. The reasons why they did so varied. Some probably did so for electoral effect. Some may have done so for pragmatic reasons. Others may have genuinely found their way to policy positions that were also taken by movement conservatives by relying on their own distinct belief systems.

As great as it was for conservatives to finally see their ideas and proposals gain some outside support and traction, these developments posed a strategic dilemma. There was a possibility that Carter might win again in 1980 and/or that some of the so-called born again Democrats might well be able to harness conservative trends in a manner similar to what Carter had achieved in 1976 and thus pull more voters into the Democratic Party. In doing so, they might even be able institutionalize a new coalition around a new platform of ideational and political commitments. Jerry Brown was vocal about his presidential ambitions. He ran against Jimmy Carter in 1976 and then again in 1980. But Brown was decidedly not a movement conservative. As a governor, he reduced government spending, but he also liberalized marijuana laws, decriminalized homosexuality, came out as a vocal supporter of the Humphrey-Hawkins bill (which created additional government jobs in order to boost employment and spur economic recovery), and supported a greater degree of government regulation in some areas such as environmental policy.⁸ A Brown presidency might have moved American politics and

⁷ Adam Clymer, “The Nation: A ‘Less is More’ New Congress Gets Ready,” *The New York Times*, January 14, 1979.

⁸ Jesse Walker, “Five Faces of Jerry Brown,” *The American Conservative* November 1, 2009. Accessed March 13, 2015 <http://theamericanconservative.com/articles/five-faces-of-jerry-brown>

the Democratic Party farther to the right, but it would not have brought movement conservatives to power, it would not have meant the full implementation of the conservative movement's platform, and it could have plausibly dealt a blow to the Republican Party and aided instead in the revitalization of the Democratic Party. There was also a risk that during future elections, movement conservatives might not be able to differentiate themselves as effectively from outside actors and communities that embraced some of their ideas and spoke in terms that partially overlapped with their own.

Meanwhile, Jimmy Carter also posed a direct threat to the conservative movement's agenda. On the one hand, Carter advocated for the types of conservative policy solutions that I have indicated (such as spending limitation and de-regulation). He had also displayed an ability to win public support on the basis of that rhetoric. On the other hand, Carter supported certain liberal programs and initiatives that were important to entrenched Democratic activist constituencies and administrators. He certainly did not represent the platform of policy solutions and ideas that were embraced by the conservative movement, and his rhetoric, though conservative in that it called for a reduction in the size of government, was often applied to justify and rationalize the continuation rather than the repudiation of the liberal New Deal and Great Society social programs. His emphasis on multi-lateral peace talks and disarmament were also extremely incompatible with the conservative movement's aggressive, anti-Communist platform.

The Task of Conservative Leaders in 1979 and 1980

Of course, in 1979 and in early 1980, these were current events. Movement conservatives were not able to look upon developments from such a removed perspective. Carter's apparent ability to position himself as a conservative while advancing certain key liberal policy objectives, as well as the shifting rhetoric and commitments of Democratic Party politicians and communities of discourse, were a cacophonous jumble of political developments. The future of conservatism and of the country were unclear and were still dependent upon actions that had not yet been taken. Movement conservatives had no doubt that conservatism was on the rise. They took the conservative language used by Democrats as clear evidence of the salience of their ideas and positions; however, at the same time, it was not at all clear that Reagan would be nominated by the GOP in 1980 nor was it clear that movement conservatives would be triumphant in bringing their particular variant of conservatism to fruition as a new dominant public philosophy.

A major task of the conservative politicians and intellectuals in 1979 and 1980 was therefore to do exactly what they had done in the past. That was to provide important clarity— to elaborate characterizations and interpretations of outside actors and factions, to provide interpretations of Carter's behavior, leadership style, policies, and true philosophical leanings, to demystify the nature and implications of the rifts and communities the co-existed within the Democratic Party, and to offer characterizations

The article looks at the evolution of Brown's views over time and includes an excellent summary of his positions during the 1970s.

and draw distinctions between the good conservative Democrats (who were important target constituencies of the expanding coalition) and the deceptive and unacceptable Democrats (who threatened to derail conservatives and introduce unsatisfactory ideas and positions that could lead to fragmentation). There was also a need to adjust conservative narratives in order to account for the rightward movement of Democrats and to refine and reinforce strategies for holding the coalition together and for transforming the Republican Party into a vehicle that could carry movement conservatives to power.

There was a very fine line that movement conservatives needed to walk. Conservatives needed to work with the so-called born again conservative Democrats (and born again Republicans) in Congress, but at the same time, Jerry Brown, Jimmy Carter, and others who were presidential contenders posed a threat. They certainly couldn't stand as representatives of the conservative movement's platform of ideas and policies in the way that Ronald Reagan could and did. These distinctions had to be drawn and reinforced.

The mood of the 1979 and 1980 CPAC conferences reflected the unusual political situation. On the one hand, there was a sense of jubilation in the air and a sense that conservative ideas and policy solutions were beginning to strongly shape the discourses of both parties. On the other hand, this optimistic mood was tempered by a growing awareness that unless conservatives managed to strongly associate the Republican Party with a conservative platform and message, their coalition could ultimately be preempted and swept aside by a class of new Democrats like Jerry Brown who might find a way to ride the conservative wave in public opinion and manipulate it so as to keep the Democratic Party in power. In the context of 1979-1980— a context in which conservatives believed that the most conservative candidate would win and in which Democrats were moving aggressively to the right— moderation by the Republican Party was indeed the greatest danger of all and a pathway toward potential defeat in 1980 despite what they perceived as a great opportunity.

Interpretations of Political Context at CPAC 1979-1980

All of that said, the rightward shift of Democrats during the late 1970s did not precipitate a major shift in conservative discourses (at least insofar as they were reflected at CPAC). The problem that lay before the movement was explained by leaders exactly as it had been during the years 1976-1978. Simply put, Democrats were using conservative rhetoric to appeal to voters, and voters were susceptible to those appeals because they were increasingly conservative and because the GOP failed to associate itself with a bold conservative message. The solution was also the same. The GOP had to field a conservative candidate in 1980 in order to speak strongly to the conservative majority and pull conservatives away from the Democratic Party and into the Republican Party.

During his keynote address at the opening remarks of CPAC 1979, James McClure began by telling the audience:

I [want] to talk to you... about building a majority based on principle...
I'd like to be in the majority. I'm not talking about that in purely partisan

terms, although I am a reasonably partisan Republican. I'm talking about that in terms of principle. I'm talking about building a coalition in this country that will translate into effective political action those ideals that brought you all together in the first place. Because it isn't enough any longer for us to harbor our ideas, uphold them, or even to urge them on other people. It has to be translated into action that will build a majority. Why do I say that? Every poll that is taken in this country today indicates to us that the people of this country are becoming more conservative. That their viewpoint on public issues is more conservative. That what they ask their representatives and senators to do is more conservative. But that political majority that I'm talking about will not be forged because we sit back and say "now we're going to have our day." Because if you haven't noticed it, liberals are stealing our issues!⁹

McClure quickly turned his focus toward the threat that liberals who adopted conservative rhetoric and took conservative positions posed to the conservative coalition-building project. Specifically, he noted that by adopting conservative positions, liberals threatened to fragment the conservative movement. While "born again" liberals used conservative rhetoric, they weren't *really* conservatives, and they therefore shouldn't be welcomed into the movement. McClure asked rhetorically:

Why do I say the liberals are stealing our issues? Well, it is Ted Kennedy that is leading the fight to deregulate the trucking industry. It was Ted Kennedy who last year led the fight to deregulate the airline industry. He's also the same senator who is scheduling hearings on ways to limit federal spending... Senators like Senator Church and Senator Javits, who want to protect Taiwan, and Senator McGovern wants to invade Cambodia! Governor Brown wants a balanced budget constitutional amendment, and he wants to ride that theme all the way into the White House. Senator Muskie's name has become synonymous with sunset legislation, and its George Meany who cautions the country on the SALT treaty. Don't forget that it was Jimmy Carter who promised a balanced budget some time ago. I'm not concerned about whether they are going to identify the issues. They have already identified the issues and are talking about the issues! I am not concerned that they may vote with us on those issues. I'm concerned that we don't want to allow the conservative movement to be fragmented among people like that who will not apply the principle broadly but will select given high points for political effect while never accepting the underlying principle that has brought us together.¹⁰

In the context of these comments and in the subsequent portions of his speech, the senator implied that the core, underlying principles to which he alluded were that big, activist

⁹ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 116, Tape 104

¹⁰ Ibid.

government was a bad thing and that the preservation of freedom and a strong anti-Communist foreign policy were essential. He continued by asking rhetorically:

How sincere are these new conservatives? How real is their commitment to a limited government? To the preservation of freedom? To the limitation of the size of government and the limitation of the invasion of government into your pocketbook and into your paycheck? How sincerely are they concerned about your ability to determine your own life in your own way? Or are they just picking a few issues that they can parade before the electorate before the next election so that they may continue in office so that ... they can continue to vote for most of the things that we are opposed to? Today's friends of Taiwan were last year's sponsors of the Panama Canal treaty. Today's SALT treaty opponents are the ones who last year were the enemies of Rhodesia. Those who talk about a balanced budget today are the ones who helped to create the unbalanced budget and the federal debt that we don't enjoy today. Those who seek now to deregulate some portions of our economy and who have sponsored sunset legislation are the very ones who created the laws which they now tell us they want to limit...I suspect that many of these newly born conservatives, whether they be fiscal conservatives or otherwise, really still have mischief in their hearts concerning broad, general policy. Just by chance, sunset legislation will have to include tax expenditures, we are now told. The pro-Taiwan resolution will reconfirm our new friendship with Red China, and the Kennedy concern for spending limitations will be well expressed in public hearings, not in public bills...I think we have to be not only aware of what they're going to do but on guard against allowing them to succeed in deluding and diverting the American people's attention away from the failure of their actions to protect the interests of the United States. The leopard hasn't changed his spots. He merely wants to get elected. For each of us who supports deregulation, there are a dozen others trying to stick it to private enterprise in some other way. For every airline deregulation bill or every effort to deregulate the trucking industry, they support a dozen different efforts to regulate other portions of our economy. You see they pick out a few issues upon which to highlight their objections, and their appeal to the conservatives in this country, but really their heart is not in it. They don't believe the SALT will bring peace any more than you or I do. But if it means less money for defense, then there will be more money for social programs.¹¹

To return briefly to the general theory that I have outlined, what is significant about these remarks is that they show that McClure painted a rich portrait for the audience of outside actors. He did not simply express conservative ideas and positions. He juxtaposed the ideas, positions, and goals of movement conservatives to those of movement outsiders.

¹¹ Ibid.

He defined enemies by name and characterized their behavior and underlying objectives by drawing sharp distinctions between their true goals and the ideas of the conservative movement. In this vein, he argued that they didn't really believe in the SALT treaty. They supported it only to save money for their liberal social programs.

It is especially interesting to note that even in this speech in which he expressed strong opposition to the "born again" Democrats, McClure did not target conservative Democrats by name. In fact, Rep. Phil Gramm (D-TX) was invited to CPAC and introduced to the audience as "living proof of the bipartisanship of the conservative movement."¹² Senator Russell Long (D-LA) was also invited to speak at the conference on the topic of welfare.

In his remarks, Gramm expressed what seems, at first blush, to have been an attitude contrary to that of McClure, and it is therefore especially important to compare their remarks. During his remarks, Gramm advocated in favor of welcoming and working with the so-called born again Democrats and in favor of pushing for reform in a piecemeal fashion. He noted:

I think we conservatives have a bad habit, and the habit is to sort of bare our breast about how conservative we are. I think it's a habit about trying as people move towards our position— because of the overwhelming weight of facts, which has accumulated in the last 30 years— basically the weight of the facts is that big government does not work. That government cannot solve problems. That spending more of the taxpayers' money can't turn bad programs into good ones. I think we have to welcome the reborn or newborn conservatives into our fold. I think we have to be willing to accept them as equals in our move. I think its very important, something that I intend to try to do in the new Congress, is to try to build coalitions with anybody. The Fabian socialists took over great Britain, which at the time was the greatest nation in the world, by setting out their program as what they wanted to achieve and forming coalitions on a gradual basis to achieve those goals, and in the process they achieved things that if one had started at the beginning and set out their program, one would have thought that it could have never been accepted, but in fact it was, and they started out by picking a single issue which appeared to them to be the most acceptable. In their case, it was the socialization of health care, and they fought and built a coalition, achieved that goal, and then they went on to something else. I think that's something that conservatives need to do in the 96th Congress and in the future. I think that we have a better Congress than we did during the period of the 95th Congress, and I think we have a real opportunity to see that things change...¹³

¹² MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 117, Tape 118

¹³ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 117, Tape 118

In part, the different tone and approach may be seen as reflective of the fact that Gramm was a southern Democrat from Texas who was committed to working with other Democrats in his party in order to accomplish his own legislative goals. Elsewhere in the speech, he joked that his preference “would be for all the Republicans to come back into the Democratic Party,” stressing that in the South, it was essential for conservatives to continue to compete within the Democratic Party where they could win rather than moving into the Republican Party, where they risked losing their seats and creating opportunities for liberal Democrats to replace them.¹⁴

On a deeper level, however, Gramm’s remarks may also be seen as reflective of a tension between conservatives’ need to work in a bipartisan manner in Congress to pressure for reform (as reflected in Gramm’s speech) and their simultaneous need to keep their movement pure and send a strong signal to the electorate (as reflected in McClure’s speech). Ultimately, as I argued before, they wanted to somehow do both. At another point during the conference, William Rusher made a similar observation. He noted:

I think we conservatives for all that we may function best in opposition really because we’ve spent so long there, would be well-advised to recognize when things begin to go our way and let them come our way. Don’t then be blind to change, or don’t refuse to acknowledge that anybody ever has begun to move away from mistaken positions. They have begun to move. Encourage the move. Pressure for more.¹⁵

Still, at the same time, conference discourses were filled with rhetoric that was more consistent with McClure’s words— rhetoric that characterized Democrats who embraced conservative ideas and positions as deceptive and as politicians who sought only to ride the conservative wave in public opinion and maintain control of government institutions.

Interpretations of the Carter Presidency

Although Jerry Brown was often a scapegoat for this kind of rhetoric, it was Carter who was the main target. As I noted earlier, Carter’s conservatism only posed a threat to the growth of the GOP and to a Reagan candidacy.

At CPAC, the President was pegged by conservative leaders as a strategic, manipulative politician who sent out conservative and liberal messages simultaneously and who balanced between competing conservative and liberal Democratic Party factions. The point upon which coalition leaders unanimously agreed was that Carter was not a true conservative and that the path forward for conservatives meant working to ensure the nomination of a strong conservative Republican who could defeat him in 1980. Curiously, they also tended to unanimously characterize Carter not as an incompetent leader but rather as a leader who was constrained by conflicting pressures within his party and, more broadly, by conflicting pressures between his party, his own preferences, and what they saw as a strong conservative tide of public opinion. Michael Novak noted:

¹⁴ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 118, Tape 140

¹⁵ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 118, Tape 140

I think we've been experiencing government by pinball. But what I mean by that is that for two years every time somebody slaps the machine on one side, Mr. Carter bounces over, hits a light, a bell rings, a light goes on, and Jimmy smiles. Someone hits the other side, and he bounces back across the machine, and again, a bell rings, a light goes on, and Jimmy smiles.¹⁶

The pinball analogy, of course, was part of a broader characterization of Carter as waffling and trying to respond to pressures from liberal and conservative party factions as well as the pressures exerted by public opinion. Novak went on to stress that Carter did not have a coherent or constrained political philosophy and that he therefore made decisions on a case by case basis. He characterized Carter as being perhaps well-intentioned— that is, not exactly as a covert agent for liberal forces— but at the same time certainly not a conservative. Novak stressed to the audience:

There is no strategic concept, either for domestic policy or for foreign policy, and Jimmy Carter smiles. There is no sign of it. He faces issues one by one. He is a very religious and a moral man, but he comes out of no tradition which enables him to see the moral and religious connections between an act over here and an act over there. He faces each issue as a moral issue all by itself... his great ambition is to leave office as a great, good, religious man— to be a missionary to the world for the rest of his life. ... He doesn't face the substantive issues or the interconnections of these issues and what will happen in the real world by making this decision or that.¹⁷

As a result of this lack of philosophical constraint, Novak suggested that Carter had been unable “to define where we are as a nation to anybody's satisfaction.” He managed to anger conservatives and liberals alike.

Meanwhile, John Ashbrook characterized Carter as an unprincipled politician who sought to reflect and serve the needs of entrenched liberal Democratic constituencies while harnessing conservative trends in public opinion through the use of conservative rhetoric. His characterization was different from the one offered by Novak in that he depicted Carter as intentionally manipulative and as more grounded philosophically in the policies and ideas of modern liberalism. He stated:

I have a theory about Carter... I think a few years ago a number of people sat down, fed into a computer what the people wanted, what they wanted to hear, what they wanted to see, where they wanted him from... the rhetoric that they wanted in the campaign, they pressed the buttons, and what came out is precisely what Jimmy Carter was, said, did, etc. In my

¹⁶ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 117, Tape 114

¹⁷ Ibid.

way of thinking, he was a computerized candidate. He said the right things and most of what he said appealed to the constituency that you represent [conservatives] and not the constituency that he has represented during the last two years. He is the greatest two level president we've ever had— sending one message beam out to you, while at another time a message keeps going out to this other group we were talking about [liberals], because all said and done, he still has to appeal to the basic productive conservative American to get elected.¹⁸

Ashbrook continued by further characterizing Carter as a shrewd and manipulative Democratic politician— a representative of liberal Democratic constituencies who only used conservative rhetoric in order to manipulate the public and shield his true intentions. Of course, these characterizations of Carter as only using conservative rhetoric to win votes were consistent with those made by McClure, and they were consistent with characterizations of Carter's rhetoric that I traced during the 1977-78 conferences. They also continued the basic theme that the public was conservative and that a strong conservative message was essential in order to win support in the court of public opinion. Ashbrook noted:

If you establish the reputation of being the sincere outsider against the Washington establishment, honestly trying to bring this behemoth under control— you establish that reputation— it really doesn't make a darn bit of difference what you do because a great number of people are going to believe it. That's how the man has balanced the two constituencies, in my opinion. He has the big, bulk constituency— the average conservative, productive American, and he says I'm with you— [meanwhile] ... a thousand telegrams have gone out repeatedly to the other groups saying I'm really with you, too. I'm really with you, and stick with me, because I have to say a lot of things to convince this other constituency, but my heart is really with you, and you know, two years have shown where his heart really is. His heart is not with you. It's not with the productive, tax-paying American. It's not at all on that side. It is the same old liberal point of view— *using* you and making the ends of government— our government— fit the purposes of the [liberal] constituency...¹⁹

During his remarks, M. Stanton Evans made points that resonated with both the pinball analogy provided by Novak and the image of Carter as trying to manipulate conservative impulses in order to keep Democrats in power that was provided by Ashbrook. As Evans put it, a combination of forces emanating from the conservative tide in public opinion and Carter's position as leader of an increasingly fractured Democratic Party constrained the President and forced him to pursue a kind of balancing act. Carter therefore appeared to “drift” continuously back and forth in a seemingly incoherent and

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

“confusing” manner as he sought to be all things to all people. But he was not confused or incompetent. He was forced by his position to tackle policy issues on a case by case basis, to make decisions that often conflicted with each other substantively and philosophically, and to act in ways that contradicted his own prior rhetoric—ultimately satisfying no one in the process!²⁰ Evans noted:

...to an objective observer of Carter’s performance... has been without direction, without proficiency.. But I think these faults are intrinsic to his situation because Carter in his election and in his method of governance, at least in domestic matters, is symptomatic of a condition— that condition is the phenomenon of liberal collapse, at least as that word has been understood in domestic politics for the last generation. The disintegration of the liberal orthodoxy in American politics is perhaps the leading political fact of our time. The leading political question of our time is what will emerge to replace that orthodoxy. Mr. Carter’s domestic policy may best be described as an attempt to maneuver among the ruins of that orthodoxy. If we’re at midpoint [in Carter’s presidency], I think it’s apt to be describing this endeavor because his maximum effort appears to be that of situating himself at the exact geometric center of his own increasingly diverse and splintered political party and also, if he can manage it, at the geometric center of American politics. He is therefore situated as best he can manage it at the vector sum of forces and is thus a prisoner of those forces. Through this method of proceeding, he can offer no alternative to the liberal system that has been in the process of collapse. He is simply attempting manipulate it through rhetoric and partial remedies... to manipulate the conservative impulses arising in the body politic to the benefit of established liberal institutions, because to the degree that he does pacify through words or placebos he creates the illusion of something changing when in fact nothing does change very much... and it seems to me this method of proceeding accounts for the randomness and lack of direction.²¹

Significantly, then, Evans sought to reinforce the characterization that Carter was not an incompetent leader who made erratic decisions. He was simply constrained.

The “impulses” to which Evans alluded symbolized an ineluctable tide in public opinion toward preferences for less government. In order to harness these impulses, it was necessary for politicians to take conservative stands and reject the big government programs of the past. Carter recognized these impulses and the need to respond to them, but he could not respond in the way that was really called for because he was positioned as the leader of the Democratic Party and its coalition, and he was therefore unable and/or

²⁰ Stephen Skowronek, *The Politics Presidents Make: Leadership from John Adams to Bill Clinton*, revised ed. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1997). Evans’ analysis of Carter’s style of leadership is highly consistent with Skowronek’s theoretical framework and analysis.

²¹ *Ibid.*

unwilling to fully repudiate (to use Skowronek's highly compatible terminology) the policy commitments of the Great Society and the New Deal.

But certainly, the trends toward conservatism in the Democratic Party indicated that even though Carter seemed unable to offer a strong alternative, another Democrat like Jerry Brown might eventually be able to do so. Evans continued by reinforcing the concerns that had been raised by McClure. Evans noted:

Mr. Carter himself is I think an obvious forerunner...[of] events and people to come. He is not in and of himself capable of working any deep [change] in our domestic political system because of [his] philosophy and practice of drift. But he certainly suggests that it is going to be possible for Democratic candidates and Democratic officeholders to position themselves to appeal to these new impulses within our political system, and other Democrats are arising who seem more willing to grapple substantively with the problems that have given rise to Carterism than does Mr. Carter himself. We have in California the face of Governor Brown, not suggesting that he is a philosophical conservative, but he certainly sees what is happening to the political terrain in the United States, and he is moving to position himself, I think, to appeal to this *latent, conservative, tax-cutting majority*, whatever you want to call it, that is so obviously out there waiting for some kind of leadership. Governor King, who is the elected Governor of Massachusetts, obviously appeals to the same constituency that Governor Brown is looking at... The possibility certainly exists that Mr. Carter is the first of a long series of Democrats who are going to attempt to manipulate— to reach— this new majority and convert it to the advantage of the Democratic Party, and if the Republican Party does not get its own philosophical priorities in order, I think that we will see more and more such Democrats ascending to high office (emphasis mine).²²

To Evans, then, the victory of the conservative movement in 1980 was not inevitable. The rise of a conservative Republican Party was not inevitable. As of 1979, the future was still very unclear. It seemed entirely possible that conservative Democrats would be able to mobilize and institutionalize the conservative majority in the years to come as the base of a restructured Democratic Party and, by doing so, to succeed in maintaining control of the nation's political institutions. That said, efforts by Democrats did not suggest a radically new course but rather reinforced the importance of the strategies that leaders such as Buckley, Evans, and Rusher had been recommending all along. It suggested the need to nominate a strong conservative as the GOP presidential contender in 1980 who could articulate a bold conservative message. If the party would simply do so, the Republicans *would* win, and the Democrats' weak conservatism would fail to gain traction as it had in 1976. Evans echoed the words of Jesse Helms at CPAC 1978. He noted:

²² Ibid.

Mr. Carter's cosmetic manipulations could not possibly have succeeded in 1976 and could not possibly hope to succeed in 1980 if the Republican Party had spoken clearly and credibly for the aspirations of the new majority that is expressing its discontent with established liberal ideas and institutions...if the Republican Party-- even now-- with all its problems and the aftershocks Watergate and so forth and so on-- even with the rise of these new Democrats who are trying to steal conservative and Republican [support]... I think it is still possible if the Republican Party presents itself forcefully and credibly to the American public as a vehicle for the aspirations of this discontented group that has arisen in recent years. For the Republican Party to reach out and crystallize that latent majority into an actual majority and transform the momentum of political events in this country and perhaps in time restore this nation in to the ways of freedom intended for it by its founders.²³

Significantly, both McClure and Ashbrook made the same points. Ashbrook sarcastically noted: "we have a particular knack at fouling things up when it comes time to have a nominating convention. Who knows what's going to happen? If that hard-fighting, two-fisted, anti-communist Howard Baker gets in there, we're going to really be in trouble!"²⁴

Meanwhile, McClure warned that while there were "false prophets on the left" who had to be carefully watched, the Republican Party was displaying a "case of timidity" and that its leaders sought to "appeal to the left." He chastised the Republican leadership represented by Congressman Rhodes and Congressman Anderson, who refused to support the balanced budget amendment, and he stressed that conservative Republicans had to mobilize behind a strong program of principle and support those policy initiatives that were consistent with conservative principles. He even recommended that the GOP mobilize behind state-led efforts to pressure for a constitutional convention that would force the deliberation of a balanced budget amendment to the Constitution. As he put it positioning the GOP behind strong, principled initiatives was the way to appeal to the conservative tide in public opinion and to build a majority based on principle.²⁵

The strategy that McClure, Evans, and Ashbrook outlined in 1979 was thus really not very different from the one outlined in the wake of 1976. The goal was to brand the GOP as a party that stood for strong conservative principles and to mobilize behind a strong conservative in 1980 who could reach the conservative majority.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 117, Tape 114

²⁵ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 117, Tape 114

CPAC 1980

CPAC 1980 was held on February 7-9, 1980—just two weeks after George Bush defeated Ronald Reagan in the Iowa Caucuses. At the conference, there was a sense of fear that Bush could win the nomination instead of Reagan, and there was a sense of urgency that conservatives had to mobilize behind Reagan in order to prevent that from happening. During his remarks at CPAC, James Lacey, the National Chairman of Young Americans for Freedom, noted: “the results of the Iowa caucus and several major polls released since then have hung over the Conservative Political Action Conference like a dark cloud.”²⁶

He went on to stress that Ronald Reagan had the “proven ability and executive capacity to transform conservative ideas into public policy” and that he “must become the Republican nominee for President.”²⁷ Lacey also called for Representative Phil Crane, another conservative movement hero and the outgoing President of the American Conservative Union, to withdraw from the race. His remarks were bold, especially since the ACU was one of the primary sponsors of the conference and since Crane was in attendance. Lacey noted:

I ask Congressman Phil Crane to withdraw from the race for President and work with us in a unified conservative effort to elect Ronald Reagan President in 1980...unlike Ronald Reagan, Congressman Crane has not demonstrated the ability, as measured by the national polls, to capture the Republican nomination and to defeat president Carter in November. It is my concern, and the concern of many who seek a conservative victory in November, that Congressman Crane’s continued presence in upcoming Republican primaries will divide conservative efforts and hand the Republican nomination to George Bush, Howard Baker or John Connally, candidates who have not demonstrated consistent allegiance to our cause.²⁸

During his introductory remarks at CPAC, Mr. Robert Heckman, the Executive Director of Young Americans for Freedom and the head organizer of the 1980 conference, expressed a similar sentiment. He noted:

Conservatives have labored long and hard since our disastrous defeat in 1964— the last time a true believer in liberty was nominated for the Presidency. We have fought for the privilege of once again holding high the clear and unmistakable banner of conservatism through the nomination of a philosophically committed Presidential candidate. Throughout that fight, our leader has been one of the most widely respected men in America—Governor Ronald Reagan of California. Governor Reagan came

²⁶ Jim Lacey, Remarks at CPAC 1980, MSS 176, LTPSC, Series III, Box 9, Folder 13

²⁷ Jim Lacey, Remarks at CPAC 1980, MSS 176, LTPSC, Series III, Box 9, Folder 13

²⁸ Jim Lacey, Remarks at CPAC 1980, MSS 176, LTPSC, Series III, Box 9, Folder 13

close to carrying that banner of conservatism—a platform, he called it, of “Bold, bright colors...not pale pastels” for the Republican Party in 1976... We need to recognize that there is one conservative spokesman with the wisdom to analyze those events and provide for their solutions...one candidate with the energy to see those solutions through...and one candidate with the nationwide appeal and respectability to be victorious in 1980. That candidate is Governor Ronald Reagan... We call upon conservatives now... to unite their organizational and human resources in a complete and dedicated effort to elect Ronald Reagan President.²⁹

Congressman Jack Kemp, who was charged with delivering the keynote address, also emphasized that he had endorsed Reagan and assumed a similar posture. Kemp stressed:

The country desperately needs a candidate with bold, aggressive prescriptions. It is not the time to be timid. Of the leading contenders, Reagan is alone in advocating an across-the-board reduction in marginal income-tax rates, to rebuild incentives that have been torn down by inflation. He is alone in his belief that the American people would respond with greater production, sufficient even to increase the solvency of the government’s finances. Reagan hopes to bring the rates, which now go as high as 70 percent, down to no higher than 40 percent by the end of his first term...³⁰

In the remainder of his speech, Kemp stressed that it was also Reagan who understood the true problem facing the country—the “collision of inflation on the progressive federal tax system”—and that he alone embraced the level of tax cuts necessary to reduce inflation and simultaneously boost the productive capacity of the economic and spur economic growth.³¹

Significantly, in their endorsements of Reagan, both Heckman and Kemp made references to Reagan’s stand behind “bold” ideas. In 1980, this reference was still strongly connected conservative majority narrative and to the notion that bold ideas were necessary to speak to and mobilize the conservative majority. In the same speech, Kemp stressed:

In this country, a majority of Americans define themselves as conservative in their beliefs and values about economic and political freedom and a strong national defense. What we conservatives must explain is why we have not elected a majority of conservative leaders. As long as Americans are faced with a choice between two philosophies, one of which appears to offer high unemployment and low inflation and another which offers low unemployment and high inflation, Americans are forced to choose

²⁹ Robert Heckman, Remarks at CPAC 1980, MSS 176, LTPSC, Series III, Box 9, Folder 13

³⁰ Jack Kemp, Remarks at CPAC 1980, MSS 176, LTPSC, Series III, Box 9, Folder 13

³¹ Jack Kemp, Remarks at CPAC 1980, MSS 176, LTPSC, Series III, Box 9, Folder 13

constantly between the lesser of the two evils... Americans want someone who knows how to end inflation and restore full employment at the same time. But they can only indicate their choice if there is someone actually out there proposing to do it. Americans are demanding—begging for us to give them... a true and radical vision for the 1980s... First, a departure from the usual or traditional, a departure from the orthodox range of policies which are causing our 13 percent inflation and unemployment which is rising toward 8 percent...and second... to conserve are the basic principles of economic and political freedom on which this country was founded, and without which we get the sort of mess we are in today....³²

In conservative discourses, bold ideas were precisely what would carry Reagan and conservatives to victory. Conservative policy prescriptions that were rooted in supply side economics offered a positive vision— a version of conservatism that was not reactionary but rather positive and change-oriented. It was a very different public philosophy that offered an alternative to the policies traditionally offered by both the Republican and Democratic Parties who worked within a paradigm oriented around Keynesian fiscal policy.

This is what set Reagan apart not only from the Democrats but also from other Republicans. George Bush was unacceptable precisely because he was not a true believer. Unlike Reagan, he did not believe that the American people would respond to lower marginal income tax rates with greater production sufficient to make government solvent. Kemp noted:

I'm told George Bush—God bless him—has been openly critical of the idea that lower income-tax rates would be good for the economy, in and of themselves. Now it is true that George has proposed to cut taxes 20 billion. But the truth of the matter is that taxes are going to go up at least 41 billion next year unless we do something about it. In effect, a 20 billion tax cut is a 21 billion tax increase. George, whom I've always respected, was also quoted in the Washington Post as saying of president Carter's budget, "generally, it's not a budget you can be excessively critical of." If the quote is accurate, I feel let down.³³

II. Discourse Analysis of CPAC Panel Discussions

At CPAC 1979 and CPAC 1980, the primary issues that were examined during panel sessions can be grouped into four categories: 1) the social issues; 2) anti-communism and national defense; 3) taxes and spending; and 4) welfare.

³² Jack Kemp, Remarks at CPAC 1980, MSS 176, LTPSC, Series III, Box 9, Folder 13

³³ Jack Kemp, Remarks at CPAC 1980, MSS 176, LTPSC, Series III, Box 9, Folder 13

1. The Social Issues

During the social issues panels held at CPAC 1979 and CPAC 1980, New Right leaders expressed a series of grievances against big, activist government as managed by liberals. The grievances expressed during these panels may be divided into two categories: 1) a series of objections to the means by which liberals used government to regulate private activities and exert control over private institutions where values were cultivated and disseminated; and 2) a series of objections to the ends that liberals sought to accomplish by using the instrumentalities of the state to regulate private activities and exert control. The former included objections to abuses of constitutional authority by the courts and administrative state as well as objections to infringements upon individual liberties by these institutions. The latter were connected to a series characterizations and narratives about the intentions of the courts and the administrative state.

Characterizations of the courts and the administrative state suggested that these institutions (along with the executive branch) were under the control of liberals and that they served primarily as agents for implementing liberal policy objectives. As defined at CPAC, these objectives involved implementing the plans of liberal social engineers and ideologues. The plans of liberal social engineers and ideologues were, in turn, characterized as being part of an extensive effort to reshape the values of the public at large and to manufacture the liberal vision of a good, just, and equitable society through positive state action. This liberal vision was one of a society without gender, racial, economic, religious, and other differences. It was one without inequalities that conservatives believed to be natural. According to CPAC panelists, positive state actions that were used to implement the liberal social vision included the imposition of affirmative action and quota systems designed to eradicate or— at the very least— to restructure private educational institutions. They included busing policies designed to facilitate racial mixing in the schools. They also included efforts to reshape education so as to indoctrinate youth in the philosophy of secularism, eliminate gender differences, reshape gender roles, and weaken the prerogatives of the family (as it was traditionally defined) in educating and teaching children traditional Christian standards of moral virtue and good character.³⁴

Put differently, at CPAC, social conservatives expressed strong opposition to the courts and the administrative state and characterized both as institutions that were used

³⁴ As defined by conservatives, the liberal vision of a good society was one without economic, gender, racial, or religious differences. It was a society where everyone was the same. The process of engineering that society involved ignoring natural differences that social conservatives believed were natural and could not be changed, and it involved positively discriminating on the basis of race. In their view, the attack on private religious schools was targeted and due to the fact that they were moral centers that imparted values which conflicted with the creation of a more homogenous society by liberal social engineers. Social conservatives sought to create a society where everyone was treated the same but where people were not the same, and so this led them to support race neutral policies. Ironically, they saw themselves as defenders of the principle of non-discrimination included in the 1964 Civil Rights Act, and they saw liberals as seeking to violate the act and positively discriminate on the basis of race in contradiction to public law.

by liberals to interfere in private institutions such as the family and religious schools where values and morality were taught and reinforced. New Right activists depicted the efforts of liberals as efforts to use the instrumentalities of the state in order to destroy the traditions of society and reshape society according to their own vision for it.

The discussions during CPAC panels were infused with moralistic rhetoric about the importance of patriotism, good character, and the preservation of the traditions of society; however, what they lacked with a few rare exceptions were expressions of the idea that the state should be used by conservatives to enforce virtuous behavior in a direct sense. In conservative discourses as they were reflected at CPAC, good character, morals, patriotism, and so on were things that were cultivated by private institutions such as the family, churches, and religious schools. Good public policy involved rolling back state regulatory authority and liberal social engineering initiatives and eradicating federal influence over private institutions so that these institutions could flourish and do their job of encouraging, cultivating, and teaching traditional standards of morality and virtue.³⁵ It involved removing federal control over public education while, at the same time, supporting the passage of laws that would encourage local governments, communities, and private citizens to determine educational policies and curricula. It also involved supporting the passage of laws intended to cultivate and encourage the development of the family and religious centers where morality was taught and developed. Such policies included tax incentives which encouraged families to save and build wealth that would enable them to make choices without a need for government assistance, and they included policies that encouraged and rewarded actions by the private sector to strengthen and support families. Under conservative policy prescriptions, the state would not enforce morality in a heavy-handed way. It would gently encourage the natural development and spread of morality and character (as defined by conservatives) through distributive policies intended to nurture and strengthen private institutions and through measures intended to reduce governmental efforts to engineer social change.

Significantly, conservatives were able to oppose various forms of liberal governmental interference, demand a rollback of state authority, and position themselves as defenders of individual liberties while at the exact same time defending tradition and efforts that liberals were---from their own perspective--- taking in order to expand and preserve freedoms. Expressions of conservative opposition to state action and expressions of conservative support for a wide-scale rollback of governmental authority were, in effect, characteristic of de facto resistance to liberal methods for expanding minority rights and freedoms and of a de facto defense of tradition. By framing positive state actions initiated by liberals in order to bring about their vision of equality as infringements upon individual liberties and as efforts to destroy centers of traditional morality such as the family, it was actually possible to resist the very policies that were being pursued by liberals to ostensibly expand freedoms for minority groups and create a

³⁵ In the absence of state-led efforts to engineer a good society, a good society could simply flourish. State action was not needed.

more just society.³⁶ This as an instance where liberals and conservatives subscribed to different combinations of problem and solution frames.

The conservative vision of state and society represented at the CPAC conferences in 1979-1980 was thus neither libertarian nor purely traditionalist. It was most consistent with the fusionism of Frank Meyer. The New Right conservatives who spoke at CPAC harshly criticized trends toward immorality within society. But as things stood at the time, the effort to achieve the good society would not and could not come through extensive, positive state action. Crime policies, drug policies, and other positive uses of state regulatory authority to crack down on the types of activities that Christians and traditionalists regard as immoral and sinful simply were not discussed or demanded to a great extent in the late 1970s (though I will note a few caveats and exceptions). Instead, it was the anti-statist principle and the corresponding principle that morality should be cultivated through private institutions in a free and minimally regulated environment which prevailed. It was a vision of a minimal state that would gently encourage the development of a moral and virtuous society (and restore the traditions of society) through the reduction and decentralization of federal authority.

Private vs. Public Education

In order to bring these arguments into sharper focus, it is helpful to examine the panel discussions that took place at the CPAC 1979 and 1980 in greater detail.

One issue around which social conservatives mobilized was the state attack on private education. Race was an important aspect of these policy discussions. Conservatives argued that by advancing what they felt was an unconstitutional policy of racial integration through affirmative action policies, courts and administrators were destroying private education. But insofar as their public statements went, this criticism of affirmative action was not rooted in opposition to hiring black teachers or admitting black students. It was not rooted in racist statements. Instead, quotas were criticized on the

³⁶ In this vein, I would argue that for New Right conservatives, support for the principle of limited government was subsidiary to their support for Christian values and for tradition. The limited government principle was emphasized in order to oppose liberal policy initiatives, and this worked during the 1970s. In the future, however, when positive action became necessary in order to resist social change and protect traditional values (as with a marriage amendment to the constitution), social conservatives were willing to embrace positive state action since their top priority was to stand for their Christian beliefs rather than to oppose government action as a matter of the utmost principle. The difference is that context changed. As I argued in chapter 2, this is a case where a change in context has created a rift within the conservative coalition. This is so precisely because in the new context, traditionalists (who care above all else about standing for Christian beliefs) and libertarians (who care above all else about limiting state involvement) are thrown into a situation where their priorities are no longer aligned. It is a case where sub-surface differences in the emphasis upon different principles by different coalition partners have been exposed by new, cross-cutting policy issues and by changes in context that have driven social conservatives to embrace stronger state action in defense of the same policies that decades ago were defended through state inaction.

grounds that they were being used to make unrealistic demands that carried severe consequences for noncompliance that would result in the destruction of private schools.

Objections to the means of government influence over private education

One objection to the racial hiring and admissions quotas imposed upon private Christian schools by the Internal Revenue Service was that the requirements involved unrealistic demands that the schools could not reasonably meet. Specifically, according to IRS rules, if schools did not hire a certain percentage of black teachers and admit a certain percentage of black students, they could lose their federal tax exemptions. The IRS policy was characterized as unfair and unrealistic. For instance, during his comments at a panel at CPAC 1979, Lou Ingram of the Foundation for Law and Society noted:

At the Briar Crest school in Memphis Tennessee, 3500 students attend... there is not a black student on campus. Quite understandable, right? Wrong, according to the Internal Revenue Service... The IRS descended on the school to audit it in an effort to tag it as segregationist... After several weeks of auditing the school and going through the black community and taking depositions, the IRS was forced to conclude that the Briar Crest Christian School— with not a single minority student on its campus— was in fact not segregationist but entitled to its tax exemption and had an open admissions policy and was aggressively trying to encourage minority applications. Under the proposed revenue procedure, the Briar Crest Christian School would have to go out and produce 800 minority students in order to keep its tax exemption. Now that gets right to the bottom of what this proposal is all about. They established a set of guidelines for affirmative action...³⁷

The point, of course, was that the school was trying to attract black students but that black students had no interest in attending the school. Conservatives argued that forcing schools to attempt to generate interest among black students where none naturally existed was an extreme financial and logistical burden that was also entirely unrealistic. Ingram went on to note a similar objection to hiring quotas for teachers:

Only make those things mandatory which that person can reasonably control... In the appointment of minority teachers, if I offer this gentleman a job...he has got no obligation to accept my offer. Black teachers, because of affirmative action programs... in public schools are, in fact, the favored group for hiring. And that is why they have a higher entry level salary. Public school salaries range from 10,000-13,000 dollars today...private school salaries range from 6000-9000 dollars...so there is an enormous disparity between the bottom of one and the top of

³⁷ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 116, Tape 105

the other, and that means that in trying to force the schools to hire these teachers, you are burdening them with an enormous financial responsibility at the very time you tell them that you are going to take away their tax exemption.³⁸

Ingram added that the mere threat of taking away private school tax exemptions caused the schools significant financial harm and threatened to put them out of business altogether. As he explained it, this was so because the schools were heavily dependent upon charitable donations. The threat of the removal of tax exemptions by the IRS scared away donors and threatened to cause a drop in donations, even if the schools were not actually affected in the end. As Ingram put it, if a private school were to lose its tax exemption, a person who had donated to the school would then be forced to go back and amend his/her tax return and pay back taxes on any donations that had been made during the previous two years. In addition, the individual donor would then also have a greater likelihood of having his/her taxes audited. The mere risk of having to go through an audit and back payment of taxes was enough to scare away individuals from making donations in the first place. This damaged the schools' ability to raise the funds needed to stay in operation.

Another objection that was voiced to regulatory requirements imposed upon private schools was that decisions associated with the implementation of regulatory requirements were arbitrary and subject to the whims of administrators. During a panel on education at CPAC 1980, William Ball, who was an attorney for private schools, noted:

I put on the stand the chief of accreditation of the Kentucky Department of Education, and I said, "you have to pass this 100 percent right?"... And he said, "no, no, no. We work with the schools. We aren't trying to hound anybody." You see this is the benign face of the administrator. "We want to work with them." "Well, then they don't have to all be obeyed right?" "No no!" I was a little surprised by that because our people were in court because they'd been threatened with being shoved into jail if they disobeyed. I asked, "well what percent do you have to pass to make the grade, to get approved? He said, "we look for your intent, a bonafide effort." "I said well who does that?" He said, "well we do." I said, "certain public servants that make that determination... what percent permits you to be approved?" "Well, we said percentage wise," he said, "I guess 30 or 40 percent." I said, "you guess?" And he said, "well that's just off the top of my head." Well, you see here, you have two things. You have homemade law. That's a subjective individual interpretation or statement of a private individual. It has no character as law whatever. It was never authorized by the legislature and of course is never tested for constitutionality. The second feature is that you can see it's the government of men concept. He has a toy accordion which he can

³⁸ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 116 Tape 105

contract or expand according to his own whim, and that's exactly what it is. He makes a determination of your intent, and then you see again the whole concept of regulatory vagueness. Vagueness of language and vagueness of concept, and my point is, why must people be put to obedience to that kind of law?³⁹

Although Ball made these comments about a state administrator in this case, the comments were made in the context of a broader discussion of acceptance of the "principle that government knows best" and of the move toward a "unified national education," which he described as "extremely dangerous."⁴⁰

Conservatives also argued that the IRS used its control over tax exemptions to attempt to control schools and force integration. In doing so, it exceeded its statutory authority. At CPAC 1979, Ingram made a plea for more juridical public policy:

They're claiming that the public policy is that all education must be integrated. Ladies and gentlemen... you cannot find that phrase anywhere. There is no statute law that makes that requirement... what the IRS is saying is that the 1964 Civil Rights Act requires that all those schools... that get federal money, must all be integrated... and how do you get federal money? That is a tax exemption, meaning a federal subsidy. These are questions with which the *Congress* must deal... It is absolutely mandatory that the Congress close up the possibility of the bureaucracy arrogating its power⁴¹

During his remarks at CPAC 1980, Orrin Hatch noted:

Domestically, we face another disaster... the effective seizure of political power in this country by the regulatory agencies, and above all the extraordinary assault that has been launched in the last 15 years upon the American way of life under the slogan of "affirmative action." Since the Civil Rights Act was passed in 1964, the federal bureaucracy has literally turned it inside out. The Act, and the whole Civil Rights movement, was directed at the abolition of institutionalized racial discrimination. The federal bureaucracy has interpreted it to legitimize racial discrimination, and is imposing racial quotas with increasing ingenuity and arrogance upon every area of American life. This represents an unprecedented growth in state power. It also represents the end of the principle of freedom, the principle of equal protection and the principle of rewarding merit, that distinguished America from the caste-ridden, inflexible and unjust societies of Europe, and indeed most of recorded history. A powerful caste has sprung up vitally interested in affirmative action, and

³⁹ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 116 Tape 105

⁴⁰ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 118, Tape 134

⁴¹ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 116 Tape 105

unfortunately there are signs that the Supreme Court is yielding to its pressure...this is government of men, not laws. It is a flagrant breach of the principle of separation of powers. Not just freedom, but the integrity of our legal system, is threatened by affirmative action. The ultimate irony of affirmative action is that it's not even an effective way of aiding minorities, any more than the expropriation of the rich and the state seizure of industry is an effective way of helping the poor... Quotas are illegal, immoral, and they won't work, and we have to say loudly and fearlessly, so that the message gets through to the legislators, the courts and ultimately to the bureaucracy.⁴²

Characterizations of the ends of government influence over private education

According to conservatives, why was government trying to insert itself into the activities of the private schools? Why was it so intent on imposing such onerous requirements on them? Was it merely to bring about racial harmony? This was definitely not so according to the panelists. The true goal behind government intervention was to make private schools into copies of public schools— to control their composition, faculty, and curricula in order to advance the agenda of liberal social engineers. Failing that, the secondary goal was to destroy them altogether in order to bring children back into public schools controlled by the state. During his remarks at CPAC 1980, Ball noted:

The state has to assure that everybody is getting what it calls a good education... Now of course part of the mischief in the educational field is the fact that government today in our country has become a tremendous industry. It's become an enormous enterprise. It's become the source of the employment of millions of people at local, state, regional, and national levels. And its basic dynamic is to expand or die. And in the educational field where the drop in births has meant some contracting of public school enrollments, and where all of a sudden there is new vigorous competition arising by the creation of more private schools. The public schools in some states have gone on a very, very aggressive offensive... in Kentucky...parents all over the state were told that they must enroll their children in state approved schools. These fundamentalist parents who were involved said they couldn't possibly do that. They couldn't subject their schools to state approval because the state approval meant complying with a vast catalogue of regulations to comply with which would convert your private school into a carbon copy of a public school. The state presumed— would you believe it— the state presumed to say what you shall teach, the very textbooks you would use— think in terms of the right to

⁴² Orrin Hatch, Remarks at CPAC 1980, MSS 176, LTPSC, Series III, Box 9, Folder 13 Hatch 80

know— the very textbooks you would use would have to be approved by the state. In fact, you'd have to choose them from the state list.⁴³

At CPAC 1979, Ingram noted: “The public school system, of course, is the instrument of the egalitarian state. And the only conceivable way to make everybody equal is to make them universally ignorant.”⁴⁴

The plans of social engineers were generally defined as making everyone exactly the same. During his comments at CPAC 1979, the evangelical minister Rev. Robert Billings of the National Christian Action Coalition (a close associate of Jerry Falwell who would also go on to serve as the Executive Director of the Moral Majority and as Ronald Reagan’s liaison to religious groups in 1980) noted:

Part of the philosophy is that... the reason that there are so many problems is because there are differences in people, and if we remove the cause of the differences, we will remove the problem. So they like to put everyone into molds... and there, at the push of a button, everyone will be smart like Pavlov’s dog. If everyone has got the same education, the same curriculum, the same training, and therefore we all think alike, and if we remove all the differences, we have also removed all the problems. Now you know, that’s not so. I told you it was part of their philosophy because... they teach people that we want one sex, one guaranteed annual income, we want one race, we want one banking system, one library system, we want one army, we want one language... everybody on one level...⁴⁵

Billings went on to note that the IRS tax policy procedures were being used to bully private schools into compliance with state-defined standards for what schools should look like and what they should teach. He also argued that there was a danger that the same principle could be used to tax other private institutions and to impose a liberal vision of morality through tax policies defined by liberal bureaucrats. Billings said:

The arm of the federal government is trying to force its will on religious institutions. The consequences of this are frightening. If they can tax private schools, why not tax churches, and why not tax the particular church with which the government disagrees? Why not tax, for example, the Quakers on their pacifism? Why not tax the Catholics on their opposition to abortion?⁴⁶

Thus, threats to take away private school tax exemptions if those institutions did not comply with racial hiring and admissions quotas were characterized not as attempts

⁴³ ACU Audio Collection MSS 176 Box 118 Tape 134

⁴⁴ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 116 Tape 105

⁴⁵ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 116 Tape 105

⁴⁶ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 116 Tape 105

simply to create racial equality or to undo the effects of segregation but rather as efforts to bully, shut down schools at will, assert control over curricula, and influence the values that were being taught. This is what Ball meant when he said IRS rules were a “pretext of using the tax laws as a device to create or implement governmental social policy,” and it was the reason why he objected so strongly to the fact that administrative law was so easily changed to fit the goals of the regulator.⁴⁷ The objection was that rules could be shaped and adjusted in order to force schools to implement the liberal social agenda and in order to selectively shut down those institutions that refused to conform.

Other speakers reinforced this. William Stanmeyer, the President of the conservative Institute for Legal Studies and a conservative intellectual who collaborated closely with the New Right, argued:

These... schools are commonly established by faith communities, Baptist, or evangelical, or other Christian denomination, very limited funds. Almost universally, their students perform better on standardized tests... but they do not meet some contrived social policy goal of government and thus the IRS wanted to take away their status.⁴⁸

Ingram made the same claim at CPAC 1979. He noted:

I want to emphasize that the state is determined to close these schools because they [challenge] the state’s role as God. That’s what the issue really is all about. Strategically putting them out of business because they don’t adhere to the state’s religion.⁴⁹

Private Schools as Centers for Morality

Of course, as I noted at the outset, there was plenty of moralistic rhetoric during the CPAC panels, especially from Billings (who was an evangelical minister associated with Falwell) and Charles Rice (who was a Catholic scholar). Private schools were defended by both as centers where Christian values and morality were taught, and public schools were characterized as centers where secular values and bad character were encouraged in keeping with the misguided, ungodly, and destructive agenda of liberal social engineers. As “instruments of the egalitarian state,” public schools were pliable in the hands of liberals in a way that private schools were not.⁵⁰

During his remarks at CPAC, Rev. Billings argued that the private Christian schools taught moral values and Christian beliefs. For instance, they were taught that evolution (which Billings characterized as being patently absurd) was wrong. In the

⁴⁷ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 118, Tape 134

⁴⁸ ACU Audio Collection MSS 176 Box 118 Tape 133; Whitaker, *New Right Papers*. An article by Stanmeyer is also featured in the book along with articles by Richard Viguerie, Paul Weyrich, William Rusher, and other prominent conservative movement leaders.

⁴⁹ ACU Audio Collection MSS 176 Box 116 Tape 105

⁵⁰ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 116 Tape 105

private Christian schools, children were also taught they key values of discipline and respect for others. He noted that during his work in private schools, he had paddled students because it “develops discipline and character!” He added that private schools were also places where children were held to much higher academic standards than in the public schools and that they were taught not only “how to make a living but also how to live.” Private Christian schools were places that helped children to “develop some kind of character...To know what they need to get out of life and then how to get it.” In addition, he added that private schools had “an emphasis...upon patriotism.”⁵¹

In sum, the private Christian schools were institutions that taught Christian beliefs, Christian values, and that cultivated good moral character and love of country. In the context of his remarks, Billings emphasized the fact that private schools taught and encouraged good character and morality and that state-controlled public schools encouraged bad character and a lack of morality in their efforts to adhere to federal guidelines. Specifically, the public schools taught the values of “secular humanism,” they did not teach the values of discipline and respect, and they taught students to satisfy their physical desires at every turn instead of seeking spiritual fulfillment and God’s plan for their lives. Billings noted: “happiness is not something you search for, its something we stumble over on the pathway to duty.”⁵²

During his speech, Billings also emphasized that the private Christian schools were growing rapidly and that thousands would likely form by the turn of the century. His vision of a society was one in which private education would come to overshadow public sector education altogether.

Desired reforms

In the context of these panel discussions on education, it was therefore not the case that all of the panelists spoke extensively about the need to reform public education or about methods for doing so. Public schools were seen by Billings and Rice as instruments of the state. During his remarks at CPAC 1980, Charles Rice noted:

I don’t think the public schools are worth saving. I think the best thing that’s happened in this country is the Christian school movement ... The state, especially the secular humanist state, cannot educate children without imbuing them with its own religion, and I don’t think the state has any capacity to educate children.⁵³

Rice added that the solution was to build more private schools and overwhelm public education altogether. He noted:

I think what we’ve got to do is build institutions, which is why the Christian school movement is so important, and why its so important for

⁵¹ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 116 Tape 105

⁵² MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 116 Tape 105

⁵³ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 118, Tape 134

us to focus on such issues as Mr. Ball was raising... The issues of overwhelming government power, when imposed upon the family and imposed upon school children... The school prayer issue, I don't want to minimize it. I don't want to portray it as something that would be a cure all for public schools, either, because nothing's going to save the public schools, I think. I think they're careening toward extinction, and I'm glad to see it... provided, and I think this is a very important proviso, this will be a good thing provided that there are— through private initiatives, through properly limited tax credits... provided there is some way to build the alternatives, to build good education under private sources, particularly religious sources.⁵⁴

Tax credits were thus a very limited way in which public policy could be used to encourage and cultivate private education. Significantly, educational voucher programs were not mentioned at either CPAC 1979 or CPAC 1980, despite the fact that education panels were held at both.

The Family

Conservatives stressed that the most important institution where Christian values and moral standards of right and wrong were taught and learned was the traditional family. New Right conservatives placed great emphasis upon the family precisely because it was a “moral matrix.” At CPAC, discussions of the family centered on its importance and upon the dangers posed by positive state action to its existence and to its prerogatives. During his remarks during the panel on “the American Family” held at CPAC 1980, William Stanmeyer noted:

The family, the traditional family— one man married to one woman— and frequently with children, is a moral matrix. It is the only way that people can be trained through experience to the acculturation of responsibility. In other words, they learn to do what is right, and they have people loving them— with them— constantly helping them along as they begin to find themselves and find their proper role in society... where else would that happen in our society if it were not for families that encourage children to go home, do their homework, study, save their money, work summer jobs, work vacation period jobs during the school years, and so on. The family has an economic dimension in training people to take it as part of life, and one has to postpone all that he wants for the sake of developing himself and working for others. The family has a religious dimension... The family is a place where you find out about God and respect and authority that is other than the state— either your parents, or God, or both... Destroy the family, put the children as wards of the state... and you're going to end up with no sense of allegiance to anyone but the state, because there's

⁵⁴ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 118, Tape 134

no alternative authority figure in the child's life. It is not an accident that the Communist nations always attempt to disrupt the internal independence and autonomy of the family when they take over a country. Psychologically, the family gives the girl and the boy children role models. What the father is, and what the mother is, and that they are different... The young boy can learn about manliness from his father and womanliness in the best sense of that word from his mother, and the child, the girl, will learn the same from her parents and the appropriate roles if they have a father and mother... much of our problem is that the Playboy philosophy of our time keeps men and those women who adopt it in a state of perpetual adolescence. Even the name— Playboy. Get out in your sandbox, and play with your toys, but don't face the hard life. Play with you sexual toys day by day, run around with your motorcycles, and your stereos, and your girlfriends—the Playboy philosophy. 10, 12, 14 year olds. Immature, however much money is involved in it. Manliness means more than playing around. Finally, the family is an educational place. All the schools can do is build on what the family has done or try to build despite what the family has not done. I believe this will be the domestic fight of the 1980s. There are philosophical, almost ideological, almost religious, almost fanatical currents flowing in this country— winds blowing, of people who want to destroy this traditional role of the family. Sometimes they're well motivated but just stupid. Other times, one doubts their good faith. Nonetheless their goal is the same.⁵⁵

During the CPAC panel on the family, discussions centered on the ways in which liberals sought to redefine the institution of the family and therefore destroy it in its traditional sense. For example, Rosemary Thompson, an activist from Phyllis Schlafly's organization, the Eagle Forum, stressed that three million tax dollars had been allocated to implement the recommendations of the White House Conference on Families. Thompson noted:

If you want a little background on [the conference], I have one pamphlet... which is a reprint from a magazine article called "Suffer the Little Children to Come Under the Federal Government," which is exactly what they had in mind.⁵⁶

Thompson went on to describe in a highly critical and sarcastic tone the recommendations of the White House Conference. She stated:

ERA, abortion on demand, gay rights, the federal government assumes a major role in child development, national health insurance, guaranteed annual wage for everyone. This is now in the name of strengthening the

⁵⁵ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 118 Tape 133

⁵⁶ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 118 Tape 133

family. You know they don't even let you define families. The national gay task force has taken credit for that... They convinced the national White House officials not to define families. In one of the regional hearings, a homosexual minister said that they wanted laws that would allow the gays who have meaningful relationships and long term commitments to file taxes just like married couples, to adopt children, all this kind of thing [sic], and so the national gay task force seems to be having quite an impact. Eleanor Smeal testified that families should be in the inclusive sense of people who over time have established a lasting relationship involving living, loving, working together for their individual and mutual benefit, sharing mutual benefits, responsibilities, values, and goals.⁵⁷

Significantly, then, her criticisms were not just of state action that would curtail the liberties of individuals but also of state actions that would redefine families and expand rights to populations with alternative lifestyles. As I noted before, through opposition to government programs such as the White House Conference and through opposition to uses of government authority targeted at creating (or finding) individual rights that were not already enjoyed, conservatives defended tradition. Of course, putting Thompson's comments together with those of Stanmeyer (cited above), the conservative defense of the traditional family was rooted in the fact that it was a moral center where values were taught. By redefining the family, the government caused damage to the institution and therefore allowed alternative versions of the family to develop which would not centers for the cultivation of bad morals and bad character. Thompson added that Eleanor Smeal also called for "explicit sex education beginning in kindergarten all the way through high school or the school loses federal funding" and stressed, "now that give you an idea of some of the people who are calling the shots!"⁵⁸

Thompson also spoke extensively about state-led efforts to not only redefine the family but also interfere with its prerogatives and moral choices. Thompson gave several examples of state interference, including the example of an HEW-managed workshop in which a panelist stated that "if you teach your child about Jesus Christ and Christianity without teaching him any other options for choosing a religion, that that would be discrimination and... should not be legal." She also gave the example of a woman in New Jersey who was bullied by school officials and forced to take her daughter to a psychologist chosen by the state because her daughter didn't weigh enough.⁵⁹

Solutions

William Stanmeyer offered the most detailed remarks for redressing the problems created by the state attack on the family. Among Stanmeyer's policy recommendations were the following:

⁵⁷ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 118 Tape 133

⁵⁸ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 118 Tape 133

⁵⁹ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 118 Tape 133

- Tax deductibility of mortgage payments, which would help families to buy homes
- Removal of federal funding of education, unless laws are enacted to allow voluntary prayer in public buildings
- Denial of federal funds to states unless they allow parents and the community to review textbooks prior to their use in public schools
- The removal of the authority of HEW to determine policies regarding the sexual intermingling of boys and girls in schools and the return of that authority to state and local authorities
- The establishment of a family savings and education plan to allow families to create a special savings account to save for their children's education.
- Provision of tax incentives to corporations which would encourage them to establish daycare centers near the workplace for mothers⁶⁰

He noted that the purpose of provisions was to restore “the proper natural order of things” that were “destroyed by earlier actions of government.”⁶¹ As I argued earlier, the list is reflective of a vision of public policy that would gently support the traditional family, reduce the heavy-handed control of government, and decentralize state authority in the area of education. It is a public policy that would not directly regulate private activity or reshape schools according to a different moral vision but rather one that would empower private individuals to take an active role free from government influence and control.

Court-Ordered Busing: an Unconstitutional Policy of Racial Integration

At CPAC 1980, Lino Graglia, a professor of Constitutional Law at the University of Texas-Austin, was invited to speak on the issue of busing. During his remarks, he argued that busing was a policy created not by Congress but rather by the Supreme Court. Specifically, it was a policy that was pursued by the Court at the urging of liberal groups such as the NAACP in order to accomplish a social policy goal of racial integration. In Graglia's view, racial integration, which was a policy that was pursued via positive discrimination on the basis of race, directly contradicted the requirements of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which specifically required that government not assign students to schools on the basis of race.⁶²

According to Graglia, the objective of the busing policies (as pursued at the urging of liberals) was to create greater racial harmony and educational opportunities for minority students. Graglia denied that they achieved this purpose. While he made arguments against the policy on constitutional grounds, he added that busing did not achieve its intended objective at all but in fact did the opposite. According to Graglia, the threat of busing devastated school systems and led to greater racial homogeneity in

⁶⁰ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 118 Tape 133 The list was not recited in this format. It was compiled from a transcription of a portion of the audio recording of Stanmeyer's remarks.

⁶¹ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 118 Tape 133

⁶² MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 118, Tape 134

schools, since middle class and wealthy families simply moved or pulled their children out of public schools altogether when they faced the threat that their children would be bused. In addition, busing created greater racial hostility among students who were forced into environments where they did not prefer to be.⁶³

During his remarks, Graglia also strongly criticized the method by which the Court pursued the policy. He argued that the Court concealed its true intentions and by framing its efforts to mandate busing only as efforts to further implement its *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision and thus undo the effects of segregation. By doing so, it lured a majority of the public outside of the South into a false sense of complacency that busing would only be applied to others. As a result, the initial policy was advanced by the Court without much public opposition. Once it was applied to schools outside of the South, those in areas that had already been destroyed by it were unwilling to mobilize behind the efforts of other states to oppose the policy.⁶⁴

Conclusion

In sum, just as the IRS was blamed for seeking to implement social policy through its tax exemptions, and just as the White House Conference on Families was accused of seeking to alter the definition of the family at the urging of liberal interest groups, so too was the Court accused of seeking to implement social policy at the urging of Civil Rights groups. In all three issue areas, conservatives mobilized against state-led efforts to pursue social change. In doing so, they opposed what they characterized as abuses of state authority while also expressing strong opposition to the liberal ideologues and interest groups who were depicted as using the instrumentalities of the state to enact change. Expressions of opposition to the state were therefore also tied to strong defenses of tradition.

2. Anti-Communism and Defense Policy

At CPAC 1979 and CPAC 1980, the discourses in the area of anti-communist and defense policy were not markedly different from what they had been in prior years. Panelists argued that it was important to: 1) expand the US arsenal of conventional weapons and 2) assume a tougher posture with regard to US-Soviet relations. The two points were tightly connected. Superiority in the area of conventional weapons capabilities was regarded as essential in order to assume a tough rhetorical posture toward the Soviets. Assuming a tough rhetorical posture meant rejecting the policies of détente and making irrational and misguided agreements to reduce armaments. Stronger weapons systems and a tough rhetorical posture were both considered to be essential in order to discourage the Soviet Union from further expanding its influence in the countries of Africa and the Middle East— particularly over countries that controlled oil and other natural resources upon which the United States depended.

⁶³ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 118, Tape 134

⁶⁴ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 118, Tape 134

Without strong weapons capabilities, conservatives stressed that the Soviets would simply ignore American warnings and that they would continue to expand their sphere of influence without any fear of retribution. Indeed, panelists stressed that a great imbalance already existed in the area of conventional weapons and that the Soviets already took American threats to their advances lightly. Soviets did so because they recognized that the Americans would not risk a nuclear war in response to small advances in small countries and that the Americans did not have the weapons to back up their threats in a war of conventional weapons. During his remarks at CPAC 1980, Jesse Helms noted:

If the US strategic nuclear arsenal cancels out the Soviet strategic nuclear arsenal, and vice-versa, then the country with the largest conventional force has the advantage. And that country is the Soviet Union.⁶⁵

He added:

The Soviet union has out-maneuvered us, out-thought us, and moved ahead of us. Being number one does mean something!... Short of nuclear war with the United States, the Soviets now feel that they can do pretty much as they please in the world. They [know] that the US will do essentially nothing. And they have Angola, Ethiopia, Afghanistan, and Iran to prove it. Because the United States seems powerless to deal with the Soviets in conflicts below the strategic level, the Soviets will continue their activities. Will the United States risk nuclear war with the Soviets, say, over Angola? Or Ethiopia? Or Iran? Or Rhodesia? Or South Africa? Or Saudi Arabia? Or Abu Dhabi? Or Kuwait?⁶⁶

The answer, of course, was no! Soviets knew that Americans would not risk nuclear war over those countries, and with its weak rhetorical posture, it allowed to Soviets to expand their sphere of influence.

The decline in weapons capabilities was blamed on the weak defense posture of presidential administrations stretching all the way back to Eisenhower. In this vein, President Carter's decisions to cancel the B-1 bomber, the MX missile, and other weapons systems were cast not as radical departures from the missteps of earlier administrations but rather as misguided moves that made an already serious problem far worse. At CPAC 1979, Congressman Steve Symms (R-ID) noted:

Within a few months after his inauguration, Jimmy Carter began to show his timidity and lack of resolve and redress in the emerging strategic imbalance. In my opinion, Carter's decision to cancel production of the B-1 was one of the most outrageous and far-reaching decisions made today by this administration...the neutron bomb has been all but

⁶⁵ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 9, Folder 13

⁶⁶ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 9, Folder 13

cancelled. The Trident submarine construction program is behind schedule, the cruise missile program is not only falling behind schedule but there's a growing concern that the little missiles may not be as invisible as advertised to the public. With regard to the MX mobile ICBM, the Carter Administration has repeatedly delayed decisions... thereby further delaying the date of its initial operational capability so that even if a production decision was made today, it would be at least 1987 before that system could be operational. It's my personal opinion that this administration has no intention of ever deploying the MX in a land mobile mode, which is the way the missile was ... required to be made so that it would be effective. I'm of the belief that the administration is just stringing the Congress along. Once they get SALT II signed by the Senate and ratified, the trap will snap shut on the US Senate, and the Carter administration will then cancel the MX program, just like they've done with all the other strategic programs.⁶⁷

In this context, conservatives also harshly criticized the national security bureaucracy. This bureaucracy was characterized as the instrument of a coalition of liberal ideologues and other interests who sought to shape the direction of foreign policy and mould it to meet their own strategic purposes. In conservative discourses, it was this bureaucracy (not just carter) that was responsible for the continued decline of US strength and armaments over multiple administrations. . It was accused of influencing the decisions of presidents from both parties and forcing its will on the American people, even when its will was entirely contrary to public opinion. One example of this was the treaty to give away the Panama Canal, which was unpopular with the public and which weakened US interests by relinquishing control of a key "choke point" through which the world's natural resources moved. Another example involved the actions of the US Commerce Department which, despite clear prohibitions by Congress, worked to aggressively export American technologies to the Soviet Union. During his comments at CPAC, William Rusher noted:

I would suggest to you that as we gear up to announce the Carter foreign policy, if that's what we're about, let us have the grace to remember that the policy we will be denouncing was the Ford foreign policy and the Nixon foreign policy and the Johnson foreign policy, with, as I said, individual modifications. For example, the whole disgraceful giveaway of the Panama Canal was negotiated and pursued at least as far back as the Johnson administration, and there are those who would trace it to the Eisenhower Administration. Mr. Kissinger laid down the fundamental tenets upon which it would be, upon which it would be followed, pursued, and was pursued to its triumphant conclusion under Mr. Carter. This was not, therefore, a Carter policy any more than it had been the policy of his predecessors. As a matter of fact, he got the vocal support of

⁶⁷ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 117, Tape 116

I believe at least Mr. Ford and Mr. Kissinger and could have had that of Mr. Nixon if anybody had thought it would do good instead of harm. This same bipartisan establishment engineered you know perfectly well the recognition of Red China. That was on the cards. I was told by officials of the Republic of China and Taiwan in 1976 and early in 1976 at that that they had been told by officers of the US State Department— this was the Ford State Department, if that's what you want to call it— that the recognition of Red China was coming in the next administration regardless of who was elected president of the United States. That was just on the tracks... gonna happen! Might not have, would not probably have happened as ruthlessly and undiplomatically as it happened under Mr. Carter, but it was there and on its way, and that, too, had been engineered as far back as the Nixon Administration by this bipartisan foreign policy establishment. Both of the SALT treaties are the products of the same crowd. SALT started under Mr. Nixon, marched forward under Mr. Ford, and then negotiations for SALT II were brought to their culmination by Mr. Carter. In fact, the whole concept of détente, which I think is little more than the word, the code word for appeasement ... That whole concept moved forward under the bipartisan establishment So let us not, as we embark upon our war dance, suppose that what is wrong with American foreign policy and has been, and there's plenty, is necessarily the possession of any one party. What we are dealing with is a group of people— some banks, some multinational corporations, their lawyers, their friends in the foreign service, and certain members of the Congressional offices— who together make up this bipartisan foreign policy establishment, and they care very little about the policy or the views of the American people.⁶⁸

For these reasons, Rusher and M. Stanton Evans both argued that the simple removal of Carter and the election of a conservative president would not be enough. In order to reverse the dangerous course in US foreign policy, it would be essential to dismantle the national security bureaucracy of which he and other presidents had been an agent by ousting those leaders who were responsible for pursuing irresponsible and misguided policies.

Conservatives also argued that the US should assume a more aggressive posture toward the Soviet Union. As they had been in the past, the SALT II talks were an important topic of conversation. These talks were characterized as ill-advised because the Soviet Union could not be trusted to follow through on its agreements. In fact, the participation of the Soviets in the SALT talks was characterized as little more than a ploy intended to mislead and create the illusion of attempts at cooperation while masking efforts to expand armaments and expand influence in countries of strategic importance behind the scenes. The President was depicted as naive in the sense that he believed in

⁶⁸ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 118, Tape 142

the talks and in that he thought he could somehow negotiate with the Soviet Union. Helms noted:

Iranian oil is vital to a number of US allies, not the least of which are South Africa, Rhodesia and Israel. Europeans buy large quantities of Iranian oil. We do too... While the Soviets moved decisively in Iran, the United States again stood idly by. When the Soviets warned that events in Iran were not a matter of US concern, the Carter Administration acquiesced in the Soviet view... Instead of telling the Soviets and that the shah was our ally, and that the Soviets had better stay out, President Carter told them "you stay out, and we will stay out." We stayed out, but the Soviets didn't. In doing so, Iran was lost.⁶⁹

Negotiations and arrangements were therefore treated as an impossible and futile because the Soviet Union's tactic was to achieve domination. By reducing American armaments and by engaging in the talks with the Soviets, Carter essentially allowed them to succeed in their deceptions, and he facilitated the continued decline of US strategic superiority, and he put the United States and its economy at an even greater risk. It is significant to note that this context also gave rise to extensive discussions of the importance of harvesting and developing domestic energy resources and the importance of US energy independence generally. By harvesting natural resources domestically, this enhanced national security by making the country and its economy less susceptible to the aggressive actions taken by the Soviets.

3. Taxes and Spending

As in years past, the cornerstones of the conservative movement's economic agenda involved: 1) implementing spending and tax reductions; and 2) rejecting Keynesianism as the theory best suited for guiding the development of public economic policy and replacing it with an entirely new public philosophy rooted in the theories supply side economics.

There was a particularly strong push for a balanced budget amendment to the constitution. This had been a major issue during the 1978 campaign, and as I already noted, a number of Democrats had also come out in support of the initiative while the Republican leadership in Congress had balked at it. One after one, the conservative leaders who spoke argued that such an amendment was absolutely essential in order to enforce fiscal restraint and reduce spending. Standing strongly behind the amendment was also an important step that could help to more strongly associate the GOP with a conservative message in the public mind. As the argument generally went, a balanced budget amendment would not just require Congress to balance the budget— it would actually force them to reduce government expenditures. It would have this effect because Congressmen would be reluctant to balance the budget by raising taxes. They would therefore balance it by reducing spending.

⁶⁹ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 9, Folder 13

That said, there was a slight tension between the great push to restrain spending via a balanced budget amendment and the second piece that I mentioned— the importance of supply side economics. The great push to restrain spending risked overshadowing the supply side message which emphasized tax cuts. During his remarks at CPAC 1979, Jack Kemp sought to reinforce the idea that while reductions in spending were important, tax cuts were an essential part of the conservative message that would help them to distinguish themselves. Kemp argued that supply side theory offered enormous political potential for conservatives. It enabled them to articulate a positive message and a positive vision that carried the potential for not only reducing inflation but also building a stronger economy and therefore creating greater wealth. Budget balancing and spending reductions were only effective for explaining what conservatives were against. Supply side theory would help conservatives to explain what they were for in a positive sense. Kemp noted during a discussion of supply side theory:

I think there's political value. I think we have a chance as never before to bring to the American people the hope that they've been waiting for for so long— that there is an answer to this Keynesian dilemma of high inflation and slow growth at the very same time. And I think that's what we need to bring to them. I think that is what really we must do if we are to respond to the needs... of the American people, and I think it is all wrapped up in the idea of individual liberty, individual freedom, and reducing the level of government spending by encouraging the growth of the greatest economic experiment in human freedom that mankind has ever designed... it is more threatened today by some of these outdated, outmoded economic models than anything I can possibly imagine.⁷⁰

Another important task undertaken at CPAC involved not just advocating for reducing tax and spending cuts but also characterizing and criticizing the initiatives of the Democrats and the Carter administration and stressing the fact that the administration's policies were not really conservative. During his remarks at CPAC 1979, Congressman Mickey Edwards stressed that despite his conservative rhetoric, Carter's budget, which was described as "lean and austere," was actually anything but. He noted:

[Carter's] budget of half a trillion dollars, and that deficit of 29 billion dollars, is described in the press as 'lean' and 'austere.' At the rate we are going, our federal budget is increasing by 11 percent a year, and by 1986, we are going to, unless we turn it around, have a budget of a trillion dollars a year.⁷¹

⁷⁰ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 117, Tape 109

⁷¹ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 117, Tape 118

4. Welfare

There was very little that was new about conservative discourses on welfare at CPAC 1979 and CPAC 1980. Welfare policies were opposed for the same combination of reasons that they had been in previous years. One important speech that is especially worthy of note was delivered by Reagan's former welfare director, Robert Carlson, who had also spoken at CPAC 1975. During his remarks, Carlson sought to characterize the true intentions of the welfare bureaucracy, who he described as including "the people in HEW [and] the professional welfare people at the state level and at the county and local level."⁷²

As he put it, the intentions of this welfare bureaucracy was to engineer change within society and to implement its own flawed vision of a society without inequalities. Carlson noted: "those who want to develop an efficient income redistribution system ... felt... if they could take the welfare system and demonstrate that it's a mess, call it a mess, and so forth" that they could "then replace it with not just a guaranteed income but an efficient system for redistributing income" and that "in a very short time they could level income in [the] country." He went on to explain how the welfare bureaucracy systematically pursuing and seeking to implement this vision of a country with level income by fighting for universal welfare eligibility, the centralized determination of benefits by the federal government, and the provision of welfare benefits to citizens in the form of cash payments.⁷³

Conclusion

In 1979-1980, the various conservative constituencies who were involved in CPAC conference proceedings were concerned about a variety of different things. Some like Robert Carlson were concerned about welfare policy while others like Rev. Robert Billings were chiefly concerned about the IRS attack upon private schools. The important tie that bound all of these actors together was that they shared a group of common enemies— President Carter, the liberals in Congress, the Courts, and the federal bureaucracy. These individuals and institutions were opposed because they sought to destroy the traditions of society, to destroy the economy, to alter the balance of the power in the world to suit their own goals and interests, and to enact their own vision for society through administrative law. Just as the welfare bureaucracy sought to impose its vision for a society with equalized income distribution, the IRS conducted a frontal assault on private schools in order to eradicate social differences and promote standard educational curricula. Just as the HEW bureaucrats bullied parents by forcing their children to needlessly visit school psychologists, the national security bureaucracy sought to force the enactment of the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty. The examples and specific actions that were opposed by the various activist constituencies differed from issue area to issue area, but regardless of the issue, what brought conservatives of all stripes together was their opposition to big, activist government as conceived, advanced, and

⁷² MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 116, Tape 104

⁷³ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 116, Tape 104

managed by liberals. In this context, conservatives argued strenuously for the reduction of judicial and bureaucratic power in a broad range of issue areas. When Reagan said, “government is the problem,” the various conservative constituencies all had their own ideas about what that meant, but they all embraced the words with great enthusiasm.

CHAPTER 9

Conclusion

In this dissertation, I have argued that CPAC played an important role in the life of the early conservative movement, and I have clarified the nature of that role that it played through an examination of conference proceedings held between 1974 and 1980. In this concluding chapter, I argue that this investigation sheds fresh light on the process by which the modern conservative coalition developed and evolved and that it offers insight into the nature of ideational transitions and the variables that shape them.

Broader Implications: The Development of Modern Conservatism

The Role of Public Intellectuals There is a broad consensus among scholars that by working out reasons why the anti-communist, free market, and traditionalist strands of conservatism were consistent with each other philosophically, fusion conservatives at the *National Review* helped to set the stage for different types of conservative politicians and activists to also join together as part of a single political coalition.¹

While this is certainly true, most accounts of the work done by public intellectuals do not consider the coalition-building role that these individuals also played. As the history of the ACU and CPAC demonstrates, activist conservative public intellectuals did not just write about ideas; they served as aggressive advocates for them in the political arena. They went out into the world to build organizations designed to encourage political action and cultivate the development and expansion of the conservative movement.

In that vein, the American Conservative Union (ACU) was formed in 1964 by a coalition of politicians and public intellectuals in order to encourage conservative political action within the Republican Party. Among its founders were William F. Buckley, Frank Meyer, and many other writers at the *National Review*. Ten years later, William Rusher and M. Stanton Evans worked through the ACU to build CPAC. In doing so, they recruited many other public intellectuals, including Lee Edwards, Daniel Oliver, Alan Reynolds, Norman Turé, Bill Rickenbacker, and others to join the ongoing dialogue that they facilitated at the conference. Through their contributions to the discourse at CPAC conferences, the public intellectuals assembled by Rusher, Evans, and their peers helped to elaborate narratives, recommend strategies, and apply ideas in constructive ways and, in the process, helped to steer discourse. In doing so, they helped to bridge ideational gaps between diverse interests, help the coalition to navigate ideational and institutional opportunities and constraints, and encourage the development of greater unity within the conservative movement.

Of course, the activities of conservative intellectuals at the ACU and CPAC are reflective of a much broader role that they played throughout the era that I have studied

¹ Hart, *Making of the American Conservative Mind*; Nash, *Conservative Movement*; Noel, *Political Ideologies*; Rusher, *Rise of the Right*; Smart, *Principles and Heresies*

and even today. Rusher and Evans actively traveled around the country advancing ideas, interpretations, and strategies as they spoke to a broad range of conservative audiences. Evans wrote a regular opinion column for the *Indianapolis Star News*. In the future, scholars should consider investigating the role of activist conservative intellectuals further and examining the role that these individuals have played in not only connecting ideas in books and opinion pieces but also representing ideas and assembling coalitions in the world of politics.

Communicative vs. Coordinative Discourses Other scholarly accounts of the rise of modern conservatism have focused on the process by which ideas and themes were linked together rhetorically by Republican politicians such as Strom Thurmond, George Wallace, Barry Goldwater, and Richard Nixon in collaboration with conservative public intellectuals during the early years of the conservative movement. These accounts tend to focus upon the cumulative efforts of GOP politicians as they sought to pry racial conservatives in the South away from the Democratic Party's mass voting coalition and harness the backlash of voters against cultural and social changes of the 1960s.²

Such accounts help to explain the ways that ideas were communicated and used to assemble key swing voting constituencies by politicians. They say very little, however, about the background processes of coalition formation and platform construction that undergirded these rhetorical appeals. In the case of the conservative movement, the background dynamics of coalition formation involved the blending of multiple, bounded discursive communities, single issue groups, intellectual interests, and politicians. The diverse commitments and ideas of these communities and interests were blended together not only by the work of public intellectuals but also through more organic discursive processes as these interests interacted with each other, exchanged ideas, and found their way onto common ground. These organic processes happened at sites of discourse like CPAC. Through these discursive exchanges, a diverse platform of policy commitments was assembled and rationalized, and a movement coalesced that ultimately came to serve as a critical support base for Ronald Reagan. The rhetorical appeals made by politicians are often reflective of and are made possible by background processes of coalition formation. This is especially true in the modern era where party organizations are weak and where election contests between candidates of competing political parties may, at a deeper level, become competitions between the candidates of competing political coalitions, their agendas, and the package of problem and solution frames that they have come to represent.

The New Right Certainly, the most important change between 1964 and 1980 was the growth of the New Right in the 1970s and the fusion of the New Right coalition and its many traditionalist elements with the Old Right Goldwater coalition and its predominantly libertarian elements.

There is a vast literature in political science that describes and analyzes the mobilization of socially conservative and religious constituencies (commonly referred to as the New Right and the New Religious Right, respectively) between the 1970s and

² Thomas Edsall and Mary Edsall, *Chain Reaction: The Impact of Race, Rights, and Taxes on American Politics* (New York: WW Norton, 1991); Lowndes, *New Deal*

1990s.³ The problem is that most accounts tend to blur the boundaries between the Old Right and the New Right and conflate the two. Accounts of the rise of the New Right fail to make careful distinctions between the ideas, principles, and philosophies of what I have argued were actually two partially conjoined political coalitions, and they therefore fail to isolate and examine critically the processes by which the two were consciously merged together. Accounts of the rise of the New Right also say very little about the themes, narratives, and frames that connected social conservatives, religious conservatives, economic/libertarian conservatives, and small government conservatives together into a single coalition.

Through my analysis of CPAC discourses, I have shown that these groups were united through their opposition to a common enemy---modern liberalism. Modern liberalism and its transformative properties were, in turn, framed as the *problem* responsible for the all of the diverse grievances of the groups that became bound up within the conservative movement. The agendas of the Old Right and the New Right were merged together as they expressed their hostilities in shared settings and as an image of modern liberalism was socially constructed through discourse.

Partisan Realignment Finally, in the realignment genre, scholars have gone to great lengths to explain changes in the partisan composition of the electorate that occurred between the 1950s and 1990s. The question they address is a straightforward one: if partisanship tends to be mostly stable over time (as we know to be the case), then why did many voters switch parties during this era? The most convincing explanations to date are those that have linked improvements in the Republican Party's electoral fortunes between the 1950s and the 1990s to the collapse of the Democratic Party's inverted class coalition (which had been held together by race), to economic growth in the South, and to party-switching behavior by an expanding American middle class. Without the issue of race conservatism to hold middle class and wealthy white southerners in the Democratic Party, many became Republicans in proportions roughly consistent with trends in the rest of the country. In essence, as mainstream thinking goes, the South ceased to be exceptional, and the reshuffling of partisan attachments benefited the GOP.⁴

³ Critchlow, *Conservative Ascendancy*; Paul Gottfried, *The Conservative Movement*, Revised Edition (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1993); Michael Lienesch, *Redeeming America: Piety and Politics in the New Christian Right* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1993); Clyde Wilcox and Carin Robinson, *Onward Christian Soldiers? The Religious Right in American Politics* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000); For a first-hand account, see Richard Viguerie, *The New Right: We're Ready to Lead* (Falls Church, VA: The Viguerie Company, 1981)

⁴ Larry Bartels, *Unequal Democracy: The Political Economy of the New Gilded Age* (New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation, 2008); Edward Carmines and James Stimson, *Issue Evolution: Race and the Transformation of American Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989); Nolan McCarty, Keith Poole, and Howard Rosenthal, *Polarized America: The Dance of Ideology and Unequal Riches* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006); Byron Shafer and Richard Johnston, *The End of Southern Exceptionalism: Class, Race, and Partisan Change in the Postwar South* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006)

Unfortunately, while empirical accounts that attribute realignment to the parties' positions on race and to economic change are convincing, they are also limited in the scope of what they are able to explain. Economic explanations can help to explain the growth of the Republican Party's electoral base, but they offer limited insight into the complex dynamics of the ideational transformation of the Republican Party and its policy commitments. For that, one must look not at trends in mass voting behavior and realignment but at the perceptions, calculations, and strategic choices made by political elites and activists in their quest for political power and influence. As I have shown, conservatives made many thoughtful and strategic decisions about what to say, about what to stand for, and which groups to welcome into their coalition as they sought to expand their base and transform the Republican Party into a representative of their philosophy. The decisions and activities of small communities of actors had an impact that is not captured by behaviorist, economic accounts of the rise of modern conservatism.

The Nature of Ideational Transitions

My analysis also sheds fresh light on the nature of ideational transitions and the complementary roles that ideas and discourse, interests, and institutions play in their development.

Ideas and Discourse I have argued that discourse plays an important role in bringing groups of actors together and in fostering stronger relationships between them. Discourse is a medium through which ideas and other ideationally laden elements of discourse (including characterizations, narratives, and interpretations) are exchanged among a community of actors. Ideas and elements of discourse are created, expressed, and circulated among the members of a coalition as participants express their ideas and as they cooperate, coordinate, and communicate with each other. Certain ideas can live within the discourses of a coalition and can ultimately come to function as the basis for shared perceptions of the political world as well as the foundation for shared strategies and commonly defined problems and goals which can, in turn, enhance group cohesion.

Through my analysis of CPAC proceedings, I have identified some of the characterizations, narratives, and interpretations that were carriers of ideas in conservative discourses during the 1970s and have been able to trace the development and usage of these elements over time. I have shown that the characterization of the voting public as being inclusive of a conservative majority served as the basis for a series of shared strategies that were expected to help conservatives transform the Republican Party into a vehicle for their ideas. In movement discourses, President Nixon and President Ford were depicted as poor Republican leaders who contributed to the decline in popularity of their party because they failed to articulate a conservative message and therefore alienated the conservative majority. Ford's loss to Carter was attributed to the fact that Carter positioned himself to the right of Ford and therefore won the partial support of the conservative majority. Carter's conservative rhetoric was depicted not as true conservatism but rather as a deception and an effort to manipulate conservative impulses arising within the country. Ronald Reagan was characterized as a strong

candidate precisely because he embraced core conservative principles and could speak to the conservative majority.

Other characterizations, narratives, and interpretations of the era connected a series of grievances against modern liberalism together and targeted them— first at liberalism as expressed and represented by the Republican Party and then at liberalism as expressed and represented by the Democratic Party. It also focused hostility upon the courts, the bureaucracy, and the coalition of liberal ideologues and social engineers who were purported to be using state institutions to restructure the economy and enact their vision of a good society through “judicial edict” and administrative law.

Prior to 1977, Nixon, Ford, and the liberal Republicans were criticized for supporting deficit spending, détente, and New Deal social programs. During 1977 and beyond, hostility became increasingly focused upon liberals outside of the GOP. The bureaucracy sought to destroy private schools, control public school curricula, redefine the family, redistribute income in order to eliminate economic inequality, force the giveaway of the Panama Canal, and force misguided efforts to pursue the SALT talks with the Soviet Union. The national security bureaucracy was characterized as being under the control of an unelected and dangerous bipartisan defense establishment, and the courts, HEW, and the rest of the Executive Branch were characterized as instruments of a coalition of entrenched liberal interest groups who sought to destroy American values and culture and restructure society to fit their own vision for it. The idea that big, activist government as conceived, developed, and managed by liberals was a bad and dangerous thing was a powerful idea that connected the grievances of a diverse community of activist constituencies together and united them in opposition to a common enemy.

These connections were forged— and this coalition of interests found its way onto that common ground— as they interacted and exchanged ideas with each other at sites of discourse like CPAC. The characterizations, interpretations, narratives, and strategies that flowed through the discourses at CPAC were more than just neutral descriptions of the motives of political actors or sterile accounts of the causes of the political developments of the day. Ingrained within CPAC discourses were evolving definitions of what it meant to be a principled conservative, of what it meant to be a liberal, and of which groups of actors were working under which label at which time. The ideas and elements of discourse that were exchanged among conservative elites, intellectuals, and activists who interacted with each other at CPAC thus served as the foundations for a rich and ideationally laden portrait of the political universe to which each conference participant was exposed and ultimately free to interpret and apply in his or her own way.⁵

Interests By definition, a political coalition includes a diverse group of interests who have a diverse series of ideas, grievances, and policy objectives. The discourses of a

⁵ I have not made any claims about the uptake and absorption of the ideas expressed at CPAC by attendees. Aside from audio recordings of the levels of applause in response to various speakers and comments, there is not sufficient evidence to say how the ideas and narratives that I have traced were actually received or processed by those who were in attendance. In a few instances, it has been possible to use applause levels to make some rough assessments of how ideas and speakers were received. For instance, it is possible to say without any doubt that the “bold colors” speech delivered by Ronald Reagan at CPAC 1975 strongly resonated with the audience.

coalition take shape and evolve as those interests interact with each other and exchange ideas. The ideational formulations that ultimately develop within a community of actors are a product of those interactions. They are a reflection of the ideas and grievances of the participants in a community's discourses. In this vein, I have argued that as new groups join a political coalition, discourses expand and evolve as the ideas that those groups represent become infused into the discourses of the coalition. The policy platform of a community of actors and the ideational linkages that emerge to rationalize that platform and ultimately become the core principles around which the community is oriented are products of the interests that are involved.

Ideas may be used by elites to mobilize new interests and encourage them to join a coalition (so the arrows may also point in the other direction), but, as I argued in chapter 2, the mobilization of new interests still has the potential to bring new ideas into the discourses of a coalition and to expand the platform of issues and grievances to which a coalition is committed. As new grievances represented by newly mobilized interests are rationalized in terms of established and widely accepted principles, the collective identity of an entire coalition can change and assume new connotations in the process.

The flow of ideas within a community of actors— including the elements of discourse that take root and the discursive connections that are forged and rise in salience over time— do not do so because they naturally occur in those combinations or because it is inevitable that they must be linked in a particular way according to the laws of the universe. Rather, ideas develop and become tied together within the discourses of a community based on the ideas that are ultimately represented by the conglomeration of interests that are involved. The fact that the modern conservative coalition came together behind a platform that stressed opposition to social engineering, opposition to the welfare state, and opposition to internationalist foreign policy (among other things) was a result of the fact that the particular groups who cooperated, coordinated, and communicated with other and who participated in its discourses had those particular grievances.⁶

Through a time series analysis of CPAC proceedings, I have shown how the inclusion and mobilization of new conservative constituencies led to the expansion of coalition discourses over time. In 1975, there was relatively limited discussion at CPAC about the importance of morals and character, and there was very little racially charged rhetoric. Charles Rice and Mildred Jefferson spoke about the use of abortion by the state to manipulate and to encourage family planning. Rice also spoke about state-led efforts to impose its own vision of morality on children in the public schools. By the late 1970s, however, the New Right had expanded to include the Christian Right and with it many

⁶ Lowndes, *New Deal*, 157-159. Lowndes makes a similar argument. He notes: "In the case of the modern right, nothing necessarily links the positions of states' rights, more punitive sentencing, opposition to welfare, neo-liberal economics, and "family values' into one political identity. Actors began articulating these themes into an associative chain in opposition to the New Deal order. Over time and through continual efforts to recombine political elements in ways that would have traction among voters, the regime builders of the modern Right successfully crafted a coherent political identity.... This new political identity had valence to the degree that different groups came to share a sense of common opposition to the existing political regime as such."

more vocal advocates of these ideas such as the Rev. Robert Billings became involved in conservative politics. Billings, an evangelical pastor, was welcomed at the CPAC conference along with others who were associated with the Christian school movement, and as a result, moralistic rhetoric about the importance of character and Christian values became much more strongly represented within conference discourses than they had been before. During his remarks at CPAC 1979, Billings shouted:

We have a lot of folks who travel around this country– the Rap Brown’s, and the Stokely Charmichael’s, and the Angela Davis’s, and the Joan Baez’s– who go around peddling their trash and their pointers. Listen, as grassroots Americans we have as much right to speak out loud, and if they can jump high, we can jump higher. And let ‘em know that we... believe... in America! This country is right!⁷

These remarks prompted an outburst of thunderous applause from the audience that masked the next few lines of his speech. These highly moralistic and racially charged characterizations simply were not a part of the discourses at earlier CPAC conferences. They were brought into the discourses at CPAC as the coalition expanded and as new actors like Billings joined the effort and began to express their own ideas and grievances.

Institutions Political coalitions exist outside of the boundaries of the established political parties, and so the actors who want to create and maintain them must necessarily set up independent institutions and mechanisms to facilitate their own cooperation, coordination, and communication. Institutions that are set up to serve in this capacity necessarily structure the interactions of participants. By extension, they shape the expression and flow of ideas and determine the pathways through which involved actors find their way onto common ideational ground.

I have shown CPAC was established by intellectuals and political leaders to serve as one such mechanism for the conservative movement. Specifically, the purpose of CPAC was to bring conservatives together and unite them behind common goals and common understandings at a time when the conservative movement was highly fragmented. Since its inception, the conference has become an institution. Even today, it helps to strengthen and reinforce the independence of conservatives as a distinct discursive community within the Republican Party. At CPAC, conservatives are able to hone arguments and sharpen a distinctive platform of ideational and policy commitments that is not Republican but conservative. In the discourses at CPAC, participants also share characterizations, narratives, and interpretations of political context which reinforce an "us vs. them" mentality with respect to other groups of actors and institutions within the political system.

I have shown that during the 1970s, CPAC emerged as a setting where conservative leaders constructed and popularized highly stylized understandings of ideological and institutional context. Through these shared understandings of context, they promoted the development of a shared sense of conservative identity, complete with

⁷ MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 116, Tape 105

shared understandings and language regarding the behavior and intentions of other political actors, the significance of events, and the coalition-building tasks that lay ahead for conservatives. In short, CPAC served as a distinctive forum that enabled conservative elites and activists to coordinate with each other and to develop and thrive as a cohesive group separate from the broader Republican Party coalition of which they were also a part. In 1975, especially, CPAC provided an environment in which movement conservatives expressed their hostility to the leaders of the Republican Party and considered whether or not they should form a separate party altogether. The discussions that took place at CPAC 1975 could *never* have occurred at a Republican Party convention or political rally.

The investigation of CPAC also highlights an important function that politicians and intellectuals play in the coalition-building process. Specifically, they create institutions like CPAC, and in doing so, they create environments which facilitate discourse and structure the flow of ideas. By creating CPAC, leaders like William Rusher and M. Stanton Evans were not only able to bring various groups of conservative interests together but also to determine which interests would be included and which ideas would be expressed and reinforced. By creating the institution, they were also able to shape the environment in which discourse happened and in which ideational connections were forged. They further influenced the process by recruiting speakers for the early conferences from the *National Review* and other think tanks and by actively participating themselves.

Over the years, part of the coalition-building process has involved inviting a select blend of conservative groups to participate in the discourses at CPAC and to express their ideas before the crowd that is assembled there. The choices that are made regarding whom should be invited and whom should speak determine the ideas that are ultimately received by attendees. At the early conferences, groups that were considered to be racist were not invited to be cosponsors. Even today, by organizing the conference, the ACU, YAF, and others who help to organize the conference collaborate to exert influence over which ideas will be represented. In 2013, the organizers of CPAC refused to extend an invitation to Gov. Chris Christie (R-NJ) because he adopted positions as Governor that were considered to be unrepresentative of the conservative movement.

History and Context As groups coordinate and share ideas with each other, they do so in response to the particular political context in which they are situated. As history slides ineluctably along, however, political context changes. New issues emerge, and new leaders arise. New opportunities to achieve success may become evident, and new political and institutional barriers may suddenly appear where none existed before. The emergence of new issues can prompt the development of new interest groups and, with them, new opportunities for a coalition to expand in size. New political developments can pose a sudden challenge to the characterizations, narratives, and interpretations around which a coalition has become united. This can easily happen when expectations are not fulfilled and/or when events occur for which there is not an obvious explanation or response based in current discourses.

Over the course of the decade, political developments happened that forced elites to update and amend coalition narratives. In the wake of Ford's loss, outside critics and even some in the conservative movement began to doubt that there really was a

conservative majority as leaders claimed. If there was a conservative majority, then why was government suddenly under the united control of the Democratic Party? In this context, it was the intellectual and political leaders of the conservative movement who helped to frame interpretations and explanations of political developments in order to amend coalition narratives and keep the coalition united behind a common set of strategies and goals. By analyzing the discourses at CPAC, I have shown how elites worked to preserve and maintain unity over the course of the 1970s and how they sought to preserve core ideas and elements of discourse. Changes in historical context thus disciplined conservative discourses and drove changes in them, even though their basic assumptions were never overturned.

Changes in political context also altered the political opportunity structure faced by conservatives on two occasions. This happened when Ford ascended to the Presidency (taking the slot that had been open for Reagan), and it happened again when Ford lost to Carter and conservatives were able to partially reshape the GOP platform (thus opening up a new opportunity to re-brand the party and mobilize behind Reagan). In both instances, there was a need for elites to adjust conservative discourses to explain these developments and to recommend strategies that would hold the coalition together. As I have shown, they did just that.

Finally, changes in historical context facilitated the rise of new constituencies that offered both new potential for coalition-builders to expand the size of the commitment. Specifically, the sudden imposition use of IRS rules to challenge Christian school tax exemptions created new problems where none had existed before and served as an issue around which new communities of religious issue activists were mobilized. At the invitation of CPAC planners, these new groups and actors joined the coalition and began contributing to the discourses at CPAC. As they did so, they carried other ideas with them and infused more moralistic rhetoric into the discourses at CPAC. In this vein, historical context also drove the expansion of the coalition and led to the infusion of new and diverse ideas into movement discourses.

Tracing Changes in Discourse Finally, I have shown that when seeking to discern the processes by which coalitions become connected together at the ideological-discursive level, there are advantages to conducting an extremely focused, time-series analysis. By focusing on coordinative discourses as represented at CPAC conferences only, it has been possible to identify ideas and elements of discourse that played an important role in tying the coalition together and to look at how these ideas were expressed as actors spoke to each other at a very granular level. It has also been possible to consider carefully how in this one case the institutional environment in which discourse happened structured the substance and flow of ideas.

I have also shown that when seeking to understand the dynamics of the process by which a political coalition comes together, it is important to look beyond books and journal articles and to examine the substance of spoken political discourse and organic discursive interactions. In the context of such exchanges, ideas are combined with other elements of discourse as actors react and respond to each other and try to make sense of the world around them. Journals of opinion such as the *National Review* play an important role in that they help to connect ideas together and help to rationalize policy positions in terms of core philosophical principles. However, political coalitions are

composed of real people who must ultimately come to trust and relate to each other in the real world. As they do so, they rely on certain ideas and concepts— such as the conservative majority thesis— to frame developments, characterize their opponents, and defend their ideas and strategies.

While it is possible to look back and identify the conservative majority narrative in books and articles written by conservatives during the 1970s, it only becomes clear how important the idea was for building enthusiasm and for defining political strategies when one hears the frequency with which the idea was repeated and used as conservatives spoke to each other and built up corollaries around it to explain events and make sense of the political developments that were happening around them.

Political coalitions are ultimately forged not in books or journals but by real people as they interact with each other and share ideas. By tracing and examining the substance and flow of ideas in settings like CPAC, it is possible to gain deeper insights about what brings people together as a community.

APPENDIX

CPAC 1974: January 24-26, 1974¹Panels and Sessions (Chronological)*

- A. The Conservative Community in Washington
- B. The Role of the Party in the Campaign
- A. Budget Control
- B. Campaign Management
- A. The Women's Movement and Equal Rights
- B. Issue Development in a Campaign
- A. The Nixon Presidency
- B. Polling and Direct Mail
- A. National Health Care Legislation
- B. Campaign Finance and Reform
- A. Energy
- B. Precinct Organization
Strategy for '74
- A. Détente and Red Trade
- B. Youth Campaigns
- A. Busing
- B. Campaign Media
- A. Taxes
- B. Women in Politics

*A/B denote sessions that were double tracked. Every CPAC also included an awards banquet and a series of separate addresses delivered by prominent conservative leaders. For a comprehensive list of all meetings that were on CPAC agendas between 1974 and 1980, consult the conference programs, all of which are available in the American Conservative Union Archive, located at Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT.

Affiliations of CPAC 1974 Speakers**

Organizations

American Conservative Union
 Buckley for Senate Campaign
 Cardinal Society of Virginia
 Commission on Foreign Policy
 Committee for Responsible Youth Politics

¹ CPAC 1974, Official Program of the Conference, MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 2, Folder 30

Council of Medical Staffs
Harris County (Texas) Republican Party
Human Events
Indianapolis News
National Review
New Guard
New York Conservative Party
Reagan for Governor Campaign
Republican Party of Oklahoma
Republican Party of Virginia
Republican Steering Committee
The Right Report
The Schlafly Report
Speakers Bureau of America
Young Americans for Freedom
Young Republican National Federation

Government

State:

California (Governor)
New Hampshire (Governor)
Ohio (Senate)
Wisconsin (Senate)

Federal:

US Department of Health, Education, and Welfare
US House of Representatives
US Office of Economic Opportunity
US Senate
US White House

Universities

Georgetown University
University of Maryland
Texas A&M

** Includes only organizational affiliations specifically listed in the official conference program. Some speakers chose not to list their affiliations.

CPAC 1975: February 13-16, 1975²Panels & Sessions (Chronological)

What are Conservatives to Do?

- A. Defense and Foreign Policy
- B. Welfare Reform
 - The Economy: Inflation, Recession, or Both?
- A. The Regulated American
- B. The Social Issues
 - Have the States Become Irrelevant?
 - The Republican Party: Does it Have a Future?
- A. Taking the Offensive
- B. The Mechanics of a New Party
- A. Forming a State Conservative Union or YAF Chapter
- B. Working Within the Republican Party

Affiliations of CPAC 1975 Speakers

Organizations

American Conservative Union
 Americans for Effective Law Enforcement
 American Security Council
 Citizens Committee for the Right to Keep and Bear Arms
 Hoover Institute of California
Human Events
Indianapolis News
 Republican National Committee
National Review
 Mississippi Republican Party
 National Right to Life Committee
 National Right to Work Committee
 National United Taxpayers Union
New Guard
 New York Conservative Party
 Public Service Research Council
The Right Report
 Rule 29 Committee
 Stop-ERA
TV Guide Magazine
Washington Star

² CPAC 1975, Official Program of the Conference, MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 3, Folder 16

Welfare Reform Office
Young Americans for Freedom
Young Republican National Federation

Government

State:

California (Governor)
Illinois (House of Representatives)
Louisiana (House of Representatives)
New Hampshire (Governor)
Oklahoma (Senate)

Federal:

US Senate
US House of Representatives

Universities

Catholic University
Georgetown University
University of Maryland
New York University
University of Notre Dame
University of Virginia

CPAC 1976: February 13-15, 1976*³Panels & Sessions (Chronological)

- Our Vanishing Rights
- A. Free Market Solutions
- B. Federal Laws and Campaigns
 - The Ford Presidency
- A. Détente and Foreign Policy
- B. Campaigning
 - Creative Federalism
- A. Attack on the Family
- B. Taking the Offensive in the States

Affiliations of CPAC 1976 Speakers

Organizations

American Conservative Union
 Americans for Effective Law Enforcement
 American Foreign Service Association
 American Legislative Exchange Council
 California Conservative Union
 Citizens Committee for the Right to Keep and Bear Arms
 Citizens for Ronald Reagan
 Committee for Responsible Youth Politics
Conservative Digest
 DIRACTION
 Governor George Wallace, Campaign
 Hoover Institute at Stanford University
Human Events
 Illinois Conservative Union
 International Monetary Fund
 Iowa Conservative Union
 National Coalition for Children
National Review
 National Right to Life Committee
 National Right to Work Committee
New Guard
Newsweek
 New York Conservative Party

³ CPAC 1976, Official Program of the Conference, MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 4, Folder 4

Stop-ERA
TV Guide Magazine
US Chamber of Commerce
Young Americans for Freedom

Government

State:

California (Assembly)
New Hampshire (Governor)
Ohio (Senate)
Oklahoma (Senate)
South Carolina (Governor)

Federal:

US House of Representatives
US Senate
US Welfare Reform Office

Universities

University of Chicago

*This conference is not analyzed in the dissertation because audio recordings were not preserved.

CPAC 1977: February 3-6, 1977⁴Panels & Sessions (Chronological)

- The Media
- The Carter Presidency
- Options for Conservatives
- A. Marketing Free Enterprise
- B. Taking the Offensive: The Challenge of Big Labor
- A. The Social Issues
- B. Lobbying to Influence Your Legislators
- A. National Defense
- B. The Crisis in American Education
- A. Free Market Initiatives
- B. Local Campaigning
- How We Won

Affiliations of CPAC 1977 Speakers

Organizations

Accuracy in Media
 American Association of Physicians and Surgeons
 American Conservative Union
 American Legislative Exchange Council
 American Security Council
 Americans for Effective Law Enforcement
Barrons Magazine
 Citizens for Reagan
 Committee for Responsible Youth Politics
Conservative Digest
 Defense Intelligence Agency
 DIRACTION
 Florida Conservative Union
Human Events
 Illinois Conservative Union
National Review
 National Right to Life Committee
 National Right to Work Committee
New Guard
 New York Conservative Party
 Public Service Research Council

⁴ CPAC 1977, Official Program of the Conference, MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 5, Folder 14

Republican National Committee
STOP-ERA
Texas Conservative Union
TV Guide
Young Americans for Freedom

Government

State:

Arkansas State University
Illinois (House)
New Hampshire (Governor)

Federal:

US House of Representatives
US Senate

Universities

Texas A&M University
University of Maryland

CPAC 1978: March 16-19, 1978⁵Panels & Sessions (Chronological)

Communicating the Conservative Message

- A. America in Retreat
- B. The Conservative Soviet Dissidents
- A. The Growing Tax Burden
- B. Influencing Your State Legislature
- A. Attack on the Family
- B. How to Win
- A. Salt II and a Strong America
- B. Achieving Quality Education
 - Conservative Initiatives
 - The Carter Presidency
- A. Toward Labor Reform
- B. Building the Conservative Constituency
 - Regional Political Action Seminars

Affiliations of CPAC 1978 Speakers

Organizations

American Conservative Union
 American Legislative Exchange Council
 Bruce W. Eberle and Associates
 Center for Strategic and International Studies
 Chase Manhattan Bank
 Committee on the Status of Women
 Consumer Alert Council
 Defense Intelligence Agency
 Florida Conservative Union
 Fund for a Conservative Majority
 Hoover Institution
 Jim Baker for Attorney General of Texas
 Long Advertising Agency
 National Right to Life Committee
 National Right to Work Committee
 National Tax Limitation Committee
 Phillips Publishing Company
 Public Service Research Council
 Republican National Committee

⁵ CPAC 1978, Official Program of the Conference, MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 6, Folder 3

Richard A. Viguerie Company
Rhodesian Information Service
Second Amendment Foundation
Young Americans for Freedom
Young Republican National Federation

Government

State:

Arizona (Legislature)
California (State Legislature)
Illinois (Legislature)
New Hampshire (Governor)
Washington (Legislature)

Federal:

US House of Representatives

Universities

University of California- Los Angeles
George Washington University
Georgetown University School of Foreign Service
University of Maryland
Pepperdine Law School

CPAC 1979: February 8-10, 1979⁶Panels & Sessions (Chronological)

- A. The Battle for the Equal Rights Amendment
- B. Health Issues and the Prospects for National Health Insurance
- A. D.C. Amendment
- B. Private Education vs. Government Edict
- A. Tax Limitation
- B. Prospects for Welfare Reform
 - Terrorism, Internal Security, and Intelligence
- A. Fighting for Free Enterprise
- B. How I Won the Special Constituencies
 - Federal Tax Reform
 - The Tax Issue
 - SALT II and National Defense
 - SALT II
 - Carter at Mid-Point
- A. Prospects for 1980
- B. Lobbying Initiatives
- A. A Look at the New Congress
- B. The Burden of Government Regulation

Affiliations of CPAC 1979 Speakers & Sponsoring Organizations with Booths*

Organizations

- *Accuracy in Media
- American Conservative Union
- *American Conservative Union- Education and Research Institute
- *American Council for World Freedom
- *American Enterprise Institute
- American Legislative Exchange Council
- *Citizens Committee for the Right to Keep and Bear Arms
- *Conservative Caucus Foundation
- **Conservative Digest*
- *Conservative Victory Fund
- Coors
- Dart Industries
- *Devin-Adair Publishers
- Foundation of Law and Society
- *Frank Enten (Button Man)

⁶ CPAC 1979, Official Program of the Conference, MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 6, Folder 15

*Freedom Leadership Foundation
 *Green Hill Publishers
 *The Heritage Foundation
 *Hillsdale College
Human Events
 *Initiative America
 *Intercollegiate Studies Institute
 *National Alliance of Senior Citizens
 National Christian Action Coalition
 *National Conservative Political Action Committee
National Review
 National Right to Work Committee
 National Tax Limitation Committee
 **The Phyllis Schlafly Report*
Pink Sheet on the Left
 Postal Rate Commission
 *Public Service Research Council
 Senate Republican Policy Committee
 STOP-ERA
 Taxpayers United of Michigan
 Young Americans for Freedom
 *Young America's Foundation

Government

State:

Delaware (Senate)
 Ohio (House, Senate)
 Tennessee (House)

Federal:

US House of Representatives
 US Senate

Universities

University of Maryland

*Biographical data for speakers in 1979 are abbreviated in available documentation, so the list of speakers is not as comprehensive as the lists for other conference years. I have supplemented the list with the names of participating organizations and outside cooperating groups. These are distinguished by asterisks.

CPAC 1980: February 7-9, 1980*⁷Panels & Sessions (Chronological)

- Outlook for the 1980s: The American Family
- Outlook for the 1980s: Education and the Schools
- The Conservative Alternatives to American Foreign Policy
- Outlook for the 1980s: Nuclear Power
- Outlook for the 1980s: Options for Energy Development
- Outlook for the 1980s: Taxes, Spending, and the Budget
- Media and Lobbying Workshop
- Outlook for the 1980s: A Critique of Carter Foreign Policy
- Outlook for the 1980s: America's Position in the World
- A. Outlook for the 1980s: America Reevaluates SALT II
- B. Outlook for the 1980s: Conservative Responses to Big Labor Initiatives
- Outlook for the 1980s: Our Collapsing Intelligence
- Outlook for the 1980s: Our Struggling Allies

Affiliations of CPAC 1980 Speakers

Organizations

American Conservative Union
 American Legislative Exchange Council
 American Security Council
 Chicago Tribune- New York News Syndicate
 Committee for Responsible Youth Politics
 Eagle Forum
 Fund for a Conservative Majority
 Hofenblum, Mollrich, and Lacy Inc.
 Lee Edwards and Associates
 Lincoln Center for Legal Studies
National Review
Phyllis Schlafly Report
Pink Sheet on the Left
 Public Service Research Council
 Young Americans for Freedom

Government

State:

Ohio (Senate)

⁷ CPAC 1980, Official Program of the Conference, MSS 176, LTPSC, Box 8, Folder 12

Illinois (Senate)
Indiana (Senate)
Massachusetts (Governor)

Federal:
US House of Representatives
US Senate

Universities

Catholic University
University of Haifa-Israel
University of Notre Dame Law School
University of Texas-Austin

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